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The Polish-Czechoslovak Conflict over Teschen Silesia (1918–1920): a case study

FÉLIX BUTTIN

Abstract: After describing how Czechoslovakia and Poland took up arms over their shared border, several conceptual tools are applied to this conflict. This article goes beyond pure historiography to reach a theoretical interpretation of the crisis. The analysis focuses by turns on ideological, economic and geopolitical arguments, as well as on the political framework which led to the conflict's resolution. Finally, the research indicates how the Teschen issue escaped a fair bilateral agreement. It also shows how it embedded a secular distrust and distancing between the Czechs and the Poles, which may have played a crucial role on the eve of the Second World War.

Key words: Teschen, Cieszyn, Silesia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, World War I resolution, Entente, levels of analysis, border conflict

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes called a “(nearly) forgotten conflict”, the fight between Czechoslovakia and Poland for control of Teschen Silesia between November 1918 and July 1920 may seem to be a footnote of European history. More than 80 years after the events, nearly nobody but the Czechs and Poles remember the crisis. A few historical handbooks cite its resolution, mistakenly, as one of the few successes of the League of Nations in the 1920s. Today, the work between the Czechs and Poles within the Visegrad group (with Hungary and Slovakia) or within the European Union, shows a real partnership. Few remember that the two countries were in utter opposition for two decades due to a 2,000 km² province, far from both Prague and Warsaw.

Central and Eastern Europe knew many border conflicts of this kind, especially during the intense period of transformation following World War I. The empires which had governed the region for decades, if not centuries, disappeared. The Habsburg monarchy which had reigned over Bohemia crown for 400 years ceased to rule, creating a political vacuum in the heart of Europe. On the former territory of Austria-Hungary, in the very city where Austria-Hungarian headquarters were located,¹ the Poles and the Czechs fought to delimit their influences and sovereignties.

The former duchy of Teschen (*Cieszyn* in Polish, *Těšín* in Czech²), historically belonging to the Czech lands, was mostly inhabited by Poles, and was therefore claimed by both nations. The region possessed major strategic assets including rich coal-mines and the railway linking Oderberg (now Bohumín) with Poland (Cracow) and Slovakia (Košice).

In this article, we apply conceptual tools developed since the 1920s to analyze this particular crisis. Theories outlined by Carr, Morgenthau, Waltz, Campbell and Wendt in the 20th century provide the keys to further comprehend events in international relations. Applying such theories to this very crisis may allow a new approach, and might offer some clues in understanding this conflict.

After describing the facts of the crisis itself, we analyze it using by turns traditional (idealist, realist) and modern (levels of analysis, text analyses) methods.

DISPUTE, WAR AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION OVER TESCHEN SILESIA

Immediately after World War I, new states, like Czechoslovakia and Poland, had to define boundaries that had not existed for decades, if not centuries. Teschen, a former duchy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was particularly at stake. Inhabited by some Poles, Czechs and Germans (also including Jewish and Silesian minorities), Teschen Silesia was rich in coal mines, an industrial centre for metallurgy and textiles, and a railway crucial junction. In the late 19th century, the region became a source of contention. Poles and Czechs, undergoing their respective nation-building and industrialization processes, both claimed Teschen Silesia. Because of this opposition, they ended their previous co-operation and joint defence against the Germans.

During World War I, Teschen was thus discussed many times by Polish and Czech representatives, either in Prague, Kiev, or the United States. Yet those leaders did not rule their respective countries at the time, and any decision taken was more goodwill than binding agreement. For example, the resolution concluded in Prague in May 1918 dividing Teschen Silesia peacefully was never enforced.

Claimed by both countries for different historical, ethnic and economic reasons, the contested area was temporarily divided into two parts according to an agreement signed on 5 November 1918, as the war ended. This agreement, between the local Czech and Polish authorities (respectively the *Zemský národní výbor* and the *Rada Narodowa*), occurred a few days after the Czechoslovak Republic was proclaimed (28 October 1918), and two days before Polish independence was declared (7 November 1918). This agreement, concluded without the central governments' consent, shared Teschen Silesia in the expectation of a definitive treaty. The 5 November agreement basically followed an ethnic delimitation by putting the districts of Teschen, Bielitz (Bielsko) and Freistadt (Fryštát) under Polish control, and Frýdek under the Czechoslovaks. This agreement thus gave the majority of population to Poland but gave an economic advantage to Czechoslovakia (which gained 26 active coal mines out of 36). Relatively imprecise on the status of general infrastructure (the railway was to be jointly administrated), the accord clearly stated its temporary character, anticipating an agreement by the two governments.

Troops of each country occupied their respective controlled areas, whilst bilateral negotiations progressed less successfully than ever. The Polish government announced on 10 December that it would hold parliamentary elections in the parts of the Teschen Silesia under its control. This decision

was strongly criticized by the Czechs, who disagreed with this “appropriation” of Teschen Silesia, and hoped for a more favourable redefinition of the borders. Prague considered the regional elections to the *Sejm* a deliberate breach of the preliminary agreement and as a deliberate attempt to create a *fait accompli*.

