



INTRODUCTION

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The First World War mobilised millions in the implementation of political ideas in Europe. Civilians-turned-soldiers became an armed force accustomed to carrying out the orders of their officers. In turn, army officers, especially in the second half of the war, were forced into the deepening conflict between the no-longer-adequate political order and responsibility for their troops, exhausted by a war which had failed to produce the promised political results. Not only did some senior officers in East-Central Europe start wavering in their loyalty to their empires, but they also became involved in the revolutionary political processes that rippled over a large part of the old continent in different forms. In a society that was tired of war, they understood their role as guaranteeing the political and social order, and simultaneously had an impact on politics by supporting one group or another advocating a political idea. The role of armed men characterised by particular abilities of self-organisation in the chaotic situation at that time stood out after revolutions had destroyed empires.

In the revolutionary situation of the transfer of power,¹ many officers with military experience, even though troubled by the issue of their oath of loyalty, became involved in organising troops of states that were emerging in East-Central Europe under slogans for radical change, and started defending the new political regimes and the influence of borders designated by them in military conflicts which were still far from over in 1918. Both the process of the transfer of power and the active role that the army played lasted until at least 1921. On one hand, in that period it was clear that without the army the new political leaders were not going to achieve the goals they had proclaimed to their supporters. On the other hand, the eternal issue of the depoliticisation of the army and its control, which was widely discussed by Niccolò Machiavelli as far back as the 16th century, was becoming increasingly relevant. With the stabilisation of the new regimes in parts of the continent affected by revolutionary change, the issue of how to bring the army, and especially ambitious officers, under civilian control was a fundamental challenge. In different East-Central European countries, the challenge was dealt with in very different ways.

In our collection of papers, the role of the armed forces in the political process, paying special attention to attempts at the transfer of power in the region, is dealt with by the example of two states, Poland and Lithuania. It is well known that in the interwar period, the Vilnius region was a source of conflict between these countries which was not solved, despite the efforts of the League of Nations. Because of Vil-

¹ We were encouraged to use the term by the research of Tilly, cf.: TILLY, Charles. *European Revolutions, 1492-1992*. Oxford and Cambridge, MA, 1993, pp. 15-16.

nius, the governments of the two countries did not have formal diplomatic relations, and Poland was long regarded in Lithuania as the main military threat to national security in the interwar period. However, Lithuania and Poland were 'related' not only by the dispute over the seat of the former Lithuanian grand dukes in the interwar years. The new political regimes established in these countries through the revolutionary changes of 1918–1921 both claimed the return of the nation's natural rights. Both looked back to political structures that had once existed: Poland declared itself a continuation of the Commonwealth of the Two Nations, and Lithuania the heir to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It is true that in Lithuania, a trend predominated to 'assign' to the Poles the shared experience of the regional elites of the 17th to 19th centuries, full of riots, uprisings and other armed transfers of power (the only exception was perhaps the 1863–1864 uprising). Nevertheless, in both countries, officers who had revolted during the First World War and the wars of independence enjoyed indisputable authority in the eyes of the public, and in both countries more than one attempt was made to take over power by using the authority and the strength of the military. The democratic experiment, failing to transform the autocratic imperial ruling tradition that most were accustomed to, lasted only until 1926 in Poland and Lithuania. In that year, both countries were shaken by military coups. In Poland in May, and in Lithuania in December, heroes of the First World War whose names were associated with the founding myths of the two modern nation-states 'returned' to power. In Poland, *de facto* control was taken by an army officer, Marshal Józef Piłsudski, who had initiated the creation of the Polish Legion in the Habsburg Army in Galicia in 1914, and was granted the status of head of state (*Naczelnik Państwa*) in 1918. In Lithuania, it was taken by Antanas Smetona, who did not have any military experience, and who in the years of the Great War had led a faction representing the political interests of the Lithuanians in the Ober Ost area, and in 1919 became the first President of the Republic of Lithuania. The roles of Piłsudski in Poland and Smetona in Lithuania were far from similar. Their return to power in 1926 showed the differences in the roles of the armed forces in the situation of the transfer of power in 1918–1919. Lithuanian national units in the Russian army were first formed in 1917, and their leaders, who started returning to Lithuania only in the second half of 1918, either failed or were unable to gain sufficient authority in order not to be controlled by the already established State Council of Lithuania led by Smetona. Despite all this, it seems that both Smetona and Piłsudski considered that the revolution did not end in the period 1918 to 1921. Both sought to exercise greater political power than the democratic system allowed, and both used their influence over the army to implement their goals.

