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ARTICLE

Mini-States and Micro-Sovereignty: Local Democracies in East Central Europe, 1918–1923

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As recent scholarship has shown, most of East Central Europe remained at war for several years after the official armistice in November 1918, complicating the transition from empires into nation-states. This article addresses another aspect of the state-building process. As opposed to centralising power emanating from capitals such as Prague, Warsaw and Budapest, I argue that local politicians and village leaders made their own territorial and sovereignty claims. Rather than whole nations, it was small communities that first defined self-determination. Here I present a loose typology of such localities (ethno-linguistic republics, non-Bolshevik workers' councils, and radical agrarians), and show that conflicts between mini-states and burgeoning nation-states shaped the development of the latter.

In December 1918, Lutheran pastor Emil Hegemann left his native Schwenten in east Prussia and headed for Glogau (present-day Głogów). Hegemann and his 800 or so parishioners felt under attack from the east, where Poles were revolting against German rule. As the ongoing uprising showed, scrappy Polish units were able to take control of town after town.[1] In Glogau, Hegemann sought support from the garrison to bolster his position against the encroaching threat. To his great dismay, the officers informed him that the soldiers' councils were now in charge, and they could not offer Schwenten protection from Polish paramilitaries. While in Glogau, Hegemann was shocked to hear someone lecture on the principle of the self-determination of nations, but citing Lenin and not Wilson. The speaker was clearly justifying what the Poles were doing in Poznań and other formerly German cities.[2]

Severely disappointed, Rev. Hegemann returned to his village, now fearing Bolshevism in Germany and a Polish national state to the east. Rather than give up hope, Hegemann declared his town independent in January 1919, with himself as head of state, and the *Freistaat Schwenten* was born. In a few days, they managed to hold elections for representatives, though the pastor removed all the social democrats. The Schwenten parliament then set up a police force and an army with around 100 young men. In quick succession, Schwenten gained recognition from the Polish government in Warsaw, then Germany, and finally the Allied Commission in Paris.[3] Schwenten continued as an independent entity until August 1919, when the parliament voted to join a more stable Germany. On that same day, a border patrol began its work, and the eastern edges of the Schwenten mini-state marked the border between Poland and Germany.[4]

[1] For an overview of the Greater Poland Uprising: Antoni Czubiński, Zdzisław Grot and Benon Miśkiewicz, *Powstanie Wielkopolskie 1918–1919: zarys dziejów* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1983).

[2] Emil Gustav Hegemann, *Der Freistaat Schwenten der deutsche Not und Treue in der Grenzmark Posen: gewidmet der deutschen Jugend* (Prenzlau: Vincent, 1936). This brief memoir (31 pages) is one of the few documents pertaining to the history of the mini-state.

[3] Gulczyński, *Ministerstwo Byłej Dzielnicy Pruskie (1919–1922)* (Poznan: Wydawnictwo Poznanskiego Towarzystwo Przyjaciol Nauk, 1995), 17.

[4] 'Republika Świętnieńska' *Nadodrze*, Special edition, Feb. (1958), 14.

Across Central and Eastern Europe, the First World War and its aftermath disrupted the power and sovereignty emanating from imperial capitals. In prior generations, historians painted broad-stroke narratives, imagining that nationalism and national states would replace, and thus erase, empire.[5] This older tradition was often teleological or too quick to accept the claims of lobbyists at the Paris Peace Conference. The view from distant drawing rooms did not take into account local peculiarities. Recent historiography on the 'shatterzone' of empires has highlighted the fact that the breakdown of normal order led to widespread violence in the region.[6] This has produced an image of the region bereft of government, where violent people enacted their will on anyone they chose.[7] So the argument goes, the absence of sovereignty led to violence. Jochen Böhler, writing about this period, claimed that without regular order, force became the law.[8] The orderly march from empire to nation-state is historiographically dead. However, random acts of violence are not the entirety of the postwar experience.

Over the past twenty years, historians of East Central Europe have paid particular attention to the transition from empires into nation-states. This work has mostly served to emphasise the continuities of the empires, through law, practices, personnel or other forms. Dominique Reill called this lingering influence an 'imperial ghost' hanging over institutions and interpersonal relationships.[9] Historians showed there was no clean break with the past despite the radical changes on political maps. Instead, there was a process of repurposing existing systems within different state entities. Elected representatives replaced monarchs as the decision makers, but often laws, currencies, customs and civil servants remained the same as under the kaisers and kings. Even though self-rule was the stated goal, empires could not be shaken off overnight. This has advanced our understanding of the period tremendously, shedding new light on the weakness of the entire Versailles system and the Wilsonian understanding of peace in postwar Europe. But there is a missing link between the moment when empires nominally ceased to exist and new state entities began to appear. The connection cannot be found in the new post-imperial capital cities, such as Prague, Warsaw or Budapest, but at the local level.

From the Adriatic to the Baltic seas, dozens of cities, towns and counties declared their right to self-rule. Rather than whole nations, it was small communities that first defined self-determination. The phenomenon of localities claiming independence was so widespread that one of Poland's early prime ministers commented, 'As many municipalities as there were, that's how many republics there were in Poland; indeed, a separate state at every railway station'.[10] And this was hardly limited to Poland, as a Lithuanian paramilitary leader remarked that 'in 1918, the whole of Lithuania was divided into [tiny] "republics"'.[11] Several other parts of the region where central authorities receded,

[5] Aside from the national histories, this was characteristic of older English-language historiography too. See: Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974); Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe Between the Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945).

[6] Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, eds., *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, eds., *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End* (New York: Penguin, 2016).

[7] The fashion for the 'state in retreat' creating space for violence directly preceded the move toward exploring post-First World War violence. Mark Mazower, 'Violence and the State in the Twentieth Century', *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), 1158–78; Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Donald Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia's Civil War: Politics, Society and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917–1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[8] Jochen Böhler, 'Generals and Warlords, Revolutionaries and Nation-State Builders', in Jochen Böhler, Włodzimierz Borodziej and Joachim von Puttkamer, eds., *Legacies of Violence. Eastern Europe's First World War* (Munich: De Gruyter, 2014), 60–3.

[9] Dominique Kirchner Reill, *The Fiume Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2020), 14.