Polish troops mobilized along the frontier on 17 December, Czech troops on 19 December. Three days before the elections to the *Sejm*, on 23 January 1919, when the Polish troops had withdrawn from the area, Czechoslovak troops invaded Polish-controlled Teschen Silesia. The so-called “Seven-Days-War” occurred on the Western side of the Olsa River, mainly in Freistadt and Teschen. Two-hundred soldiers and civilians died, and approximately a thousand were injured. More than 80% of the wounded were Polish (Kubík, 2001: 57). The Czechoslovak troops successfully seized the district of Freistadt and the city of Teschen, even facing an unexpected Polish popular resistance. Under pressure from the war-winning powers (the Entente), Beneš finally concluded an agreement on 3 February, known as the Paris Protocol. This was signed by the leaders of the Entente (Wilson, Lloyd George, Orlando, Clemenceau), as well as Dmowski on the Polish side and Beneš on the Czechoslovak side.³ The agreement created a control commission,⁴ which was sent two weeks later to Prague and Teschen. The commission’s members met leaders from both sides, as well as representatives of each ethnic group (Germans, Jews and Silesians). The commission informed the Entente powers of the situation, leading to the withdrawal of the Czechoslovak troops.

Czechoslovak President Masaryk and Polish Prime Minister Paderewski met in Prague on 25 May and began talks on the Teschen affair. While the leaders discussed the issue, political, economic and cultural agitation worsened the situation. Czechoslovakia demanded considerable changes to the solution laid out in the November agreement. Yet Poland rejected any agreement that would ratify or legalize the Czechoslovak invasion, and appealed to the Entente powers to arrange a plebiscite. Such votes had been used in other contested territories (Saarland, Schleswig, and Upper Silesia), and the Poles used these precedents as they would have gained the most from such a vote.

After some unsuccessful negotiations in Cracow (21–27 July 1919) and the constant rejection of a plebiscite by the Czechoslovaks, the situation remained unresolved. The solution backed by all countries except Czechoslovakia and France was a step-by-step plan towards a plebiscite. On 10 September 1919, at the Supreme Council of the Peace Conference, the United States, the United Kingdom and Italy supported an arbitrary division of the area until a plebiscite took place. Terrorist acts and political agitation (led for instance by the *Polska Organizacja Wojskowa*) continuously destabilized the region. Similar events also occurred in the disputed territories of Spiš (Spisz) and Orava (Orawa), occupied by Czechoslovakia. Yet the Czechoslovak authorities constantly delayed the popular vote and waited for change in the political situation. Negotiations did not recommence until late June 1920, at the Paris Peace Conference and later at the Spa conference.⁵ The Poles were looking for a quick resolution of the Teschen problem to free their hands for their war against Bolshevik Russia.

The Spa joint declaration stated the acceptance of an arbitrage decided by the Entente powers. The Conference of Ambassadors in Paris proposed a final agreement, issued 28 July 1920, planning a division of the region and actually confirming the Czechoslovak military occupation. While the historical city of Teschen would become Polish (except the western part and the railway station), the Freistadt district and coal-mines would remain Czechoslovak. In the conflict, Poland obtained a 1000 km² area inhabited by 143,000 people, and Czechoslovakia a territory of 1,300 km² inhabited by 284,000 people including 120,000 Poles (Łossowski, 1995). In compensation, Czechoslovak delegates to the Conference assented to the districts of Spisz and Orawa in Slovakia becoming Polish. That arbitrage, accepted the day it was issued by Czechoslovakia, was signed by Ignacy Paderewski on 31 July 1920 after much hesitation. Thus the Teschen crisis temporarily ended.

***Looking for Legitimacy:
Polish and "Czecho-Slovak" Arguments***

The struggle between the Czechs and Poles for control of Teschen was largely shaped by arguments justifying the legitimacy of each country to rule this area.

The new order being set after World War I was, for the first time in history, particularly interested in peoples' self-determination. In a speech given on 8 January 1918, US-President Woodrow Wilson gave the impetus to the building of a new system in international relations, acknowledging democracy, law and open diplomacy. He emphasized the notion a nation's *right* to be self-governed. Wilson expressed his will to see an independent Polish state, and he wished the nations of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to accede to an autonomous development. The inter-war "idealism", which aimed at peaceful resolutions of conflicts by "outlawing war" and using international institutions, shaped the Czechoslovak and Polish arguments and attitudes. Both stressed first the aspects of legitimacy: either ethnic or historical.

Polish officials argued almost completely according to demographics, highlighting the statistical importance of the Poles. According to the 1910 statistics, the Poles actually represented 54.85% of the Teschen population (233,850 Poles) i.e. more than twice the proportion of "Czecho-Slovaks" (27.11%).⁶ The Poles dominated the whole region except for the Frýdek district (almost entirely Czech), and therefore claimed the right to Teschen Silesia as part of the Polish State. The elections to the *Sejm* in the Polish-controlled areas of Teschen Silesia at the end of 1918 were the logical consequence of that argument. The emphasis put on the legitimacy of the Polish claim was doubled by Piłsudski's doctrine stating that all Poles had to live in Poland.

