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THE "SANACJA" AND PROBLEMS OF SECURITY OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC

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The term "Sanacja" was used to describe the political group which came to power after the May 1926 coup. It emerged as a journalistic description, and not only for that reason it was far from precise. It was inexact also because the post-May ruling group was extremely complex in composition and underwent essential changes in the course of thirteen years in power. These perhaps banal ascertainties at the outset are necessary in order to define the chronological scope and the topic of our subsequent reflections.

As regards the chronology, I should like to propose a period ranging from 1921 to 1939. The closing data is obvious, but the beginning one requires an explanation. I regard 1921 as the year which marked the end of the process of territorial formation of the Polish state as well as the shaping of its internal structure (the March Constitution). This suggestion of delving into the period preceding the May coup means that the naming of "Sanacja" is, of course, a matter of convention. This is why our reflections concern themselves with not so much the "Sanacja" itself as the followers of Piłsudski, with one exception of Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski. Such a condensation of the topic is a result of not only the author's limited possibilities, but also my conviction that, in general, one cannot speak about the political thought of the "Sanacja". In contrast to nationalist, socialist or populist groups, not to mention the communists, the "Sanacja" did not have a political doctrine, i. e. a system of views which makes it possible to analyze reality, formulate aims of activities and select means for their realization. Hence considerable discrepancies not only among representatives of individual political groups which as a whole constituted the "Sanacja" movement, but also Piłsudski's followers themselves. These discrepancies pertained not only to the political praxis, which is rather usual in a political group, but also to the definition of political aims.

One of the causes which is of considerable importance is the fact that Piłsudski himself created not only no political doctrine, but adopted no reflections of ideologists of the group which he headed. Of course, one can question this statement by referring to the example of the April 1935 Constitution which, undoubtedly, was an expression of a political doctrine, but let us remember that it was precisely this aspect that was never realized. Moreover, almost immediately after its adoption,

fundamental premises on which it was based were renounced. Walery Sławek was forced to leave the political scene because the ruling group rejected the programme contained in the April Constitution.

The absence of a uniform political doctrine did not signify the lack of certain general suppositions accepted by the entire "Sanacja" group. In an interesting essay on Piłsudskian ideology Daria Nałęcz writes, "The state was made the core of ideological thought and the concept of state itself was given the rank of a philosophical category". She adds further, "The choice of an ideological constitutive category was connected, above all, with the general opinion of the entire group concerning laws of social development and its basic determinants. It was assumed that the supreme creative factor in history that guarantees progress could only be an organized factor. Upon such a foundation the state was recognized as having a dominating role, and the nation which, according to the followers of Piłsudski, was an amorphous and internally incohesive product was subjected to it. The nation was seen as a by-product of the state. It was maintained that only the form of state existence can ensure the possibility of such a coordination of efforts which guarantees national development. This basic premise gave rise to further attempts at describing the attributes of state. The state was regarded the organizer of social life, and it was claimed that the state constitutes the framework of any type of political, cultural, social and economic activity. In turn, the recognition that the state is the goal and yardstick for public activity stimulated concrete postulates of the social programme pursued by the followers of Piłsudski. The opinion that the state is indispensable for realization of the national historical mission became a linch-pin holding together this assembly of traits. The Piłsudskian ideologists thus created a construction in which the category of state became an independent entity, ruling itself with its own laws and in the name of its own interests which they wished to identify with the interests of society".¹⁾

Later we shall return to the role of the state from the point of view of internal threats. For the moment, however, let us dwell a little on the Piłsudski group's evaluation of external threats and ways of overcoming them.

The conception of an Eastern policy realized in the period 1918-1920 was an attempt at compensating Poland's weaknesses. The idea of dividing Russia along national lines presupposed the emergence of a number of national states from the Romanov empire and, as a result, the limitation of the Russian state to ethnic Russia. According to Piłsudski's adherents, these new states, owing to the very fact of their emergence, would be involved in conflict with Russia and would naturally lean

1) D. Nałęcz, "'Droga' jako platforma kształtowania się ideologii piłsudczyków ('The Plan' as a platform for the shaping of the Piłsudskian ideology)," *Przegląd Historyczny*, 1975, pp. 592-593.

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towards Poland. Supposed that a federation would make it possible to solve the problem of Polish-Lithuanian relations and also, although here conceptions were much more unclear, the problem of Polish-Ukrainian relations, Poland would become an attractive partner for these national states. Piłsudski was also convinced that for a long time to come the military defeat of Germany would make her incapable of waging war and that the Polish-French alliance would guarantee this further²⁾.