[10] Quote from Jędrzej Moraczewski in Andrzej Chwalba, *1919: Pierwszy Rok Wolności* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2019), 63.

[11] Quote from Jonas Navakas of the Jonis˘kėlis paramilitary in Tomas Balkelis, 'From Defence to Revolution: Lithuanian Paramilitary Groups in 1918 and 1919', *Acta historica universitatis Klaipedensis*, XX, viii (2014), 51.

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such as the former Kingdom of Hungary, also experienced their own era of local sovereignty.[12] In the absence of any authority, it is unsurprising that so many people simultaneously formed their own community initiatives to maintain order and safety, as well as ensure continuity.

Though these claims to rule a small territory were often short-lived, mini-states directed much of the state-building and consolidation activities that took place in the post-First World War period in East Central Europe. Each local claim to authority challenged the more famous declarations made in Prague, Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, or Warsaw. Despite lacking a mandate from the former metropole or other symbolic national 'centre', local groups collected taxes, printed currency and postage stamps, policed, meted out justice, and even fielded their own armies. In so doing, they sometimes inhibited the ability of a central government to do the same, while in other cases they actually aided the state-building process. Post-First World War mini-states were either absorbed into the central apparatus when helpful to the centre or destroyed because they ran counter to an alternative local claim to statehood and sovereignty. At the local level, successor states were the expression of imperfect narrow sovereignty in each town and village.

Absence allowed this process to take place. In the immediate postwar period, as imperial power crumbled, sovereignty emanating from the central government faded away or ended abruptly, and local people were able to pick up this authority and use it for themselves. The material remains of the empires lived on for many years after they disappeared.[13] Local administrators used the same laws, forms and filing systems, teachers were the same (though the language of instruction often changed), public works remained, but the ultimate source of authority shifted from a faraway monarch to the local context. The sovereign moved from the emperor to the community.

The dominant theories on sovereignty reflect this chaotic period. The two towering definitions that tend to appear in the literature over and over come from Max Weber and Carl Schmitt, German academics who formulated their ideas during, and in response to, post-First World War violence and revolutions.[14] Weber claimed the monopoly on the use of legitimate force within a specified territory as the definition of sovereign power, and Schmitt summarised that 'Sovereign is he who decides the exception'.[15] With these rather open-ended definitions, we can accept the idea that mini-states arising in postwar Europe were sovereign entities. Sovereignty is never infinite in time or space; on the contrary, sovereignty is often fleeting and *always* limited territorially. Mini-states can therefore theoretically be just as legitimate for their time and space as any other sovereign state.

Claiming sovereign power is one thing, but acting legitimately is another, related issue. Weber offered a definition of legitimate authority: essentially, that if the people who are being ruled deem an expression of state power as legitimate, then it is so. But how can the 'people' express their consent? Another classic social thinker, Jean Jacques Rousseau, fills in the blank. With Rousseau, sovereignty and legitimacy come together. In his famous essay on the 'social contract', Rousseau envisioned a transition from absolute monarchy to a healthy republic where the 'people' (variously defined) would contribute their voice to the decision-making process and express their collective will; in

[12] Reill's book shows how this process also took place in the Hungarian port city Fiume, with local sovereignty carrying on long after 1918. Reill, *The Fiume Crisis*.

[13] On this subject: Marcus Payk and Roberta Pragher, eds., *Beyond Versailles: Sovereignty, Legitimacy, and the Foundation of New Polities after the Great War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019); Paul Miller and Claire Morelon, eds., *Embers of Empire: Continuity and Rupture in the Habsburg Successor States after 1918* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019); Natasha Wheatley and Peter Becker, eds., *Remaking Central Europe: The League of Nations and the Former Habsburg Lands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); Kathryn Ciancia, *On Civilization's Edge: A Polish Borderland in the Interwar World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Klaus Richter, *Fragmentation in East Central Europe. Poland and the Baltics, 1915–1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[14] One recent example, among many others: Leonard V. Smith, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 8.

[15] Max Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation', in Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946); Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985 [1922]), 5.

other words: self-determination.[16] This was precisely the idea that was powerfully spreading around Europe at the end of the First World War. There is a clear affinity between the situation Rousseau wrote about in the eighteenth century and this post-First World War period. The many local republics that popped up were focused on the ideal of direct democracy, with peasant and workers' councils deciding their fate. From around October 1918 onward, there was a much wider dispersion of self-determination than Rousseau could have imagined.

It is a great irony of history that Rousseau's ideas were applied to the national scale, when he had in mind a small republic like Geneva as the model for legitimating government through the will of the people. Across a larger geographic area, it is difficult to ensure that individuals can have their voices heard, but on the local level after the First World War I this is exactly what happened with Schwenten: the town voted and acted in concert as a voluntary independent polity, outside of Germany and Poland. It met the conditions of sovereign statehood, namely centralised political authority over a given territory and recognition from other state actors.[17] Their will was the will of the people, a legitimate sovereign state, even though it only lasted for eight months.

This article moves between theory and practice, using cases from the territories of the Polish Second Republic and its borders to show how local power developed and competed against centralising forces. While exercising sovereign power, local leaders made claims and successfully carried out administrative work, such as policing, taxation and official communication. I argue that the symbiotic relationship between abstract power (theory) and the ability of that power to have a direct effect on the lives of people (practice) is what makes a state a state. Thus in the immediate postwar period rising nation-states competed with or co-opted local polities so that when the borders of Poland solidified in 1921, it was as a consequence of hundreds of such interactions between rival sovereignty claims. Direct territorial government was the first stage of transition from empire to nation-state in post-First World War East Central Europe.

Precedents: Local Autonomy in the German, Austrian and Russian Empires

Democratic local self-government began in the decades before the appearance of mini-states thanks to various reforms. On the territory that became the Second Polish Republic, there were at least four distinct legal contexts in which such institutions functioned. Aside from the dividing lines between German, Austrian and Russian imperial governance, within the empires themselves varying regional frameworks allowed for broad or narrow franchise, and either limited or considerable financial and administrative autonomy. There is a clear correlation between the level of freedom and power afforded to local councils in the late nineteenth century, and declarations of lasting local autonomy in the wake of the First World War. Exercising rights in voting, decision-making and wielding power laid the groundwork for the introduction of independently functioning polities, with no connection to the traditional sources of power.

