

“Poles of the World Unite”: The Transnational History of the 1929 World Congress of Poles Abroad in the Context of Interwar Soviet–Polish Rivalries¹

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Abstract: By investigating the information and propaganda campaign surrounding the election of delegates to the 1929 World Congress of Poles Abroad, this article seeks to elucidate a complex interplay between foreign policy considerations, security concerns, and nationality policies of the Polish and Soviet governments. It examines the role of national minorities in the Soviet modernization effort and the ongoing Polish-Soviet rivalry of the interwar period. The focused study of the information campaign, and the public discussion surrounding the election process to the congress contributes also to the debates on mass political culture in the interwar Soviet Union. Party communication, intelligence, and secret reports compiled during the local elections and conferences provide a unique source for sampling public opinion of the Polish population regarding the Soviet regime in the early years of Stalin’s First Five-Year plan. The article argues that despite considerable efforts of the party to define and promote Polish identity and thus shift their loyalties closer to the Soviet state, the Polish population in Soviet Ukraine even at the end of the 1920s continued to express persistent nonconformity and a lack of faith in the Soviet government.

Keywords: Congress of Poles Abroad; Polonia; Polish minority in the Soviet Union; Soviet propaganda

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In the autumn of 1925, the leaders of various Polish civil society organizations working in the field of migration and diaspora (Polonia) suggested a novel idea for organizing a general meeting of Polish minority representatives. An organizing committee of the World Congress of Poles Abroad was quickly established charged with the task of ensuring that this future congress would help identify the cultural needs of Poles residing outside of Poland's borders, and propose strategies for bringing them into closer alliance with the Polish government (*Pamiętnik* 1930, 15–16). The idea of a congress received full support from the Polish authorities, with and invitations to join being signed by its honorary committee members: marshal of the Polish Sejm Maciej Rataj and marshal of the Senate Wojciech Trąpczyński.¹ According to an information circular sent out to various Polish associations in other countries, the list of themes for discussion included problems facing Poles living abroad, their rights in their countries of residence, access to education in their mother tongue, and their cultural life abroad. The aim of establishing closer links among Poles throughout the world was also reflected in the congress slogan “Strength in Unity” (“W Jedności Siła”). The flyer concluded with a greeting from the organizers: “The motherland [*ojczyzna*] will welcome you as a mother welcomes her children”²

The first World Congress of Poles Abroad took place on July 14–21, 1929, two years later than initially planned. In early June 1929, information about the upcoming congress appeared in the Soviet Polish-language press—Moscow-based newspaper *Trybuna Radziecka* and Ukraine's *Sierp*—thus initiating the information campaign surrounding the elections for the Soviet delegation to the congress. In less than a month, some fifty regional and city conferences across Ukraine were held in order to select candidates for the all-Ukrainian conference scheduled for July 2, 1929. During this event five candidates, representing a total of 476,435 Poles were elected. Together with five approved delegates from Soviet Belarus and four from Russia, they were subsequently issued passports and applied for visas to travel

to Warsaw. Nonetheless, when the congress opened on July 14, none of the Soviet delegates were present. The Soviet delegation had been denied participation in the World Congress of Poles Abroad. The Lithuanian delegation was the only other national group absent from the Congress, as its representatives had not received exit visas.

What might this episode reveal us about Soviet-Polish relations in the late 1920s? How did these foreign considerations influence both countries' domestic policies? Most importantly, what role did minorities come to play in the ongoing Soviet-Polish rivalry? Based on a thorough analysis of primary sources collected in the archives in Kyiv and Warsaw and of other previously published sources, this article offers a transnational history of the 1929 World Congress of Poles Abroad, scrutinizing Polish and Soviet perspectives on the event, as well as its perceived potential to mobilize their minority populations. While Polish planning for the congress provides a necessary context (Wrzesiński 1975, 1979; Albin 1981; Lusinski 1998), this article primarily focuses on the election of delegates from Soviet Ukraine and the prevention of their participation by the Polish authorities (Iwanow 1991; Życki 2007; Ieremenko 1993; Zarets'ka 2006).

Interwar Polish-Soviet and Polish-Ukrainian relations have received considerable scholarly attention. In particular, two avenues of enquiry can be distinguished. The first deals with Soviet and Polish security policies and anxieties about foreign threats and fears of subversion, with the Polish-Soviet borderland being at the center of these scholarly investigations (Rieber 2015; Shearer 2018). Recent research has underlined how perceived Polish subversive and military threats contributed to the early Soviet state's decision to launch hardline policies such as the industrialization and collectivization of agriculture (Davies 1980; Stone 2000; Samuelson 2000; Whitewood 2019, 2020) and more "soft-line" measures, among them the nationalities policy (Pauly 2015). Moreover, Soviet security anxieties became one of the contributing factors in the authorities' decision to conduct mass

arrests targeting the Union's Poles in the early 1930s, as part of the Stalinist terror (on the international factor in unleashing the purges, see Naimark 2010; Kuromiya 2011; Khlevniuk 1995).

Diplomatic history offers another perspective on the evolution of Polish-Soviet relations during this period (Ken 1996; Kamiński and Zacharias 1998; Ken and Rupasov 2000, 2014; Materski 2005, 2019; Bruski 2010; Kantor and Wołos 2011; Kornat 2012a, 2012b). In this regard, scholars often focus their attention on the Riga Peace Treaty of 1921 and its ramifications for Polish-Soviet and Polish-Ukrainian relations (Ol'shanskii 1974; Hisem 2008; Het'manchuk 2008; Pisuliński 2004; Borzęcki 2008; Dębski 2013).

This article explores Polish-Soviet and Ukrainian relations through the prism of minority experiences, thus contributing to existing scholarship on the respective governments' views on the national question, minorities, migration, and diasporas abroad. While most scholarly enquiries emphasize the ways that respective governments' nationality policies contributed to an atmosphere of ethnic intolerance and resulted in ethnic-based violence across the region, especially in Volhynia (Piotrowski 2000; Filar 2003; Motyka 2006; McBride 2016) and Eastern Galicia (Motyl 1985; Snyder 1999, 2003), this article takes a step back to investigate what motivated those governments to promote such forms of identification in the first place; and how they utilized the national factor of mass mobilization to achieve their far-reaching strategic goals. (On Poland's migration policies, see Wrzesiński 1975, 1979; Lusinski 1998; Kołodziej 1999; Patek 2000; Kraszewski 2001. On the Soviet minorities policies toward Poles, see Iwanow 1991; Stroński 1992; Kupczak 1994; Brown 2004.)

Further, the article's focus on the information campaign and public discussion surrounding the election process to the 1929 World Congress of Poles Abroad contributes to the debates on mass political culture in the interwar Soviet Union. Recent studies on popular

participation and political culture during the Union's formative decades has emphasized the bilateral nature of the discussion (Getty 1991; Siegelbaum and Sokolov 2000; Lomb 2018; Velikanova 2018). The Soviet state took a deep interest in what people were saying. Within this process, Soviet citizens were not without agency and were able to negotiate with the state. While the available sources on public opinion among Soviet Poles can hardly prove the participatory and collaborative aspect of their relations with the state, the elections provided them with a forum through which to voice their disagreement with state policies and criticize state-sponsored modernization. Moreover, the discussion of public opinion among the Soviet Polish population provides another angle to understanding the onset of the mass repression of ethnic minorities in the early 1930s. (On the Polish Operation of the 1930s, see Rubl'ov, Repryntsev 1995; Stroński 1998; Kokin, Podkur, and Rubl'ov 2011; Iwanow 2014). At the height of what was called the "war scare," positive attitudes toward Poland and its government, and dissatisfaction with Soviet power, expressed and recorded during this public debate reinforced the party's security anxieties to the point that it contributed to the repression of the population based on their ethnic identification.

