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THE POLITICAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT OF THE INTRODUCTION OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN POLAND

ABSTRACT

POLITYCZNO-PRAWNY KONTEKST WPROWADZENIA WYBORCZYCH PRAW KOBIECI W POLSCE

W 1918 r. Polskie władze, jako jedne z pierwszych w Europie, wprowadziły wyborcze prawa kobiet. Celem mojego artykułu jest analiza politycznych i prawnych czynników, które umożliwiły tę zmianę. Przyczyny ustanowienia liberalnego systemu wyborczego w odrodzonej Polsce były ściśle związane z rzeczywistością życia politycznego Polaków pod obcymi porozbiorowymi reżimami. W następnych latach wyborcze prawa kobiet przetrwały w polskim systemie prawnym, pomimo burzliwych przemian politycznych w XX wieku.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: sufrażystki, ruchy kobiece w XIX i XX w., prawa polityczne, historia prawa polskiego

KEYWORDS: women's suffrage, women's movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, legal history of Poland, political rights

In 1795, the last parts of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were annexed by Austria, Prussia and Russia. During the next 123 years the nations living in the territories of the former Republic were forced to adapt to the conditions imposed by the foreign authorities. Their situation in particular annexed parts of Poland was largely dependent on the scale of oppression by the new authorities. In the second half of the nineteenth century tendencies

toward liberalization of political realm arose in the of whole Europe. Polish people often had to pay a high price for their social or political involvement, including death. However, some of them could participate officially (and very efficiently) in the political life of their new countries.

Women's suffrage became one of the demands of Polish activists in their political struggle with the occupiers. Reborn Poland was one of the first European countries to introduce these rights in 1918. I would like to show some aspects of the development of the idea of women's political rights among Polish nationals since the end of nineteenth century. I also want to examine why the introduction of these rights by independent Polish authorities was politically and legally possible.

I have decided to divide the Polish road to women's suffrage into four periods. Particular parts of my analysis will refer to this distinction. The beginning of the first period is difficult to specify. In 1891 Polish women living in land annexed by Austria (called Galicia), gathered signatures under a petition for the direct right to vote in local elections¹. In the subsequent years Polish female citizens of all the occupying countries became more and more active as far as the issue of their political rights was concerned. I will try to describe the forms of their involvement and circumstances under which they acted. The next period that I propose to demarcate covers January 1917 to November 1918, the time when Poland existed as a puppet kingdom. The third part concerns the building of the institutions of independent Poland. The later years constitute the fourth period. Since the enactment of the Constitution in 1921, women's suffrage became part of the Polish legal system.

1890s–1917: the development of ideas and the experience of struggle

Adam Próchnik, broadly describing the participation of women in the Polish socialist movement², connected their involvement to the necessity

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- 1 P. Kuczalska-Reinschmit, *Wyborcze prawa kobiet*, Warsaw 1911, <http://lewicowo.pl/wyborcze-prawa-kobiety/> (availability of all texts in footnotes for 2nd of July 2015). In the case of this and some other articles, I refer to their electronic versions, available on the website www.lewicowo.pl, which is the big source of texts published in various magazines in the first decades of XX century.
 - 2 A. Próchnik, *Kobieta w polskim ruchu socjalistycznym*, Warsaw 1948, <http://lewicowo.pl/kobieta-w-polskim-ruchu-socjalistycznym/>.

that appeared under the foreign regimes. As he writes, while the men were participating in the uprisings against the occupiers, dying in the struggle, being called up for military service or deported to Siberia, at the same time women had to become active participants in social, economic and political life³. The need for the political liberties of women then arose naturally. Women noticed more and more that their influence on the life of local communities was strictly connected to the right to vote.

Experienced in the bloody results of the military resistance, Polish elites – among them many women – searched for new ways of social involvement. They found inspiration in positivism⁴. They organized the structures of aid and they supported the poor, but some of them also wanted to participate actively in politics. They experienced a lot of resistance, not only from the occupiers. Even some male socialists were afraid of the increasing political role of women.

In the period in which I am interested in this part of my paper – the end of nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth century – the ideological background of political equality had been developing dynamically among Polish activists. Polish women observed the feminist struggle in the other countries, which was the source of inspiration for them⁵. In the meantime their male counterparts became convinced that women's suffrage was an important issue in the broad fight for socialism. This issue also attracted new followers outside the socialist parties.