The largest part of the future Polish state was formed out of Russian territory. The Russian legal system was extremely convoluted and the declaration of a new law did not lead to its equal application across the empire. Instead, administrative units experienced new structures and codices over a drawn out process. In 1864, along with a number of fundamental reforms, communal self-government also underwent massive change. For the lands that became Poland, these reforms did not come into force until 1879, when the mayor (*wójt*) and notary (*pisarz*) became local tax accessors, acting on behalf of the Russian tsar. However, municipal governments and often discussed *zemstvo* councils never came into force in the Polish-majority provinces called the Kingdom of Poland. In territories further east, local councils had the power to make infrastructure improvements on roads, canals and other

[16] Jean Jacques Rousseau, 'On the Social Contract, or, Principles of Political Right', in *The Essential Writings of Rousseau*, Peter Constantine trans. (New York: Modern Library, 2013).

[17] Social science literature tends to be considerably clearer on this subject than historians. See for example: Stephen Krasner, 'Rethinking the Sovereign State Model', *Review of International Studies* (2001), 27, 17–42.

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waterways, as well as found and fund schools. However, who could vote and who could serve on the village councils was severely limited to the landed wealthy elites. Thus these councils tended to solely serve the interests of the affluent, to the detriment of participatory democracy into the future.[18] Jews, even in towns where they constituted a majority, could not participate in local government until the October Manifesto of 1905 drastically changed the political structure of the country. The Revolution of 1905 in the Russian Empire also opened up new opportunities for participatory governance through workers' councils or soviets. The most famous of these early organisations of working-class governance were in St. Petersburg and Moscow.[19] However, in nearly every industrialised area in the Polish lands, similar organisations formed in 1905 and returned after the First World War.[20]

The second largest portion of the interwar Polish state was in the Austrian Empire, mostly the provinces of Galicia and Cieszyn/Tešin Silesia. In the Habsburg Empire, local self-government had a long tradition before the end of the First World War. Village councils and municipal officials became important executors of policy with the advent of the 1867 constitution. These organs were not intended to be legislative bodies or even decision-makers; they received their orders from above and faithfully carried them out.[21] In the unique environment of 1918, however, some of those same structures could be employed to form mini-states. In addition to the responsibilities listed above for the Russian Empire, the Austrian lands put the burden of fire brigades, public safety and business regulation onto village and city governments. All official documents had to be signed by two officials and stamped with an official seal in order to become legally binding. In future, this same system allowed for the issuance of various decrees and passports without power deriving from the imperial centre in Vienna.[22]

The German territories had the most wide-ranging system of self-government among the three empires. Communities collected most taxes at the local level and kept some of that money for discretionary spending. Any adults, including women, who were resident in a community for at least one calendar year could vote, though women, clergy and government employees could not be elected.[23] This broad suffrage was tempered with a curia system to ensure that large landowners would have a numerical advantage. The wealthiest, based upon the amount of land tax paid, could have up to four votes.[24]

The training in democratic politics that German, Austrian and Russian subjects received did not lead to a Jeffersonian dreamland.[25] Then as now, there were many people who did not vote, many who were susceptible to demagoguery, and people who voted against their own economic interests. The major difference after the collapse of empire was that the locals became the ultimate arbiters of sovereign power. This allowed for considerably more freedom and sometimes radical decision-making.

[18] Janek Mrówka, *Jakby się wieśniacy mogli rządzić w gminach?* (Warsaw: Wiek, 1882).

[19] Laura Engelstein, *Moscow, 1905: Working-Class Organization and Political Conflict* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982); Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905* (2 vols.) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988–1992).

[20] Robert Blobaum, *Rewolucja: Russian Poland, 1904–1907* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Wiktor Marzec, *Rising Subjects: The Revolution of 1905 and the Origins of Modern Polish Politics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020).

[21] Pawlo Gural, 'Samorząd lokalny w Galicji i jego regulacje konstytucyjno-prawne (1848–1918)', *Wrocławsko-lwowskie zeszyty prawnicze* 2, 2011, 320–32. Also available in the Ukrainian original.

[22] 'Ustawa gminna dla Królestwa Galicyi i Lodomeryi z Wielkim Księstwem Krakowskiem', *Ustawa o urządzeniu gmin i o ordynacyi wyborczej dla gmin* (Rzeszów: Księgarnia Pelara, 1866).

[23] *Ordynacya gmin wiejskich dla siedmiu wschodnich prowincyi z 3 lipca 1891 z trzema ministeryalnemi instrukcyami* (Poznań: Drukarnia Kuryera Poznańskiego, 1893), 23–5.

[24] Stanisław Kutrzeba, *Historja ustroju Polski w zarysie: Po rozbiorach*, T. 4, cz. II (Lwów: Gebethner i Wolff, 1921), 71–9.

[25] Margaret Anderson, *Practising Democracy: Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

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Ethno-Linguistic Local Democracies in the Carpathian Mountains

In some parts of the region that became Polish territory, small groups defended their local ethno-linguistic identity in opposition to larger polities. Such was the case with Carpathian groups who hoped to avoid being part of either a Polish or Ukrainian state. These mountain dwellers were often linguistically and religiously dissimilar to their flatland Polish or Slovak counterparts. Ukrainian governments, based in L'viv and Kyiv, claimed sub-groups, including Boykos, Lemkos and Hutsuls, as part of their own nation. Thus the declaration of Lemko and Hutsul republics created an uncomfortable dissonance for the broader nationalist claims emanating from cities further east. It also served as a roadblock for state-building projects backed by the Allies such as Czechoslovakia and Poland.