Specifically, I scrutinize the 1929 World Congress of Poles Abroad on two different levels. At the macro level, I examine the Polish political and ideological context behind conceiving and organizing the first general meeting of Polish minority representatives, set against Soviet responses to the congress, through the intra-party debates and Soviet propaganda. On the micro level, I look beyond propaganda to explore public opinion among Soviet Poles regarding the congress and Soviet power more generally. This two-level analysis also defines my two key objectives. First, by investigating the information and propaganda campaign surrounding the congress, I elucidate a complex interplay between the foreign policy considerations, security concerns and nationality policies of the Soviet and Polish governments. Second, I use party communications, intelligence, and secret reports compiled

during the local elections and conferences as a means of gauging Soviet Polish public opinion toward the regime in the early years of Stalin's First Five-Year plan.

I argue that there was a mutual influence between Soviet-Polish relations: Soviet and Polish domestic policies and the Polish minority's public response. While the context of the Polish-Soviet rivalry informed the implementation of Soviet and Polish domestic policies, especially those targeting these countries' minorities and diaspora during the early 1920s, those domestic policies had equal impact on public responses, shaping popular opinion toward Soviet power among the Polish population. As I demonstrate, despite the party's considerable efforts to mobilize and modernize its minorities in the hope of drawing them closer to the state, many Poles in Soviet Ukraine, even at the end of the 1920s, expressed a persistent nonconformity with Soviet policies. Moreover, they continued to express fear of, and a lack of faith in the Soviet government. These negative attitudes toward the Soviet authorities among the Polish minority redefined Soviet domestic policy, paving the way for their eventual persecution. Consequently, this shift toward ethnic-based terror reinforced the interstate rivalry between Moscow and Warsaw, resulting in greater distrust and antagonism.

Class Solidarity versus National Unity: The Origins of the Congress and the Soviet Response

The initial idea to summon a congress of Poles from abroad emerged among activists affiliated with the Union for the Defense of the Western Borderlands (Związek Obrony Kresów Zachodnich) in 1925. The Union for the Defense of the Western Borderlands was looking for an institutional setting that would promote a link between all Poles living abroad and the Polish state without undermining their loyalty to their countries of residence (Wrzesiński 1975, 298). In this, it was inspired by a similar endeavor undertaken by its German counterpart, the Congress of Germans Abroad that took place in Berlin in the

summer of 1925. The Polish authorities were also in favor of the idea, having grown increasingly alarmed by the political influence Weimar Germany was gaining in Europe by playing the minority card. Initiated by German minority organizations in the Baltic states, the First Congress of European Nationalities held in Geneva in October 1925 ran parallel to the League of Nations and was instrumentalized by Germans as anti-Versailles propaganda (Wrzesiński 1975, 299; Smith, Germane, and Housden, 2019).

The Polish delegates to the congress in Geneva discussed the possibility of holding a similar meeting of Polish minority representatives. Shortly thereafter, the leaders of three Polish civic associations—the Union for the Defense of the Western Borderlands, the Polish Emigration Society (Polskie Towarzystwo Emigracyjne), and the Adam Mickiewicz Society for the Cultural Support for Poles Abroad (Towarzystwo Opieki Kulturalnej nad Polakami Zamieszkałymi Zagranicą im. Adama Mickiewicza)—formed an organizing committee to oversee the future World Congress of Poles Abroad. The committee also included representatives of the Polish government, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education, and the Emigration office of the Ministry of Labor and Social Care (Albin 1981).

The congress was initially scheduled for May 3, 1927. An appeal to “all Poles beyond Poland’s borders” was circulated worldwide, inviting Poles to take part in the upcoming event. The appeal highlighted the cultural and historic unity of the Polish people, regardless of their country of residence, and the diaspora’s historical responsibilities to the Polish nation and state. The declared objective of the congress was to establish a permanent cultural connection between Poles living abroad and their homeland (*kraj ojczysty*).³ The invitation to the congress was accompanied with a preliminary program along with an explanation as to how quotas for each country would be calculated.

The number of delegates to the congress was established on the basis of the estimated Polish population residing in different countries, with the largest delegations coming from the United States (32 delegates representing some three million American Poles), Germany (24 delegates), and the Soviet Union (14 delegates representing the Poles of Soviet Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia). Delegates were to be elected through independent associations of Poles (*związek polaków*) domiciled in each country, the formation of which was based on free national and cultural self-identification, or lack thereof, facilitated by the most relevant cultural and educational organizations. Altogether, 120 delegates were expected to arrive in Warsaw from 23 countries, including the Free City Gdansk .⁴

At this point, one could also ask why the organizing committee even considered inviting Soviet delegates to Warsaw, allowing for potential disruption at the congress. Mikołaj Iwanow suggests that while the organizers could not simply ignore the large number of Poles residing within the Soviet Union's borders, the invitation was itself an attempt to provoke the Communist Party into rejecting their participation and thus provide evidence of the Soviet regime's repressive nature. To that end, Iwanow posits that the number of seats allocated for the Soviet delegation (14 in total) was intentionally limited to provoke anger from among Polish communists across the border. Moreover, the historian further highlights that it was perhaps the first time in Poland's history that the number of Poles beyond its eastern border had been intentionally underestimated: while calculating the quotas for national delegations, the Polish population in Soviet Ukraine was estimated to be 300,000, with a further 200,000 in Belarus and 150,000 in Russia (Iwanow 1991, 260). By contrast, the Soviet census of 1926 recorded more than 780,000 Poles living across the Soviet Union (*Vsesoiuznaia Perepis' 1928*, xxiv–xxvii; on the problem of the Soviet census see Palko forthcoming).

In early December 1926, the editorial boards of the Polish-language Soviet newspapers—*Trybuna Radziecka* in Moscow, *Głos Młodzieży* in Kyiv, and *Orka* in Minsk—were contacted by the Warsaw-based organizing committee about the upcoming congress.⁵ In early 1927, the same invitation was also sent to the Ukraine’s largest Polish-language newspaper *Sierp* (*Sierp*, June 6, 1929).⁶ The organizers encouraged the editors to publish the committee’s appeal along with a dedicated article that would explain the significance of the event. The organizers also solicited exhibits for an expedition on the international Polish-language press that was intended to be held during the congress.⁷

Information about the congress was immediately passed on to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Ukraine, which promptly called a session to discuss the possibility of participating in the Warsaw congress. As the organizers in Warsaw had anticipated, the Central Committee’s meeting on March 11, 1927, decided that participation by Polish delegates from Soviet Ukraine was inadvisable (*netselesoobraznyi*). Instead, a motion was put forward to organize an alternative congress of Poles in Soviet Ukraine, where the achievements of the Polish minority in the Soviet Union would be set against the failures of Polish government’s own minority politics. However, this resolution on nonparticipation had to be confirmed by the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks.⁸

Around that time, information concerning the congress had also reached the Polish Bureau (Pol’biuro), a special unit within the Department for Agitation, Propaganda and Press, or Agitprop,⁹ of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, which was responsible for Poles living in Soviet territory. At a special session summoned to discuss the invitation to the congress, a top-secret memorandum, to be sent to the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, was prepared, outlining the Pol’biuro’s position on the matter.¹⁰ In the memo, signed by the bureau’s secretary, Sofia

Dzerzhinskaia,¹¹ the congress was condemned as an attempt by the Polish government to create “a nationalist and Catholic union of Poles outside Poland” that would be used “against the Revolution, the Komintern and, primarily, against the Soviet Union”.¹² The future Congress of Poles Abroad was itself perceived as an instrument of Warsaw that was designed to influence public opinion in support of any future military campaigns. Poles living en masse in the Soviet-Polish borderlands were regarded as its main targets. By cultivating a sense of political allegiance toward the Polish government, the congress, in the eyes of the Moscow-based Pol’biuro, aimed to create informal military outposts that would serve in a future Polish invasion of the USSR.

