

War Experience and National State in Poland. Veterans and Welfare in the 20th Century

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RESÜMEE

Nachdem Polen 1918 seine staatliche Unabhängigkeit wiedererlangte, folgte eine Phase paralleler Nationsbildung und staatlicher Konsolidierung. Die Diskussion, ob und wie der Staat sich der Veteranen und Invaliden des Ersten Weltkriegs annehmen sollte, hatte großen Einfluss auf diese Prozesse. Hier manifestierten sich Fragen zur Nationalität – wer gehörte zur polnischen Nation und wer nicht – und zum nationalen kollektiven Gedächtnis – wie sollte man die polnische Teilnahme am Ersten Weltkrieg bewerten und gedenken. Konfrontiert mit den Forderungen von Veteranen und Kriegsoffizieren, entschied sich der polnische Staat für ein wohlfahrtsstaatliches Modell mit starker staatlicher Kontrolle. Der sich entwickelnde polnische Wohlfahrtsstaat war stark beeinflusst von strukturellen Kontinuitäten aus den Teilungsmächten Deutschland und Österreich, die den speziellen polnischen Bedingungen angepasst wurden. Obwohl die Umsetzung des Wohlfahrtsstaates in der Zwischenkriegszeit weniger erfolgreich war, als die Gesetzgebung es vermuten lassen könnte, bereitete die Diskussion zur Veteranenfürsorge in vielerlei Hinsicht das Fundament für das polnische Verständnis staatlicher Wohlfahrt im 20. Jahrhundert.

The First World War officially ended with the armistice on the 11th November 1918. The Polish state gradually emerged behind the lines of the withdrawing powers Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary. But the consolidation of a central government and national administration took much more time.

Deprived of developing its own tradition of statehood, civil society and welfare due to partitions, the Polish state had to be reinvented after 1918. The rapid and profound social and political changes of the 19th century such as industrialisation, urbanisation and the introduction of welfare legislation had been experienced only from the periphery of the *ancien régimes*. When Poland had to integrate the formerly partitioned territories after the end of the First World War, it was challenged with catching up to these changes.

Social welfare for soldiers, and the debates on its legislation, played a crucial part in these developments. In the national commemoration, the First World War was overwritten by the following border wars. However, this article argues that its heritage and the necessity to discuss social welfare for the soldiers who had fought in the wars were highly influential in the forming of the Polish nation, its state as well as its civil society in the 20th Century.

Poland's independence in 1918 entailed further battle: defending – and expanding – the new Polish borders. Yet, while Polish troops were still fighting, the young Polish state was already confronted with the problems of demobilisation. Soldiers and invalids of the First World War returned to their homes in what was now Polish territory.¹ Since they no longer lived in the state they had fought for, they turned to the Polish parliament, the Sejm, and the (often changing) government with their demands. They realised soon, however, that widows and orphans pensions, disability pensions and allowances for unemployed men were not the Sejm's first priority. The emerging political institutions preferred to attend to other problems first: ensuring the consolidation of state independence, military questions concerning the border wars and the re-unification of the infra-structure. Only a few members of the parliament took active concern in the problems of demobilised soldiers and submitted parliamentary inquiries to criticise the lack of action taken by the government. Adding to the difficulties, various ministries were responsible for questions of veterans' and invalids' pensions or allowances: the Ministry for the Former Prussian Province (*Ministerstwo b. Dzielnicy Pruskiej*), the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (*Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej*) and the Ministry of Military Affairs (*Ministerstwo Spraw Wojskowych*). Many of the requests also required the approval of the Ministry of Treasury (*Ministerstwo Skarbu*). To pursue their aims, ex-servicemen had to organise and to found institutions and associations to promote their needs. This was true in particular for the Polish veterans of the First World War, standing in the shadow of the soldiers of the Polish army. Polish First World War veterans and invalids wanted more than purely charitable aid. They demanded moral and legal acknowledgement and compensation for their "work for the state".²

The first provisional regulations, issued during the Polish border wars, referred only to the Polish army and the Polish legions. War service on behalf of the nation, and defend-

