



FORUM

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Kraków

Introduction

It is our pleasure to present the English- and Russian-language articles published as products of the international conference *The Treaty of Riga and Other Post-Versailles Treaties as Elements of the Interwar World-Order in Central and Eastern Europe*, which took place at the Pedagogical University of Kraków on September 22–24, 2021. Being one of the first in-person academic gatherings in Poland after months of Covid-19-related restrictions, our conference featured talks by 37 speakers coming from Poland, Russia, Belarus, Latvia, Finland, France, Luxembourg, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. The official languages of the conference were English, Polish, and Russian, and simultaneous interpreting was offered to participants. Due to the number of contributions, the Polish-language articles will be published separately in another academic journal.

Our conference commemorated the centennial of the Polish-Soviet peace treaty signed in March 1921. This agreement not only sanctioned the border between the resurrected Polish Republic, on the one hand, and Soviet Russia and Soviet Ukraine, on the other, but also constituted a major pillar of European peace. As such, we argued, it should be viewed as an element of the broadly defined Versailles order in the years 1921–1939. Our desire to analyze the Treaty of Riga in this broader context encouraged us to propose the idea of an interwar international system based upon a series of “post-Versailles” treaties, some of which stemmed from the need to render the agreements

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made in Paris more precise whereas others were attempts to negotiate certain aspects of Versailles or to contest them. In particular, the treaties in question are Saint-Germain-en-Laye (September 1919), Trianon (June 1920), Rapallo (April 1922), Locarno (October 1925), among others. Together with the Treaty of Riga, these agreements became reference points for reflection and discussion for our guests, specialists in the fields of political, diplomatic, economic, social, and legal history.

In the speech opening our conference, Mariusz Wołos presented the importance of the Treaty of Riga not only for Central and Eastern Europe, but for the entire international order established after the First World War. Referring to the results of research by Polish historians, he stated that the Treaty of Riga was a factor that both supplemented and complemented the Versailles order; which is why we can talk about the “Versailles-Riga order” existing in Europe in the interwar period. The Treaty of Riga and its provisions collapsed in 1939–1940, at the same time as the Treaty of Versailles. In fact, both treaties were closely related and constituted an integral whole. The loss of independence by Poland in 1939 meant the loss of independence by Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In turn, Finland and Romania lost parts of their territory to the Soviet Union. These were the consequences of the dismantling of the Treaty of Riga, which best testifies to its importance beyond Polish-Soviet relations¹.

Our deliberations opened with a session titled “In the Search of a New World Order,” during which Krzysztof Kania outlined the foundations of the most important international treaties signed in the interwar period, John J. Kulczycki (featured in this journal) discussed the legitimization of forced migration as stemming from the Treaty of Lausanne, Paweł Duber explained the failure of the (Polish) “moral disarmament” concept, and Piotr Puchalski argued for understanding Józef Beck’s approach to the “Colonial Question” in the context of a broader international system.

The following two sessions concluded the first day of the conference and tackled the position of “Eastern Europe in the Eyes of the Great Powers” (Britain and France). During the first part of this session, Dariusz Jeziorny, Jan Pisuliński, and Krystian Maciej Szudarek discussed the attitude of the British government toward the borders established in Eastern Europe in the years 1918–1921 (1923), underlining Whitehall’s critical and self-interested interpretation of Warsaw’s rule in territories outside the Polish ethnic core. During the second panel, Isabelle Davion, Frédéric Dessberg (featured in this journal), and Małgorzata Gmurczyk-Wrońska debated about the diplomatic actions of the Quai d’Orsay with regard to the same question, which tended to be more pro-Polish and anti-Soviet but equally particular.

The fourth session (“The Treaty of Riga from the Perspective of Eastern European Historiography”), which took place on the second day of the conference,

¹ More on the Polish perspective on the meaning of the Treaty of Riga: J. Borzęcki, 2008; J. Kumaniecki, 1985; M. Wojciechowski (ed.), 1998; Komorowski B. (ed.), 2006; S. Dębski (ed.), 2013; M. Wołos, 2021a, p. 97–124; idem, 2021b, p. 71–97.

featured presentations by leading Russian scholars and one Belarusian historian (Ogorodnikov). Yulia Kantor talked about the Polish Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) in relation to Soviet Russia's plan to impose communist rule in Poland in case of a Polish defeat. Alexander Ogorodnikov argued for a reassessment of Belarusian (and Soviet) historiography regarding the Treaty of Riga, underlining its propagandistic but nevertheless fruitful findings. Evgeny Sergeev referred to the discussion on the role of British diplomacy in the Polish-Soviet conflict, pointing out the ways in which Riga signified London's failed attempt to stabilize the region to its own liking. Lastly, Alexander Shubin discussed the Lithuanian factor in the wartime years leading to the March 1921 peace. Shubin's, Sergeev's, and Ogorodnikov's articles are featured in the following pages.