Nonetheless, the Pol’biuro were convinced that the Congress in Warsaw could not be ignored. According to them, participation by a Soviet delegation could equally yield great benefits for Moscow’s own strategic goals. First and foremost, it could potentially help the Soviet authorities develop the trust of their Polish population while also providing an international forum for Soviet propaganda.¹³ Possible domestic gains, the memo continued, included tackling widespread anti-Soviet propaganda among Soviet Poles, strengthening their class consciousness and deepening their trust in Soviet power while encouraging them to contribute to the process of the construction of socialism.¹⁴

Internationally, the congress might also provide one of very few legal opportunities to agitate in favor of the Soviet Union and its ideology abroad. Soviet participation could have important political and international resonance too—during the congress, the Soviet delegation hoped to draw international attention to the negative treatment of national minorities in Poland and reject any potential support to Poland’s military plans. This might also have the added bonus of helping the Soviets gain the sympathy of Poland’s workers and peasants and of improving the Soviet Union’s image abroad. Instead, rejecting participation

could also be construed as evidence of the Soviet Union's oppression of its Polish minority, leading to even stronger anti-Soviet attitudes, both domestically and internationally.

Given the above, it was decided that the Soviet delegation would go to Warsaw to emphasize that their loyalty to the socialist cause was stronger than their connection to Poland. At the congress they would reject the congress slogan of "national unity" in favor of Soviet slogan of "class solidarity".¹⁵ In a way, it was a win-win situation for Soviet ideologists: either they would use the congress as a forum to promote Soviet ideology, or, if denied entry, they would present the refusal as proof of the oppressive nature of the Polish fascist regime, thus validating and reinforcing their anti-Polish propaganda narrative.

Consequently, Soviet delegation's participation at the World Congress of Poles Abroad was deemed both important and necessary. To gain most from its campaign, the Pol'biuro encouraged a broad public discussion of the congress' aims and objectives at all levels. The election of the congress delegates would receive widespread coverage in the local, republican, and central press, both in Polish and other languages.¹⁶ On April 7, 1927, the Pol'biuro recommendations were approved by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks. Contrary to the committee's decision, the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks described Soviet participation at the Warsaw congress as being "advisable" (*tselesoobraznyi*). Responsibility for organizing the campaign and form the delegation itself was thus assigned to the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks (Ken and Rupasov 2000, 466–467).

The Political Dimension of the Congress of Poles Abroad

Meanwhile, following the coup d'état of May 1926, Marshal Józef Piłsudski had overthrown the democratically elected government of President Stanisław Wojciechowski and Prime Minister Wincenty Witos and installed his own political movement, Sanacja. As preparations

for the congress continued, so did the public debate around its ostensible objectives. Such debates exposed the lack of uniformity among the various communities of the Polish diaspora itself, especially in their assessment of the coup. Anti-Sanacja voices were particularly strong among representatives in the United States, France, and Germany, those countries whose delegations to the congress would also be the largest by a considerable margin. Moreover, Piłsudski's supporters were still a minority within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hence they could not rely on the ministry's compliance in organizing the Congress (Wrzesiński 1975, 300). In addition, the congress's proposed date of May 3, 1927, coincided with an election campaign in Poland, sparking fears that the congress could be used as a forum for antigovernment opposition during a politically sensitive time. The government therefore intended to postpone the congress's convocation for as long as it needed to gain enough influence and support to define the event's ideological makeup and decisions (Wrzesiński 1975, 299). However, it was the lack of unanimity among the Polish communities abroad during the delegate elections that was presented as the formal reason for its adjournment (Albin 1981, 68–69).

Nevertheless, Polish civic and cultural organizations did not abandon the idea of the congress. Following a broad public discussion of the importance of such a gathering, as well as the consolidation of the Sanacja regime as the dominant force in Polish politics, a new date was set: July 14, 1929. The new organizing committee this time fully reflected the dominant role of the state and Polish Catholic Church in defining the shape and course of the congress. This new organizing committee itself was established under the patronage of President Ignacy Mościcki, Marshal Piłsudski, and Cardinal August Hlond. In addition, the committee included numerous government representatives, including those from the ministries of foreign and internal affairs, religious affairs, education, labor, and social care, and the mayors of Poland's largest cities: Warsaw, Krakow, and Poznan (*Pamiętnik* 1930, 20).

The 1929 congress appeal was somewhat different from the one distributed two years prior. In 1927, the organizers had wanted to reassure Poles living abroad that their home country had not forgotten its “children” dispersed throughout the world and that it still remained responsible for them. By contrast, the 1929 petition highlighted the duty of the Poles abroad to contribute toward strengthening the Polish state. While the 1927 congress was meant to emphasize the responsibilities of the state toward Poles worldwide (such as identifying their cultural needs or supporting education activities), the 1929 congress accentuated the Polish diaspora’s patriotic obligations in supporting the new state. The congress was meant to show Poles abroad “how to be the spokesmen of the Republic of Poland and defenders of its interests in the most advantageous way for yourself and Poland” (Albin 1981, 73).

This new emphasis reflected a more general shift in the government’s emigration policy and their attitudes toward Polonia. The ideological scope of the congress as conceived before 1926 had reflected the national doctrine of the National Democracy movement (Endecja), according to which the Polish state was seen as stemming from the Polish people and was hence obliged to extend its support also to those Poles residing beyond its borders (Wrzesiński 1975, 297). The Sanacja regime was instead seeking to subordinate the interests of emigrant communities to those of the state, with the latter caring “for the economic and spiritual benefit of the immigrants while adjusting those to the benefit of the state,” as stated in a memo from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Wrzesiński 1975, 300). Particular emphasis was placed on using Polish diaspora communities as conduits for improving Poland’s international position (Lencznarowicz 2019, 191). To achieve this, however, a centralized organization of Poles residing abroad was needed with the congress deemed a good opportunity to discuss what such an organization might look like. As underscored by Piłsudski in his opening address to the congress, the first Congress of Poles Abroad saw the

idea of “uniting all our compatriots in exile into one organized entity for the benefit of the Polish state” made manifest (*Pamiętnik* 1930, 50).

In mid-April 1929, the official Polish press announced that the World Congress of Poles Abroad would take place on July 14, 1929, and that invitations were to finally be sent out. Unlike in 1927, however, no official invitation was received by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Commissariat for Foreign Affairs did not show much interest in the event, unlike Agitprop and the Pol’buro, although they had received this information quite late and almost “by chance” (Ken and Rupasov 2000, 468). Toward the end of April, the secretariat of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist party of Bolsheviks decided to establish a commission headed by the Agitprop chief, Aleksander Krinitski. It is important to note, however, that there was no unified view on the Soviet participation at the congress. Krinitski regarded the event as a great opportunity for anti-Polish propaganda both internally and internationally. Conversely, the leader of the Polish Communist Party in Moscow, Leon Purman, and the head of the Special Department of the Joint State Political Directorate, Ian Olski (Kulakovski), opposed the idea either for ideological or security concerns.

Krinitski himself was well-aware of the fact that the Polish congress was ideologically hostile to the Soviet state. In a note addressed to the Politburo of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks dated May 29, 1929, he recognized that the congress had been summoned by the “fascist” government and would make voicing opposition to the Piłsudskiites virtually impossible, unlike in 1927. Nevertheless, he believed that Soviet participation in the congress was still “advisable” (*tselesoobraznyi*) and could allow Moscow to pursue several objectives. First, the forum itself could be used to uncover the fascist nature of the Polish government. Second, the Soviet delegation could refute “the rumors of persecutions on national grounds” in the Soviet Union. Third, sanctioning the participation of Soviet Poles would undermine those Poles in the Soviet Union who “have not yet rejected the

nationalist ideology and remain under the influence of the priests [*księża*].” Finally, a state-sanctioned presence would prevent the participation of a delegation “hostile to us” (Ken and Rupasov 2000, 468). Instead, the Agitprop head proposed to elect the delegates under the close supervision of both the central and republican All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks in such a way that 60 percent would be the members of the Communist Party (Ken and Rupasov 2000, 468).

