

# ARDUOUS ROAD TO STATEHOOD AT THE END OF IMPERIAL RULE

## SACRIFICE COOPERATION TRADITION

### ENTHUSIASM FOR INDEPENDENCE - RETURN TO THE MAP OF EUROPE AFTER 123 YEARS OF ENSLAVEMENT

In all three partitions, as well as in exile, Poles conducted conspiratorial activities aimed at insurrectionary struggle, often ending in deportation to Siberia or imprisonment in a Prussian or Austrian fortress. Despite these setbacks, care was taken to maintain Polish national consciousness, passing on to the next generation devotion to the native language and culture and faith in regaining independence.

And finally, after more than 100 years of subjugation, numerous international crises - including increasing disputes between the partitioning powers - led to the outbreak of World War I (1914-1918). In its course, Germany and Austria rose up against Russia, and Poles began to see the situation as an opportunity to regain a sovereign state.

Consequently, they independently formed military units in the partitioned lands (e.g., Józef Pilsudski's Legions in the territories occupied by Austria) and abroad ("Blue" Polish Army in France of General Józef Haller) and actively participated in the ongoing military operations. Their struggle, however, was not aimed at bringing about the victory of any of the partitioners, but at the establishment of the independent Republic. Finally, the year 1918 arrived, in which the Germans and Austria were finally defeated, and Russia was struggling with the civil war. In this situation, on November 11, Poles enthusiastically proclaimed the rebirth of Rzeczpospolita [the Republic], headed by Marshal Józef Pilsudski as Chief of State. The anniversary of this event very soon began to be solemnly celebrated as a patriotic Independence Day.



Welcoming of a Polish refugee in France. After the unhappily ended November Uprising, and later subsequent fruitless uprisings, Poles were forced to leave the Polish lands in large numbers, and thus was born the phenomenon of the Great Emigration, which in France established many Polish associations, schools, libraries, parishes, also led an intense political life, constantly reminding the countries of Western Europe of the relevance of the "Polish cause"

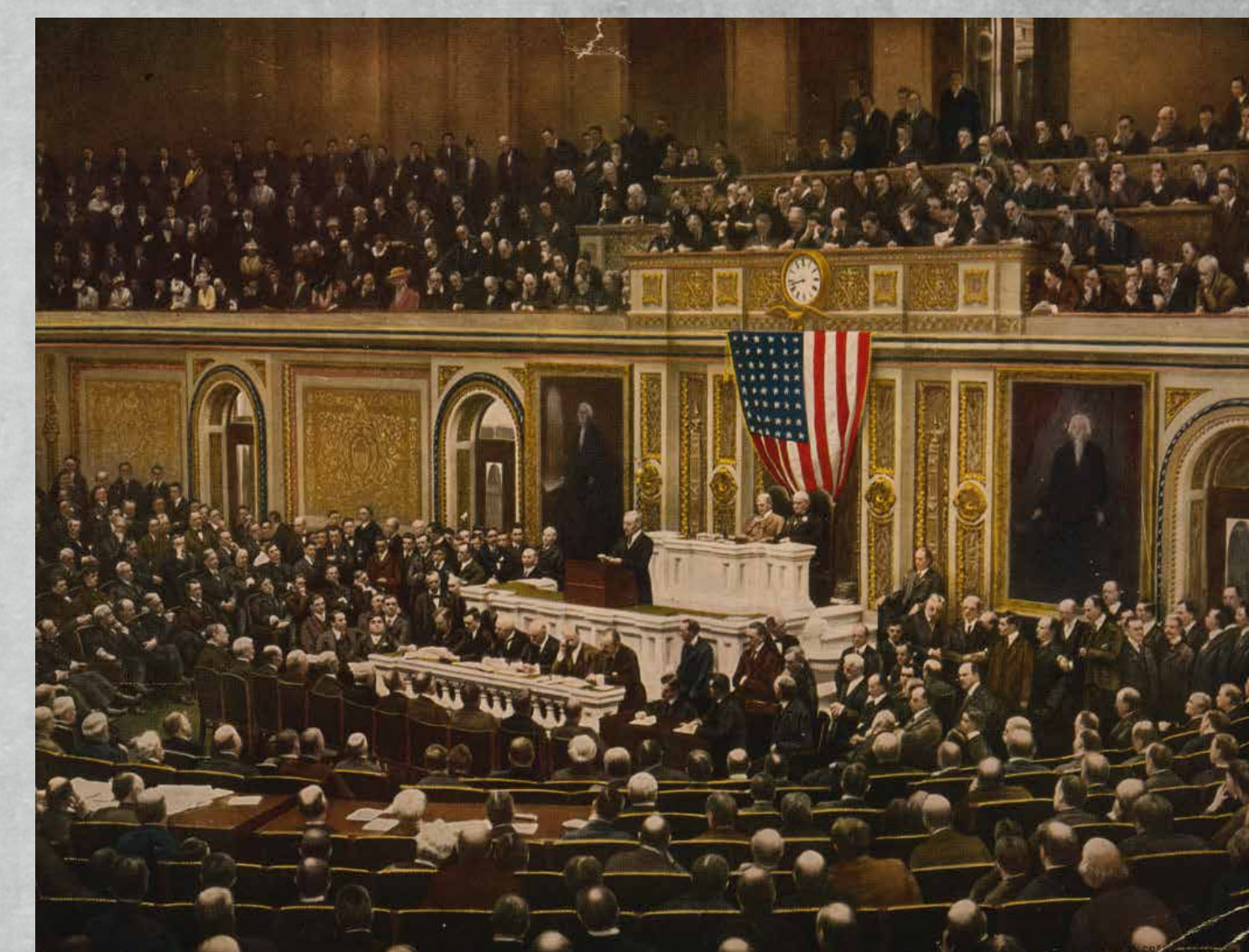
*An independent and democratic Poland - this is the goal of our association.*

