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**Janusz Faryś, Grzegorz Kucharczyk, Elżbieta Skorupska-Raczyńska, Przemysław Słowiński, *Cud niepodległości. Odbudowa państwa polskiego 1918–1919* [*The miracle of independence. The rebuilding of the Polish state 1918–1919*], Gorzów Wielkopolski: Wydawnictwo Akademii im. Jakuba z Paradyża, 2018, 202 pp.**

The year 2018, for obvious reasons, abounded in a set of undertakings, diverse in form and content, accompanying the celebrations of the centenary of Poland's regaining independence. The issue of restoration of sovereignty was attempted to be looked at from various angles and perspectives, using, among others, film, several kinds of exhibitions, concerts and conferences. An important place in the process of commemoration was also played by book publications, usually the result of scholarly reflection of historians. A number of propositions referring in their content to the theme of independence appeared on the publishing market.

The book under review is one of those. Four Authors, representing the Jakub of Paradyż Academy in Gorzów Wielkopolski, presented texts, the result of their own research, which are linked by the topic of independent Poland. However, the Authors clearly "trimmed" the subject, both in terms of time and problems. The first was clearly indicated in the subtitle of the work (The rebuilding of the Polish state 1918–1919), while the second was signalled in the introduction: "The authors focused on issues of domestic politics and diplomacy, showing the essence of the process of building the foundations of the country's statehood" (p. 8). The area of research thus outlined was supposed to limit the scope of consideration, which, however, did not turn out to be entirely possible (although it did eliminate the

analysis of, among other things, the important and interesting issues of the struggle for national borders; nevertheless, echoes of these events are present in the narrative).

The book has a problem-based structure, clearly divided into five chapters, for which the respective authors were (autonomously) responsible. It has been prepared on a solid factual basis, although it should be noted that the Authors did not reach directly to the archives or the press. However, they have made extensive use of the available literature on the subject (both books and articles)<sup>1</sup>, which they supported with references to normative acts, as well as Internet resources.

The first chapter of the book can be regarded as unusual or, one might say, “unobvious”. In a work, which seems to be uniformly historical, we first encounter reflections on language. The situation becomes a little clearer when we take a look at the profile of the Author. This is because Elżbieta Skorupska-Raczyńska, who heads the Jakub z Paradyża Academy, is a professor of humanities and linguistics. The Author has made the expressions, notions and paraphrases present in the Polish language and connected with the problem of independence the leit-motif of her chapter. Her analysis is based on a very wide chronological range – from the Renaissance (although in places her references go as far back as the Bible) to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The text is richly woven with references to specific writers and their output. Thanks to this chapter, Readers can learn the etymology and meaning of particular terms, as well as see how they were used by certain artists. One could say that the linguist’s statement confirms the historian’s opinion that “the image of independence [...] is characterized by struggle and suffering” (p. 28). The Author aptly referred to the historical context, but she did not avoid a mistake, because when describing the realities of the 19<sup>th</sup> century she referred to the attitude of a Pole – a Catholic – a patriot, which “was reflected in the unambiguously interpreted and perceived motto ‘God – Honour – Homeland’ displayed on military banners, and being a kind of life motto of a soldier, an officer, a Pole, a responsible and noble man” (p. 18). Yet the motto adopted by the Polish army in 1919 was “Honour and Homeland”, “God” was added for a short time in 1943<sup>2</sup>, while the inscription “God – Honour – Homeland” was introduced on the banners of the armed forces in the reality of the Third Republic and only in 1993.

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<sup>1</sup> Although it may seem surprising that G. Kucharczyk did not make use of Michał Śliwa’s work (*Polska myśl polityczna w I połowie XX wieku*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1993), or that P. Słowiński did not refer to Karol Sanojca’s (*Relacje polsko-ukraińskie w szkolnictwie państwowym południowo-wschodnich województw Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Kraków 2013).

<sup>2</sup> In the maxim “To the Fatherland everything but the love of God Supreme and Honour”.