- 1 No definite numbers exist for Polish soldiers fighting 1914–1918, but research suggests at least about 2 Million active combattants. Alexander Watson, *Fighting for Another Fatherland: The Polish Minority in The German Army, 1914–1918*. [forthcoming]. Piotr Wandycz, *Se remobiliser pour renaitre: Les vies polonaises de la sortie de la guerre*, in: Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau/Christophe Prochasson, *Sortir de la grande guerre. Le monde et l'après-1918*. Paris 2008, p. 307-328, p. 314. Lesław Dudek, *Polish Military Formations in World War I*, in: Béla K. Király/Nándor F. Dreisziger (Hg.), *East-Central European Society in World War I*. New York 1985, S. 454–470, p. 455. About half a million of these soldiers died, countless were wounded. Rezmer, *Polacy w korpusie oficerskim*, S. 140. Numbers for invalids vary, deputies talk of half a million RP II/0/ Sitzung 15, S. 819–828, 18.3.1919, p. 823; however, in 1921 the invalids committee speaks of 200,000 invalids; 150,000 of them registered RP II/0/2599, p. 1. – The present article was written within the framework of the the Dublin-based project „The Limits of Demobilization”, funded by the ERC/IRCHSS.
- 2 Michael Geyer, *Ein Vorbote des Wohlfahrtstaates. Die Kriegsoferversorgung in Frankreich, Deutschland und Großbritannien nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*. in: GG 9 (1983), p. 230-277, p. 236.

ing the state led to an overall accepted right for compensation just like in other nation-states with a conscription army. However, the service of the large number of Polish First World War veterans was more difficult to translate into the new national narrative. Many of those who had fought alongside the partition armies did not continue to fight in the Polish army, and therefore did not take part in the following border wars. They had risked their lives and health in the war, but they had done so wearing foreign uniforms. Therefore, their position and their claims in the Second Polish Republic were subject to controversy.

In March 1919, barely a month after the convocation of the Sejm, the question of benefits for the invalids of the First World War was first raised. The previously improvised allowances were criticised as inadequate with regard to the increasing inflation. Immediate action was needed to avoid the impression that foreign countries were better in providing care for their citizens than Poland.³ The first steps were taken, however they were highly influenced by the Polish national narrative of a state-building war. When the Polish state, in May 1919, issued a law on provisional payments for widows and orphans, it was limited to the members of the Polish army and legions. Several representatives demanded to include veterans of the First World War into the pension and allowance policy. Yet the legislation remained limited to the families of those who had fought directly for the liberation of Poland (i.e. not in the partition armies).

Deputy Hermann Lieberman argued against the discrimination of veterans of the partition armies. Their claims had been repeatedly rejected under the pretext that the armies of the former partitioning powers would cover their needs. Lieberman pointed out that this was completely unjustified and that the current Polish policy was one of sheer neglect.⁴ Other delegates demanded benefits for the families of these soldiers on the ground that they “had fought for the Polish cause”.⁵ Wincenty Witos, later Prime Minister, described the service in the partition armies as a service of soldiers, “who did not lose their lives in defence of their own country, but who have indirectly contributed to it with their war service in foreign armies, to which they had been forced”. He described the problem of veterans who had fought in these armies, as a “festering, often dangerous, wound” in the Polish nation, which needed to be attended quickly.⁶

Already the first debate introduced a welfare concept that was to become central to the Polish veterans’ policy. Veterans demanded the assignment of so-called “Trafik”-concessions, authorising the sale of tobacco products and alcohol. The Polish Association of War Invalids (*Związek Inwalidów Wojennych RP*, ZIWRP) introduced this demand into the

3 RP II/0/15, p. 819-828, 18.3.1919, p. 822.

4 Herman Lieberman, RP II/0/33, p. 34-37, 6.5.1919, p. 35-36.

5 RP II/0/42, p. 19-27, Matakiewicz, 27.5.1919, p. 21.

6 RP II/0/42, p. 19-27, Witos, 27.5.1919, p. 23-24.

debate. However, it relied on a long tradition of social welfare for invalids, originating in the Habsburg social policy.⁷

Work became a key issue in the debates on veterans' welfare. The ex-servicemen associations stressed the desire to be reintegrated into work life. Veterans and their representatives criticised employers for not providing jobs for the disabled or ex-servicemen in general. Furthermore, veterans blamed the state for failing to provide legal guidelines and financial aid for the reintegration. Polish invalids were so desperate in their present situation that many regarded emigration as their only option.⁸ By the same token, the Polish state chose to introduce a welfare concept that was closely linked to the concept of work. Invalidity was to be defined by the percentage of disability to work. Allowances were calculated accordingly. Work became the central point of reference for veterans' welfare, thus demonstrating structural continuities of administration from the partition powers into the new Polish state. The idea to estimate invalidity in terms of the disability to work originated in the German labour protection legislation, introduced under Bismarck. Both Germany and Austria-Hungary had taken this policy as an example to shape their own veterans' legislation before the First World War.⁹ Through strong administrative continuities, the new Polish state adapted a very similar system.