*Not one part, not one fraction of a great nation, but the whole of Poland, united within its pre-partition borders, is capable of maintaining its independent existence, of fulfilling its mission [...]. The crime [of partition] perpetrated on Poland interrupted only the political existence of the country, but did not destroy the life of the nation [...]. The unceasing efforts for independence infallibly bear witness that the Polish nation is alive, that it is certain of its future [...].*

excerpt from the Great Manifesto of the Polish Democratic Society - a Polish organization created in exile after the fall of the November Uprising



Staff of Legion officers with Commander Józef Pilsudski, Kielce, August 1914.



U.S. President Thomas Woodrow Wilson's address to Congress, which aroused enthusiasm among Poles as giving them hope for American support for the idea of regaining the Republic's independence, January 8, 1918.



A group of immigrant volunteers spontaneously joining the Polish Army being formed in France, to be led by Gen. Józef Haller in October 1918.



Józef Haller (second from right) takes the oath as commander-in-chief of the Polish Army in France (the so-called Blue Army), October 6, 1918.

*Our program is one that will bring peace to the world; this program - in our opinion the only possible one - is as follows:(...)*

*13 An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant (...).*

excerpt from the US President's speech to Congress on the so-called Polish question

***I swear before the Lord God Almighty in the Holy Trinity alone, to be faithful to my homeland, Poland, one and independent, I swear that I am ready to give my life for the sacred cause of its unification and liberation, to defend my banner to the last drop of blood, to uphold discipline and obedience to military authority, and in all my conduct to uphold the honor of the Polish soldier.***

text of the oath delivered by General Józef Haller when taking command of the Polish Army created in France in 1918.

*On the night of November 9-10, all of Warsaw took to the streets in incredible excitement. All feuds were forgotten [...] Everyone wanted to return home with a bayonet, a saber, a revolver, and at worst with a German belt or a cockade of a military cap. Railroad stations, areas where German troops were quartered, places where uniformed Germans were encountered were guarded. Force was not used, moreover, there was no need. The disarming was accompanied by general laughter from the crowd, general joy, general enthusiasm, and the Germans disarmed to such accompaniment usually did not hide their satisfaction, if not their gratitude. Thus passed the 9th of November. And lo and behold, on the memorable day of November 10, the news spread throughout Warsaw with a flash of lightning: "Pilsudski in the capital"...He escaped from Germany!... The Germans released him from prison! It is difficult to describe the enthusiasm of the crowds still filling the streets..."The commander is back! Power to Pilsudski! Down with the German regents!..."*