The coups of 1926 in Poland and Lithuania, and especially the roles played in them by Piłsudski and Smetona, are not a new topic in historiography. However, this publi-

cation aims to focus on a more general issue: how the armed forces, an institution to which the government entrusted the function of the defence of the country against external aggressors, and the function of guarantor of stability in the constitutional system, were used in national internal political processes in both countries, and what kind of independent role they played in these processes.

The issue is developed in three chapters. Chapter 1 is a contribution by Gintautas Mažeikis on the changes in the concept of revolution in Western cultures. Revolution can be defined as a typically violent phenomenon, which usually involves the armed forces. Specific cases of the role of the armed forces in the transfer of power, discussed further in the volume, are contextualised in Mažeikis' article by ideas on the content of the phenomenon of the transfer of power, and its permanent and varying components. In the second chapter, both successful and unsuccessful cases of the military-aided takeover of power are analysed empirically. Based on the example of Poland, two cases are discussed in detail: the failed coup of 1919 (Waldemar Rezmer's contribution), and the successful coup of 1926 (by Marek Sioma). In addition, the chapter looks into the army's involvement in politics, and its relations with politicians (in the case of Poland, the issue is partly covered by the paper by Sioma, and in the case of Lithuania by Kęstutis Kilinskas). Chapter 3 is devoted to showing the role of the armed forces in situations of non-recognition of the legal authorities. Andriejus Stoliarovas overviews the legal regulation of the use of the army against civilians, and discusses specific cases of its use. The chapter also examines the role of the armed forces in assuring the sovereignty of the central authorities in a region whose population was quite reserved in terms of loyalty to them. Silva Pocyté reveals this by discussing incidents of troops, paramilitary organisations, and civilians in the Territory of Memel, or the Klaipėda region. Finally, Dainius Noreika studies the controversial issue of the June 1941 uprising in Lithuania. In the assessment of military and political relations in the region, some questions certainly remain relevant: why during the occupation of Lithuania and Poland in 1939 and 1940 the army played different roles, and why the army in Lithuania, after participating in political processes for two decades and using force against both the civilian power and against civilians, did not resist the occupation in 1940, despite the government's decision not to resist. In that context, Dainius Noreika's glimpse into the uprising of June 1941 is important, as the author reveals that in a repeated critical situation, the social networks that developed in the interwar period and the operational models elaborated at the time still worked.

Of course, this publication does not and cannot pretend to cover all aspects of the issue of the role of the armed forces in political processes, and specific cases of the transfer of power. Rather, it consists of glimpses by several Lithuanian and Polish authors at similar trends in Lithuania and Poland in the interwar period, which, we

believe, will provide opportunities for a wider comparative analysis in the future. The scale of the analysis of East-Central Europe in the period could undoubtedly be expanded. In 1934, coups aided by military formations took place in Latvia and Estonia. Not fully controlled by the civilian authorities, and on difficult terms with them, the army played a significant political role in other countries as well (a chrestomathic example is the Weimar Republic), while Spain plunged into a bloody civil war when part of the army rebelled and tried to take power. The analysis of this issue is especially important today, when military coups, uprisings, 'colour revolutions', riots and conflicts between the army and civilian authorities, instead of recalling part of the historical discourse, make up part of the topical agenda of the 21st century on a global level.

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