Members of the Sejm supported the veterans' case in the debates for several reasons. Some featured a generally positive and sympathetic attitude towards veterans and their merits. Their support originated in an understanding of solidarity and moral commitment to social welfare based on the equality of all Poles and the responsibility of the Polish state for all its citizens.¹⁰ In other cases, increased social welfare was clearly linked to political needs and objectives.¹¹ Especially the fear of social unrest, revolution, and the objective of maintaining political stability led to support for the veterans' claims. The return of the ex-servicemen, many of them wounded, called for a rapid processing of their request. A quick settlement was regarded as the best means to prevent and to calm social protests.¹² The border wars, while distracting the interest of the Parliament and the public from the needs of First World War veterans on the one hand, also provided the debates on state

7 RP II/0/15, p. 819-828, 18.3.1919, p. 823. For more details on the concept of 'Trafik' see Stegmann, Natali, *Kriegsdeutungen Staatsgründungen Sozialpolitik. Der Helden- und Opferdiskurs in der Tschechoslowakei 1918-1948*. München 2010, p. 94 ff.

8 RP II/0/15, p. 819-828, 18.3.1919, p. 820.

9 Robert Weldon Whalen, *Bitter Wounds. German Victims of the Great War, 1914-1939*. Ithaca/London 1984, p. 88-89.

10 Matakiewicz, 42/20, 27.5.1919 "They may have fought in the adversary armies and sometimes died in fratricidal battles, but all of them envisioned the same love for their country"; Józef Bochenek, RPII/0; Session 42/21; 27.5.1919.

11 Siehe Julia Eichenberg, "Söldner der Besatzer oder Helden des Unabhängigkeitskampfes? - Die Debatte um die polnischen Veteranen des Ersten Weltkriegs", in: Natali Stegmann (Hg.), *Die Weltkriegs als symbolische Bezugspunkte: Poland, die Tschechoslowakei, die Ukraine und Deutschland nach dem Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Prague 2009, p. 147-168.

12 MP Reger refers to unrest und protest in Warsaw in November 1921 to protest the law of 1921 RP II/0/325 CCCXXV/19-24, 6.6.1922, p. 20.

care for veterans with a current reference. A fair pension system for veterans was seen as a motivation for the soldiers still fighting.¹³

A comprehensive veterans' legislation was also seen as the best representation of the Polish state in the international community. By voting for comprehensive welfare, the Polish Sejm deputies wanted to fight the reputation of the Second Republic as a "Saisonstaat", a German label indicating Poland was a state that would not last a season.¹⁴ The developments of social benefits policy provided for former combatants abroad, especially in Western Europe, were a constant point of comparison. As a report by the Sejm's Committee for Invalids and the Budget Committee from March 1921 stated, that the decreeing of respective laws should be accelerated in Poland, "at a time when other countries such as France and Germany have already passed laws that ensure the welfare of their invalids."¹⁵

The newly formed veterans' organisations tried to impose pressure on debates and decisions of the parliament. One way employed to do so was direct lobbying. Some of the deputies were also members of the parliament. These men, who had fought in the First World War, had an important function as intermediaries (e.g. Edmund Bigoński, Herman Lieberman).¹⁶ They represented the views of the veterans in parliamentary debates and joined the relevant committees. The invalids' organisation ZIWRP emphasised the significance of disabled veterans as members of the Sejm – among them fourteen members of the ZIWRP. Consequently, the association boasted having "exercised a special influence on legislation concerning the protection of war victims", especially since three experts in the relevant Sejm committee (*Komisja Inwalidzka*) were members of the ZIWRP.¹⁷ The committee itself was a result of lobbying. The *Komisja Wojskowa*, the Military Committee of the Sejm, focused mostly on the soldiers of the Polish army. The veterans of First World War, however, were already in need. Under the impression that the division of responsibilities between the different committees did not speed up the process, the ZIWRP called for the foundation of an invalids' committee in the Sejm. They based this claim on the argument that Poland owed "the current political freedom" to the war invalids.¹⁸ The committee, composed of 15 members from diverse parties, now filtered the debates regarding the issue of the demobilised (and disabled) soldiers. With the return of the first "Polish soldiers" from the border wars, legislation became more open to the problems of veterans in general. In May 1920, the issue of welfare for veterans from the partition armies had first been raised in debates on military pensions. Due to the high number of officers and soldiers from the former partition armies in the