Women's suffrage became an important topic for feminist newspaper columnists. Nowadays, their texts are a precious source of knowledge about the development of the idea of women's political rights among Polish nationals. Some of these authors, *inter alia* Dorota Kłuszyńska, substantiated the need for the political rights of women by the fact that they were equal to men in their influence on the functioning of every kind of community. They also bore equal responsibility according to the law⁶.

3 *Ibidem*.

4 M. Sikorska-Kowalska, *O wyborcze prawa kobiet. Historia politycznej emancypacji*, [in:] Desperak, G. Matuszjak, M. Sikorska-Kowalska, *Emancypantki, włóknarki i ciche bohaterki. Znikające kobiety, czyli białe plamy naszej historii*, Pabianice 2009, p. 9–10, http://www.ekologiasztuka.pl/pdf/emancypantki_wloknarki.pdf.

5 See for instance: P. Kuczalska-Reinschmit, *Wyborcze...*, *op. cit.*

6 D. Kłuszyńska, *Walka o polityczne prawa kobiet* (19 marca), „Przedświt”, issue 5/1911, <http://lewicowo.pl/walka-o-polityczne-prawa-kobiet-19-marca/>.

In 1909, in ‘Whether woman should have the same rights as men’⁷, Kazimiera Bujwidowa presented two arguments for women’s suffrage. Both of them referred to the political experiences of the countries where women’s suffrage had been introduced. Firstly, as Bujwidowa noted, in these countries development of such branches as family law and labor law occurred – both beneficial for women⁸. Secondly, the political involvement of women caused ‘cultural-humanitarian’ changes because of their focus on the ‘neglected issues’ such as militarism, alcoholism and prostitution⁹.

The possibilities of real activity were strictly dependent on the character of the foreign regime in each of the annexed parts of Poland.

The political circumstances in Galicia were ambivalent for the development of the movement for women’s political rights.

On the one hand, in the second half of the nineteenth century Polish people living under the Austrian regime gained the greatest political autonomy. Polish politicians had been members of the Austrian Parliament since its establishment in 1861. The Polish noble Kazimierz Badeni was Austrian prime minister in the years 1895–1897. Galicia had its own local parliament, and Cracow and Lviv were cities with a special election system¹⁰. Since the 1860s a very small group of women gained the indirect active right to vote in local elections¹¹.

On the other hand, women’s suffrage as well as the general rights to vote were very limited, indirect and favorable only for citizens with high social and financial status¹². The local parliament of Galicia had quite limited power¹³. Until 1913, women’s membership in political organizations was forbidden¹⁴. Women also did not gain the passive right to vote. Finally, the conservative approach of many Polish members of the Austrian Parliament was not helpful in achieving the goals of the advocates of women’s suffrage.

7 I am the author of the translation of all titles and quotations used in the text.

8 K. Bujwidowa, *Czy kobieta powinna mieć te same prawa co mężczyzna*, Kraków 1909. See: <http://lewicowo.pl/czy-kobieta-powinna-miec-te-same-prawa-co-mezczyzna/>.

9 *Ibidem*. Similar conclusion presented P. Kuczalska-Reinschmit, *Wyborcze...*, *op. cit.*

10 M. Sikorska-Kowalska, *O wyborcze prawa...*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

11 *Ibidem*.

12 *Dzieje Sejmu Polskiego*, J. Bardach (red.), Warszawa 1997, p. 123–125.

13 See: *ibidem*, p. 125 and the next.

14 M. Sikorska-Kowalska, *O wyborcze prawa...*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

The election system was the cause of large controversies among members of the Austrian Parliament for many years¹⁵. In the second half of first decade of the twentieth century, so at the time of revolution and liberation, debates about the reform of election system started again¹⁶.

Polish members of parliament actively participated in these discussions while Galician women lobbied for opportunity to vote in elections for municipal councils. In Cracow and Lviv, 'Committees of Equality' were active. They strongly expressed demands for equality in the forthcoming regulation of the voting procedure¹⁷. A special protest took place in Lviv during the elections to the Sejm in 1908. Maria Dułbianka, the famous feminist and artist, decided to be a candidate although according to the law she did not have the right. She received 511 votes¹⁸.