In addition to Krinitski’s considerations, the decision to endorse the Soviet delegation’s participation was linked to the changing international political scene. It was believed that the formation of the second Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald in the United Kingdom on June 5, 1929, would lead to less Western support for Poland, granting the Soviet Union an upper hand in its ongoing rivalry. Consequently, the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks granted its approval for Soviet participation. On June 6, 1929, a special commission of the Central Committee was established to supervise the election of delegates to the Warsaw congress. Although headed by Krinitskii, as a compromise, Olski was also included as the representative of the Special Department of the Joint State Political Directorate (Ken and Rupasov 2000, 468).

“Manifestation of Polish Fascism”: The Information Campaign

Once the official position toward the congress had been defined, the Soviet information campaign commenced. On June 3, 1929, *Trybuna Radziecka* featured an editorial titled “The Manifestation of Polish Fascism” (“Manifestacja faszysmu polskiego”). The same editorial appeared on the pages of the republican Polish press, the Ukrainian *Sierp* among them (*Sierp*, June 6, 1929). The editorial’s aims were twofold. First, it provided an outlet for Soviet anti-Polish propaganda. The article went on to expose the “true” intentions of the Polish “fascist” regime that had invited Poles from abroad to the congress to break the unity of the world

revolutionary movement, establish fascist footholds worldwide and rally support for its government's anti-Soviet military campaign (*Sierp*, June 6, 1929).¹⁷ Second, it sought to mobilize Poles across the Soviet Union, especially workers and poor and middle-class peasants, to take active part in the election of delegates to the congress and, once in Warsaw, to voice their disapproval to the Poland's anti-Soviet agenda. The editorial illustrated this strategy: "Our delegates will go to Warsaw to tell the whole truth about the Soviet Union. They will speak about the ongoing grand socialist construction here, the socialist building that is firmly based on the conscious active participation of the broadest masses of workers and toiling peasants, including those of Polish origin, who had fought and won in October alongside other workers and peasants, and are now building a new life" (*Sierp*, June 6, 1929).¹⁸

To challenge the congress's intentions, the editorial declared that Poles living in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia had only one "socialist motherland" and they were ready to defend it from "international and Polish imperialists" (*Sierp*, June 6, 1929).¹⁹ Soviet Poles would go to Warsaw to reject the slogan of "national unity" and instead call for international workers' solidarity and proletarian revolution. The editorial note published at the end of the article concluded with the following proclamations: "Long Live the Communist Party and the Soviet Union, the motherland of all toilers"; "Long Live the Union of Soviet republics—the only motherland of the working masses of the whole world"; "Long live a future proletarian Poland that would stride hand-in-hand with the Soviet proletariat"; and "Long live Komintern—the headquarters of the world revolution and its section—the Polish Communist Party" (*Sierp*, June 6, 1929).²⁰

From June 6 onward, all the major newspapers in the Soviet Union, including the central state and party organ, *Pravda*, had daily features dedicated to the elections of congress delegates in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. This coverage condemned Poland and its national

policy, lauded Lenin's nationality strategy and the Soviet minority regime, acknowledged the social and economic development of the Polish minority in the border republics and highlighted the leading role of the party as a purveyor of modernity among its Polish communities. Newspapers also published dedicated features on party activists, privileged rural workers, teachers, and medical professionals of Polish origin who condemned the intentions of the Warsaw congress and highlighted their loyalty to the Soviet regime (*Pravda*, July 2, 1929). Needless to say, such voices represented the strata of Polish population that had benefited the most from Soviet power and its preferential minority regime.

The coverage produced by the central authorities did more than spread information, however. By outlining a list of concise themes, they focused popular debate and provided discussion materials for bottom-level election conferences. They also offered rhetorical tools on how to speak about the Warsaw congress and communicate with the party. Most importantly, the Soviet press encouraged Poles to participate in the wider public discourse and express opinions for or against the party line. Meanwhile, party officials meticulously recorded their answers and opinions.

“The Soviet Union Is Our Only Motherland”: The Election Campaign

With the approval of the central party leadership, the republican Pol'biuro launched the election campaign. On June 17, 1929, an all-Ukrainian Public Committee was established and tasked with organizing and supervising the election of delegates to the all-Ukrainian congress, scheduled for July 2, 1929. The committee's presidium consisted of the director of the Kharkiv Miedviediev factory named Buivan; the editor-in-chief of *Sierp*, Vyshnevsky; a worker at the Kharkiv Sierp i Molot factory, Shved; a worker at the Kharkiv Profintern factory, Smarchevsky; and the editor of the Polish Section of the Central Publishing House

for the People of the Soviet Union, Sovinsky. Sovinsky was appointed the head of the committee but was later replaced by Buivan.²¹

Altogether, 150 delegates were to be elected to the congress in Kyiv during the first election stage. This calculation was based on the number of Poles residing in each province, with the largest delegations representing Volhynia, Kyiv, Shepetivka, Korosten, and Kam'ianets provinces (*okruhy*).²² Elections were organized at the provincial (*okruh*) (Volhynia, Shepetivka, Korosten, Berdychiv, Kyiv, Proskuriv, Kam'ianets, Vinnytsia), regional (*raion*) (Mohyliv, Uman, Kherson, Melitopol), and city (Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Kam'ianske) levels. In every province, a separate public committee was formed to supervise local elections and collect donations toward the travel expenses of the Ukrainian delegation to Warsaw.

The regulations received from the Warsaw organizing committee stipulated that each delegate sent to the congress should be elected through an independent association of Poles. In the Soviet context, however, these elections had great political importance and could not be simply entrusted to non-party organizations, let alone that there were actually none. Instead, control over the election process was in hands of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Ukraine. This body instructed that “in order to ensure appropriate political supervision of the election campaign, each election commission should consist of three members: a member of the party committee, a secretary of the Pol'biuro and a head of the Special Department of the Joint State Political Directorate” .²³ Detailed instructions on how to prepare, guide, and shape public debates; gauge popular reactions among Poles toward Soviet power; and, last but not least, select the “appropriate” delegates were designed centrally and handed down to local organizers. As part of the process, party and state officials encouraged deliberation of Polish and Soviet politics among candidates. Overall, the election campaign was an opportunity to explore whether the Polish population,

well known for its hostile attitude toward the central authorities, had accepted the Soviet regime and whether party efforts to sovietize its minorities had been successful.

It is worth noting that delegates to the congress were elected under the Soviet constitution and Soviet electoral law, according to which certain Poles were disfranchised. According to the data on the 1925/26 elections to village soviets, for instance, 0.7 percent of Ukraine's Poles were denied the right to vote based on their social status. During the 1926/27 elections, the disfranchised comprised 3.7 percent,²⁴ while in 1929, the number of Poles deprived of voting rights had grown to 3.8 percent.²⁵ By applying this law, the party could ensure that the delegates to the Warsaw congress would be elected by and among those deemed most trustworthy: workers and poor and middle-class peasants, thus minimizing the influence of wealthier peasants (*kulaks*) and Catholic priests (*księża*) over the election process.