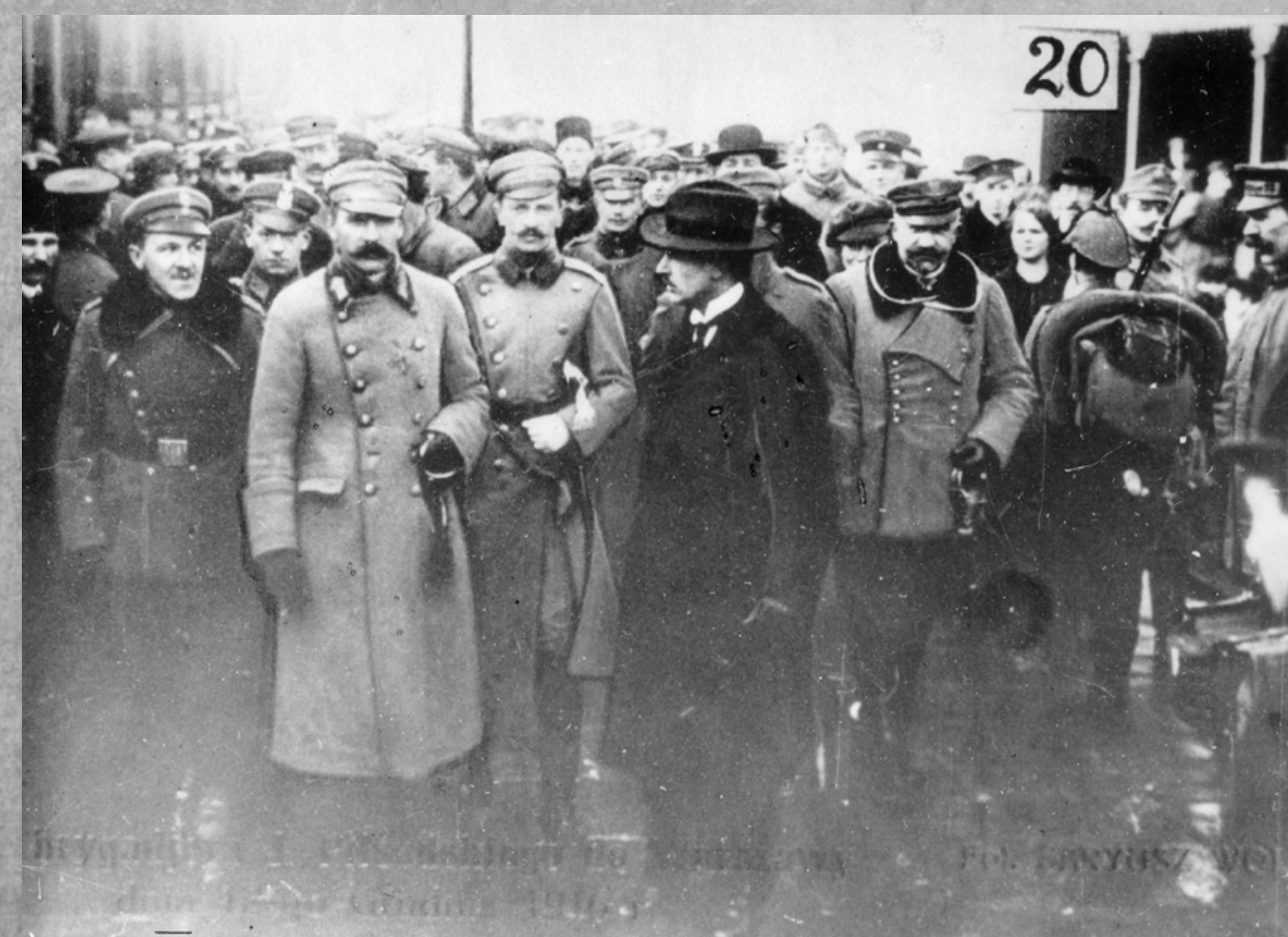
M. Romeyko



Spontaneous disarming of Germans by Poles in Warsaw before the end of World War I, November 10, 1918.



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Józef Pilsudski greeted by Poles at the train station in Warsaw as the future Head of the reborn state, November 11, 1918.

***The decisive hour has struck! Poland has ceased to be a slave! And Poland wants to determine its own fate, it wants to build its own past by itself, throwing its own armed strength on the scales of accidents.***

Józef Pilsudski



Celebration of Independence Day in Warsaw - the capital of reborn Poland, November 11, 1918.



Celebration of Independence Day in Krakow, November 11, 1918.

