

The outbreak of World War I (referred to as the Great War) was a surprise to everyone. It was expected to happen as politicians even set the date of its beginning for 1917. At the time when it broke out, however, no one knew what the consequences of the war would be. In the early summer of 1914, the world order seemed unwavering. Europe was at the peak of its power and significance. It was the actual centre of the world at that time. Almost the entire African continent and part of Asia belonged to European countries. European culture, especially French, set the tone for the world, and the British empire with nearly 37 million km² became the largest state in human history.

Europe had been ruled by the same dynasties for many centuries, and the network of family connections was personified by the similar figures of the ruler of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland King George V of the Sachsen-Coburg Gotha, and the Russian tsar Nicholas II Romanov. Germany was ruled by impetuous and megalomaniac William II Hohenzollern, while Austria-Hungary remained under the authority of Franz Josef I Habsburg – the aged emperor, endowed with great authority and respect.

However, it was the Habsburg monarchy, bursting with national quarrels, that was to become part of the European political puzzle that would trigger an avalanche of events leading to the fall of *La Belle Époque*.

The territories of Gdańsk Pomerania also called Eastern Pomerania, Pomerelia, Royal Prussia, or in the German terminology West Prussia, was a special and important area. Polish and German influences had been clashing there since the Middle Ages, and the area had changed its owners a couple of times. Originally associated with the Polish Piast monarchy, in 1308 it was seized by the Teutonic Order and remained under its authority until 1466. Then for the next 300 years under the name of Royal Prussia it was part of the Polish-Lithuanian state. In 1772 and 1793, i.e. during the First and Second Partitions it was incorporated into the Prussian state. With an exception of the short episode of the Duchy of Warsaw (1807-1815), when Chełmno, Michałów and Lubawa lands were separated from Prussia, Pomeranian territories remained under German rule until January 1920.

Just as Pomerania's territorial affiliation was changing, so was its ethnic composition. Among the Slavs that dominated during the first centuries of the second millennium, as a result of the progressing economic development people from various German countries began to settle there. In the early modern period, especially the areas of Chełmno, Michałów and Lubawa were inhabited by people from the neighbouring territories of Mazovia and Dobrzyń. Political and religious refugees from Western Europe also arrived there- especially Dutch Mennonites and groups from the British Isles or Huguenots from France. Over time, these and other groups became Polonized or Germanized, naturally joining one of the two dominant nations in this area. From this linguistic and religious melting pot, the basic Pomeranian skeleton was created, whose Polish and German speaking parts at the beginning of the 20th century were relatively comparable in terms of quantity.

At the beginning of the Great War, however, demographic trends were more favorable to the German party. According to the official data from the last census of 1910, the province of West Prussia was inhabited by 65% of Germans and 35% of Poles¹. The Polish population prevailed in Kashubia, Kociewie, Chełmno, Michałów and Lubawa lands. In the latter area it constituted nearly 80%. However, the consistent Germanization policy and natural assimilation processes progressed. Due to this state of affairs, the German speaking group was becoming more and more confident keeping in mind the words of their leaders Bismarck and William II that Germany was afraid only of God and nobody else in the world. They also became witnesses of how their state, throughout two generations, had become the most powerful state in Europe and the second powerful (after the USA) economy in the world. On the other hand, the active, very patriotic, but gradually shrinking circle of the Polish population looked anxiously at the future. From the German party, the local anthem *Westpreussenlied* with the words of Paul Felske and the music of Hugo Hartmann was heard with an increasing triumph, starting with the words: "Westpreussen,

¹ L. Belzyt, *Sprachliche Minderheiten im preußischen Staat 1815-1914*, Marburg 1998, p. 17.

mein lieb' Heimatland. Wie bist du wunderschön". On the other hand, the Polish party made the stubborn but increasingly diasporal emphasis on the Slavic character of this area, as expressed in *Marsz Kaszubski* [Kashubian March] by Hieronim Derdowski. It included clear and emphatic words: „Tam gdzie Wisła od Krakowa w polskie morze płynie, Polska wiara, polska mowa nigdy nie zaginie” [“Where the Vistula from Cracow, the Polish faith flows into the Polish sea, the Polish speech will never disappear”]. In the territories beyond Kashubia, classical Polish patriotic songs prevailed, and every Polish child knew *Mazurek Dąbrowskiego*, *Rota* or *Boże coś Polskę*. The Germans also often repeated the song of Ernst Moritz Arndt *Wo ist des Deutschen Vaterland* in which the words: “So weit die deutsche Zunge klingt” were used, whilst Poles in the same narrative proclaimed „Dokąd język polski sięga, tak daleko polska rozciąga się Ojczyzna” [“Where the Polish language extends, Poland extends”]².