During the three-week election campaign, 37 regional conferences with a total of 1,100 participants were organized; in addition, a total of 1,219 participants attended 17 provincial and city conferences. At each meeting, a protocol reporting on the process of electing candidates was prepared. Such protocols followed a prescribed script throughout, although some were written in Polish and others in Ukrainian. These local meetings had a similar agenda: providing an overview of the international situation, introducing the aims of the First Five-Year plan, discussing the goals of the Warsaw Congress of Poles Abroad, electing delegates, suggesting messages for the elected delegates to pass on to the congress, and gathering voluntary donations. At each conference, the ideology of "fascist Poland" was rejected, while the party's leading role was recognized. For example, the protocol of the committee meeting in Uman from June 19, 1929, read as follows: "We do not recognize fascist Poland where toiling masses and national minorities are being oppressed. The Soviet Union is our only motherland. Here, all power belongs to the working masses, and all

national minorities, including Poles, enjoy equal rights. We wish that the proletariat in Poland achieve the same rights as we already enjoy here in the Soviet Union”.²⁶ The protocol from the committee meeting in Hrudka from June 16, 1929, followed a similar line: “We would like to contrast the slogans from fascist Poland with those of fraternity among the proletariat from all countries and the poor and middle-class peasants regardless of nationality in their common fight against capitalism around the world”.²⁷

Local organizing committees were also expected to solicit private donations to fund the Soviet delegation’s participation at the Warsaw congress. Indeed, during the election campaign more than 10,000 rubles were donated overall.²⁸ The subscription lists feature numerous donations ranging from a mere 5 kopecks to 1 rubel.²⁹ Very few attendees were eager to donate, however. As seen from the reports, prepared by the party officials sent to supervise the election process, local conference participants were reluctant to sign subscription lists or even have their names mentioned in the meeting report, fearing that their signatures might later be used against them. In Korosten, for instance, one party representative attempted to explain the low number of signatories by referring to an incident during the civil war, when those who had signed a petition against Soviet power were promptly executed.³⁰ Others feared that in case of war with Poland, their signatures would be deemed as proof of collaboration with the Soviet state.

Secret reports compiled during the election campaign also suggest that the Polish population was anticipating another war. In the village of Petrovka in Nyzhniosirohozky *raion*, for example, delegates to the local conference warned, “War is imminent. Poles will come and execute those who have signed”³¹ and “There is no need to sign the protocol. Anyway, Soviet power is doomed, the war with Poland has started already, and those who sign will be in trouble”.³² Conversely, participants used the rhetorical and political tools provided by these new public forums to influence the outcome of the election and negotiate

with officials. In Korosten, northwest of Kyiv, one Pole had even pledged 15 rubles from each household in exchange for “their own candidates to be elected to the Congress”.³³ While these reports were used to justify the lack of social activism among Ukraine’s Poles, they also exposed the discrepancy between the specific vision the party had for the campaign and its reception at the local level.

“Let Poland Take over Ukraine Faster”: Public Opinion toward Soviet Power

Newspaper articles written by the authorities created an image of all-out support for the Soviet state and its minority policies. However, secret reports detailing the course of these local discussions exposed a wide array of opinions that belied the propaganda slogans. Top-secret letters of explanation (*dopovidna zapyska*) sent by the provincial party committees to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Ukraine often reported on low attendance at conference meetings and a general lack of public interest in the elections. Limited social activism reflected the low level of political and civic education among the Polish minority while also suggesting poor preparatory work on the ground. This was linked to the low standard of party work in Polish village soviets. In the border provinces, the Soviet state was underrepresented, often having no party cells or party organizers at the local level. Those party activists who did work in these villages were accused of failing to reach out to a broader audience and not making party propaganda known to those communities without access to a Polish-language press. Weak party organization at the local level resulted in granting the “broadest democracy” to the masses.³⁴ Consequently, kulaks, priests, and members of the Catholic church committees entered regional organizing committees and were elected as delegates to the provincial and republican conferences.³⁵

The campaign involved collecting and accumulating popular comments. These opinions often contradicted the goals of the central leadership. One party investigator, who

had been sent to perform agitating work and supervise the elections, observed a certain indifference toward public matters. Sceptics even questioned the fairness of the elections with one concluding that “They will choose their own candidates and will not listen to us”,³⁶ others doubted that their concerns would be taken seriously: “Why should we bother, no one will believe us anyway”.³⁷ The focus and concern of central officials, however, was about the loyalties of the Soviet Polish population. Public opinion, the reports suggested, was often in support of Poland.

As seen from the popular comments, political propaganda often resulted in the opposite of the intended effect. Extensive press coverage aimed to stir up fears of Polish subversiveness, instead kindled hope of swift political change among the Polish minority. Poles in the western provinces, whose livelihood was repeatedly threatened by adverse weather conditions and little assistance from the state, hoped for a better life under the Polish government. Comments ranged from those encouraging the election of pro-Polish sympathizers as delegates to the Warsaw congress (“We need to choose good delegates, who will tell how we live here in the free Russia”³⁸) to open calls for a military invasion (“Let Poland take over Ukraine faster, then we will have more potatoes”,³⁹ “Maybe Poland wants to take over Ukraine and this is the reason for calling the congress? If Poland takes over Ukraine, life for us will become easier”⁴⁰).

Pro-Polish sympathies, the reporters summarized, depended on the social origin of the participants. In the region of Markhlevsk, according to the report, “all working-class Poles were against the counter-revolutionary plans of the Warsaw congress.” Similarly, poor peasants and most middle-class peasants had rejected the Polish *opieka* (care).⁴¹ Richer peasants, instead, welcomed the Polish move, as presented by the comments from the village of Nikolaievka, Velykolepetyskiy *raion*: “I wish our own delegates went [to the congress] and told them everything. Perhaps life here would become easier for us”.⁴²

The reports also commented on the negative influence of local priests who were actively involved in the campaign. In some instances, priests urged their parishes to boycott the elections and other party initiatives linked to the congress. In others, they encouraged people to exploit the elections for their own benefit. In one reported instance, a *ksiądz* in Novohrad-Volynsky had emphasized that “mother Poland is calling her children to shelter under her wings, she has not forgotten us” and encouraged his parishioners to take active part in the elections.⁴³ In Kytaigorod in Korosten region a local *ksiądz*, a certain Bredytsky, encouraged others to vote for “our own” candidates who would tell “the truth” about the Soviet Union. If this was not possible, he suggested writing letters to the organizing committee in Warsaw, informing them about the conditions facing Poles in Ukraine and initiated a fund-raising campaign in support of such initiatives.⁴⁴

Top-secret reports highlighted how participants had taken advantage of the public discussion, and the state’s own language, to bring to their grievances and disagreements with government policies. A telling example comes from the Polish Markhlevsk Autonomous district, the first and only Polish national region in Soviet Ukraine established in 1925, some 120 kilometers east of the Polish border. One S. Marchevsky, head of the Politbiuro of the Volhnnia provincial party committee, was appointed to supervise the elections in the province. He reported that peasants in Volhynia remained very much under the influence of the *kurkuli* (rich peasants) and had little regard for the Soviet authorities. In the villages of Velyki Kosyri and Nerash of Pulyn *raion*, Marchevsky noted that “*kurkuli* spread rumors that a man came from Warsaw to take all Poles to Poland”.⁴⁵ Marchevsky also referred to a complaint by a young middle peasant from the village of Hremiache (Korvyn village soviet) as exemplifying the attitudes of the Volhynia Poles toward the Soviet state, its policies, and its strategies of ethnic identification. He further observed that the villagers:

<BQ>want to live as in old times. Without the cooperative system. [They say that] the newspapers lie. They all write about the achievements. And where are they? That they were tired of reading about the Five-Year plan, that the economy is not developing, that the party breeds disagreements in the village; that they give cheaper to the poor who drink and play cards. If Lenin were a good person, no one would have tried to assassinate him in [19]18; that a peasant is silent only because he fears the terror. That when he read Mickewicz and [Henryk] Sienkiewicz, he felt more like a Pole, than now when reading [Felix] Dzerzhinski and [Julian] Marchlewski.⁴⁶</BQ>