On the 19th of March, 1911, demonstrations took place for the political rights of women in many cities of some European countries, organized by socialist circles. Polish women took part in a great march in Vienna. One of them delivered a speech in Polish¹⁹. In Galicia demonstrations and marches were organized in many small towns as well. The participants in the protests proclaimed a resolution. According to its authors, political rights would make them able to fight for their interests: protection of the life and health of working women, an increase of their salaries, a decrease of the prices of food and housing, and social security for the weakest social groups²⁰. This was a clear expression of the deep conviction of women that equal requirements (forced upon them by the political and economic situation) must be balanced by equal rights.

Polish women fought for their rights under the Russian regime as well. Female members of the socialist movement – similar to men – worked as newspaper columnists, organizers and printers. They were imprisoned, and many got shot during the demonstrations or were sentenced to death²¹.

15 See for instance: J. Buszko, *Polacy w Parlamencie Wiedeńskim 1848–1918*, Warszawa 1996, p. 184 and the next.

16 See: *ibidem*, p. 259 and the next.

17 Skiba (pseudonym), *Z ruchu kobiecego*, [in:] *Krytyka*, issue VI/1909.

18 K. Bujwidowa, *Czy kobieta powinna...*, *op. cit.*

19 D. Kłuszyńska, *Walka o polityczne...*, *op. cit.*

20 *Ibidem*.

21 A. Próchnik, *Kobieta...*, *op. cit.*

The first revolution in Russia made the women's struggle less dramatic. As Skiba (following Bojanowska) mentions, the 'Circle of Women's Work', which published a pamphlet containing demands for equal rights, had been formed in about 1905 in the part of Poland annexed by Russia²². Their appeal was signed by 4,000 women²³. Congresses of women took place. Polish female citizens, among others, demanded the introduction of equal political rights.

The circles of women fighting for their interests were quite well organized in Russia²⁴. They had the support of some intellectuals and members of the Russian Duma, which allowed them to submit several drafts of new legal acts and to establish some regulations in favor of women²⁵.

During the same period, women living in Polish territories incorporated into Russia had a very limited right to vote. Only several small groups of female citizens could vote, such as the owners of factories.

Women also protested in Germany. As Kłuszyńska notes, on the 19th of March, 1911, 'hundreds of assemblies took place in Germany, only in Berlin, with 44 of them seeing mass participation of women and men.'²⁶. At the Second Social-democratic Assembly of Women, on the 12th of May, 1912, in Stuttgart, Rosa Luxemburg (born in the Polish city of Zamość in the territory annexed by Russia) delivered a speech entitled 'The suffrage of women and the class conflict'. She claimed: 'The present mass fight of women for the acknowledgement of political rights is only an expression and fragment of the general fight for liberation'²⁷. The main goal for Luxemburg, the founder of the party Social Democracy for the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, was the power exercised by the proletariat. But her comrades constituted a small minority among Polish activists.

A newspaper columnist describing the actions of Polish women in the first decade of the twentieth century emphasized the role of the Permanent Congress of Women's Issues, formed in Paris in 1909²⁸. This organization monitored the state of political reforms favorable to women and

22 Skiba (pseudonym), *Z ruchu...*, *op. cit.*

23 *Ibidem.*

24 *Ibidem.*

25 *Ibidem.*

26 D. Kłuszyńska, *Walka o polityczne...*, *op. cit.*

27 R. Luxemburg, *Prawo wyborcze kobiet a walka klas*, Warszawa 2005, p. 5.

28 Skiba (pseudonym), *Z ruchu...*, *op. cit.*

helped activists in various countries. Also, a Polish section of the Congress formed – Kazimiera Bujwidowa became a correspondent member from Galicia²⁹. The articles devoted to the struggle for women's suffrage written by Polish columnists at that time show a strong tendency to identify with the activities of feminists from foreign countries.

1917–1918: independence on the horizon

In 1916, Austria and Germany, allied against the Triple Entente, conquered the Polish territories annexed by Russia. On the 5th of November the occupiers proclaimed in an act that they promised to form an independent Polish state with a constitutional regime³⁰. Their aim was to gain the involvement of Polish nationals in the struggle against Russia.

Several weeks later they formed the Provisional Council of State. It was the beginning of Kingdom of Poland, a quasi-state dependent on Austria and Germany. In January 1917, the Council established a special Commission in order to prepare the Constitution and election laws for the future Polish parliament. The draft of Constitution submitted by the commission contained the basics of the election system. According to these provisions, only men had suffrage. As K. Kacperski notes, the members of commission claimed that active suffrage for women would cause 'a decrease in the intellectual level of the mass electorate', because many women were illiterate³¹. As an argument against passive women's suffrage, the commission expressed the presumption that men would not want to vote for women³². According to commission, the decision about women's suffrage should belong to the future Sejm (the traditional name of the Lower Chamber of Polish parliament). These provisions met strong resistance from various circles of women³³. In the election law for

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ Akt 5 listopada, Warszawa 1916.