However, this struggle for souls was not so even at the beginning of 1914, and the German party became increasingly dominant. More comparable proportions were found only in terms of religion, where, according to the census of 1910, the number of Catholics and Evangelicals was 52% and 46%, respectively, which in turn testified to the progressing Germanization of the Catholic population. In the summer of 1914 the image of Gdańsk Pomerania was bi-national and bi-denominational.

The Great War did not change the statistics, but it made radical changes in people's consciousness. When the army set out to the front, local Poles expected Germany's quick triumph and the acceleration of Germanization. However, another “golden thought” expressed by William II, who in August 1914 was supposed to say to the soldiers marching to death – “You will come back before the leaves fall from the trees” failed. In fact, the leaves fell from the trees, winter came, but the soldiers remained in the front and continued to die in the following years in an unprecedented way. Suffice it to mention that 38 million people were killed during the Great War, and 8 million were declared

² R. Wapiński, *Polska i małe ojczyzny Polaków*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 1994, p. 125.

missing. The civilian population remaining in the belligerent countries withstood the hardships of the war with increasing difficulty, and famine became a clear price to be paid for the end of the conflict. This had to cause a social turmoil and a shake of the current social and political order. Along with the erosion of the monarchical system and the progressive collapse of the partitioning powers, Poles' hopes for regaining their own state grew. In the autumn of 1918 this became a fact.

On 11 November 1918, Germany asked for a truce on the Western Front. At the time of its conclusion, the Germans fought practically alone, as Austria-Hungary had fallen apart and ceased to exist as a state at the end of October 1918. In Germany a revolution broke out on 9 November leading to the collapse of the Hohenzollern monarchy and other dynasties in other Reich countries. It resulted in the emergence of workers' and soldiers' councils. The multi-century German monarchical system was replaced by the republic. All over the country workers' and soldiers' councils were set up. On 8 November such a council was established in Tuchola, gaining the support of the local community and prisoners of war from the allied countries staying in the area. A day later, the council was established in Toruń, which resulted in disarming the local gendarmerie, seizing the prison in Fosa Staromiejska Street and releasing prisoners. On 10-11 November, the Workers' and Soldiers' Council was formed in Bydgoszcz, Chełmża, Chełmno, Brodnica, Chojnice and Świecie³. In Orłowo (the county of Wąbrzeźno), a symbolic sign of a change of power was the removal of the imperial black eagle from the mailbox. Three-colored, white-red-black Prussian flags disappeared, and red banners began to flutter over public buildings. However, there were exceptions, e.g. in Toruń during the November Revolution the Polish flag also fluttered at the town hall tower⁴. In general, the councils were under the political influence of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), but some of its members sympa-

³ J. Wojtowicz, *Czasy zaboru*, [in:] *Województwo bydgoskie. Krajobraz. Dzieje. Kultura. Gospodarka*, Poznań 1967, p. 150-151.

⁴ P. Kosiński, *Prusy Zachodnie 1914 – Pomorze 1920. Ludność regionu wobec przemian politycznych okresu I wojny światowej*, Warszawa 2002, p. 181.

thized with the communist Spartacus League. One of its activists was a man named Artur Raube from Toruń. Its activities could also be seen in Bydgoszcz, Grudziądz, Tuchola or Brodnica⁵. Workers 'and soldiers' councils sought to take over the competence of the current municipal, county or provincial authorities, which in practice led to dual power. Initially, the Germans had the majority in the councils, but over time more and more Poles began to appear in their composition. Such was the case, for example, in Chełmża, where Poles prevailed among the council's members⁶.