13 RP II/0/ 1262 W. Michalak (Nar. Zw. Rob.), (1920); RP II/0/325 CCCXXV/19-24, 6.7.1922, p 20.

14 RP II/0/15, p. 819-828, 18.3.1919, p. 822 speech by Putek.

15 Joint report by the Invalids' Committee and the Treasury regarding invalids' welfare legislation, in response to the inquiry by z Bigoński (Druk Nr. 1599) and Michalak (Druk Nr. 1262): RP II/0/ Druk Nr. 2599, p. 2.

16 Andrzej Garlicki (Hg.), *Posłowie i Senatorowie Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 1919–1939*. Słownik biograficzny. Hrsg. von Andrzej Krzysztof Kunert. Warszawa 1998; Herman Lieberman. *Pamiętniki*. Warsaw 1996.

17 Polen. Zentralverband der Kriegsinvaliden der Polnischen Republik (ZIWRP) in: CIAMAC Bericht der X. Jahresversammlung in Genf, 20.-22. September 1934, Bericht Nr. III, p. 63-64.

18 RP II/0/107, 8.1.1920, CVII 29-32.

now Polish army, the Department of Military Affairs advised that they should receive a pension, if they had fought for Poland for more than six months or had retired because of invalidity.¹⁹ Frequent inquiries and parliamentary petitions on behalf of minority delegates in the Sejm revealed that in reality, even of these scant benefits, only very few have ever actually been paid out. In comparison, invalids of the former partition powers seemed to have been well off, as they were legally entitled to the same rights as invalids of the Polish army. Nevertheless this law was only enacted in 1921, whereas financial support for the Polish army and the Polish legions was ensured as soon as 1919. Only after repeated parliamentary motions, a more balanced law was passed. After 1921, invalids of the partition armies were legally equal to the Polish invalids, but only if they served between August 1914 and November 1918 and if they held Polish citizenship.²⁰ However, a major problem for Polish ex-servicemen and invalids of the partition armies was the requirement to supply demobilisation documents. These had mostly been lost into the turmoil of war or had never even been issued in the first place. Members of the parliament complained in the name of the veterans about the “terror of evidence” that was imposed on requesting veterans to prove that they had never acted hostile towards the Polish state. Still, according to the Disability Committee more than three quarters of the First World War invalids were registered up to March 1921.²¹

The Making of the Polish Veteran

The question of accepting responsibilities for the former non-invalid combatants of the partition armies by the Polish state was put on hold.²² The willingness to provide welfare was ranked, preferring some and neglecting others. At the top of the hierarchy were those veterans who could prove to have served in the ranks of the Polish army and who, in addition, fit the definition of “Polishness” (*polskość*).²³ Veterans who had only fought in the armies of the partition powers and those who belonged to ethnic and religious minorities were ranked lower in the hierarchy of national commemoration. The journal ‘Inwalida’²⁴ accused the government of distinguishing between “‘Polish’ invalids – and

19 Their pension was 60% of what they would have received by German and Austrian (until 1.11.1918) or Russian (until 1.11.1917) calculations. Officers received 40% after ten years, plus additional payments. Siehe RP II/0/151, CLI/56-61, P. Godek 29.5.1920.

20 1921 r. 27.12.1918 (German army), 1.11.1918 (Austrian army), 1.3.1918 (Russian army). Ustawa o zaopatrzeniu inwalidów wojennych i ich rodzin z dnia 18 marca.

21 Joint report by the Invalids’ Committee and the Treasury, RP II/0/ Druk Nr. 2599, p. 1.

22 Compare further inquiries with the same subject: RP II/0/Druk 211, Józef Rączkowski (PSL), 19.3.1919; RP II/0/ Druk Nr. 1122, Ks. Dr. Lubelski, 30.10.1919; [RP II/0/ Druk Nr. 1930, Komisja Inwalidzka (Jan Gawlikowski), 5.7.1920 (demanding a 300% raise of the allowances for families of the Polish armies and those of the partition soldiers), RP II/0/ Druk Nr. 2229, Pussak, Michalak, Bigoński, 10.11.1920.