The articles from the following three sessions are not published in this journal. In the first of them, the speakers presented their research on "Ukraine and Belarus between Poland and Soviet Russia." Maciej Franz, Rafał Galuba, and Adam Ostanek discussed the Polish rule in Eastern Galicia (Eastern Lesser Poland) in its domestic and international ramifications, while Aleksandra Pomiecko talked about the Slutsk Insurrection of 1920 as an instance of a Belarusian uprising amid the signing of the Treaty of Riga.

In the penultimate session of the day, "A New Order in Eastern Europe," Jerzy Borzęcki opened the discussion with his remarks regarding the role of the Treaty of Riga in the creation of the Soviet Union (1922). Next, Ēriks Jēkabsons and Jarosław Suchoples highlighted Latvia, Estonia, and Finland's own struggles with Soviet Russia and their attitude toward the Riga peace treaty. On the other hand, Julie Reynolds tackled another aspect of the "new order": the Convention of Paris (1920) between Poland and the Free City of Danzig (Gdańsk).

During the last session of the day, our guests deliberated about "Minorities in New Political and Legal Realities" in interwar Eastern Europe. Estelle Bunout outlined the ways in which the Polish state addressed the issue of ethnic and religious minorities by establishing a series of state-allied institutes. Kinga Czechowska illuminated the little known Polish diplomatic campaign to use the Geneva Convention (1922) to punish Nazi Germany for its 1933 anti-Jewish persecution in German Upper Silesia. On the other hand, Keely Stauter-Halsted addressed the Treaty of Riga, but from a non-diplomatic angle, demonstrating the sorting of Poland's "post-imperial population" in internment camps, while Wiktor Marzec discussed the Minority Treaty signed by Poland back in June 1919 as foundational for the country's "ethnic democracy."

The last day of the conference featured three sessions. During the first, "The Human Factor in Politics and Diplomacy," Marek Kornat and Krzysztof Kloc laid out Józef Piłsudski's thoughts about the Treaty of Riga, whose character was not fully in line with his strategic aims, while Mateusz Drozdowski presented the figure of Jan Dąbski, the leader of the Polish delegation in Riga, contrasting him with his Russian counterpart, Adolph Joffe. More broadly, Maciej Górny (featured in this journal) discussed the activities of geographers, mapping the

boundaries of Eastern Europe as a curious example of scholarship serving both science and state.

The following session was dedicated to “The Treaty of Riga and Sociocultural Phenomena,” with the first two speakers laying out the interpretations of the Polish-Soviet agreement by different press publications and the third offering a presentation of the philosophical currents driving sides of the conflict. Maciej Grabski discussed the image of Soviet Russia in the Polish leftist *Robotnik* from October 12, 1920 to March 18, 1921, while Tomasz Korban talked about the Riga peace treaty as referenced in the pages of the London-based émigré *Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza* in the years 1945–1989. Wojciech Paduchowski, on the other hand, discussed the Russian “social-philosophical space” behind the Polish-Soviet war and the Riga treaty.

Concluding the conference there was a debate between Gennadi Matveyev, Karina Kolkova, Mariusz Wołos, and Łukasz Adamski concerning “The Implementation and Long-Term Effects of the Treaty of Riga.” In his talk, Matveyev argued that the implementation of the Polish-Soviet Peace Preliminaries (October–November 1920) was delayed due to the intransigence of the Polish military leadership and its support for Ukrainian and Belarusian uprisings in Soviet-controlled territories. In contrast, Wołos demonstrated that signing peace with Poland was a purely tactical action on the part of Soviet Russia (and Soviet Ukraine). It allowed them to buy time to strengthen the Soviet state and finish the “world revolution” in Eastern Europe in the future, and they never meant to implement most of the stipulations, for example those regarding financial and material restitution to Poland. Finally, Łukasz Adamski discussed whether the Treaty of Riga was still in force, at least regarding certain aspects of Polish-Russian and Polish-Ukrainian relations.

In the face of the unjustified and genocidal Russian invasion of Ukraine, which began as we compiled this issue of the journal, we find it necessary to explain the inclusion of articles by Russian scholars affiliated with Russian state institutions, some of whom express historical interpretations which are close to Putin’s official propagandistic line and with which we profoundly disagree. While we considered the option of discarding these texts, we decided to include them (1) to underline that, in contrast to Russia, the Western world welcomes open academic debate, (2) to keep our promises to all conference participants, including those whose affiliation does not correspond to their privately held views. We hope that this position of ours will find understanding among our readers.

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