The reports also exposed a deep distrust of the party and its activists, who even after a decade of Soviet rule were not regarded as, to use Stalin's expression, "near and dear" to the local population. In the village of Nerash, the local residents were taken aback by the presence of a party representative, whom they regarded as an outsider: "Look! A representative was sent to us; but is he ours? Can you hear how he sings Communist [*poet po-kommunisticheskomu*]?"⁴⁷ Another report showed that people were generally opposed to the communists and did not want to take part in any initiatives linked to the party. At one local village conference, the participants had even asked the head of Volhynia province Pol'buiro if he was a communist. Following his responding in the positive, the villagers retorted that "he has sold his Catholic religion for money".⁴⁸

These reports showed that public opinion among Poles at the local level was often contrary to that expected by the state with local interpretations of the Warsaw congress and its aims often being in opposition to the official party line. While Soviet newspapers encouraged Poles to condemn the Polish congress and express loyalty toward the union, many welcomed it as a sign that the Polish government had not forgotten the Polish population across the eastern border and would come to ease their lot. While the party

allowed and even encouraged popular participation, hoping to elicit public support, the public debate exposed the weakness of the party at the local level. Overall, a wide array of opinions expressed by the local Polish population, particularly those suggesting deeply rooted sympathies for the Second Polish Republic and skepticism of Soviet achievements, amplified the preexisting anxieties of the Moscow leadership over the perceived disloyalty of their minorities.

Pursuing “Destructive Tasks and Political Goals”: The Rejection of the Soviet

Delegation

On July 2, 1929, 150 delegates from across Soviet Ukraine arrived in Kyiv for the all-Ukrainian Conference of Poles. During this second election stage, five candidates were to be elected to attend the Congress of Poles Abroad in Warsaw. The meeting followed the prescribed script, with its program being preapproved by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Ukraine. Delegates acknowledged the success of the Soviet regime, especially the industrialization and collectivization campaigns, and the Moscow’s nationalities and minority policies (*Visti VUTsVK*, July 5, 1929, July 6, 1929; *Pravda*, July 2, 1929, July 4, 1929). The conference participants also approved the text of a greeting telegram to be sent to the head of Ukraine’s Executive Committee, Hryhori Petrovsky, in which the Polish population expressed full support to Soviet power and its policies (*Visti VUTsVK*, July 13, 1929). In addition to this, the delegates were called upon to vote for two open letters to their fellows in Poland. The first of these, composed by the Polish Soviet pioneers, was addressed to “The children of the toiling masses in Poland,” urging their comrades to help their parents and older siblings “in their revolutionary struggle against the fascist yoke”.⁴⁹ The second letter, “To the toilers in Poland,” invited Polish workers and peasants to come to Soviet Ukraine where they could witness the advances of Soviet

minorities firsthand (*Visti VUTsVK*, July 6, 1929). The respective visit of the Polish delegation, composed of representatives of different national minorities residing in Poland, took place in August 1929 (Ken and Rupasov 2000, 470–471, 473–474). Poles from Soviet Ukraine also invited their counterparts from Soviet Belarus and Russia in order to participate in a socialist competition to rebuild Polish villages that included a campaign to eradicate illiteracy in three years, full collectivization and increased crop yields (*Visti VUTsVK*, July 5, 1929; *Pravda*, July 4, 1929).

During the all-Ukrainian Conference, five delegates from Ukraine were approved to travel to Warsaw. These were Karolina Khimska, a peasant from Hrechany (Proskuriv province); *Sierp*'s editor Konstantin Vyshnevsky; Roman Sheviatovsky, a worker from the First Berdychiv State Tannery; Karl Shymansky, the head of the village soviet from Shepetivka province; and Frantsishek Rakovsky, a worker from the Felix Kon porcelain factory in the Polish Markhlevsk region (*Visti VUTsVK*, July 6, 1929). They subsequently received international passports and were instructed to apply for entry visas into Poland (*Visti VUTsVK*, July 13, 1929).⁵⁰

On July 2–3, a similar conference took place in Minsk, where another five representatives were elected from among 114 delegates. On July 3–4, a Congress of Poles of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic elected another four delegates. These arrived in Kyiv on July 12, 1929, where they formed a joint Soviet delegation to participate at the congress in Warsaw. Two of Russia's delegates from Moscow—a worker named Ia. Lesnevski and a writer named B. Pshybyshovski—became its chairman and secretary, respectively (*Pravda*, July 11, 1929). Shortly after this, all 14 delegates were approved by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks (Ken and Rupasov 2000, 471–472).

The information campaign surrounding the election of the Soviet delegates was closely monitored by the congress organizers in Warsaw and the Polish diplomats in the respective Soviet republics. As early as June 17, 1929, the Polish legation in Moscow prepared a report to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, signed by the Polish envoy, Stanisław Patek. The report analyzed the propaganda campaign surrounding the elections to the Warsaw congress in the Soviet press. According to the communiqué, the party had consistently interfered in the process of electing the Soviet delegates (Khrenov and Tsesliak 1967, 393–397).⁵¹ Moreover, the delegates had been chosen from among party activists, who shared the Communist ideology and thus were hostile to the Polish Republic. Polish diplomats in Moscow also believed that the Soviet government was intending to use the Warsaw congress as a legal forum to pursue its “destructive tasks and political goals”.⁵² In addition to this, the report continued, participation by the Soviet delegation could strengthen local communist and radical left forces. This also posed the risk of exacerbating Poland’s own domestic tensions, since the Soviet delegation would bring money to fund these groups’ future activities. In summation, the participation of the Soviet delegation at the World Congress of Poles Abroad could be “destructive politically . . . even more so, it could lead to general disturbance; and it could even impede the entire course of the congress”.⁵³ The Moscow consulate also suggested that the organizing committee in Warsaw inform the Soviet organizers that the invitations for the Soviet delegates could not be sent. This would provide the consulate with a formal reason to reject its members’ visa applications.⁵⁴

The communication from the Polish legation in Moscow was received in Warsaw on June 17, the same day that the all-Ukrainian public committee initiated Soviet Ukraine’s election campaign. On June 28, 1929, at the height of the election and propaganda campaigns in the Soviet republics, the congress’s organizing committee sent a letter to the All-Russian Public Committee in Moscow informing them about the decision to reject the Soviet

delegation's participation at the World Congress of Poles Abroad. The letter was signed by the chairman of the organizing committee, marshal of the Senate, Professor Julian Szymański, and its general secretary, Stefan Lernatowicz.⁵⁵

The letter explained that the decision to reject the Soviet delegation stemmed from the fact that the elections had been held in contravention of the organizing committee's stipulations. The coverage in the Soviet press had proven that the delegates were not elected by the free choice of the Polish population or through independent associations of Poles within the country; the letter accused the party of control over elections and manipulation. Moreover, many Poles were not able to participate in the elections since they were disfranchised under Soviet law. In fact, the Consular Section of the Polish Legation in Moscow suggested that only 30 percent of the Polish population could participate in the elections.⁵⁶ The organizing committee therefore believed that the delegates approved to the congress would not represent the Polish population of the Soviet Union. Instead, they would arrive at the congress having been tasked to disrupt its work and publicly reject its approved aims. Given these circumstances, the organizers did not consider the participation of the Soviet delegation either possible, or necessary (Stepien 1999, 106–107;).⁵⁷ The same letter was received by Ukraine's organizing committee and the General Consul of the Polish Republic in Kharkiv.⁵⁸