The Eastern policy conception was a total fiasco. The followers of Piłsudski were to refer to it throughout the entire period of the Second Republic that they wanted to formulate Prometheian programmes and assist, also financially, the emigré groups of nationalities comprised in the USSR, but that all this was propaganda undertakings and preparations in case of a dissolution of the Soviet Union rather than a real political concept.

The defeat of the Eastern policy placed the Piłsudski group in a difficult situation since its members were incapable of formulating an alternative conception which could compensate for the objective weakness of Poland. The conception of "Poland from sea to sea" could not become such an alternative because for any realistically thinking politician its chance must have appeared to be almost zero

Finally, the collapse of the Eastern policy coincided with the period of an obvious deterioration of Poland's international situation expressed in the Rapallo Treaty and the Rhine Pact.

When in May 1926 the Piłsudski group seized power, it did not have a prepared conception of its own foreign policy. It accepted the general premises of the Polish *raison d'état* which consisted in the defence of the Versailles and the Riga Treaties. Hence the strong emphasis, both in government statements and in the press, on the peaceful intentions of the Polish state, even more so, considering that the European situation did not appear to be very promising. This was to change at the beginning of the 1930's when the spirit of Rapallo became increasingly a thing of the past. The growing hostility between the Third Reich and the USSR automatically made

2) The protocols register that already at the session of the Committee of State Defense held on Nov. 23, 1926 Piłsudski upheld his view: "Following a thorough analysis the Marshal does not foresee the possibility for the present generation of Germans to attack us or anyone else. At the moment the Germans are incapable of any sort of military undertakings. Moreover, each year they are becoming weaker as a result of technological and moral demobilization. Germany today does not have the possibility of arming a large number of people, unless methods of warfare should change. At present these methods remain unchanged and when they do change, then one can revise our opinion. The membership of Germany in the League of Nations has decreased the possibility of war with Germany, while the partial demobilization of France caused by state financial difficulties is a factor of growing importance. The Marshal proposes a detailed discussion on this topic during one of the future sessions and announces more detailed proof for his thesis". (Protocols of the session of the Committee of State Defense in the collections of the Joseph Piłsudski Institute in New York)

Poland more attractive for both of its neighbours and made it possible to formulate a new conception of Polish foreign policy based on the assumption of a permanent Soviet-German conflict.

The "Sanacja" group considered foreign policy an important but insufficient means to ensure security for Poland. In 1931 Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski wrote, "On all sides Poland today faces pressure of great problems and serious difficulties. Hostile winds which at any moment can change into hurricanes blow from all sides. Our statecraft is unceasingly threatened by treacherous dynamite mines, while underwater reefs and rocks pierce the water's surface. (...) Diplomatic endeavours alone and even alliances are not able to guarantee Poland the peace which is so absolutely and imperatively necessary to reconstruct and develop the material and cultural values of a country laid waste by systematic, centuries-old occupation and war (...) We cannot rely solely on the law of nations since even the most obvious rights are questioned. We cannot trust political treaties and agreements completely and unreservedly since, even though for the past thirty centuries all treaties were made to be permanent, eternal and inviolable, copious volumes of world history are in reality only a history of the breaking of international agreements and obligations. Finally, we cannot put our trust only in the sword, since ten others can be raised against it, and the methods of battle are inexhaustible and unlimited. True security and strength are to be found predominantly in the organization, intellect, will and work of the entire ship's crew, from the captain down to the rank and file soldier".³⁾

Obviously one ought to read Kwiatkowski's book *Disproportions* with certain reserve, keeping in mind that it was written and appeared in a period when its author was relegated to the sidelines. Although he was soon to resume an active political role, it would be difficult to call him a follower of Piłsudski. A reference to Kwiatkowski's opinion seems, however, to be justified inasmuch as his views concerning precisely this question are identical with those of the Piłsudski group.