As early as 8 November 1918, when Habsburg rule collapsed in Upper Hungary (modern-day Slovakia), a Rusyn National Council (*Ruska Narodnaia Rada*) met in Lubovna, known then as Olublo. The Council included elders, priests and other village elites from the surrounding counties. The declaration they agreed upon included language about uniting the 'Rusyn (Ruthenian)' people on both sides of the Carpathian Mountains to decide on their own fate as a single unit. Thus, as the Rada moved south to Prešov, debate swirled about whether all Ruthenians should join Russia, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia or Poland.[26]

The Prešov Rada, as it was later known, initially petitioned the Paris Peace Conference for the right to join Russia. A local lawyer, Anton Beskid, emerged as the de facto leader of the Rada and the main author of the report presented to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. In this English-language report, the Rusyn people are referred to as 'Hungarian Russians' for those living south of the Carpathian peaks and 'Lems' (meaning Lemkos) for those to the north. The Beskid report claims that meetings with locals led to the decision that on both sides of the mountains the people desire nothing more than to be joined to Russia. We can only assume they did not mean Bolshevik Russia, but an imaginary White Russia, emerging victorious from the Russian Civil War and that would include all of Ukraine. And if that were impossible, then they could be joined to Czechoslovakia. However, the Prešov group specifically said that 'nothing on earth would induce them to be annexed to Poland'.[27] Beskid then goes on to make accusations that Polish soldiers committed mass murder in Lemko villages.

> The inhabitants, even children were murdered; all possessions were confiscated even to the last hen. Rivers of Russian blood are still flowing in the Lemish country. Those who were not murdered, were thrown into concentration camps, where typhus raged, or into Polish prisons over-crowded with Lems.[28]

There is no extant evidence that such a massacre occurred, but the publicity goal is clear: Beskid and others wanted to prove that Poland could not rule the Lemko people. 'The whole of Lemish and Hungarian Russia beg and insist on not being left to the mercy of Polish domination, which would, as has been proved by the past of Russian and Polish countries, mean certain national death for Lemish Russia'.[29] This fragment appears near the end of the piece and indicates that assimilation into the Polish-language was their greatest concern. As its final consideration to the Allies in Paris, the Prešov group proposed that if a Czechoslovak solution could not be found, they would accept a mandate, under the protection of the United States and Great Britain. The Prešov Rada continued its work toward Czechoslovak unity, but they did not get their wish to

[26] Paul R. Magocsi, *The Shaping of a National Identity: Subcarpathian Rus', 1848–1948* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 87–8.

[27] Anthony Beskid and Dimitry Sobin, *The Origin of the Lems, Slavs of the Danubian Provenance: Memorandum to the Peace Conference Concerning Their National Claims* (Prešov: [n.p.], 1919), 22.

[28] Beskid, *Origin of the Lems*, 22.

[29] Ibid., 24.

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unite with Ruthenians on the northern side of the mountains.[30] Several other similar Ruthenian council governments cropped up in local areas to take control of their fate and decide for themselves which state they would end up in.

While the Prešov Rada claimed to speak for all Rusyns, Lemkos and others were speaking for themselves. On the northern side of the Carpathian Mountains, the Lemkos presented two different visions for the future. Lemkos to the south of Kraków and Nowy Sącz formed a relatively durable mini-state called the Lemko-Rusyn People's Republic.[31] At the end of November, local people started gathering at mass meetings to discuss their future. A mass meeting with representatives from 130 villages and towns in the area voted to form a government composed of an executive council and a national council. Thus on 5 December 1918 Lemko-Rusyn People's Republic came into existence, led by a priest, Mykhal Iurchakevych, and a lawyer, Jaroslav Kacmaryk. Their first order of business was to establish defence capabilities and schools. In official communications and documents, the local dialect became the language of administration.[32] It is unclear what territory the Lemko republic administered, but it was threatening enough to the burgeoning Polish state that Polish police arrested Kacmaryk and the rest of the government in March 1920, putting an end to the official existence of the state.[33]

At around the same time, another Lemko village formed the Komańcza Republic. There a similar pattern played out, with the local intelligentsia – a village priest, a lawyer, a notary – calling together a council to claim their authority over the land. Ruthenian speakers hoped to wrest the area away from potential Polish rule and join the larger entity of the West Ukrainian Republic. This entity lasted only three months before Polish troops arrived and dismantled the mini-state, amidst a wider war against Ukrainians in eastern Galicia.[34]

To the east of the Lemkos, a further Ruthenian subgroup, the Hutsuls, decided to forgo the other available choices and declare their independence. A group of demobilised soldiers from the area attacked Hungarian gendarmes stationed in Rahó/Rakhiv district in January 1919. With this stockpile of weapons. they declared the Hutsul Republic, forming a forty-two-member council and four-man executive government.[35] Rakhiv, though an otherwise sleepy town in the middle of nowhere, was the geographic centre of Europe according to the Viennese Geographic Society. Near the town centre, where a monument declaring Rakhiv's distinction as the 'heart of Europe', the new state began its operations. The council fielded an army of around 1000 men, and the soldiers were quickly called to arms against the encroachments of Romanian troops. For the next few months in 1919, the Hutsul state ruled over a territory with 20,000 inhabitants.

There is little indication that this new form of government dramatically affected the lives of its 'citizens', but it continued to be a thorn in the side of the larger neighbours. The Prešov group ultimately decided the fate of all Subcarpathian Ruthenians who joined Czechoslovakia in April 1919. The Romanian and Czechoslovak troops roaming the area came into direct conflict with the Hutsul army and ended its brief rule in June 1919. The area then was incorporated into the Czechoslovak state in September 1919.

Even beyond their official existence, these short-lived entities continued to pose a threat to Polish officials. The head of the Banica municipality (Grybów county), Wasyl Rydzanycz, continued to issue

[30] Magocsi links this decision to Russophile or Pan-Slavist tendencies among the group. Magocsi, *The Shaping of a National Identity*, 88.

[31] Rada Ludova Republika Lemkiv.

[32] Letter from Appellate Court in Kraków to Viceroy's Office in Lwów, L. 12282.17.N.21 19 VII 1921. Complaints expressed here that all the documents created from that era need to be translated into Polish. Syg. 4/23, Starostwo Powiatowe w Grybowie zes. 217 (SPwG), Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie (ANKr).

[33] Paul Robert Magocsi, 'The Ukrainian Question Between Poland and Czechoslovakia: The Lemko Rusyn Repbulic (1918–1920) and Political Thought in Western Rus'-Ukraine', *Nationalities Papers* Vol. XXI, No. 2, 95–105.

[34] Taduesz Andrzej Olszański, 'Republika Komaniecka – nieznana karta ukraińskiego zrywu niepodległościowego listopad 1918 – styczeń 1919 roku', in *Trzy miesiące wolności: Ukraińska Republika Komaniecka* (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Ukraińskie Dziedzictwo, 2019).