On the other side, the Czechs justified their right to Teschen Silesia mainly by historical and ethnic arguments. Teschen Silesia had actually belonged to the Crown of Bohemia since the beginning of the 14th century. The Austrian Empress Maria-Theresa lost the major part of Silesia through the Peace of Hebertsburg (1763), except for the Troppau (now Opava) and Teschen regions. During the Paris Conference, Czechoslovak officials emphasized this historical argument. The will to make the Czechoslovak state fit the historical borders of Bohemia's crown lands when they would be occupied by non-

-Czech people was the basis of all Czech claims over Germany and Austria in contested areas (for example the Sudetenland, Iglau-Jihlava, etc.).

The Czechs also rejected the Poles' ethnic argument, denying the validity of the 1910 Austrian census. The Czechs based this argument on some irregularities in the 1910 census, which was counted according to spoken language (*Umgangssprache*), and not mother tongue. The Czechs argued that important parts of the population were registered against their will as Polish or German instead of Czech. They also denounced the "forced Polonisation" of the area during the preceding decades. Teschen Silesia actually knew many waves of Polish immigration, mainly from Galicia, at the end of the 19th century. According to the Czechoslovak memorandum of 1919, which now seems quite dubious, "this majority of theirs [the Poles] is artificial and in reality does not exist."

These ethnic and historical arguments mainly emphasize each state's quest for legitimacy. As far as the Paris Council of Ambassadors took account of these requests, Czechoslovak historians traditionally defined the final decision on Teschen as fair and equitable, reflecting the result of an international process.

A Struggle Outside the Boundaries of International Law

A more realistic approach to the crisis than that developed by E. H. Carr in the 1930s, would focus more on the actual capabilities of each country, particularly in the military sphere.

During the Czechoslovak occupation, Polish troops were almost all deployed elsewhere to defend Polish interests, for instance along the German frontier (particularly near Gdańsk-Danzig) or along the Eastern border. In January 1919, a few days before the Czechoslovak intervention, Polish troops withdrew from the Teschen Silesia to relieve Lvov. So from December 1918, Czechoslovakia had a military superiority in the region. Czechoslovak troops staying in France after their journey through Siberia returned home on 19 December allowing for the first time the Czech leaders to contemplate the possible non-peaceful seizure of Teschen Silesia. The concentration of Czech troops along the demarcation line frightened the new Polish Foreign Minister, prompting him to send representatives to Prague for negotiations. The Czechoslovak authorities ignored the Polish committee, and waited three weeks, in vain, for French approval of their intervention (Wandycz, 1962: 82). Facing the ambiguity of the French officials, the Czechs finally decided to act, violating the international consensus for peaceful means. They were particularly confident of victory both militarily and before the Paris Peace Conference.

Czechoslovakia's recourse to arms is typical of the unilateral approach of power. The state behaved as if outside the international consensus and legality embodied by the Entente. Yet the method of the intervention is symptomatic of the Czechoslovak will to intervene and to maintain a semblance of this legitimacy. While occupying the Polish part of Teschen Silesia, Czechoslovak troops wore the uniforms of Allied troops to trick the Poles and make them believe they acted with the Entente's legality. The Czechoslovak government also recruited many Czech or foreign officers who had served in the French, American or Italian armies. Yet it did not serve its purpose at all, and was denounced by the Poles as a masquerade.

Governments of both sides endeavoured to gain the support of the region's inhabitants. During World War I, propaganda was already being used to win public opinion, and again during the Teschen crisis propaganda played a leading role. Posters or flyers were distributed to sway undecided inhabitants with respect to an eventual plebiscite. The undecided Silesian minority (the so-called *Šlonzáci*), neither Polish nor Czech, was particularly targeted by this propaganda.⁷

Realist thinkers adjust their analyses towards power, and see the struggle for it as the first determinant in international politics. In the Teschen affair, Poland and Czechoslovakia tried to maximise their gains, in accordance with the newly established international order decided in Versailles. Czechoslovakia succeeded in maintaining the *status quo* until the Summer of 1920, when Poland faced the worst. The determination of Poland's Eastern borders and the non-recognition of the Curzon line actually led to the Polish-Soviet war in April 1920. After the capture of Kiev, Polish troops were driven back to Warsaw and dangerously threatened by Tukhachevski's armies. The Council of Ambassadors signed an agreement on 30 July 1919, on the eve of a crucial battle, when Poland needed international support. Actually, on 16 August the so-called "Vistula miracle" occurred with the successful Allied counteroffensive led by Maxime Weygand, supporting Marshal Piłsudski.

However, at the time of the final agreement on Teschen Silesia the situation was anything but favourable for the Poles.

The Predominance of the Entente Powers and the Versailles International System

The Polish government accepted the agreement prepared by the Council of Ambassadors because it had no alternative. Poland had to follow the recommendations of the international authority ruling over the newly established European order.

Actually, the first level emphasized by Kenneth Waltz in the comprehension of any international event (crisis, war or conference) is the structure of the international system, which systematically shapes the way conflicts are resolved. First of all, we have to stress how unfinished the new international order was. At this key moment between the international order derived from the Vienna Congress and an utterly new deal in international politics, the whole diplomatic game was dominated by the Entente winners. The League of Nations was not yet founded (that happened in 1920), and what would become the Versailles system was still immature and incomplete. The destinies of Poland and Czechoslovakia – two newly-founded "little" states – were both in the hands of the major winners of World War I.