The Chapter Two, written by Janusz Faryś, introduces the Readers to the essential, because strictly historical part of the work. It presents a historical sketch of building the Polish state in the years 1918–1919. It is difficult to find mistakes or point out errors to the Author, who is a student of Janusz Pajewski, one of the best known and respected researchers of the interwar period of the older generation<sup>3</sup>. Rather, it is worth examining the structure of the chapter. Let us therefore briefly note the main threads: a description of the circumstances of the formation of the organs of state power and the competition for power between various political forces (culminating in the formation and launching of Ignacy Jan Paderewski's government); a presentation of the first social reforms; an overview of the beginnings of democracy (elections and the earliest period of the activity of the Constituent Assembly); a picture of the emergence of two different visions of the reborn Poland (Piłsudski's federation-based vision and R. Dmowski's incorporation-based one) as well as a reminder of the work on the structure of the political system and the development of the economic life of the state. Although in the introduction to the book the Authors declared that they would not discuss the military aspects of shaping the country's borders, the text does contain some references to these issues. Faryś describes, among other things, the formation of the Polish army, tracing the Polish-Ukrainian conflict and the dispute over Vilnius, sketching a picture of "Poland as the largest state in Europe" ("because it had no borders, wars were fought on all of them", p. 46). Particularly interesting are those passages in which the Author referred to lesser known aspects (e.g. noting as a 'paradox of the times of the breakthrough' the establishment of Jędrzej Moraczewski's government by J. Piłsudski, and the issuing by that government of a decree appointing J. Piłsudski as Interim Chief of State, as well as reminding of edifying examples of rising above particular political interests by J. Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski, pp. 34, 37). J. Faryś summed up his presentation of these issues by stating that "[t]he period under review was a period of great successes in almost every field" (p. 66).

The next two chapters were written by Grzegorz Kucharczyk, Professor of the Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, a scholar of Germany and the history of political thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See: Janusz Faryś, *Koncepcje polskiej polityki zagranicznej: 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1982; *idem*, *Piłsudski i Piłsudczycy. Z dziejów koncepcji polityczno-ustrojowej (1918–1939)*, Szczecin 1991.

centuries<sup>4</sup>. In his discussion, he analysed Polish political thought (in Chapter Three) and the foreign policy of the Second Republic (in Chapter Four) in the first two years of the reborn Independent Poland. Chapter Three presents an orderly and synthetic picture of the political thought of Polish socialists, national democrats, representatives of the most important groupings of the people's movement, conservatives, Christian democrats and communists. In the Chapter Four the Author presented a picture of the relations between J. Piłsudski and R. Dmowski, shaped at the beginning of the Polish statehood, and then presented a vision of Polish foreign policy in the first two years of the Second Republic. As a good researcher of Polish-German relations G. Kucharczyk dedicated special attention to these relations, characterizing, among other things, the conditions accompanying the Wielkopolska Uprising and the Paris Conference. In the second part of the chapter, G. Kucharczyk outlined the attitudes of other countries to the Polish questions: Soviet Russia, Great Britain, and the United States, and concluded by returning to the manner in which Polish eastern policy had been shaped. In this case as well, the Author's evaluation of the Polish achievements is unequivocally positive – the whole of Polish foreign policy of that period was assessed by him as “the success of the reborn Polish state” (p. 119).

The final chapter, concerning social policy of the Polish state, was prepared by Przemysław Słowiński, a historian currently serving as Vice-Chancellor of the Academy. Although the Author is mainly known for his publications relating to the period after World War II<sup>5</sup>, the chapter is nevertheless a thorough study of the policies of those in power in the context described above. The Author began his considerations by presenting the models of social policy of the partitioning states, after which he described the social activities carried out by the first governments of the Second Republic. He presented and described in detail the main problems of the emerging Poland: housing and supply limitations, the process of counteracting unemployment, solutions in the area of insurance and health care, the regulation of salaries and pensions, and other employee rights, as well as ways of counteracting activities “with the characteristics of usury and speculation”. He also paid considerable attention to the reconstruction of the foundations of education, taking into account the difficulties of both general and university education, but also the training in teachers' colleges.

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g.: *Polska myśl polityczna po roku 1939*, Dębogóra 2009, and *Polska myśl polityczna do roku 1939*, Dębogóra 2011.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Przemysław Słowiński, *Administracja terytorialna województwa szczecińskiego w latach 1945–1950*, Gorzów Wielkopolski 2008.