23 Christoph Mick, *Kriegserfahrung in einer multiethnischen Stadt. Lemberg 1914–1950*. Habilitationsschrift, Tübingen 2003, p. 298.

24 Official Journal of the Association of disabled veterans ZIWRP.

invalid ‘Poles’” (“*Inwalidzi ‘Polscy’ a inwalidzi ‘Polacy’*”).²⁵ The association complained that, “an invalid of the Polish Army is met with gratitude, while invalids of the foreign armies receive only pity.” They demanded that public acknowledgment of the sacrifice and legal recognition had to go hand in hand. In their view, a Polish soldier fought for Poland, whether in the Austrian, Russian, or German army. Their Polishness should not be questioned any more than that of Poles in one of the Allied armies. Polish invalids should be recognised without regard to the army in which they suffered their injuries. By the same token, everybody, regardless of their nationality, who served the Polish Army, should receive benefits. The same was demanded for civilians wounded on Polish territory. With the exception of obvious traitors, everybody should be included in the state welfare.²⁶

The implementation of the Invalids’ Law of 1921 was postponed repeatedly. In June 1923 the Committee for Welfare and Invalids (*Komisja Opieki Społecznej i Inwalidzkiej*) handed in a report, in which it accused the Sejm for repeatedly delaying this law under different pretexts.²⁷ The draft law of March 1921 which ensured social welfare and provisions for invalids had been called back for revisions by the committee in May 1922.²⁸ As late as January 1923 was the debate on the bill resumed – only to be postponed again. The committee accused the Sejm of deliberately delaying the implementation of the law. After long discussions, it was finally decreed on 23rd November 1923. However, payments were not applied until 1925, and even then they were introduced only slowly and repeatedly stopped.²⁹ Moreover, the 1921 law was based on calculations in Polish Mark, and were not modified when Poland converted to the Polish Złoty in 1924. Only the reform of the invalids’ legislation in 1932 would solve the complications arising out of this inconsistency.

Rapid and equal pension legislation was therefore a premature hope. Veterans constantly joined in public and sometimes violent manifestations.³⁰ They protested against the slow legislative process, against the slow implementation of the actual payments, and against cuts to the scarce existing allowances.³¹ Regular motions and petitions documented that even though there was legal justice, financial support to veterans of the former partition powers was barely provided.

The late 1920s saw a nationalisation of discussions, including those related to the pension schemes. The lack of resources and the chronically tight budget of the Polish state wors-

25 Boleśław Kikiewicz, „Inwalidzi ‘polscy’, a inwalidzi Polacy”, in: *Inwalida*, 8 (1919), p. 1-2, p. 1.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

27 RP II/0/Druk Nr. 607 Report by the Committee for Social Welfare and Invalids regarding social welfare legislation, signed by Edmund Bigoński, 13.6.1923, RP II/1/Druk Nr. 132: Urgent inquiry by the Sejm’s Social Welfare Committee, signed by Edmund Bigoński.

28 RP II/1/81, 23.11.1923, LXXXI/5-9, S. 5.

29 Jabłonowski, *Sen o potęgę*, p. 252-262.

30 RP II/0/273, p. 39-40 inquiry by MP Reger regarding the progress of legislation, referring to the invalids protest over the last weeks, 14.12.1921. „Demonstracja inwalidzka w Warszawie”, *Inwalida* Nr. 34, 21.8.1920, p. 1-3; *Nasza kontra-manifestacja*, in: *Inwalida* Nr. 10, 1925, p. 1-3.

31 RP II/0/ 273, p. 39-40 MP Reger, 14th December 1921

ened this situation. Even the legal requirements of international treaties were questioned and contested. A 1923 report on pensions of civil servants and professional soldiers of the partition powers by the Budget Committee emphasised the need for urgent legal improvements. It referred particularly to the growing number of retirees from the former partition powers. To reject claims by the veterans, it was argued that the Polish State had voluntarily taken on a moral obligation, but that it was not bound by any official legal agreement.³² The moral promise, however, would have to be revised under the current economic situation. In a nutshell, the report of the Budget Committee formulated the view that would dominate the discussions of the following years: those veterans who had fought in the Polish army had earned their right to pensions, whereas the large share of pensioners of the partition powers were cared for based on morality and charity. The latter were increasingly regarded as a financial liability, “given as a favour” (*dar z Łaski*). With the rising economic crisis they were more and more regarded as a luxury the state could no longer afford.