The extreme instability Europe's borders and regimes is fundamental to an understanding of the Entente's reactions. The fear of revolutionary Russia was a central issue immediately after the war. The rise of a new power in the East, utterly different in its very nature to the foregoing regimes, and trying to expand in Central Europe, was extremely preoccupying. The Entente countries therefore wanted to counterbalance Bolshevik Russia, or, at least, to isolate it. The building of a *cordon sanitaire* (sanitary cordon) or a *glacis protecteur* (slope of protection) became a priority.

Not having been defeated (unlike Austria or Hungary), Poland and Czechoslovakia were natural pivots and allies of the Entente powers in the region, while directly in contact with potentially dangerous Russia and Germany. The fear of communist-styled revolutions was however not focused solely on Bolshevik Russia, but also, in 1919, on the Spartakist insurrection in Berlin (January) and on the short-lived Republic of Councils in Bavaria (April-May), in Hungary (March-August) and even in Slovakia (June-July). The constitution of two non-communist (if not anti-communist) states in Central Europe was decisive. The Entente was therefore quite reluctant to judge a crisis between its two allies. Even the Czechoslovak government invoked the Bolshevik danger, allegedly in the very district of the Teschen coal mines (Wandycz, 1962: 80), to urge French Foreign Minister Pichon to support a Czechoslovak invasion in January 1919.

In this specific area, Czechoslovakia's government had a trump card over the Polish government. Actually, the Czechoslovak legions that fought in Russia against the Bolsheviks until the end of 1918 provided the Czechoslovaks a real advantage. The military successes achieved in Siberia gave Czechoslovakia the credit it lacked before. For instance, French Marshal Ferdinand Foch, supreme commandant of Allied forces during World War I, presented the Czechoslovak republic as a "dyke against anarchy and bolshevism" (Haruštiak, 2002: 15).

As mentioned before, the Teschen crisis was a consequent source of hardships for the Allies as they wanted to ensure future Polish-Czechoslovak friendship and loyalty. Thus the international commission applying the Paris Protocol, (later Entente) decision was composed of winners' representatives (from France, Italy, Japan and the United Kingdom), and of Czechoslovak and Polish representatives.⁸ Without entering into too much detail, the goals of each great power were different, if not contradictory. The extreme French commitment towards Czechoslovakia was partly compensated by the relatively moderate positions of the British and Italians. Even if the Wilsonian conception of international relations prohibited secret diplomacy, attempts by the different sides to ensure their positions in the region were decisive.

The US foreign policy led by Woodrow Wilson was often referred to as idealist, or even utopian. The US President wanted actually to shape a new international order to guarantee a fair and long-lasting peace. His speech before Congress on 8 January 1918 developed Fourteen Points on how the future of international politics should look. Wilson's personal position was more favourable for the Poles than the Czechs. On the other side of the Atlantic, the British Foreign Office was mainly concerned about Poland's Eastern and Western borders and sought to stabilize the situation and maintain the UK's privileged position on the continent. Quite in a different way, Italy supported Poland mostly to counterbalance Czechoslovakia, ally of adversary Yugoslavia. The Italian authorities also hoped to gather all Catholic powers around its policy, including Austria, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland (Kubík, 2001: 82). Under its leadership, it would have maintained a "Catholic pact" in Central Europe.

If the American, British or Italian behaviour towards Czechoslovakia and Poland are not underestimated here, France's role looks unparalleled. The

tremendous French involvement in the Teschen crisis and France's commitment to Czechoslovakia really weighted the situation in Prague's favour.

Clemenceau's diplomacy was at first willing to weaken Germany and Austria. Systematically, Clemenceau adopted the most severe attitude towards Germany and Austria and was among the hardliners of the Entente leaders. The French fear of Germany was omnipresent, partly due to France's own border problem in Alsace-Lorraine. A generation of Frenchmen grew up with aversion to and hopes of revenge against Germany. Even if, at least at the beginning of the war, Clemenceau was not the most decided opponent of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he made Richelieu's doctrine ("*abaisser la Maison d'Autriche*") his own and supported the fragmentation of Austria. As a counterweight to the German and Austrian presence in Central Europe, he supported the concept of a Czech, and later Czechoslovak, state. However, the French policy in Central Europe was not purely rational, but rather guided by a particular representation of reality. On 28 September 1918, a month before the Czechoslovak declaration of independence, an agreement signed by Beneš and Foreign Minister Pichon recognized "Czecho-Slovakia" as an allied Nation and the National Council as an acting government. According to the agreement, France supported "an independent Czechoslovak state within the borders of its historic provinces." France therefore recognized Czech rights on every land of Bohemia's crown, including implicitly the whole of the Teschen Duchy.