[35] Гуцульська народна рада.

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travel documents until at least mid-1921 without the authorisation to do so.[36] Police accused a priest in a nearby village, Fr. Mykhal Fechytsa, of issuing dozens of passports so that people could move freely between Poland and Czechoslovakia. The new borders could not sever family or traditional ties that spread across the mountain ridge. Investigators also noted that Fr. Fechytsa was in possession of a municipal seal stamp, thus giving him the power to practically make any piece of paper an official document.[37] In the chaotic years after the First World War, a simple ink blotting tool was extremely powerful.[38]

A (Non-Bolshevik) Workers' Council

In the lands that would become Poland, several workers' councils took control of cities and provinces with industrial assets. These were the exact opposite of the Hungarian councils that wanted to maintain the old order as much as possible, since they wished to overturn the past forms of government and replace traditional elites, such as large landowners and imperial police. In the Dąbrowa coal basin, for example, several workers' councils sprung up quickly at mines and factories as it became clear that the Austrian occupation there was collapsing. This area was home to thousands of workers in heavy industry and had been in the Russian Empire before the First World War. Using their experience from the Revolution of 1905 – when the first 'soviets' (councils) were set up – some of the same figures led the charge to replace the local government with revolutionary councils.

A small group of communists started to disarm local Austrian units on 2 November 1918 and used those weapons to found a Red Guard. With around 300 rifles, the loosely connected councils gained some real power. Overnight, between 9–10 November, workers with the People's Militia (*Milicja Ludowa*) took control of all command posts, banks and the county treasury. Local leaders announced independence on 10 November, declaring 'From today onward, both civilian and military power will be in our hands'. The speakers implied that 'we' meant the working class of the Dąbrowa Basin.[39] The next day, German troops responded by trying to take control of the area but failed, and the soldiers were disarmed. The People's Militia, in addition to the boost in arms they gained from the abortive raid, managed to derail an armoured train and commandeer it.

Over the following days, factory workers and miners elected representatives to councils. The remaining German soldiers stationed in the area gave up their weapons after 11 November. This created the opportunity for one of the only organised political forces in the area, the workers' councils, to take over civil administration as well. Thus, with mostly socialist and communist representatives, the administration unified the various local councils into a de facto government for the region called the Council of Workers' Deputies (RDR). The first parliamentary session took place on 19 November, with Henryk Bicz from the Polish Socialist Party as the presiding member. The council included representatives from all the region's mines, factories and steelworks.[40]

The new centralised council, based in Sosnowiec, organised six departments to start the business of governing. Among them were departments addressing business, culture, health, food distribution, education, the military and a secret section for undermining counter-revolutionary forces.[41] The RDR

[36] Letter from Criminal Investigations Department of the State Police in Gorlice to Department IV at Regional Command of the State Police in Kraków, L.174, 10 June 1921, Syg. 4/23, SPwG, ANKr.

[37] The archival record shows several such notes, handwritten in pencil with a stamp bearing the words 'People's government' (громады уряд) and the name of the municipality. For example: passim. Syg. 1/01, Komenda Powiatowa Policji Państwowej w Gorlicach zes. 254, ANKr.

[38] Gábor Egry, 'Negotiating Post-Imperial Transitions: Local Societies and Nationalizing States in East Central Europe', in Paul Miller and Claire Morelon, eds., *Embers of Empire: Continuity and Rupture in the Habsburg Successor States after 1918* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018).

[39] 'Robotnicy ujmują władzę w swoje ręce. Zagłębie Dąbrowskie pod władzą robotników', [no date], Syg. 167/VI – 1, Zesp. 1296 (Rady Delegatów Robotniczych), Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN).

[40] 'Z Zagłębia Dąbrowskiego: Pierwsze posiedzenie Rady Delegatów Robotniczych w Dąbrowie', *Głos Robotniczy*, 20 Nov. 1918.

[41] Henryk Bitner, *Rady Delegatow Robotniczych w Polsce w 1918–1919 r.* (Moscow: Poligrafkniga, 1934), 25.

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defined counter-revolutionary threats quite broadly. For example, when the Warsaw government offered to provide aid in the form of food and medicine, the council refused. At least a majority of the representatives did not want to be associated with what they labelled the 'Paderewski' government in Warsaw, in reference to the pianist-turned-diplomat for the Polish cause, Ignacy Jan Paderewski.[42]

From the surviving record, it appears that the RDR also managed one of the most fundamental functions of governing, that is, tax collection.[43] Unsurprisingly for socialists, the main targets of their tax plans were the factory and mine owners. The RDR used existing Russian law on the books as the basis for their activities but changed the tax rates to ensure that they could extract as much as possible from the businesses operating in the region.[44] A report from April 1919 claims that tax receipts were quite robust over a three month period, indicating that business owners saw the RDR as a legitimate local government in some sense.[45]

Not all workers, however, were allied with the RDR's leftist stance. The National Workers' Union (NZR) and other 'Polish' unions had strong backing since the Revolution of 1905. During one incident at the Saturn mine, a group of nationalist workers attacked socialist unionists who were gathering for a meeting. In the melee several men were killed, leading the RDR to order that all 'white guards' be removed and disarmed. The civil authorities were apparently thinking well into the future since they also offered that the families of the fallen men should receive a pension for the rest of their lives.[46]

A Radical Peasant Republic

On another section of former Austro-Galician territory, the Tarnobrzeg Republic showed a different face of self-determination, with peasant populists resisting the implementation of rule from the traditional landed elites. The unlikely duo of a Catholic priest, Eugeniusz Okoń, and a communist, former Austrian army Capitan Tomasz Dąbal, arose as the leaders of this short-lived state. Situated along the Vistula River, Tarnobrzeg was located at the northern edge of Galicia within the Austro-Hungarian Empire before the First World War. On 31 October 1918, in a Tarnobrzeg movie theatre, locals learned of the end of the Habsburg Empire. The announcement was met with the usual response: disarmament, fleeing soldiers and a remaking of the social order with non-Polish civil servants and police officials unceremoniously removed. Most soldiers stationed in the town simply abandoned their weapons and headed home. They were war-weary Austrian subjects of various origins. The few gendarmes who stayed at their posts dealt with attacks from local bandits, who were then heavily armed. A few gendarmes with a reputation for cruelty were even killed in these attacks. Jews too became an easy target. Marauders attacked the pubs and inns that were part of the fabric of village life, and almost exclusively owned by Jews.[47]

The Tarnobrzeg Republic was part of the larger phenomenon of the 'Green Cadres', armed peasant groups that operated in the former Habsburg lands and beyond.[48] Similarly to their Green counterparts around the region, the radical mini-state and its values did not fit neatly into the traditional paradigms of party politics. While they highlighted their Polishness and could be labelled 'national', they also rejected the leadership role played by traditional Polish elites, the great magnate families, because

[42] Bitner, *Rady Delegatów Robotniczych*, 23.