³¹ K. Kacperski, *System wyborczy do Sejmu i Senatu u progu Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 2007, p. 22 (following J. Buzek). Kacperski notices, that the members of the Commission did not recognize the high level of analphabetism among men as an obstacle.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 23.

³³ *Ibidem*.

the Senate, the members of commission gave limited and indirect active rights to vote to female owners of large enterprises.

In November 1917, the Regency Council officially obtained power in the Kingdom of Poland (the Provisional Council of State had been dissolved two months earlier). Among the powers of the Regency Council was the appointment of the government. Work on the drafts was continued by the Government of Prime Minister Jan Kanty Steczkowski, formed in April 1918. The amended regulations guaranteed the active right to vote in elections to the Lower Chamber for women who had graduated from high school and were independently leading an enterprise or farm³⁴. According to Kacperski, this provision was significant in shaping the awareness of society³⁵.

Józef Świeżyński became the next Prime Minister in November 1918. The draft by his government, probably prepared in early autumn³⁶, contained the election system for a single-chamber parliament. Kacperski points out that this draft gave the first basics for the election system of independent Poland³⁷. Its authors acknowledged the active right to vote regardless of sex, for all citizens who had reached the age of 21 and lived in their voting district on the day of proclamation of the elections. All Polish citizens having the active right to vote, regardless of the place of living, gained passive suffrage. It is worth noting that the authors of the draft, justifying the introduction of women's suffrage, referred to the change in the role of women during the war³⁸. Their reasoning was very similar to the arguments presented by feminist columnists several years earlier.

The drafts prepared at that time became an important matter of debate. At the same time Polish women, inspired by the vision of an independent Poland, undertook well organized demonstrations for their political rights. They convened, inter alia, a conference of women representing all of the occupied parts of Poland³⁹.

In the years of World War I the members of the Polish Socialist Party played a very significant role among independent Polish activists. They identified the fight for liberation of the proletariat with the fight for the

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 60 and the next.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 63.

³⁹ M. Sikorska-Kowalska, *O wyborcze prawa...*, *op. cit.*, p. 19–20.

independence of the nation. One of their leaders, Ignacy Daszyński, born in Galicia, had more than 30 years of experience in pro-independence and socialist activity. He took part in a demonstration of women in Cracow in 1911 with Zofia Emilia Daszyńska-Golińska, his sister-in-law, who as the first woman at the University of Zurich defended her doctoral dissertation⁴⁰. Daszyński was also a member of Austrian Parliament.

Daszyński became Prime Minister of the Provisional People's Government of the Republic of Poland, formed on the night the 6th/7th of November, 1918, by the members of the Polish left-wing and people's organizations. They published a manifesto addressed to 'Polish farmers, laborers and soldiers' in which they proclaimed that the People's Republic of Poland covered the territories where Polish people lived. They also declared that all power in Poland should belong to them until the convening of the Legislative Parliament (which was supposed to enact the Constitution). They introduced some political liberties, such as right to strike, the right to eight-hour workday, freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, and equality. One of the provisions stated: 'The Legislative Sejm will be convened by us in the current year on the basis of universal suffrage with equal, direct, anonymous and proportional voting – without reference to sex. The voting system will be proclaimed during few next days. Active and passive suffrage shall be granted to every male and female citizen who has reached the age of 21.'⁴¹

End of 1918: building the new state

Four days after the proclamation of the manifesto of Daszyński's Government, World War I ended and Poland regained independence. Józef Piłsudski, the military commander and an activist in the Polish Socialist Party, returned to Warsaw from German prison and immediately became the widely accepted leader of the country. He appointed Daszyński to form the government of independent Poland. Nevertheless, the

⁴⁰ D. Kłuszyńska, *Walka o polityczne...*, *op. cit.* In 1928 Daszyńska became a member of Senate of Republic of Poland.