On 11 November Poland symbolically regained independence. In Warsaw Józef Piłsudski took over the military authority from the Regency Council, and three days later, as the Commander-in-Chief, he also took over the civilian authority. On 11 November 1918, Polish border posts appeared on the border of the former Polish Kingdom with the territories of the Prussian partition. Yet, Poles living in the areas of the Prussian partition had to wait another one year and a half to return to their homeland.

From the Poles' point of view, the territory of Gdańsk Pomerania was a very important region, as it opened access to the Baltic Sea and, consequently, to the world. In turn, for the Germans the most important thing was that Gdańsk Pomerania connected East Prussia with the rest of the German lands. After the loss of Gdańsk Pomerania, Germany would be divided into two parts. As a result of such a great load of interests and emotions on the part of both Poland and Germany, there was no way to satisfy both parties of the conflict.

Poles living in West Prussia were in a worse geographical situation than their Poznań neighbours. The areas of Pomerania bordered (mostly) with the ethnically German provinces: Pommern (Pomerania) and Ostpreussen (East Prussia). In the north there was the sea and it was only in the south that the province West Prussia was adjacent to reborn Poland. In addition, there existed powerful Prussian fortresses in Toruń and Grudziądz. Strong garrisons were also stationed in Chełmno, Tczew

⁵ J. Wojtowicz, op. cit., p. 152.

⁶ M. Wojciechowski, *Dzieje Chełmży w latach 1914-1920*, [in:] *Dzieje Chełmży*, ed. M. Wojciechowski, Chełmża 1994, p. 154.

or Malbork. What was also significant is that the revolutionary wave in the German army gradually subsided, and all the political groups, including workers' and soldiers' councils, stood firm and relentless maintaining that the territory of defeated Germany should remain indivisible. The thesis about "a blow to the back" (*Dolchstoßlegende*), which had been inflicted to the allegedly victorious army by the red-black-yellow international, also found more and more supporters in German society. Nationalist tendencies in German society had not subsided. On the contrary, they had even increased. This trend also affected the German inhabitants of Pomerania and Polish national activists had to bear this in mind.

In view of the situation presented above, the prevailing view among local Poles was that there was simply no greater chance of an uprising. However, the need to wait for the verdict of the Paris peace conference was emphasized. Therefore, Poles focused primarily on expanding their own political representation. In the autumn of 1918, Polish People's Councils were created in each county; they were subordinated to the Supreme People's Council in Poznań. They played the role of actual representatives of the Polish community in the territory of the Prussian partition and were politically associated with the national democracy prevailing in the area. For example, in Chełmno, the county's People's Council was established on 24 November 1918. It was composed of: Rev. Zygmunt Rogala, Ottomar Krefft, Jan Odrowski, Jakub Arczyński, Paweł Ossowski, and Rev. Lipski, Mamel, Kozakiewicz and Bukowski (the first names of all of them are unknown)⁷. In turn, the members of the council for the Toruń county with headquarters in Chełmża were elected on 12 December 1918 and they included Adam Czarliński from Zakrzewko, Stanisław Łukomski, Rev. Józef Wrycza, Stanisław Pilatowski, Maks Grabowski.

The subcommittee of the Supreme People's Council with headquarters in Gdańsk also remained a public Polish organization. It was established on 13 December 1918 and managed by Stefan Łaszewski. The other head of the subcommittee was Józef Wybicki from Gdańsk.

⁷ *Dzieje Chełmna. Zarys monograficzny*, ed. M. Biskup, Warszawa-Poznań-Toruń 1987, p. 272.

The closest collaborators of Łaszewski also included: Franciszek Kręcki, a lawyer Roman Wawrowski from Świecie, Mieczysław Marchlewski, and the earl Stanisław Sierakowski, Brunon Gabryelewicz, Józef Głowacki, Lange, Szczepan Gracz, Paweł Dykta and Rev. Bolesław Makowski⁸.