The leading Piłsudskian ideologist, Adam Skwarczyński, pointed out that "the existence of a nation without a State is that of a cripple since only as a State can the nation become a complete Nation. Only as a State does it thrive, develop its will and act. According to the Polish concept, the state is the common good of all its citizens, but at the same time it is also something more—an organ which aids the nation in shaping and fulfilling its historical role, which links it with the other nations and enables it, through cooperation or competition, to achieve increasingly new and perfect forms of life and creativity. Without a state, and a strong one at that, the nation is managed by someone else, and its historical role, cultural expansion and

3) E. Kwiatkowski, *Dysproporcje. Rzecz o Polsce przeszłej i obecnej* (Disproportions. On Future and Present Poland), Warszawa 1932, pp. 200-201.

creativity become impossible. Once we comprehend in this way the union between Nation, State and their creative role among other states and nations, then we shall immediately cease to show interest in various subtleties on the subject whether the Nation is more important than the State or if internationalism is more important than the Nation and the State. We believe that only the State is the active form of the Nation and that is why the State, its welfare and strength must be the test for civic activity”.⁴⁾

This fragment contains polemics with both the national group (primacy of nation over state) and the working class movement (primacy of the international proletarian solidarity) although this is not the reason why it was quoted. Above all, it is typical of the way how the followers of Piłsudski defined the role of the State. One can easily encounter similar statements in the opinions of all the members of the Piłsudski group who were engaged in ideology.

A strong state, if we use once again the definition made by Skwarczyński, is the only guarantee for Poland’s security. But this thought was, to a large degree, of general nature and had to be translated into everyday language if it were not to remain a propaganda slogan. In other words, it demanded the taking of a position towards at least two basic questions, that of the political and the national structure of Poland.

Let us begin with the second question which from the point of view of the theoretical premises made by the Piłsudski group was much less controversial although in political practice it proved to be unsoluble, and during the closing years of the Second Republic this fact caused rejection by the “Sanacja” of hitherto fundamental theoretical assumptions of the entire group.

Political practice was directly influenced by the theoretical debate concerning the primacy of the nation or the state in the conditions of the national structure of the Second Republic. The Piłsudskian supposition of subjecting national interests to the interest of the state signified equal rights for all the national communities of the Second Republic and, at the same time, a restraining of domineering tendencies on the part of the Polish community. All nationalisms, including Polish one, were, from the point of view of this assumption, equally harmful because they constituted a disintegrative factor which weakens the state. The political praxis of the post-May governments was, however, rather remote from the views of Piłsudski’s ideologists. This came about due to many reasons, but the entire subject exceeds the framework of this essay⁵⁾.

4) A. Skwarczyński, *Wskazania* (Directives), Warszawa 1934, pp. 48–49.

5) On these problems see: Andrzej Chojnowski, *Koncepcje polityki narodowościowej rządów polskich w latach 1921–1939* (Conceptions of a National Minorities Policy of the Polish Government in the 1921–1939 Period), Wrocław 1979.

Let us note only that it was exactly in these questions that the "Sanacja" group experienced an evolution which led to the negation of state primacy. The establishment of the Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego (OZN—the National Unity Camp) was an external symptom of this evolution. The author of the most recent work on the OZN points to the fact that "a strong emphasis on national ideology and the granting to the nation of a sovereign and dominating role in the State was the essential feature of the OZN programme. This motif was interwoven logically throughout the entire programme declaration and subsequent journalistic publications making clear the evolution which occurred in the case of a number of the leaders of the Belvedere group. In contrast to the BBWR (Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rządem—Non-Party Bloc for Cooperation with the Government) which placed the ideology of state in the forefront, the OZN took the position of priority of nation".⁶⁾ The "Sanacja" publications of this period also introduced the conception of positive nationalism.

Let us return, however, to the first question, i. e. views concerning the political structure of the state. "The strength of the state," wrote Wojciech Stpiczyński, "is not determined by the system. The decisive factor is the attachment on the part of citizens towards their state while the system is only a means serving that aim or, to put it more precisely, it should guarantee its realization. Otherwise, it is bad."⁷⁾

At the time when Stpiczyński wrote these words, he was already engaged in an open conflict with the ruling group of the colonels. From their point of view he was much too radical and as a result troublesome. His attacks directed against the egoism of the propertied classes and the bureaucracy were untimely, and for this reason he was removed from the journal "Głos Prawdy", which was handed over to Adam Koc. One should keep this in mind, analyzing programme statements made by Stpiczyński. He remained a spokesman for Piłsudskian ideology even when his position in its general outlines remained, in a certain sense, independent within the entire group.

According to the followers of Piłsudski, the legal and political structure of the state expressed by the March Constitution did not meet its aim of winning the citizens' attachment to the state. This was a faulty structure not only, and perhaps even not above all, in the relationship between the executive and legislative powers. This feature could have been relatively easily overcome after coming to power and to a

6) J. M. Majchrowski, *Czynniki jednoczące naród w myśli politycznej Obozu Zjednoczenia Narodowego* (Factors Unifying the Nation in the Political Thought of the National Unity Camp), Krakow 1978, p. 45.