[43] 'Posiedzenie Komitetu Wykonawczego', 31 Jan. 1919, Syg 167/VI – 1, Rady Delegatów Robotniczych, AAN.

[44] 'W sprawie opodatkowwania przedsiębiorstw', undated, Syg 167/VI – 1, Rady Delegatów Robotniczych, AAN.

[45] Report from Zagłębie Dąbrowskie, 11 Apr. 1919 [signed by Ludwik Szmid], Syg. 167/I- 1, Rady Delegatów Robotniczych, AAN.

[46] Letter from RDR to Commander of Dąbrowa area in Dąbrowa Górnicza, 22 Nov. 1918, Syg 167/VI – 1, Rady Delegatów Robotniczych, AAN.

[47] Józef Rawski, *Republika Tarnobrzeska w świetle źródeł i wspomnień adiutanta Powiatowej Komendy Wojsk Polskich w Tarnobrzegu* (Tarnobrzeg: Rada Miasta Tarnobrzega, 1993), 9–14.

[48] Jakub Benes, 'The Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918', *Past and Present*, Vol. 236(1) (2017): 207–41. Benes writes about the Tarnobrzeg Republic (pgs. 236–7), but his account is unfortunately riddled with errors and citations that do not support his suppositions. For example, it would be physically impossible to fit 30,000 people in the market square in Tarnobrzeg, which is less than 10,000m^2.

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of the antagonism entrenched in a post-feudal society. The gap between the old feudal 'lords' and their former serfs was too great to overcome, even generations after the formal end of feudalism. To some extent the movement rode on the 'red wave' of the moment, but its content was informed by Catholicism and village antisemitism. The peasant radicals delivered a violent message of liberation, but one limited only to their strict socio-national group.

During the time of war, formal governing had been dominated by local Polish elites who generally did the bidding of whatever occupying force was in power. Peasants resented the fact that as the fronts moved, sometimes Russian, sometimes Austrian troops demanded the same types of forced requisitions of cereals, grains and livestock.[49] The wealthy landowners and intelligentsia managed to survive this period relatively unscathed. Therefore when those same elites claimed to take over the reins of formal power, they had no mandate from the population to rule and as a result dealt with protests and unrest from the impoverished farmers in the area. Inequality was the top concern in that region, where just ten families owned 70 per cent of the land.[50]

The first major issue that arose was that of safety. The end of Austrian rule, and the easy availability of weapons, coupled with demobilised soldiers still roaming around, made for a particularly dangerous environment. The magnates were incapable of controlling the situation to any degree. As a result, several competing paramilitary organisations arose, such as the citizens' militia in Tarnobrzeg, all with the stated goal of protecting life and property. Jews, however, remained mostly unprotected. Even 'official' forces, such as the Polish Military Organization (POW) and PKL attacked and robbed Jewish merchants. Under their command were some of the best equipped and trained 'Polish' soldiers, though at this stage there was no central Polish state.

The county committee, formed of peasant leaders on 6 November 1918, asked the former Austrian civil servants to step aside, but they refused to cede power until a 'higher authority' would arise. Physicality won out, and the citizens militia in Tarnobrzeg bodily removed them from office. In the absence of Austrian soldiers and gendarmes, peasant soldiers, in the form of the Rural Guard (*Straż wiejska*), became the reigning military-policing force.[51] Peasants replaced the gentry clerks and the Tarnobrzeg Republic was born. Its putative territory stretched between the Vistula and San rivers, covering a sizable swath of land, with Tarnobrzeg in the west and Nisko in the east as its urban centres. There were no elections in the area, but farmers showed their support (or disdain) through weekly parades, numbering around 5,000 participants, held in Tarnobrzeg.[52] At these rallies local Catholic priest and firebrand preacher Father Eugeniusz Okoń egged on the hungry and impoverished small holders, telling them that it was God's will to steal from the wealthy.[53] The focal point in Tarnobrzeg was always the statue of Bartosz Głowacki, who was a peasant volunteer in the Kościuszko Uprising (1794), and thus a symbol of both peasant agency and Polish patriotism. Okoń drew inspiration from the events of revolutionary Russia, where land hungry farmers simply dispossessed the old elites, though he adapted this message perfectly for his audience. Okoń wrapped a radical view in the language of religion, often repeating that God would forgive their acts of thievery and violence in the name of cosmic justice.

As the leader of the new Republic, Okoń nominated Tomasz Dąbal, a radical peasant politician and former Austrian army captain, to take over the formal authority of the gendarmes. Dąbal inherited the infrastructure of buildings, weapons and equipment of the old gendarmes, the men of the citizens' militia and, most importantly, the claim to the authority of the state. Dąbal and Okoń promised safety to their peasant constituents, but not to those who lay outside of it. From Okoń's speeches, we can glean that the intelligentsia, magnates and Jews were not worthy of protection.

[49] Rawski, *Republika Tarnobrzeska*, 18.

[50] Zdzisława Trawińska and Augustyn Ciulik, '*Republika Tarnobrzeska' w świetle faktów i dokumentów* (Rzeszów: Druk Rzeszowski Zakłady Graficzne, 1958).

[51] Przeniosło, *Polska Komisja Likwidacyjna*, 245–6.

[52] The first such meeting supposedly drew more than 10,000 participants. Tadeusz Spiss, *Ze wspomnień c.k. urzędnika politycznego* (Rzeszów: [n.p.], 1936), 156.

[53] Przeniosło, *Polska Komisja Likwidacyjna*, 247.