However, underground preparations for possible military operations were not abandoned. In November 1918, in the Toruń county, the Security Guard was established. It was headed by Kazimierz Siudowski. After its liquidation in December 1918 the following organizations were set up: People's Guard, the Military Society "Jedność" [English "Unity"], the Polish Youth Society and the Gymnastic Society "Sokół" [English: "Falcon"]. Only in Toruń, in March 1919 the latter organization had 520 members⁹. They probably became part of a larger, underground structure called the Military Organization of Pomerania. It was established at the turn of 1918/1919, and its leader was dr Franciszek Kręcki from Gdańsk. His collaborators were also: Józef Wybicki, Oswald Potocki, and Leon Czarliński. The organisation's headquarters were based in the edifice of the Subcommittee of the Supreme People's Council in Gdańsk.

The Military Organization of Pomerania operated in four districts. The first of them included the following counties: Chełmno, Toruń and Wąbrzeźno; its first commandant was Leon Czarliński, who was subsequently replaced by Wincenty Rawicz-Dembiński. The second district consisted of the following counties: Brodnica, Grudziądz, Kwidzyn, Lubawa, Świecie, Warmia and Mazury. It was commanded by Józef Goga. The third and fourth districts constituted Kaszuby and Kociewie, i.e. the counties of Chojnice, Kartuzy, Kościerzyna, Puck, Starogard, Tczew, Tuchola, Wejherowo, and Złotów.

The Military Organization of Pomerania remained an underground organization, operating mainly in urban areas including Grudziądz, Tuchola, Świecie or Chełmża. It won the greatest support in the

⁸ M. Szurło-Gorzela, *Pomorski Urząd Wojewódzki. Jego powstanie, rozwój i chwila obecna*, [in:] *Księga Pamiątkowa dziesięciolecia Pomorza*, Toruń 1930, p. 283.

⁹ M. Wojciechowski, *Powrót Pomorza do Polski 1918-1920*, Warszawa-Poznań-Toruń 1981, p. 80-83.

Kashubian and Kociewie counties (Kartuzy, Kościerzyna, and Tczew)¹⁰. The main place of the guerrilla formation of this organization was Tuchola Forest/Bory Tucholskie. Its commanders were Wincenty Szpica, Franciszek Kleinschmidt and the Gnaciński brothers¹¹. In the Chełmno region, activists of the Military Organization of Pomerania included Rev. Jan Wrycza, Stanisław Michalski and Bolesław Dzięgielewski¹².

Preparing for a possible armed activity was not accidental. At the end of 1918, decisions regarding the transport of the Polish Army (the so-called Blue Army commanded from October 1918 by General Józef Haller) from France to the Polish lands were made. According to the original plans of the Allies, this army was to come to Poland by sea, arrive in Gdańsk and move further towards the central Polish lands. Germans were perfectly aware of the possible consequences this could have caused in West Prussia. That is why Germany officially protested against this idea, proposing instead that the army be transported by rail through the territory of central Germany. They also used the argument that the army's march through Gdańsk Pomerania could result in an outbreak of bloody fights between Poles and Germans, which could entail a conflict in Central Europe. The arguments convinced the Allies, who on 4 April 1919, upon the decision of the Waffenstillstandskommission in Spa, decided to send "Hallerians" by land. This situation ruled out the possibility of implementing the national uprising plan in Upper Silesia, Greater Poland, Pomerania and East Prussia¹³.

The German party was aware of how well organized local Poles were and tried to limit the development and role of people's councils among local communities. The Germans also responded by creating their own German People's Councils. The German People's Council for West Prussia was established in Gdańsk. On the local ground, they

¹⁰ M. Wojciechowski, *Powrót Pomorza*, p. 84, 86.

¹¹ M. Wojciechowski, *Pomorze w dobie odbudowy państwowości polskiej 1918-1920*, [in:] *Powrót. Dokumentacja ustanowienia suwerenności polskiej na Pomorzu w latach 1918-1920*, the selection was made by J. Bełkot and M. Wojciechowski, Toruń 1988, p. 12.

¹² J. Wojtowicz, op. cit., p. 152-153; M. Wojciechowski, *Dzieje Chełmży*, p. 156.