⁴¹ Manifest Tymczasowego Rządu Ludowego Republiki Polskiej z 7 listopada 1918, Lublin 1918.

negotiations failed. The next politician appointed was Jędrzej Moraczewski, another Galician socialist and pro-independence activist, soldier under Piłsudski and minister of the Daszyński's Government. He succeeded in forming the left-wing People's Provisional Government of Polish Republic. On the 21st of November, 1918, during the first meeting of his ministers, Moraczewski addressed the 'Polish Nation' and declared that because his Government has gained power from the laborers and farmers, its desire was to defend the interests of the People. The program of Moraczewski's Government to a large extent was a continuation of the plans of the Provisional Government of People's Republic of Poland, *inter alia*, in the field of elections. Moraczewski emphasized the provisionality of this political body. He set out the rules of the first Polish elections in decades:

The Legislative Sejm, based on the universal, equal, direct, anonymous and proportional voting of all male and female citizens who have reached the age of 21, has decided to convene in the beginning of the next year, appointing the day of the voting for the last Sunday of January⁴².

The Prime Minister stated these rules in the first parts of his speech. This shows how significant they were for the process of building the institutions of the reviving state.

K. Kacperski demonstrates that on November 1918 several organizations, among them nationalist and right-wing ones, published the appeals for the swift introduction of the election law, including the right of women to vote⁴³.

Piłsudski, who legally had gained power from Daszyński's Government and Regency Council⁴⁴, had a function called Chief of State. He started to enact decrees with the power of statutes of parliament. On the basis of the first of these statutes, proclaimed on the 22nd of November, the Chief of State gained supreme power in the state and could confirm the legislative drafts of the Government. These acts were binding since

⁴² *Przemówienie Prezesa Rady Ministrów Jędrzeja Moraczewskiego na pierwszym posiedzeniu Rządu (21. XI. 1918 r.)*, [in:] B. Sygit, *Exposé premierów polskich 1918–2009*. Wydanie IV poprawione i rozszerzone, Toruń 2010, p. 55 and the next.

⁴³ K. Kacperski (following J. Buzek), *System...*, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁴⁴ See: R. Kraczkowski, *Dekretowanie ustaw w Polsce w latach 1918–1926*, Warszawa 1994, p. 32.

the day of proclamation in the *Journal of Laws*. If the acts would not be presented to the Legislative Sejm during its first meeting, they would lose binding power⁴⁵.

Piłsudski realized the need for quickly convening the Sejm, so several days after the legal establishment of his power he entrusted the government with the preparation of election law. As Kacperski reconstructs, the ministers created it during 8 days of intense work, using to some extent the content of the drafts prepared by the governments of the Kingdom of Poland⁴⁶.

On the 28th of November 1918, Józef Piłsudski, enacted a decree concerning the Election System of the Legislative Sejm, based on the project by the Government.

Article 1 stated:

The elector to the Sejm is every citizen of the state, regardless of difference in sex, who until the day of proclamation of the voting has reached the age of 21.

Article 7 guaranteed that:

All male and female citizens of the state vested with the active right to vote, regardless of their place of residence, including servicemen, may be elected to the Sejm⁴⁷.

This decree was the first binding act in Polish legal history that introduced suffrage for the women. Certainly, the special character of the enacting institutions and the nature of the act were factors that enabled the introduction of women's right to vote. The representatives of female activists could personally lobby at Piłsudski's villa. He had the real power in the state⁴⁸. Although he was not an enthusiast of the women's suffrage⁴⁹, his aim was to provide the institutional basics of the state. Piłsudski and

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 32 and the next.

⁴⁶ K. Kacperski, *System...*, *op. cit.*, p. 77 and the next.

⁴⁷ *Dekret o ordynacji wyborczej do Sejmu Ustawodawczego*, Dz.U. 1918 nr 18 poz. 46 (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland).

⁴⁸ See: N.M. Kurek, *Historia prawa wyborczego kobiet w Polsce*, <http://www.student.lex.pl/czytaj/-/artykul/historia-prawa-wyborczego-kobiet-w-polsce>.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

his circle understood that the parliament must be the cornerstone of a restored Poland⁵⁰. Moreover, as Polish historians emphasize, the Chief of State was never an advocate of any particular shape of the election system, considering it insignificant issue⁵¹. His authority and the loyalty of Prime Minister Moraczewski towards him⁵² meant that his decisions had the status of a last word. Finally, we should not forget about Piłsudski's socialist past.