Warsaw's decision, nevertheless, initially remained confidential (Życki 2007, 111), and the Soviet organizers continued their preparation and information campaign regardless. The fact that the Soviet delegation would not be allowed to travel to Poland became widely known only after its members had already submitted their visa application to the Consular Section in Moscow on July 9, more than 10 days after Warsaw had informed Moscow of its decision. This official rejection galvanized the anti-Polish campaign in the Soviet press. Republican conferences of Polish delegates were now used as a means of showcasing the

social and cultural achievements of the Soviet Union and its numerous minorities. They also provided Soviet ideologists with an opportunity to slander the Polish “fascist” government that had rejected the Soviet delegation “out of fear to hear the truth about Soviet achievements”.⁵⁹ Polish organizers, Soviet officials continued, had disregarded the will of 98 percent of the Soviet Polish population and instead sided with that 2 percent who had not been eligible to vote (*Pravda*, July 11, 1929).⁶⁰ The rejection of Soviet delegation’s participation at the Congress in Warsaw was thus further proof of the event’s true intention: to mobilize the Polish diaspora for a future war with the Soviet Union (*Visti VUTsVK*, July 13, 1929; *Pravda*, July 11, 1929; *Komunist*, July 5, 1929).⁶¹

In addition, mass rallies took place on industrial sites and at state institutions across Soviet Ukraine where Polish workers expressed their outrage over Warsaw’s decision. Meanwhile, in Minsk, some 15,000 people marched through the streets toward the Polish consulate, where a note of protest was presented to the consul himself. Another rally in support of the Soviet delegates took place in Leningrad on July 17 (Iwanow 1991, 265).

The Communist Party also used their proxies in Poland to broadcast their protest to audiences across the border. At the beginning of July, “The committee demanding the acceptance of the Polish workers’ and a peasants’ delegation from the Soviet Union to the Congress of Poles Abroad” was formed in the Polish Sejm. The committee was composed of members of the Polish Communist Party and other Soviet sympathizers. It issued an appeal to the Polish Sejm objecting to the organizing committee of the Warsaw congress’s decision on the grounds that it was motivated, according to the text, by the desire of the Polish government to hide the truth about the achievements of the Soviet Poles, all while the toiling masses in Western Ukraine and Western Belarus, as well as Lithuanians and Jews, continued to be oppressed by Polish fascists. The appeal was signed by the leader of the Communist faction in Sejm, Konstanty Sypuła; the representative from the Ukrainian Peasants’ and

Workers' Socialist Union Sel-Rob, Kyryło Walnyćkyj; and a representative of the Belarusian Workers' and Peasants' Union, or Hramada, Ihnat Dwarczanin (*Visti VUTsVK*, July 11, 1929).

“The Miserable Bankruptcy of Polish Fascism”: Propaganda Continues

The first Congress of Poles Abroad commenced on July 14, 1929 with a celebratory Mass in the Holy Cross Church in Warsaw and a march to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Afterwards, Marshal of the Senate Szymański officially opened the congress at the Sejm building. Overall, 98 delegates from 18 countries and the Free City of Gdansk participated. Some seats remained unoccupied—a symbolic reminder of the Polish population in Lithuania and the Soviet Union that, albeit for different reasons, were not represented at the congress (*Pamiętnik* 1930, 44). The absence of delegates from Lithuania and the Soviet Union was used as an occasion for propaganda speeches, in which the speakers spared no effort in seeking to attack the respective governments for not allowing their Polish populations to freely exercise their cultural rights and join the congress at Warsaw of their own free will.

In his opening address, Szymański linked the rejection of exit visas for Lithuania's Poles to Kaunas's *raison d'etat*, whereby the Lithuanian authorities feared that a few delegates representing a Polish population that had resided there for centuries could pose a threat to the entire country. Conversely, he continued, it had been the congress's decision not to allow the Soviet representatives to attend. The organizers could not permit the event to be used as a forum for spreading Bolshevik slogans. Moreover, their participation in this “family gathering” was not welcomed since, as the available sources had suggested, Soviet Poles did not view themselves as part of Poland, instead acknowledging the Soviet Union as their true motherland (*Pamiętnik* 1930, 46).

In his closing remarks, Lernasowicz, on behalf of the organizing committee, maintained that Poles in the Soviet Union were not able to act independently and freely develop their cultural rights (*Pamiętnik* 1930, 87). A special resolution on the absence of the delegations from the Soviet Union, in which Moscow was condemned for its repressive policies and disregard of minority rights, was also voted upon:

<BQ>To our compatriots, who for many years have been subjected to the barbaric persecutions in the prisons of the Solovetsky Islands and Siberia for defending their nationality, language and the faith of their fathers, who have been deprived of all the rights and opportunities to freely develop their culture, this congress sends the deepest expressions of sympathy and wishes to reassure them that Poles from all over the world, as represented at this congress, will never forget the plight of their brethren beyond the eastern border, hoping that nothing could rip from their hearts the most sacred sense of Polishness. (*Pamiętnik* 1930, 116)</BQ>

At the same time, the Soviet anti-Polish propaganda campaign continued apace. As the Pol'biuro's leaders had predicted back in 1927, the rejection of the Soviet delegation became a running feature, enabling the party to accelerate its anti-Polish campaign, albeit mainly for internal use. On the congress's opening day, Soviet newspapers vehemently criticized its aims, as well as the Polish government more broadly. Because the Soviet delegation was not allowed to travel to Warsaw, the main content of its intended presentation appeared in the press. On July 14, a long front-page editorial, "The Miserable Bankruptcy of Polish Fascism," appeared in *Pravda*. The article glossed over negative political developments in Poland since 1926 coup, while pointing out the deepening social and economic crisis in the country (*Pravda*, July 14, 1929). Instead, it detailed far-reaching social and economic developments in the Soviet Union and the role of minorities in the construction

of socialism. The main points covered included the situation of Polish laborers in the Soviet Union; the achievements of the Polish Markhlevsk region; solutions to the land and peasant questions in regard to Soviet Poles; development of the village cooperative system; advances in women's rights issues; the development of Polish national culture, education, book-publishing, and literature; and the international relations of the Soviet Union (*Pravda*, July 14, 1929). A few days later, on July 19, another article appeared in *Pravda*, drawing an official line under the anti-Polish campaign. This was an appeal by the joint Soviet delegation of Poles addressed "To our Polish workers and peasants in the Soviet Union, in Poland and around the world," that once again reiterated the jaded formulae about the rejection of the Soviet delegation, and Soviet Poles being ready to reject Polish fascist ideology and rally their forces to build a new socialist society (*Pravda*, July 19, 1929).

Conclusion

When conceiving the idea for the first congress of Polish representatives, its initiators had sought to ensure each and every Pole residing abroad that the newly reemerged Polish state was committed to protecting their cultural and national rights and ready to step in if those rights and freedoms were infringed. When the congress finally opened its doors in 1929, its patrons representing the Republic's highest political offices, called for those delegates to bear responsibility for the state and its growth. Poles abroad were viewed as part of their homeland insofar as they were eager to share its government's policies and contribute to strengthening its position on the international stage. At the same time, Warsaw was prepared to abandon its ambitious plans for a world union of Poles if that endeavor did not guarantee the unquestionable support they were seeking.

Pledging allegiance to Poland, however, was not always compatible with ensuring loyalty to one's actual country of residence, as in the case of those governments that were in

open or latent opposition to the Polish state. In the case of Lithuania, its government had severed all ties with Warsaw over Poland's incorporation of Vilnius (Wilno) in 1922. In the Soviet case, it was the mutually exclusive state ideologies that made the representation of the sizable Polish population residing within the union's borders impossible from the onset.