¹³ M. Wojciechowski, *Powrót Pomorza*, p. 88-89.

were created i.e. in Bydgoszcz, Toruń, Chełmża and Grudziądz¹⁴. Such a council was established in Chełmża on 29 December 1918, and it was headed by the secretary of the Magistrate K. Kriebel. In January 1919, German councils from this part of the province became part of the Deutsche Vereinigung, which was headed by Georg Cleinow and the headquarters of which were in Bydgoszcz¹⁵.

The process of installing the German army in the counties where the Polish population dominated started. A paramilitary volunteer organization called Grenzschutz Ost was also established. On 6 January 1919 in Czersk the formation clashed with the local Polish population, who were leaving the church after a solemn mass on the occasion of the Epiphany. During the riots, several people were killed and another dozen were arrested¹⁶.

In turn, inhabitants of Chełmża were affected by the action of Grenzschutz Ost under the command of Gerhard Rossbach¹⁷, who on 28 January 1919 gave the order to bomb Chełmża with the artillery fire. Afterwards the German army began to capture the city, as a result of which six Polish residents of the city died on the spot or from wounds: Jan Szczypiorski, Antoni Kielbasiewicz, Franciszek Rosiński, Weronika Żurawska, Edward Zieliński, Alfons Wiliński and twelve-year-old Kazimierz Lewandowski. Chełmża was occupied and pacified¹⁸.

Undoubtedly, the outbreak of the uprising in the capital of Greater Poland on 27 December 1918 became the factor which influenced adversely local Polish-German relations. The fights did not reach the West Prussia province, but for example Inowrocław located 35 km southwest of Toruń was taken over by the Poles; so did Mogilno and Nakło located on the important railway route Berlin-Königsberg.

The truce in Trier signed on 16 February 1919, prolonging the suspension of military operations on the western front, sanctioned this state of affairs. The area occupied by the insurgents remained formally

¹⁴ J. Wojtowicz, op. cit., p. 152.

¹⁵ M. Wojciechowski, *Dzieje Chełmży*, p. 156.

¹⁶ J. Wojtowicz, op. cit., p.153.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 152.

¹⁸ M. Wojciechowski, *Dzieje Chełmży*, p. 159.

part of the Weimar Republic (Germany), but in practice the power in most of the provinces controlled by the insurgent forces was taken over by Polish political circles associated with the Supreme People's Council in Poznań. Rev. dr Antoni Wolszlegier from Pomerania held the position of the vice-president of its board. Within the Supreme People's Council there was also a committee of six people, including also a delegate representing Pomerania – dr Stefan Łaszewski from Grudziądz. This happened after the German authorities began repressive measures in the spring of 1919. They planned to arrest Stefan Łaszewski on charges of treason, which forced him to leave the city and go to Poznań. Since then, the subcommittee had actually operated in Poznań. In Gdańsk, Józef Wybicki dealt with this activity informally. On 17 May 1919, Germany eventually banned the activities of the subcommittee of the Supreme People's Council in Gdańsk. They also dissolved the Military Societies of “Jedność” in: Chojnice, Świecie, Susz and Lubawa, along with the structures of “Sokół” in: Brusy, Gdańsk and Grudziądz. The Polish press: “Gazeta Gdańska”, “Gazeta Grudziądzka”, “Głos Lubawski”, “Przyjaciel Ludu” and “Polnische Warte” were subjected to strong censorship, bans on their publication or the confiscation of the circulation¹⁹.

One of the last actions of the Germans aimed at preventing the surrender of the disputable territory became the postulate of holding a plebiscite on this issue. Inhabitants of West Prussia were supposed to answer the question which country they wanted to belong to. Preparations for this plebiscite began as a result of Germany's defeat in the Poznań province. In January 1919, August Winnig was appointed Reich Commissioner for Affairs of the East. In May 1919 he appointed his representative for West Prussia and the Bydgoszcz region in the person of a local politician of the SPD Julius Gehl²⁰. The establishment of the North Parliamentary Department in Berlin became a further step on the German side. It was to be a kind of a local representative body, which eventually received the name Parliament of the German East. Its main task was to convince the Allies to issue a decision

¹⁹ M. Wojciechowski, *Powrót Pomorza*, p. 117-119.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

to carry out the plebiscite in East and West Prussia and in the Bydgoszcz region²¹. Given the quantitative advantage of the German population and the probably significant group of indifferent and ethnically labile people – the borderland population – this postulate could have dangerous consequences for Poland. Nevertheless, the idea of conducting the plebiscite was rejected mainly due to the objection put forward by France.