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While the Republic widened its reach, claims and counterclaims for sovereignty over the territory continued. The successor of the Galician administration, known as the Polish Liquidation Commission (PKL) in Kraków, which was dominated by conservative political figures, nominated its own commissioner for the territory. In actual fact, he had no power whatsoever, only a claim to govern Tarnobrzeg and four surrounding counties.[54] Okoń and Dąbal refused to bow to someone they saw as antithetical to their mission. Attitudes changed slightly when Ignacy Daszyński, a prominent social democrat from Galicia and seasoned parliamentarian, declared the People's Republic of Poland in Lublin on 7 November 1918. The city, located to the northeast from Tarnobrzeg, was part of the Russian Empire prior to the war, but served as a hub for the Austrian occupation of Russian lands. Okoń sent representatives to Lublin to see if the Tarnobrzeg Republic should join this new entity. With travel stalled, however, little came of this since, by 11 November, Daszyński had ceded his symbolic power to Józef Piłsudski, who arrived in Warsaw to become the 'head of state'.

The declaration of a Polish Republic in Warsaw changed little for the people of Tarnobrzeg. Every Wednesday, the market day, a familiar scene repeated itself. Thousands of peasants paraded through the centre of town, listened attentively to the words of Father Okoń, and usually a few looters robbed Jewish shops and homes. Similar scenarios played out in Nisko, Rozwadów and various other market towns in the territory of the mini-state.[55] Agitators spread out to surrounding villages to promulgate their radical message, that the reign of the 'lords' had ended. This resulted in hundreds of riled-up peasants pillaging the largest estates in the area.[56]

In order to finally get control of the situation, and end the reign of Okoń and Dąbal, the PKL sent a contingent of a few hundred soldiers to Tarnobrzeg on 4 December. Okoń referred to the soldiers as the 'lords' army (*wojsko panów*), connecting them not to God but to the magnate families that had ruled the land for centuries. As the local farmers incensed each other, calls came to disarm the soldiers. They yelled that instead of defending Lwów/L'viv, which was then engaged in a war between Ukrainian and Polish units, these men came to babysit a bunch of farmers. The soldiers managed to disperse the crowd with bayonets, and no one was shot.[57] Despite continued pressure from the outside, expressions of popular will continued.

The PKL leaders considered this situation untenable and therefore ordered a 'pacification' of the area. Polish army units travelled around to villages and towns in the Tarnobrzeg Republic, disarming anyone they could.[58] This action did little to endear the local people to their new government. Despite whatever the PKL wanted to do, they could not prevent peasants from attacking their perceived enemies, the Jews and magnates. Each time a riot or an attack occurred, peasants murdered a few people and injured dozens, and they did so in the name of justice, supported by the Tarnobrzeg Republic.

One of the first acts of the Piłsudski-led Warsaw government was to set a date for parliamentary elections. The elections to the so-called legislative Sejm included only a fraction of the lands that would be part of Poland in the following years, but it did include the Tarnobrzeg Republic. This provided another opportunity for Dąbal and Okoń to travel around the area and promote their ideas, and themselves. Before the elections took place, however, a prosecutor in Rzeszów issued an arrest warrant for the two men. Dąbal got wind of the order early and managed to escape. Okoń was arrested on 6 January 1919, just days before the elections. The Tarnobrzeg Republic fizzled out without its leaders

[54] The Tarnobrzeg Republic controlled four surrounding counties: Mielec, Niżanski, Kolbuszkówki and Tarnobrzeski.

[55] In Rozwadów, on 4 and 13 Nov., crowds of people robbed and beat Jews, in response to a speech by Okoń. Konrad Zieliński, 'Z fali zajść antysemickich i pogromów w Galicji Zachodniej: Mielec, listopad 1918 r', in Kamil Kijek, Artur Markowski and Konrad Zieliński, eds., *Pogromy Zydow na Ziemiach Polskich w XIX i XX wieku, T. 2: Studia przypadków (do 1939 roku)* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IH PAN, 2019), 226.

[56] Zdzisław Tarnowski and Seweryn Dolański were the wealthiest magnates in the area. Przeniosło, *Polska Komisja Likwidacyjna*, 252.

[57] Rawski, *Republika Tarnobrzeska*, 45.

[58] Ibid., 48–50.

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and the PKL managed to send more troops to control the area. The Tarnobrzeg experiment in radical peasant rule was at an end.[59]

Despite the fact that Okoń was sitting in a jail cell in Rzeszów, voters were not discouraged from electing him, and he was therefore freed. Parliamentary immunity also provided Dąbal with a chance to come out of hiding. The two men headed off to Warsaw, where Dąbal announced that he was not just a peasant radical but a communist.[60]

The above examples can be contrasted with many other expressions of local sovereignty that stopped short of declaring independence. In the aforementioned German lands, especially around Poznań, Polish majority areas had little difficulty taking over the formal reins of governing, often while maintaining experienced German clerks for several years afterwards. This was the case in tax offices and city works departments, where local Poles had little experience. While a central council cropped up in Poznań, with prominent nationalist politicians at its head, they never claimed to be their own country. In November 1918, they awaited the arrival of a stronger force in Warsaw to attach themselves to – an idea to which they could declare their allegiance.

In Krakow, the PKL also functioned like a government, but they had the easiest time of all. They simply inherited the structures of the Galician administration, which was already employing a majority of Polish civil servants. In the immediate aftermath of the empire's collapse, the civil administration swore allegiance not to the PKL but to a non-existent Polish state. In the more linguistically diverse former Austrian Duchy of Cieszyn/Tesin, a Polish council government claimed that it belonged to a Polish state long before one existed. Czechs, meanwhile, claimed the same territory without actually administering it.