During the 2-year crisis, the Czechoslovak policy was shaped by the will of its Western ally. From the beginning, the Czechs hoped they would be backed by France. In Paris they tried to gain, without real success, the support of Marshal Philippe Foch, chief-commander of the Entente forces. Before the New Year, the Czechs asked France about the opportunity for an intervention in Teschen. The French authorities stayed silent until 18 January 1919, when they proposed a French seizure of the area. Nevertheless, the French implicitly consented to a Czechoslovak attack while it seemed imminent. As the attack began, Clément-Simon, Quai d'Orsay's representative in Czechoslovakia, was out of Prague for a few days. We can only wonder whether this was on purpose, to let Czechoslovakia intervene without obliging France to officially condemn the attack on its other ally.

In the following months, France proved its position as the best (and sometimes only) ally of Czechoslovakia among the influential powers, and backed Prague's officials whenever necessary.

In the Beginning: the Nation-State Building Process

At a deeper level of analysis, we can closely analyse the situation of each protagonist state.

More than any other previous war, the first world war showed the antagonism between nations. Encouraged during the conflict, the nations' exasperation was at first a tool for the great powers to destabilize their adversaries. While the Central Powers supported Irish and Baltic nations in the fights against the rule of the United Kingdom and Russia respectively, the Entente strongly backed Slavic nations against their "oppressors". They supported the Serbs and Croats, as well as the Czechs, Slovaks and Poles in their claims for

self-determination and therefore supported the emergence of antagonists wills. Later, they recognized the right for each nation to own its state, and acknowledged the existence of those states even later, only in January 1919.

In his neo-realist synthesis, Kenneth Waltz considers the internal order of each state central. Waltz stresses the real tension from the interaction between nation and state. As we have said, the Teschen conflict must be analyzed within the wider perspective of the complete change on the European map after World War I. In many ways, the Paris Peace Conference destroyed an order established more than a century before in Vienna. The national claims which contributed to the collapse of Austria-Hungary implied the creation of two new states based on national roots: Poland and Czechoslovakia. The re-creation of Poland within its 18th century borders was the declared aim of many nationalists, including Piłsudski in particular. The creation of a totally new state gathering the Czech and Slovak nations was also the initial goal of politicians such as Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Edvard Beneš and Milan Štefánik. Nonetheless, Czechoslovak officials also presented their country as a multi-national country, accepting and protecting its minorities such as Germans, Jews, Hungarians and Poles.

The creation of the two states was not yet complete when the Teschen crisis occurred. The local agreement of 5 November 1918 was signed five days after the Czechoslovak declaration of independence and two days before the Polish one. At this time, the two head of states, Masaryk and Piłsudski were not fully appointed in their functions and, tellingly, not physically in the capitals of their countries. During the crisis, and particularly at its beginning, the states were at a crucial point in their building process. In a letter to Beneš on 5 January 1919, Masaryk wrote that “the Poles do not have as yet a state” (Wandycz, 1962: 80), therefore putting the emphasis on the very difficulty of the Polish state’s establishment.

Czechoslovakia was particularly touched by the Teschen crisis as it touched upon elements crucial for its very existence. Czechoslovakia was not really able to agree with the Polish move to create borders according to ethnographic criteria, since such acceptance would have allowed the use of similar arguments by the more numerous minorities of Czechoslovakia, including the three million Germans that Austria or Germany claimed as theirs.

Teschen Silesia was also vital for the newly-born state due to the railroad linking Odeberg-Bohumín to Košice in Slovakia, described as “the only spot where a way exists leading over the mountains [the Beskydes] and giving means of access to the Slovaks”. In fact, Slovakia was not well integrated within the Czechoslovak territory, and Prague needed a railroad to strengthen the ties between the different regions. Besides, the Polish government partly supported Slovak agitators for autonomy to weaken Czechoslovakia’s unity. Monsignor Hlinka blamed the Prague government for the Teschen crisis and thereafter obtained, unofficially, a Polish passport (Wandycz, 1962: 102).

Poland, on the other hand, was also confronted with a problem dealing of its identity as a Nation-State in the crisis. If Czechoslovakia’s representatives liked to define their country as peaceful, being naturally a “small power” taking care of its minorities, the Poles emphasized Poland’s natural historical and political role as a leading state in Eastern Europe. The evocation of

Poland's glorious past before it was dismembered endorsed Piłsudski's severe policy towards Lithuania, the Soviet Union and Germany. Piłsudski wanted all Poles to be integrated within the territory of the new State.

Economic and Ethnic Interests

Going deeper in the analysis, the study of sub-state actors concentrates on the interests of social and ethnic groups, as well as economic ones.

Ethnically, the situation in Teschen was not evident, with a mix of up to five minorities, more or less separate and having diverging interests and behaviours. Besides the Poles and Czechs, whose political attitudes were directly understandable, the Germans, Jews and Silesians followed their own interests.

Actually, the German and German-Jewish communities sided for Czechoslovakia, as more favourable for their businesses. Being a part of Czechoslovakia would favour their relations with the former Austrian-Hungarian Empire, bringing them closer to Vienna than Warsaw. Furthermore, the dubious position of many Polish leaders concerning the Jews, and Piłsudski's ambitions convinced them to side with Czechoslovakia (Michel, 1991: 213).