The deputy treasury minister Markowski warned against the challenge of the increasing number of veterans. Future developments would put the Polish state in a difficult position, as its tight budget could not cover all of the demands. He therefore called for a major correction of the whole concept of pensions.³³ The committee chairman Mączyński replied

*that our national minorities, who are not suppressed in the Polish state and never have been suppressed, have to get used to the fact that they live in a Polish state, and that the Polish State has the choice to honour citizens who had served the Polish nation in a special way.*³⁴

For the first time, an official party claimed – in spite of better knowledge – that the Polish state was not obliged to look after the former military professionals of the partition powers as required by international treaties. Critics of veterans’ welfare repeated this argument over the coming years.

With the increasing nationalisation of the political atmosphere in Poland in the 1930s a more radical attitude towards national minorities emerged. The minorities (Jews, Germans, Ukrainians, and Lithuanians) were suspected of having a general lack of interest in the national memory culture and a negative attitude towards Polish independence.³⁵ The suspicion that members of minorities had no loyalty towards the Polish state dated back to the World War and was used to justify their exclusion from the Polish nation. These claims were picked up on during the debates on veterans care. Representatives of the Jewish, German, and Ukrainian minorities repeatedly complained about receiving poor treatments and requested legal equality. As Dietrich Beyrau stated with regard to

32 RP II/1/Druk Nr. 673 Budget Committee Report regarding welfare legislation for retired military and civil servants (Druk Nr. 500), 23.7.1923, signed by Mączyński (head of committee): RP II/1/58, 27.7.1923, LVIII/9-79, p. 11-16.

33 RP II/1/58, 27.7.1923, LVIII/9-79, p. 16-18 : Vice-minister Skarbu Mańkowski answering to the committee’s report.

34 Ebd.

35 Steffen, *Jüdische Polonität*, p. 104, p. 108-109, p. 383.

labour market policies in Poland, the debates on pensions and care were social conflicts concerning positions and distribution that took on the character of national conflicts.³⁶ The debates in the Sejm in the 1930s were increasingly characterised by rising aggression against minorities.

Not only inquiries by representatives of the minorities in the Sejm, but also regular parliamentary inquiries documented that even the small welfare allowance for veterans was hardly ever paid if they were “non-Polish”. Complaints increased from the second half of the 1920s onwards, especially from ethnically mixed residential areas: from the Jewish community around Cracow, complaints regarding discrimination against German invalid veterans from Silesia and complaints about unfair handling and unpaid allowances concerning Ukrainians from East Galicia. Investigations at the local level proved these claims right. For example, the situation of war invalids in Lwów was financially as well as medically far below the national average.³⁷

The Polish national narrative of regaining independence dominated the commemorative culture and had its impact on social welfare. As a consequence, all veterans tried to declare their war service as part of the struggle for Poland’s independence in order to stress their devotion to the Polish nation.

The economic situation did not help to ease the tensions. Already before the collapse of the world economy, Poland went through serious economic crises during the 1920s. The Polish currency was stabilised only in 1927, after repeated attempts. Political and economic instability seemed to run parallel to each other. This would explain why the stabilisation of the currency was only achieved after the undemocratic coup in May 1926, when the League of Nations granted a high credit to the new government.³⁸ But inflation and depression remained and due to the effects of the global economic crisis were intensified. The economic conditions improved only slowly again towards the end of the 1930s.³⁹ At this time, however, the debate on veterans care was already charged with stereotypes and hierarchies, so that the relief did not improve the material situation for veterans of the partition powers and those belonging to minorities groups.

The confrontation between the state and veterans associations influenced each other mutually. The newly established state had to prove responsibility towards the demands of the veterans. At the same time, the group of veterans (including First World War) were defined only through their confrontation with the state and their demands on it. The process thus has clear characteristics of the formation of a nation state by social responsibilities. Rather than ‘formed by war’, the group of veterans was predominantly a post-

36 Beyrau, *Antisemitismus und Judentum in Polen*, p. 224 ff.

37 Mick, *Kriegserfahrung*, p. 276-277.

38 The international loan of 72 Millionen \$ by the League of Nations allowed a stabilisation of the zloty. Patricia Clavin, *The Great Depression in Europe, 1929–1939*. London 2000, p. 56.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 182.