The World Congress of Poles Abroad also served to nourish Soviet anti-Polish propaganda. Numerous accounts in the Soviet press appeared to validate the Soviet minority policy and the party's claims of socialist victory. It was indeed the case that, by the early 1930s, the Polish national soviets, and especially the Polish Autonomous Region in Volhynia, could boast a better developed infrastructure; an increase in the number of hospital beds, schools, libraries, and reading huts; and entertainment facilities, such as stationary and moving cinemas clubs and collective farmers' houses (*budynok kolhospnyka*). However, despite these social and economic achievements, Poles remained alienated from the Soviet regime and were among the least engaged minority groups within the state-building process. According to an inspection of the Union's national regions carried out in March 1931, the Polish national region lagged far behind other national districts and had the lowest rate of collectivization—some 16 percent, it only experienced a 1.8 percent annual increase during the 1920s.⁶² Similar shortcomings were recorded in January 1932 during the examination of Polish national village councils in three provinces: Iemilcheno, Novohrad-Volynskyi, and Shepetivka. It was concluded that in those three regions, neither of the state campaigns (collectivization, collection of grain, and the mobilization of funds) had been completed.⁶³

In the eyes of the authorities, the reason for such a low level of engagement in state initiatives were twofold. First, the negative impact of “*kurkul* counterrevolutionary activities”; second, the insufficient development of party and mass work among the Polish population.⁶⁴ One party official named Vyshnevsky, who conducted an inspection of the national districts, noted that he could not find any evidence that, among the various village

councils, the Central Committee's decision to implement collectivization had even been discussed with its with poor and middle-class Polish peasants.⁶⁵ He summarized that the national soviets had failed to become Soviet strongholds on the ground, mobilize the poorer peasantry and guide the process of collectivization and mass work. He also highlighted the widespread and unabating influence of the *kurkuli* and Catholic priests over the Polish population, especially their threatening of poorer Poles with the return of Piłsudski, who was prepared to execute all those who had joined the collective farms.⁶⁶ Although only depicting the situation in one particular locality, these conclusions were likely to have been equally true for the entirety of Soviet Ukraine.

The discussion of the Warsaw congress's aims and the election of delegates was intended to mobilize the entire Polish population of Soviet Ukraine. Instead, beneath the thin veneer of Soviet propaganda that presented Soviet Poles as loyal citizens, it exposed the stark divide between the ideal image of the Union's Polish minority as presented by the press, and those "real" Polish peasants who continued with their lives while despising Soviet state power. Many Poles in Ukraine preferred to stay away from this discussion. If forced to participate, they typically expressed escapism or indifference toward state matters, prioritizing their personal safety over any form of political involvement. Overall, they expressed a fear of, and a lack of faith in, the Soviet government, with many continuing to orient themselves toward Poland.

The information and election campaign surrounding the Congress of Poles in Warsaw is a small episode in the interwar political rivalry between Poland and the Soviet Union, in which national minorities within the borders of each country were used as instruments to weaken the rival. Indeed, as suggested by the Pol'biuro's secret report from 1927, the rejection of the Soviet delegation provided Moscow with even more benefits than its actual participation. At the macro level, the congress gave enough material to produce almost one

article a day in every major official newspaper, allowing the Soviet press to publicize the successes of the state's minorities policies, the achievements of Poles of the Soviet Union and their comprehensive support for the construction of socialism. This was extremely important as it coincided with the launch of the First Five-Year plan, for which the party desperately required a loyal and committed workforce. Similarly, it provided the Soviet authorities with a great opportunity to present Poland in a negative light, as a country that not only oppressed and forcibly assimilate its national minorities but cared little for almost 800,000 Poles living across its eastern border. This proved an important message during the "war scare," both domestically and internationally.

When viewed at the micro level, the election of delegates to the Warsaw congress granted the Soviet Poles a voice, pushing them to publicly articulate positions and opinions regarding Soviet power they had not expressed so vocally before. By encouraging Poles to speak up, the campaign reinforced the view of the Polish population as less loyal to the revolution. Public opinion gathered during the election campaign proved that Poles were unable to be reeducated in the Soviet spirit leading, eventually, to the shift in the way those minority groups were treated by the authorities. Scholars (Iwanow 1991; Petrov and Roginskii 1997; Martin 1998) agree that Poles would come to represent the first case of Soviet-led ethnic cleansing and would become one of the first "enemy nations" identified within the Soviet Union, whereby their national identity, shaped by the authorities own policies in the 1920s, was used as excuse for repression and persecution.

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¹ Tsentral'nyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Hromads'kykh Ob'iednan' Ukrainy (TsDAHO), Kyiv, f. 1, op.-20, spr. 2935, ark. 45–46.

² TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2246, ark. 64–65. (Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the original language sources are mine.)

³ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2935, ark. 45–46.

⁴ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2246, ark. 66–67.

⁵ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2246, ark. 62–67.

⁶ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2939, ark. 136–137.

⁷ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2246, ark. 62.

⁸ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 12, spr. 8, ark. 79.

⁹ In 1928–29, it was called the Department of Agitation, Propaganda and Press. Otherwise, it was known as the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks.

¹⁰ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2495, ark. 38–40.

¹¹ The names of Soviet Poles are spelled in the Russian/Ukrainian orthography, as it was the case in the Soviet identity documents. Similarly, Polish transliteration is used for the names of Ukrainians and Belarusians residing in Poland.

¹² TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2495, ark. 38.

¹³ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2495, ark. 38.

¹⁴ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2495, ark. 39.

¹⁵ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2495, ark. 39.

¹⁶ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2495, ark. 40.

¹⁷ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 9–14.

¹⁸ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 12.

¹⁹ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 12.

²⁰ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 17–18.

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- ²¹ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2939, ark. 145, 147–148.
- ²² TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2941, ark. 28.
- ²³ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2932, ark. 26.
- ²⁴ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2495, ark. 41–42; f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2496, ark. 47.
- ²⁵ Tsentral'nyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Vyshchykh Orhaniv Vlady (TsDAVO), Kyiv, , f. 413, op. 1, spr. 452, ark. 154.
- ²⁶ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 16.
- ²⁷ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 45,
- ²⁸ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2940, ark. 49–50.
- ²⁹ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2942.
- ³⁰ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2932, ark. 2.
- ³¹ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 6.
- ³² TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 6.
- ³³ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2932, ark. 2.
- ³⁴ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 5.
- ³⁵ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2932, ark. 15.
- ³⁶ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2932, ark. 12.
- ³⁷ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 4.
- ³⁸ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 5.
- ³⁹ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 4.
- ⁴⁰ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 4.
- ⁴¹ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2932, ark. 10.
- ⁴² TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 2, spr. 2931, ark. 5
- ⁴³ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2932, ark. 11.
- ⁴⁴ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2932, ark. 8–8zv.
- ⁴⁵ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2932, ark. 12.
- ⁴⁶ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2932, ark. 13.
- ⁴⁷ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2932, ark. 12.
- ⁴⁸ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark.13.
- ⁴⁹ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2940, ark. 38, 39.
- ⁵⁰ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2944.
- ⁵¹ Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN), Warsaw, Ambasada RP w Moskwie, sygn. 73, ark. 2, ark. 3.
- ⁵² AAN, Ambasada RP w Moskwie, sygn. 73, ark. 3.
- ⁵³ AAN, Ambasada RP w Moskwie, sygn. 73, ark. 3.
- ⁵⁴ AAN, Ambasada RP w Moskwie, sygn. 73, ark. 4.
- ⁵⁵ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 81–89, 130.
- ⁵⁶ AAN, f. 510, sygn. 95, ark. 94.
- ⁵⁷ AAN, MSZ, sygn. 10294, ark. 39–40; TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 130.
- ⁵⁸ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2935, ark. 39, 41–41zv..
- ⁵⁹ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2940, ark. 93.
- ⁶⁰ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 81–89.
- ⁶¹ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 2931, ark. 81–89.
- ⁶² TsDAVO, f. 413, op. 1, spr. 552, ark. 14.
- ⁶³ TsDAVO, f. 413, op. 1, spr. 552, ark. 14.
- ⁶⁴ TsDAVO, f. 413, op.1, spr. 552, ark. 14.
- ⁶⁵ TsDAVO, f. 413, op. 1, spr. 552, ark. 14.
- ⁶⁶ TsDAVO, f. 413, op. 1, spr. 552, ark. 15–16.