The treaty ending the war with Germany was finally signed on 28 June 1919. Upon the treaty the German state was to surrender the majority of the areas of Greater Poland and Gdańsk Pomerania which had been obtained as a result of the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the case of the latter, 62% of West Prussia (15 864,5 km²) was incorporated into Poland – including the whole area of Chełmno, Michałów and Lubawa lands. Kashubia [Kaszuby] (with the counties of Puck, Wejherowo, Kościerzyna, Kartuzy and Chojnice) and Kociewie (with the counties of Starogard and Tczew) also became part of Poland. Nevertheless, a large group of the Polish population living in the Złotów district remained on the German side. In turn, the areas south of Elbląg, the so-called Powiśle with the counties of Kwidzyn, Sztum and Malbork submitted the decision to a plebiscite. Voting took place on 11 July 1920 and ended in the defeat of the Polish party. Ultimately, only five out of six communes voting for Poland joined the Polish state. Apart from them, the port in Korzeniew, the bridge and bridgehead in Opalenie (moved in the second half of the 1920s to Toruń) along with the railway station in Gardeja were incorporated into the Pomeranian Voivodeship²².

The capital of the region – Gdańsk – was separated along with Sopot and Żuławy. It was transformed into a new political organism – the Free City of Gdańsk. Its foreign policy and customs system were to be associated with the Republic of Poland, but in practice from the very beginning the authorities of the Free City sought to weaken these relationships and rebuild close relations with Germany.

²¹ Ibid., p. 115-116.

²² *Marienwerder Westpreussen. Aus dem leben einer deutschen Stadt an der unteren Weichsel*, ed. O. Gründer, F. Neumann, Celle 1983, p. 292-293; W. Wrzesiński, *Plebiscyty na Warmii i Mazurach oraz na Powiślu w 1920 r.*, Olsztyn 1974, p. 279.

The territories incorporated into Poland (especially rural areas) were predominantly inhabited by Poles, with the exception of the county of Sępólno and the so-called Kosznajderia [German: Koschneiderei] situated north of Świecie, which were both inhabited by a considerable part of the German population.

In total, 964 704 inhabitants lived in the areas allocated to Poland, while 330 630 people resided in the Free City of Gdańsk, which was connected with Poland. This constituted about 75% of the inhabitants of the former province of West Prussia²³.

Political decisions taken in Paris and sanctioned by the Treaty of Versailles had yet to be implemented. The handing over of the areas in a peaceful and orderly manner could only be ensured by joint Polish-German preparations for this act. A series of meetings between delegations of both countries served the purpose. During the meetings practical aspects of changing the national belonging of the territories and their inhabitants were established in detail. Committee meetings were held, among others in July 1919 in Bydgoszcz, Gdańsk and Toruń. One of their effects was the reactivation of the activities of the subcommittee of the Supreme People's Council with its headquarters in Gdańsk. In addition, during the meeting in Toruń on 16 July it was decided that a ban should be imposed on press attacks and that the guards of residents should be appointed. It was also established that German officials should be left in the Polish administration, and the issue of military service or admitting Polish trustees to some German offices should be regulated. Polish trustees were to be found, for example, in the Superintendence of the Post Office, the Directorate of Railways, the Higher National Court or at the regional school departments²⁴.

In the summer of 1919, it was assumed that the future Pomeranian Voivodeship would cover only areas that had been previously part of West Prussia. It was not decided at that time to include West Kuyavia with Bydgoszcz and Inowrocław or East Kuyavia and Dobrzyń Land. From the point of view of historical tradition, the new acquisition be-