In the northeast, the dispute between Polish and Lithuanian claims over the same territory shows a different range of 'small sovereignty' claims. In the regions around Suwalki/Suvalkai, Sejny/Seinai and Wilno/Vilnius there were some 'republics' declared, but they were fundamentally different from entities further to the south.[61] Here there was often a divide between town and country, with burghers mostly siding with the Polish cause and villagers supporting the Lithuanian soldiers. Since paramilitary groups constantly crisscrossed the region, there was little opportunity to set up a civil administration and thus cross the line between a battleground and a 'state'. After the Allies brokered an agreement to stop the fighting, creating a neutral zone between Lithuanian and Polish controlled areas, the neutral zone itself became the site of the so-called Warwiszki/Varviškė Republic, though it would be fairer to call it a terror campaign of the local population. A rag-tag band of Polish-speaking ex-soldiers requisitioned resources, threatened people and wreaked havoc in twelve villages inhabited mostly by Belarusian and Lithuanian speakers. The only expression of statehood was the so-called Republic's use of unique postage stamps that were only good for delivering a letter to the nearest Polish post office. Further investigation revealed that these were produced by the Polish government in Warsaw.[62]

When examining all these examples together, it becomes clear which elements were necessary to claim statehood. The council or republic group had to control communication (post offices and telegraph lines), civil administration, and some organised threat of physical force, a group of armed men formed into gendarmes or an army. Sovereign practice (administration) and sovereign theory (a claim to power) must come together. The emergence of hundreds of local national councils did not always rise to the level of statehood since they did not necessarily take control, or pretend to take control, of administering a territory. To maintain that the absence of violent crime would be the benchmark for the cessation of 'war' and the beginning of statehood would be inappropriate and wrong. Besides the practical trappings of state control, most of the entities deserving the title of mini-state legitimated

[59] Ibid., 51.

[60] Spiss, *Ze wspomnień c.k. urzędnika politycznego*, 163.

[61] Tomas Balkelis, *War, Revolution, and Nation-Making in Lithuania, 1914–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 136–55.

[62] Gintaras Lučinskas, 'Varviškės "Respublika" (1920–1923)', *Jotvingių kraštas: jotvingių krašto istorijos paveldo metraštis*, 5 (2013), 278–304.

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their power with democratic processes. Direct and effective voting, or the voicing of opinions in street protests, led to the formation of Rousseauian republics across East Central Europe.

Conclusion

What counts as a mini-state then is an entity that comes into being from the bottom-up and not the top-down. But why did people feel the need to even declare their independence at that historical moment? In several examples, concerns for language and national culture seemed to play a distinct role. People feared that a change in polity would lead to a change in their status. For some ethnic groups, the multi-national imperial environment was more conducive to their way of life than a national state where they would forever be a minority. This was clear with the various groups in the Carpathian Mountains who wanted to control their future in whichever state they may have ended up.

One could just as reasonably ask why there were no Jewish republics cropping up. Surely Jews did not constitute a majority in any large geographic area, but there were towns with Jewish majorities.[63] Could Bialystok or other majority-Jewish towns have formed their own mini-republics? Perhaps the question is naïve since Jewish autonomy through the *kehillot* was a fact of life for centuries. This question might reveal why the other mini-states appeared in the first place: to decide a given community's future. The *kehilla* was an institution of the past, not the future. Moreover, to ensure any chance of economic success, mini-states had to envision that they would be attached to a larger entity at some point in the future. There could be no hope, however, for a Jewish state in Europe.[64]

In each case, we can see how people's actions were reliant on a larger movement: socialism, nationalism or peasant localism. In the case of the Carpathian republics, each one served a slightly different purpose, but they all wanted the local people to decide their fate. In other cases, such as the workers' councils in the Dąbrowa basin or the Tarnobrzeg Republic, economic relations played a key role. Perhaps there was no disagreement among those leaders that they should belong to a state called 'Poland', but the disagreement was over what kind of state that would be.

Each ideology that drove the political discourse in the postwar period was justified through popular sovereignty, even if authoritarians did not want to see those people vote. As shown above, the foundational moments of several interwar successor states were shaped through their reactions to local expressions of sovereignty. For Czechoslovakia and Poland especially, the entire goal of forming a new state was to replace the imperial form of governance with self-government. Hiding behind this objective was the principle that sovereignty belongs to the 'people', and if we are to take this seriously then this change in sovereign power is extremely significant for the transition period. While many 'imperial ghosts' continued to hang on, the sovereign did not remain the same.

This is especially clear in the democratic nature of these short-lived state projects. For each locality there was a clear majority of some kind to support the formulation of a mini-state: in Tarnobrzeg, small farmers; in Dąbrowa, industrial workers; in Schwenten, German-speakers. And direct democracy took centre stage to justify the rule of these groups. The original formulation of Czechoslovakia took place without the consent of the (potentially) governed, with agreements signed in the United States and negotiations taking place in Paris. Wilson was supposedly surprised to learn that Bohemia was full of German-speakers, exclaiming, 'That's curious! Masaryk never told me that!'[65]

Since none of these mini-states lasted very long, why does their existence matter? These expressions of local autonomy show that support for self-determination was a widespread phenomenon, coming from the bottom up, not just top down. Though historians have often claimed that local actors around

[63] There were Jewish councils in some Galician towns, including a centralised one in Kraków, but it never pretended to be an administrator of government, it was meant only to represent Jewish interests.

[64] An excellent work on Jewish nationalism is: Jan Rybak, *Everyday Zionism in East-Central Europe: Nation-Building in War and Revolution, 1914–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

[65] Larry Wolff, *Woodrow Wilson and the Reimagining of Eastern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 169.

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the globe were inspired by Woodrow Wilson's liberal idealism, it is more likely that the arrival of mini-states was a practical solution to an unusual situation, a continuation of older practices with new powers.[66] Moreover, the diversity of responses – socialist, peasant, and so on – show varying visions of the future, not just one defined by nationalism and liberal constitutionalism. The mini-state moment was just one piece in a longer discourse over what types of states would replace empires. The workers' councils obviously envisioned a different future than the radical peasants in Tarnobrzeg or national conservatives in Varviškė. With so many competing ideas about what type of state Poland would become, and several large minority populations with high levels of national consciousness, it would seem that the country would require a federal structure. In the end, however, centralising forces won out, and local institutions remained relatively weak throughout the interwar period.

Despite that, the mini-state phenomenon is a key aspect of how state building took place in the aftermath of the First World War. The process of shifting from land empires to nation-states went through a brief transition period that likely changed how ordinary people understood sovereign power, i.e. not necessarily as the sole possession of a faraway monarch but as a common good that can be felt closer to home. This change in perception did not necessarily lead to widespread support for parliamentary democracy, but it gave power to the previously powerless.

[66] Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the Intetrnational Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

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