Particularly influential industrialists, such as Guttman, Rothschild and Sonnenschein, committed themselves to Czechoslovakia as being more stable than Poland (Kubík, 2001: 30). Larisch, a German industrialist of Jewish origin, met the inter-allied commission led by Grénard on 21 February 1919 (Kubík, 2001: 59), and supported the union with Czechoslovakia on economic grounds, above any patriotic or nationalistic considerations. At the least, he preferred that Teschen Silesia become an economically independent area administered by both countries, rather than it be integrated into Poland.

The industrial interests were also linked with French investments in the region. The Schneider-Creuzot metallurgy company owned 60% of the Bergund Hüttengesellschaft company, located in Moravská Ostrava and Třinec, between 1919 and 1920, when the crisis was yet unresolved.

Finally, the Silesian minority was used as a tool in the conflict. Counted almost entirely as "Polish" in the 1910 census, Silesians were the privileged target of propaganda from both sides but mostly preferred to become part of Czechoslovakia.

Characters of the Drama Backstage

The fourth level of analysis emphasized by Kenneth Waltz concentrates on individuals. In this conflict, at a first glance, the heads of states seem to provide the most contrasted view. On one side we have Józef Klemens Piłsudski, a rebel still glorified by Polish national historiography but often referred to as a nationalist emblematic of the interwar authoritarianism. On the other side, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was a democratic emblem of Czechoslovakia,⁹ former professor and eminent thinker trying to serve his nation, although Franco-Hungarian historian François Fejtö depicted him as a "genius of propaganda" and conspirator, able to activate his networks to make his position succeed by any means (Fejtö, 1992: 350).

Beyond these clichés, it should be emphasized that the Teschen conflict notably escaped the two leaders. According to Coolidge, US representative to

the international special commission on Teschen, Masaryk “had been led rather than he had taken the lead himself” in the crisis. Piłsudski also was not the most involved leader. His interventions on Teschen were limited to writing a personal letter to Masaryk, and a statement before the *Sejm* on 23 January 1918, declaring that the armed intervention was an “indescribable treachery on the part of the Czechs” (Wandycz, 1962: 83).

The real protagonists in the resolution process were instead the influential diplomats in Paris. On the Czech side, Edvard Beneš proved his agility as foreign minister in comparison to his Premier Karel Kramář. Beneš, a realist politician devoted to his cause, succeeded in make his views dominate, helping Czechoslovakia benefit from his extensive networks. Beneš, who had obtained a doctor’s degree in France, was especially well known among scholars like Ernest Denis, journalists like André Tardieu and politicians, particularly the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Pichon. His secretary, Edward Taborsky defined him as “the great master of compromise” (Taborsky, 1958: 669–670). Actually, Beneš supported a moderate position, as he would do thereafter at the League of Nations.

Kramář’s intransigence towards Poland was quite the opposite of Beneš’s attitude, and probably helped the Teschen issue become a *casus belli*. Often defined as too nationalistic and close-minded, he claimed the whole of Teschen Silesia for Czechoslovakia on historical grounds (Kubík, 2001: 18). As a Russophile, he also denied Poland any rights over Bielorussia or Ukraine (Kubík, 2001: 23). Furthermore, Slovak Milan Štefánik also contributed to the cause in Paris by arranging a meeting between Masaryk and French Premier Briand in 1915. Masaryk was also well known among American officials since he had known US Secretary of State Lansing during his time in exile.

Poland’s representatives at the Paris Peace Conference were in less of a position to make their ideas prevail, while both of the highest representatives were differently appreciated. Ignacy Paderewski benefited greatly from large popular support, and his unique career span from artist to politician. Yet he suffered from a lack of experience in politics, in contrast with Roman Dmowski, who suffered the enmity of Britain’s David Lloyd George and Arthur Balfour for his anti-Jewish beliefs (Wandycz, 1962: 24). Finally, the diverging views of Dmowski and Piłsudski on the Polish territorial policy and policy vis-à-vis Czechoslovakia¹⁰ also weakened Poland’s position with respect to the foreign powers.

So the excellent Czechoslovak networks probably had a decisive influence on the resolution of the conflict.

GEOPOLITICAL AND DISCOURSE ANALYSES

After having analyzed the Teschen crisis at various gradually-deepening levels, we now focus on the geopolitical aspects of the situation. In *Peace and Wars among Nations*, French theorist Raymond Aron envisaged three dimensions of space, “considered by turns as *environment* (milieu), *theater* and *stake* of foreign policy” (Aron, 1984: 188). Actually, an area can be objectively defined by its concrete topography, population and resources. It may also be seen by foreign policy and diplomatic leaders as an abstract scene of in-

teractions on which actors and forces evolve. Finally, it can constitute a stake in international politics for different countries to appropriate it.

As we have said, the Teschen Silesia was a key-area. At the boundary between the Czech lands and Slovakia, close to the new German state, the coveted region encompassed both a strategic location and rich raw resources, particularly desired by the Czechs. The Teschen region was quickly seen in a geostrategic perspective, more important than just a duchy belonging historically to Bohemia's crown. Coal predominated as a strategic asset and strategic instrument in the whole diplomatic game of the post-war era.