After 1918: stabilization

Only 8 women were elected to the Legislative Sejm. The first regular parliament, which started its work in 1922, had 9 female members in the Sejm and 4 women in the Senate. Some authors point out the relatively small participation of women in political life⁵³.

In the Constitutional Statute proclaimed on the 15th of July 1920 everyone who had Polish citizenship and lived in Silesia on the day of acquisition of this land by the Polish authorities, including the regime of the autonomous Silesian Province, gained the voting rights in the elections for the provincial Silesian Sejm⁵⁴.

The Polish Constitution enacted on 17 March 1921 by the Legislative Sejm explicitly stated that every citizen, regardless of sex, had the right to vote and the right to be elected⁵⁵.

50 Many memories and comments about that time show the significance of Sejm as the symbol of rebirth of Polish state. See for instance: K. Kacperski, *System...*, *op. cit.*, p. 15 (referring to L. Haas); *Dzieje Sejmu...*, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

51 See: K. Kacperski, *System...*, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

52 Kacperski presents some view on the relation between Piłsudski and Moraczewski. See: *Ibidem*, p. 73–74.

53 M. Podkowski wrote about the reasons of this state. See: M. Podkowski, *Udział kobiet w parlamencie Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, [in:] *Pozycja prawna kobiet w dziejach*, S. Rogowski (ed.), Kolonia Limited 2010, p. 161 and the next.

54 M. Sobczyk, A. Sokala, *Prawo Wyborcze II Rzeczypospolitej. Wybór tekstów źródłowych*, Toruń 2004, p. 19; *Ustawa Konstytucyjna z dnia 15 lipca 1920 r. zawierająca statut organiczny Województwa Śląskiego*, Dz.U. 1920 nr 73 poz. 497 (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland), art. 13.

55 *Ustawa z dnia 17 marca 1921 r. – Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, Dz.U. 1921 nr 44 poz. 267 (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland), art. 12 and 13.

As K. Kacperski notes, the elements of the election system established on the threshold of independence has survived in Polish law until now⁵⁶. Certainly, the tendency of the first Polish political leaders to maintain institutional continuity has made its contribution⁵⁷. We notice a strong focus on the sequential building of the institutions of the new state during the first years of independence. We can also interpret these facts as a presumption that the right to vote belongs to those elements of the legal system that became very difficult to limit after liberalization (regardless of later changes of regimes).

Conclusion

The idea of political rights for women could develop under the special circumstances that arose in the country, which had been occupied for decades. The reality of life under foreign regimes made the active role of women necessary. In socialism Polish elites could unite with laborers. This ideology provided one of the very few available ways to fight for liberation and an international exchange of ideas. The theoretical background and experiences of the struggle had to wait only for the great political change, which came in November 1918.

On the basis of the analysis presented above, it is possible to point out several factors that made the introduction of women's suffrage in Poland possible:

- 1) The involvement of Polish women in the fight for acknowledgment of their political rights under the regimes of occupiers.

Their activities certainly contributed to an increase in awareness of this issue among the people who in November 1918 became members of Polish society. Moreover, women could not be neglected by Polish decision-makers because of their active role in the fight against the occupiers. For instance, they belonged to Polish military formations during World War I⁵⁸.

⁵⁶ Kacperski, *System...*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁵⁷ On this continuity in 1918 see: R. Krackowski, *ibidem*. The maintaining of legal continuity may be seen as the characteristic feature of Polish legal culture in the twentieth century, justified by the stormy sequence of political events. The practices of the Government on Emigration during World War II and after may serve as the latter example.

⁵⁸ See: M. Sikorska-Kowalska, *O wyborcze prawa...*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

- 2) The concentration of power in the first months of independence.

It was much easier to acknowledge liberal suffrage by small, quite homogenous group of decision-makers than by parliament.

- 3) The socialist background of a large percentage of Polish political elites.

The politicians of reborn Poland remembered their female comrades. It is worth emphasizing that among the left wing activists sympathy for an independent Polish state was distinctly dominant (the group of Polish communists was relatively small). That is why the demand for women's suffrage became one of the demands of the pro-independence movement. Nevertheless, before 1918 the idea of political rights for women found advocates in conservative, right-wing and popular circles.

- 4) The significance of parliamentarianism and political liberties in the building of independent Polish institutions.

A reference to the tradition of parliament and tolerance in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was not only important to the state's identity of Poland (the election system in Poland was much more modern than the systems of its former occupiers). Such provisions seemed necessary in the light of the ethnic diversity in society.

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