7) W. Stpiczyński, *Polska, która idzie* (The Poland to Come), Warszawa 1925, p. 15. The term "system" used by Stpiczyński was to signify the legal-political structure of the state and not its socio-economic structure.

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certain degree this was achieved by the August amendment. The evil lay much deeper, in the very existence of political parties and the political organization of society. "It is impossible not to shudder at the thought of the fate of our state", wrote Stpiczyński, "whose most important problems are presented to the society by a much varied palette of party and political leaders in a false and complicated way in order to base calculations of their own prospering on social disorientation. A citizen disoriented by a permanent diet of fiction and common falsehood concerning the basic problems of state development and existence does not constitute any support for that state but becomes a burden and ballast and not the co-author of his own and his country's fate. A political party engaged in disorienting its citizens is a scandal which does not fit into the framework of political concepts—it is a criminal who by curious coincidence has been forgotten by all legal codices."⁸⁾

Stpiczyński voiced the opinion that each political party becomes psychologically conservative (the larger the party, the quicker the process) and that progress "will always be the work of individuals and small groups". This led him to the conclusion that responsibility for the state should rest upon a minority, i. e. the followers of Piłsudski. He also believed that such a minority should be a closed group in order to safeguard its ideological cohesion and vigour. "Our strength", he continued, "is not in numbers but in our ideological intensity, our vitality and unselfish public service. Hence, in reality, when losing these values in order to win numerically by forsaking our task and mission, we do not gain but lose strength".⁹⁾

The principle of the right of a minority to hold power, i. e. the principle of rule by elite found its codification in the April Constitution. Adam Skwarczyński wrote on its project: "The nucleus of the matter is to be found in the introduction of a civic cadre. It is of secondary importance whether in a final shape of the constitutional decree this cadre will enjoy small or slightly larger privileges; at any rate, it is the introduction itself which has tremendous importance. It will signify

8) *Ibid.*, p. 8.

9) *Ibid.*, p. 177. Such reasoning led to further conclusions. "Democracy", wrote Stpiczyński, "is authority responsible to the nation which is the source of power. The parliament, in its present day form, is only an instrument with whose aid the nation establishes legal norms for its own existence and exercises its right of controlling the executive authorities. This is not to say that such an instrument will not become worn out. So far, the conception of a new instrument has not matured and as a result we are making use of the well-known form of parliament. But one must anticipate the possibility of such a change which will undoubtedly occur sooner or later (...)", pp. 135-136. This statement of Stpiczyński's is characteristic also for one other reason. It demonstrates how limited the opportunity was for Piłsudski's followers to formulate concrete solutions during his lifetime. This was caused by the fact that they were only able to guess at the nature of the Marshal's plans which he did not reveal even to them. The "Sanacja" ideologists were thus in a difficult situation. The best proof of this was Piłsudski's disapproval of the draft constitution.

severance from the principle of mechanical egalitarianism, a rejection of the principle of basing the state upon the material collective of a class or race and, finally, it means abandoning all conceptions of founding the state upon the unstable equilibrium of a play of divergent class or professional interests; it constitutes the discovery of a permanent foundation of the state in a new type of citizen".¹⁰⁾

The Piłsudskian state ideology assumed the existence of specific solidarity. An ideal, regardless of its reality, was such a construction of state which would harmoniously represent all social, political and national groups. Simultaneously, however, and of their own free will, they would have to subject themselves to the interest of the state and thus abandon a part of their programme premises. Traditional political parties were unable to do this and for this reason there was no place for them in the Piłsudski vision of the state. Such an absence of political parties meant the appearance of a vacuum which ought to be filled somehow. This role was to be played by the slogan of socializing the state, which appeared, variously formulated, in the case of practically all the Piłsudskian ideologists. Adam Skwarczyński wrote that "the socializing of the state means breaking with the existing shape of affairs in which the citizen, while enjoying democratic equal rights, is an eternal client of the state. This is a tendency to make the entire society responsible for the state and to burden it with labour for the state. To place such obligations upon society means to burden precisely those forces which stem from social initiative and which are actively engaged in organizations. Wincenty Jastrzębski said recently that one should and must transfer a whole number of activities which until now have been conducted by state administration, onto social organizations; in this way, the latter will be bound even stronger to the state. This is undoubtedly a method which could also be helpful in achieving a considerable lowering of the costs of those undertakings. At the same time, such a method could become the basis of forms of government more permanent and efficient than those which are founded upon a parliament influenced by political moods. Undoubtedly in this way the masses will be linked much more permanently with the state than it is being or could be done by one nervously quivering and taunt thread of direct elections".¹¹⁾ This principle of socializing the state was understood variously, and different contents were identified with the concept. Stpicznyński suggested a conception of far-reaching autonomy of the voivodeships (defined according to new principles) and a considerable role of the voivodeship self-governing bodies. Walery Sławek was engaged in preparing the establishment of a universal Social Organization, and Kazimierz Zakrzewski postulated a syndicalist solution, to mention only some interpretations of the principle of socializing the state.¹²⁾