If the Poland's strategic interests in Teschen were positively lower than Czechoslovakia's, Poland was, however, also dependent to some extent on the area. For example, the Czechoslovak aggression totally disorganized the whole country. Gasworks in Warsaw, Cracow and Lvov were stopped for two weeks, jeopardising the Polish economy at a crucial moment. Furthermore, it cut one of the few routes linking Poland to Western Europe. For a few days, Warsaw had to communicate with its delegates in the Paris Peace Conference via radio.

Czechoslovakia's claims on Teschen were also justified by the wider geostrategic context. Almost encircled by Germany and Austria (Wandycz, 1962: 89), and threatened by Hungary in the South, the Czechoslovak authorities sought a minimum amount of protection and resources guaranteed by the Entente. Czechoslovakia "should dispose of other forces in order not to succumb under the constant menace of its neighbours and acquire, in every respect, a tranquil development",¹¹ wrote delegates to the Paris Peace Conference.

However, both the Czechoslovak and Polish approaches were not only based on tangible elements, but also on imagined elements and historical representations. Poland praised its conception of a Nation-State within its borders of 1772. In the same way, maps representing the historical lands of Bohemia's crown including Teschen Silesia were published in Czechoslovakia and abroad (Kárník, 2000: 86). Yet those representations were not only historical, but also organic. Czechoslovakia was depicted as an organism which would die if amputated from one of its most important parts. In 1897, Friedrich Ratzel, a German natural scientist, developed his "organic theory", which contends that a state is like an organism that competes with others to thrive. In their speeches on the subject, Czechoslovak officials often used this metaphor, insisting more on their dependence on Teschen Silesia rather than on their historical claims. The Czechoslovak memorandum to the Paris Peace conference states abruptly in its very first sentence that "For the Poles the problem concerning the Silesia of Teschen is but of secondary importance while for the Czecho-Slovaks that problem presents itself as a *vital* question on the solution of which depends the very existence of the Czecho-Slovak Republic" (our emphasis).¹²

Czechoslovakia's officials, and foremost Premier Karel Kramář, mainly argued that their country, the most industrialized part of the former Empire, "could not exist without the large coal area which was within the disputed area" (Wandycz, 1962: 89). Edvard Beneš also tried to minimize the Polish claims on Teschen by declaring in Paris that "Poland without Karviná's mines [was] already the richest country of Europe concerning coal reserves" and

that Czechoslovakia needed this region more than Poland. Another fact minimising the sincerity of Czechoslovaks' historical arguments is given by the future Czechoslovak President. On 10 September 1918, as the First World War was not yet finished, Masaryk evoked, while talking with Polish leaders, the eventuality of exchanging the region of Teschen for the one of Racibor (Ratibor), also rich in coal-mines. Nevertheless, it seems that the growing influence of communists in Racibor's region led to the rejection of this initial project.

The fight for Teschen shaped minds in Poland and Czechoslovakia during these years, and so it also shaped the opinions and foreign policies of influential politicians. In these bilateral relations, we can apply deconstructivist theory by showing the existence of an inside/outside phenomenon, in accordance with David Campbell's thinking. According to Campbell, this phenomenon would explain a state's identity and its foreign policy. In the Teschen case, such an inside/outside distinction was especially encouraged by authorities. For instance, Czechoslovak defence minister Klofáč encouraged anti-Polish beliefs.

A 1920 brochure on Teschen Silesia, written in French and edited in Prague, gives another good illustration of the Manichean inside/outside approach as defined by Campbell. In it, the Poles are systematically stigmatised by referring to them as "immigrants" or "foreigners". The brochure also states that Polish workers are "still at a very low degree of civilisation", lacking education, violent, etc. It also stipulates that

"Western workers [i.e. Czechs and Germans] tried to introduce civilisation among them. Nonetheless, Polish workers, due to their lack of instruction, are easily seduced by suggestions of demagogues" (Beaufort, 1920: 18).

By contrast, Czech workers are presented as "sincere", "obliging" and "hard-working" (Beaufort, 1920: 21–22). Facing the "forced Polonization", the original inhabitants of Teschen Silesia "felt themselves – rightly – oppressed by immigrated foreigners". The brochure also maintains that the Poles were working with the Austrians to weaken the Czech regional influence, and that "the Poles [in contrast with the Czechs] became enthusiastic supporters of the Entente in 1918".

More than a mere fight between two policies in the military and diplomatic spheres, the conflict over Teschen evokes a real battle of minds, symptomatic of the 20th century.

CONCLUSIONS

In this particular conflict, Czechoslovakia's leaders succeeded more or less gaining dominance for their views, owing to the French quasi-unconditional support. The Poles' dangerous situation, facing the Red Army at the very moment of final decision on Teschen Silesia, forced them to accept a disadvantageous agreement. This agreement, though sanctioned by the Entente powers supposedly in accordance with democratic and idealist norms, was neither consensual nor compromise. In accordance with Alexander Wendt's three different states of anarchy – Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian, each corre-

sponding with a different stage in international politics (Wendt, 1999: 247) – the Teschen case exemplifies the Lockean state of anarchy: neither a war of all against all, nor the development of friendly harmony between countries. Furthermore, in the 1920s Czech-Polish relations fit the relevant characteristics of this distinction, such as inter-sovereign relations and rivalry. Poland and Czechoslovakia quickly recognised their mutual existence and admitted each other's sovereignty. Before World War I, Masaryk wrote "without a free Poland there will be no free Bohemia, and if Bohemia is not free, Poland cannot be free either" (Wandycz, 1962: 26). They actually tried, but failed, to use peaceful means in governing their relations.