war construction, shaped by their affiliation to and engagement in organisations.⁴⁰ First World War veterans had to fight hard to have their war service acknowledged in Poland. Social condemnation of Poles who served the occupying powers was expressed in debates in parliament and public (press) throughout the interwar period. The memory of a war during which Poles had served in all kinds of uniforms seemed complicated. The merits of the new national Polish army and their battles in the border wars were more appropriate to remember. Polish veterans of the World War promoted their own interpretation thereof in an attempt to strengthen their social status symbolically and materially. Even though the group of veterans was manifold, they all turned to the new Polish state with needs and demands with the conviction of being a Polish veteran. The construction of an identity by their relation to the state was all the more important, as Polish veterans did not share a common war experience. It was only after the war that they could become Polish Veterans. The interplay between the veterans and the state consisted mainly of the formation of responsibilities between the state as the administrative representative of the nation and those who demanded support. The debate on welfare for war veterans thereby reflected the discussion on inclusion and exclusion into the national community. The decision was linked to the question of who rendered outstanding services to the fatherland and who did not. These categories were influential by definitions of national affiliation, which in turn condensed in the legislation on who was going to be supported.⁴¹ Noiriél suggested that the construction of a corporate feeling and social administration are closely linked together by manifesting inclusion and exclusion on the route to a national community.⁴² This is also true for veterans, who were legally defined by the state by receiving social benefit payments, and were classified accordingly.

Nationalisation and Economic Challenges

In May 1926, Piłsudski performed a *coup d'état* with the support of ex-servicemen, mainly of the Polish legions. During the following years of his *Sanacja*-Regime, a cult of Piłsudski and his Polish legions was established and cultivated as part of the political founding myth.⁴³ This also entailed a new interest in the First World War, yet this new memory remained restricted to Piłsudski, his legions and “national achievements”. The revival of a First World War commemoration therefore did not help the situation of the neglected ex-servicemen of the partition powers. Rather, the new national atmosphere raised by the Piłsudski cult rather turned against them. Public opinion and Sejm debates were once again taking sides with the “Polish soldiers”. Social prestige of military service

40 Benjamin Ziemann, Die Konstruktion des Kriegsveteranen und die Symbolik seiner Erinnerung 1918–1933, in: Jost Dülffer / Gerd Krumeich (Hg.), Der Verlorene Frieden. Politik und Kriegskultur nach 1918. Essen 2002, p. 101–118. Prost, Antoine, Les anciens combattants et la société française, 1914–1939, 3 vol., Paris 1977.

41 Geyer, Vorbote des Wohlfahrtsstaates, p. 236.

42 Gérard Noiriél, État, nation et immigration. Paris 2001.

43 Heidi Hein, Der Piłsudski-Kult und seine Bedeutung für den polnischen Staat 1926–1939. Marburg 2002.

before 1918 was now even more openly limited to those whose service could more clearly be categorised as a sacrifice for the Polish nation and its independence. Accordingly, this was exactly the line of argument the First World War veterans followed themselves. Poland, they argued, owed its resurrection to them and their sacrifice.⁴⁴

The debate on care for Polish World War One veterans during the interwar period showed central problems of the Second Polish Republic as through a looking glass. The question of how to deal with the heritage of the partition powers was personified by those who voluntarily or by conscription, served in the occupiers' armies. The Polish problem of handling its new ethnic and religious minorities was likewise portrayed in the social and monetary hierarchisation of veterans. To claim welfare payments and acknowledgement, the Polish veterans had to promote their military service as a service to the Polish nation and its independence. To avoid the suspicion of having been mercenaries, they promoted their image as independence fighters. The debate on Polish World War veterans showed in how far the apparently objective memory of war participation was in fact socially constructed. The recruit in the Russian army, the officer in the Habsburg army, the soldier fighting in German ranks – forced by the need for financial support, reinvented their past. They all argued that they had served the partition powers neither out of a sense of duty, nor for career reasons, but only to support the Polish war of independence, to infiltrate these armies or to receive military training that they could then use in the struggle for independence.

On the whole, the debate on war commemoration and on state support for ex-service-men dealt with the topic of inclusion and exclusion into and out of the national community. These topics proved to be at the same time constitutive for and critical of a newly founded nation state. Since both parties were still in a phase of formation and transformation, both influenced the other side to a large extent. Therefore, the process clearly showed characteristics of the formation of a national state by social responsibilities and by the definition of who was included and who was excluded from the national community.⁴⁵ This again had repercussions on the construction and consolidation of the Polish state and society. The newly founded state had to prove responsibility by responding to the veterans' needs. At the same time, the group of (World War) veterans had been defined in defending their interests against the state. Veterans acted as a pressure group to promote their interests. A correlation between the veteran and the nation state existed in all countries, but in Poland it proved to be particularly dominant, since the state was not yet settled. According to the thesis of the nation state construction by linkage of responsibilities, the Polish state grew with its responsibilities - and partly failed them.