10) A. Skwarczyński, *op. cit.* p. 139.

11) *ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

12) W. Stpicznyński, *op. cit.*; T. Schaetzel, *Putkownik Walery Sławek* (Colonel Walery Sławek),

These were only differences between detailed solutions. They shared an awareness of the need for fundamental transformation of the legal and political state structure. The Piłsudski group was convinced that the path towards strengthening the state led through rejection of the party system and parliamentarianism. Although they agreed to retain the Sejm and Senate, the two were to have little in common with classic parliamentarianism. We are dealing here with a tendency, typical for authoritarian systems, towards the preservation of old forms whose significance in a new situation is to be only of ornamental nature. As Daria Nałęcz has pointed out, work was an extremely essential element in the Piłsudskian vision of the state. It was understood not materialistically, but as creativity, duty and mission of an individual. Adam Skwarczyński wrote that "work, moral work of a nation, initiated by people linked by their good will and striving towards realistic goals, whether small or great, individual or more general, is in Poland the basis upon which one should build, contrary to doctrines and 'essential' formulations. Upon this basis we should solve problems of social initiative 'from below' and state authority 'from above' and aim at the ideals of a socialist state".¹³⁾

It would be a simplification to see in this approach towards work only a useful propaganda formula for dissolving conflicts and easing social pressure. The authors of those statements were truly convinced that basic transformations of legal and political structure postulated by them would eliminate sources of conflicts and social unrests and create conditions for earnest work on the part of all citizens. In this way, social conflicts would become soluble and reduced to normal conflicts which accompany every human activity. The state would be not so much a mediator as a factor which, as if automatically, liquidates the acuteness of such conflicts. If one takes into consideration the fact that in their youth a considerable number of Piłsudskian ideologists had active contact with the socialist movement, then one must wonder at the path which they followed in order to arrive at such extreme voluntarism.

Finishing our reflections, it seems worthwhile to draw attention to one more factor, as a rule unnoticed in historiography, i. e. the time factor. From May 1926 the Piłsudski group refused to take into consideration the possibility of losing power. Its members were conscious of the fact that power had been won for a long and uninterrupted time. In spite of all, external threats did not appear to be particularly dangerous while internal ones were minimal. Hence the awareness that postulated changes do not have to be achieved instantly, under the threat of losing

Jerusalem 1947; K. Zakrzewski, *Kryzys demokracji* (The Crisis of Democracy), Warszawa 1930, Cf. on this subject: A. Micewski, *W cieniu Marszałka Piłsudskiego. Szkice z dziejów myśli politycznej II Rzeczypospolitej* (Under the Shadow of Marshal Piłsudski. Essays on the History of Political Thought of the Second Republic), Warszawa 1968.

13) A. Skwarczyński, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-95.

power. The "Sanacja" group was convinced that it had enough time to prepare society for realization of its ideological premises, to educate it and thus to win social acceptance for its programme.

Piłsudski's death, the subsequent struggle within the ruling group and its astounding political defeat in the 1935 elections—all these factors as if shortened the time perspective. It suddenly became obvious that the ruling group had not achieved results in educating society but, on the contrary, that it was threatened with social isolation. Hence the necessity of taking rapid steps in order to change this situation. Hence also the rejection of a considerable part of existing ideological suppositions. However, until the new ideological conceptions became capable of transforming themselves from propaganda slogans into theoretical thought, the entire situation once again underwent a change, this time as a result of increasingly real external threat. This was to be of essential significance for the problems of interest to us since it made it possible to rally and organize Polish society around the cry "the homeland is in danger", and at the same time to overcome the social isolation of the authorities.¹⁴⁾

14) The idea of consolidation together with the accompanying call for defense of Poland is discussed in detail in the above-mentioned work by Jacek Majchrowski.