²³ P. Kosiński, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

came Działdowo in Masuria [Mazury], which before the partitions had not constituted part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The second question that was related to the province itself was the issue of its capital. Tczew, located right next to the border with the Free City of Gdańsk, was taken into account, as were Starogard, Grudziądz (situated on the border with Germany), Kwidzyn (where the plebiscite was to be held) and Toruń. Toruń was located at the very southern end of the Pomeranian Voivodeship, but a large percentage of the Polish population and numerous social and political elites created during the period of the partitions spoke in its favor. The Scientific Society operated in Toruń, where *Pan Tadeusz* was printed for the first time in 1858. Toruń was also a city where it was possible to place a large military garrison in the fortress. It was also well connected, and numerous railways passed through its area. Finally, Toruń was chosen as the future capital of the voivodeship, which caused that in October 1919 the agencies of the subcommittee of the Supreme People's Council were transferred to the city. The Pomeranian Voivodeship Office was established on 5 December 1919 out of the agencies. It was temporarily based in Poznań, but its final seat was to be Toruń. The Polish authorities appointed Stefan Łaszewski the first governor of the province.

The return of Pomerania to Poland did not happen quickly, which began to raise concerns about its viability. A quick ratification of the document was expected, and in the German parliament this procedure was constantly postponed. Nevertheless, on 24 October 1919, the "Agreement on the military transfer of land to Poland" was signed in Berlin. On its basis the transfer was supposed to start at 6 am on the seventh day after the deposit of the ratification documents in Paris.

The German parliament did not ratify the Treaty of Versailles until 10 January 1920, which enabled to start the process of taking over the territory granted to Poland on 17 January.

The Polish authorities in Warsaw had already decided to create the Pomeranian Front, whose commander was General of Arms Józef Haller. The Front Army included the following units of the Polish Army: 11th Infantry Division of the Blue Army and 16th Infantry Division called the "Pomeranian Division". The latter gathered soldiers from the Prussian Partition, including Pomerania.

The process of taking over Pomerania lasted until 10 February 1920. It was divided into two phases: the first cities to be taken over included: Gniewkowo (17 January), along with preparation for taking over Toruń), Toruń (18 January), Brodnica, Nowe Miasto Lubawskie, Lubawa (17-19 January), Wąbrzeźno and Bydgoszcz (20 January). On 20-22 January the remaining part of West Kuyavia and the Nadnoteć Oblast were to be taken over, while on 21 January Chełmża was taken over to be followed by Chełmno on 22 January, and on 23 January by Grudziądz and Sępólno. As part of the second phase, it was planned to take over Świecie, Nowe, Skórcz (January 25-28), Starogard and Chojnice (29 January), Tczew, Czersk, Tuchola, Kościerzyna (30 January), Brusy (31 January – 1 February) and the northernmost towns of Wejherowo and Hel (1-4 February). This last deadline could not be met, as difficulties had arisen with the rail transport of the Polish army through the area of the Free City of Gdańsk. It was only thanks to the intervention of the High Commissioner of the League of Nations Reginald Tower that an agreement was concluded, which allowed to take over the remaining area until 10 February 1920²⁵.

The formal transfer of the area began in Toruń – the capital of the Pomeranian Voivodeship. On 18 January 1920 at 3:30 p.m. the troops of the Pomeranian Division, under the command of Colonel Skrzyński entered the city from the side of the railway bridge. Then, the army marched from the railway station of Toruń-Miasto towards the market square, where the city was officially handed over. Mayor Hasse passed the city to the hands of the commander of the Pomeranian Division. On behalf of the Polish community, the Polish Army was welcomed by Otton Steinborn, the president of the Toruń People's Council. On behalf of the Polish government, the civil authority over the entire area of the province was taken over by the Minister of the former Prussian District Władysław Seyda. Then, he passed over the authority to Stefan Łaszewski. The arrival of General Józef Haller added splendor to the ceremony. The commander of the Pomeranian Front arrived on 21 January and began his stay by laying a wreath in front of the monument of Nicolaus Copernicus. The wreaths were also laid by the mayor

²⁵ M. Wojciechowski, *Powrót Pomorza*, pp. 198, 200.

of Warsaw, Piotr Drzewiecki and the chairman of the local City Council, Ignacy Baliński.

Pomerania returned to Poland, as the subsequent years showed, for good. The process of the Polonization of the region began. It finally ended in 1945 Gdańsk and other Pomeranian territories returned to Poland.

Translation Agnieszka Chabros