44 Inwalida 1936, Nr. 2, p. 7.

45 Noiriel, *État, nation et immigration*, p. 192-205; Dieter Gosewinkel, *Einbürgern und Ausschließen. Die Nationalisierung der Staatsangehörigkeit vom Deutschen Bund bis zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Göttingen 2001, p. 15 ff.

Conclusions and Outlook: Veterans and Welfare in Poland

The Second World War completely changed the parameters, but at the same time the questions of the veterans saw a number of similarities and continuities. Again, Poles had fought the World War in different armies. Even though official statistics vary, about 330,000 Polish soldiers fought with the Red Army, while the Polish Armed Forces in the West came up to 230,000 men in 1945. As not all returned to Poland straight after the war – some voluntarily stayed abroad, some were detained in camps – the number of demobilised soldiers in 1946 was smaller than it would have otherwise been, but has been estimated to be far more than 300,000. The number of war victims was even bigger. As a huge difference to the post-1918 period, this group not only included families of the deceased, widows and orphans, but also referred to a vast group of victims, including forced labourers, victims of Soviet repression, former prisoners and camp inmates.⁴⁶ Historians of the period have criticised the legislation of the interwar years as completely outdated and insufficient – and indeed it was. Never properly implemented in first place, the interwar legislation was by no means prepared to handle the necessities of post-1945.⁴⁷ However, it must be kept in mind that the laws issued in the interwar period provided the foundation in welfare legislation and were partly responsible in forming the Polish state as a welfare state (even if limited). Any kind of social benefits and allowances granted to veterans and war victims in Poland after 1945 therefore drew from the debates and struggles over veterans' welfare in the interwar period. Very distinctively, Poland had opted for the “conservative” welfare model with a strong state, similar to that in Germany and Austria.⁴⁸

A further continuity can be found in the organisations of the veterans' movement. After the Second World War, the Polish veterans quickly tried to re-activate the veterans' movement from before the war. The Polish War Invalids Association, ZIWRP, was re-founded while the war was still ongoing (as ZIW, dropping the RP that had referred to the Polish Republic). Other, new, veterans associations were to follow. The first years saw a broad range of different interest groups represented by their own associations, according to regional, religious or political cleavages. Just as the *Sanacja*-camp had tried to politically dominate the veterans' movement in the interwar period, the movement was once again monopolised. This time, implied political centralisation led to the monopolistic stand of the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (*Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację* ZBoWiD) in 1949. The ZBoWiD was highly influenced by the Cold War and socialism. It relied on the myth of victory against fascism. The only veterans association that could evade being forcefully integrated into the ZBoWiD was the Polish

46 Joanna Wawryzniak, On the Making of Second World War Myths. War Veterans, Victims and the Communist State in Poland, 1945–1969, in: Stegmann, *Weltkriege*, p. 189–208, p. 193–194.

47 Ebd., 195.

48 According to: Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Cambridge 1990.

War Invalids Association ZIW, probably due to its tradition dating back to the interwar period.⁴⁹ Already then, only the invalids had managed to by-pass monopolisation.

As another parallel to post-1918, the interpretation and commemoration of the Second World War became highly influential to the establishment of welfare politics and social categories. Again, the struggle for independence became the defining moment to be accepted and honoured as a Polish veteran.

In sum, there was no guarantee the Polish state, after 1918, would develop the social legislation covering veterans and invalids as it did. The state widely failed in the application of those policies. However, the active lobbyism of the veterans' movement had, if only in theory, ensured the consolidation of a welfare state. In this regard, veterans' welfare was the "herald of the welfare state" just as Michael Geyer stated in his article. Poland picked up on social legislation from its partition powers, Germany and Austria, for the concepts of how to handle a vast number of invalids returning from the war. With respect to the specific Polish national narrative, the war service in wartime was represented as "service for independence" rather than "for the state". This link between national narrative and long-term structural continuities was repeated after 1945. Even though the challenge and the political situation after 1945 were completely different, the legislation and the veterans' movement could build up on the experience of the interwar years.

49 Wawrzyniak, *Second World War Myths*, p. 199.