As a reviewer writing for “Silesian Historical Quarterly *Sobótka*”, I feel obliged to examine what the Authors of the book wrote about the “Silesian question”, and it is sad to note that the Upper Silesian theme appeared very rarely in this publication. The figure of Wojciech Korfanty was mentioned only in the context of his membership in the Commissariat of the Supreme People’s Council in Poznań and the leadership of the Popular National Union in the Parliament. The first Silesian Uprising was only mentioned in one perfunctory passage (“[...] the division of Upper Silesia had not been resolved, the Silesians were waiting for a plebiscite. The relatively short-term First Silesian Uprising showed that, irrespective of the Versailles decisions, another armed conflict might be still threatening”, p. 56). The Upper Silesian issues also appeared in the above mentioned quotation by Gustav Stresemann, which was an echo of the debate in the Reichstag on October 25 (p. 100), during which W. Korfanty demanded “Polish districts of Upper Silesia, Middle Silesia”<sup>6</sup> and during the presentation of the territorial postulates of the Polish delegation in Versailles and the Allies’ decision on the plebiscite settlement (pp. 106–107). It has to be said that the subject matter concerning the region (although formally its part became part of the reborn Poland only in 1922) is far too absent, even when the narrative allows this theme to be easily woven into the considerations.

The shortcomings of the book are: “overlapping” of some elements (e.g. elements of description of political thought of the main forces of the Second Republic by both J. Faryś and G. Kucharczyk); minor editorial errors (e.g. the figure mentioned on p. 188 was Stanisław Janicki, not Stanisław Jancki) or the lack of indication of the sources of some data (as on p. 170, when P. Słowiński provides the number of students in different cities of Poland). Strong aspects of the book – the ability to build a narrative that can attract and hold the reader’s attention, and – perhaps paradoxically – the small volume of the work (200 pages), “digestible” for a modern recipient. And certainly the editorial quality of the book. The carefulness of the edition is noticeable in almost all aspects. It is visible already at the stage of the front cover. The hard-cover shows on the front a photograph from the collection of the National Digital Archive [NAC] depicting Józef Piłsudski against a background of marching armed formations and red and white contours of the borders of the Second Republic of Poland. The back cover contains photocopies of the first pages of “*Goniec Krakowski*” of 12<sup>th</sup> November 1918, and “*Monitor Polski*” of the same date. Attention to the non-narrative elements

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<sup>6</sup> See Grzegorz Bębnik, Sławomir Rosenbaum, Mirosław Węcki, *Wojciech Korfanty 1873–1939*, Warszawa–Katowice 2018, p. 30.

of the book can also be seen in its interior. The publisher and the Authors have made sure that the effects of the scholars' work included in the book are complemented by an imaginative layer. The appendix contains not only photocopies of the press titles visible on the cover, but also texts of the most important documents and speeches which had an impact on the formation of the Second Republic (J. Piłsudski's telegram of 16<sup>th</sup> November 1918 notifying the creation of the Polish state, the Chief of State's decree of 22<sup>nd</sup> November 'on the supreme representative power of the Polish Republic', and J. Piłsudski's speech at the inaugural session of the Legislative Sejm of 10<sup>th</sup> February 1919). The appendix is supplemented by photographs of the most important Polish politicians of the period, provided by NAC: of J. Piłsudski, I. Paderewski, R. Dmowski, J. Moraczewski, Wincenty Witos and Ignacy Daszyński, as well as "background" figures (e.g. Generals Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki, Józef Leśniewski and Kazimierz Sosnkowski), which help the reader in better understanding the content and show visually the more important heroes of those events. Although it needs to be emphasized that photographs of not all the "Fathers of Independence" were included, again referring to the regional perspective, let us note that it is particularly regrettable that the image of W. Korfanty is missing. Another deficiency is the incomplete identification system (there is an index of surnames but no index of geographical names), which somewhat hinders a more analytical reading of the book (e.g. through the prism of specific places). Whereas an advantage (especially in the context of promoting Polish history outside its borders) is the inclusion of a summary of the work in as many as four languages (English, French, German and Russian).

To sum up: the book *Cud Niepodległości. Odbudowa państwa polskiego 1918–1919* is not an innovative study. It does not present the events of a hundred years ago as Jochen Böhrer did in his *Civil War*<sup>7</sup>, published in the same year. However, as one should assume, its Authors did not aspire to present a work which would "overturn" the existing order resulting from the findings of historiography. Rather, they intended to prepare a skilfully written review of the process of shaping the reborn Polish state in the first years of the Second Polish Republic – as they said themselves, to give "expression to the memory of events fundamental for posterity". And they succeeded in achieving this goal. At a time of heightened interest in historical themes, the book therefore provides material through which the reader can expand their knowledge and find inspiration and hints for further research.

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<sup>7</sup> See Jochen Böhrer, *Wojna domowa. Nowe spojrzenie na odrodzenie Polski*, Kraków 2018.