During the interwar period, the Teschen Silesia remained at stake, at least in Czech-Polish relations. It nourished the Polish nationalist propaganda. Criticisms of Czechoslovakia focused on the treatment of the Polish minorities and on the constraining policies targeting them. In 1935, ten years after the friendship treaty between the two states, Teschen remained a problem in international politics and a possible powder keg for future conflict,¹³ emphasising the massive resentment on the issue during the inter-war period. Teschen undoubtedly allowed the expression of national frustrations and nationalist hatred, as did bolshevism. Before the Warsaw *Sejm*, Józef Piłsudski mixed up the two threats in a severe speech towards Czechoslovakia, which he depicted as the "flying boat of bolshevism in Central Europe" (Kubík, 2001: 127). Piłsudski thus preferred to ally with Hitler's Germany or Horthy's Hungary instead of Czechoslovakia, then the only democracy in Central Europe.

On 2 October 1938, two days after the signing of the Munich agreement dismembering Czechoslovakia, Polish troops invaded Teschen Silesia with Hitler's consent. The cities of Bohumín, Karviná, Orlová, Třinec and Jablunkov were occupied, and Poland established a new border on the Ostravice River. The Poles finally avenged themselves and obtained the territory beyond the River Olsa. The area became fully Polish, all administrations were polonized, and nearly 30,000 the Czechs were expelled. That part of Teschen Silesia became part of Poland, and thereafter came under Poland's General Government, until 1945. During the war, Sikorski's and Beneš's London-based governments in exile failed to reach any agreement on the topic. After World War II, Stalin attributed the contested areas again to Czechoslovakia, in accordance with the 1920 treaty. He thus gave assurances to the third Czechoslovak republic, after having annexed sub-carpathian Ruthenia, part of the former Czechoslovakia to the USSR.¹⁴

E. H. Carr, often defined as the first realist thinker, noted in his most famous work *The Twenty Years' Crisis* that

"Naumann with his Mittel-Europa proved a surer prophet than Woodrow Wilson with his principles of self-determination. The victors of 1918 'lost the peace' in Central Europe because they continue to pursue a principle of political and economic disintegration in an age which called for larger and larger units" (Carr, 1991: 230).

Geographically restricted, and apparently short-lived, the issue of Teschen Silesia probably had a greater influence that we usually think. By remaining

a discordant theme between Poland and Czechoslovakia, the affair hindered the development of good bilateral relations and stalled the idea of a Czecho-Polish federation suggested by Tomáš Masaryk in *New Europe* a few years before.¹⁵ Perhaps, even, Poland would not have sided with Hitler after the Munich agreement if the case of Teschen had been resolved, and a fair agreement had been truly accepted and respected by both sides.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The seat of the Austrian-Hungarian army (the *AOK Armee Oberkommando*) was located in Teschen.
- ² In the following article, we will use the denomination of Teschen, traditionally acknowledged in English-speaking historical literature.
- ³ The original text of the agreement is available in the diplomatical archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reference Z-864-5, p. 124.
- ⁴ Composed of Grénard (France), Coulson (United Kingdom), Coolidge and Dubuis (United States).
- ⁵ The declaration of Polish and Czechoslovak officials in Spa on 10 July 1920 can be found in Haruštiak (2002).
- ⁶ Czechoslovak delegation to the Paris Peace Conference (1919), p. 2.
- ⁷ Excellent examples of Polish and Czech posters can be found in Schultz (2001).
- ⁸ Attending were Manneville (France), Wilton (United Kingdom), Marquis Borsarelli (Italy), Professor Jamada (Japan), Doctor Matouš (Czechoslovak republic) and Deputy Zamorski (Poland).
- ⁹ Vladimír Peška and Antoine Marès (1991) subtitled their book on Masaryk “European and humanist”.
- ¹⁰ Dmowski was ready to back Czechoslovakia’s territorial claims against Germany and Hungary, as argued in his book *Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa*, published in Warsaw in 1925, quoted from Wandycz (1962), p. 13.
- ¹¹ Czechoslovak delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, op. cit., p. 7.
- ¹² Czechoslovak delegation to the Paris Peace Conference (1919), p. 1.
- ¹³ Tapié (1936) in particular stresses the potential for conflict over Teschen with regards the role of Nazi Germany in the region.
- ¹⁴ Sub-carpathian Ruthenia was annexed by Hungary following the Nazi invasion in 1938, before its annexation by the Soviet Union.
- ¹⁵ Soubigou (2002, p. 386) remarks that Masaryk and Dmowski agreed on the principle of a free-trade union between the two countries on 10 September 1918.

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