
Weimar Germany's foreign policy and the protection of minorities: The case of the German minority in Poland*

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Abstract

The protection of minorities in Central Europe became a deeply controversial issue in the aftermath of World War One. The presence of a sizeable German minority in what had become Polish territory following the Versailles settlement played into the hands of political extremists on both sides when the German anti-Weimar right and Polish nationalists saw an opportunity to use the minority issue as a tool for revisionism. Whilst acknowledging that certain revisionist objectives were indeed pursued by Weimar governments, this article argues that democratic and republican forces did not use the minority problem as a direct tool for German expansionism in Eastern Europe.

Key words: Weimar Republic, protection of minorities, Germany, Poland, Stresemann, League of Nations.

La política exterior de la Alemania de Weimar y la protección de las minorías: el caso de la minoría alemana en Polonia

Resumen

La protección de las minorías en Europa Central se convirtió en un tema muy controversial durante el período que siguió a la Primera Guerra Mundial. La presencia de una minoría alemana considerable, en lo que se había convertido en territorio polaco tras la firma del Tratado de Versalles, resultó ventajosa tanto para los extremistas políticos de la derecha de la anti-Weimar alemana como para los polacos nacionalistas cuando vieron la oportunidad de utilizar el tema de las minorías como una herramienta para el revisionismo. Este artículo argumenta que las fuerzas democráticas y republicanas no utilizaron el problema de las minorías como una herramienta directa para el expansionismo alemán en Europa Oriental, sin desconocer que ciertos objetivos revisionistas fueron de hecho perseguidos por los gobiernos de Weimar.

Palabras clave: República de Weimar, protección de las minorías, Alemania, Polonia, Stresemann, Sociedad de las Naciones.

A política externa da Alemanha de Weimar e da protecção das minorias: o caso da minoria alemã na Polónia

Resumo

A protecção das minorias na Europa Central tornou-se uma questão muito controversa durante o período após a Primeira Guerra Mundial. A presença de uma minoria alemã significativa no que havia se tornado território polonês após a assinatura do Tratado de Versalhes, foi vantajoso para ambos os extremistas políticos sobre o direito de a Weimar alemão como poloneses anti-nacionalistas quando eles viram a oportunidade usando o tema das minorias como uma ferramenta para o revisionismo. Este artigo argumenta que as forças democráticas e republicanas não usou a questão das minorias como uma ferramenta direta para o expansionismo alemão na Europa Oriental, embora reconheça que certos objetivos revisionistas foram efectivamente exercidas pelos governos de Weimar.

Palavras-chave: República de Weimar, protecção das minorias, Alemanha, Polónia, Stresemann, Sociedade das Nações.

La politique étrangère de l'Allemagne de Weimar et la protection des minorités: le cas de la minorité allemande en Pologne

Résumé

La protection des minorités en Europe centrale est devenue une question très controversée au cours de la période suivant la Première Guerre mondiale. La présence d'une importante minorité allemande dans ce qui était devenu le territoire polonais après la signature du traité de Versailles, était avantageux pour les deux extrémistes politiques sur le droit de la Weimar allemand Polonais anti-nationalistes quand ils ont vu l'occasion en utilisant le thème des minorités comme un outil pour révisionnisme. Cet article soutient que les forces démocratiques et républicaines n'ont pas utilisé la question des minorités comme un moyen direct pour l'expansionnisme allemand en Europe de l'Est, tout en reconnaissant que certains objectifs révisionnistes ont été effectivement exercées par les gouvernements de Weimar.

Mots-clés: République de Weimar, protection des minorités, Allemagne, Pologne, Stresemann, Ligue des Nations.

INTRODUCTION

The protection of minorities was a key theme in European and, particularly, German-Polish relations after World War One. The post-war order was envisaged to revitalise, as well as strengthen, the conduct of international relations. Providing a minority protection system in the newly created states of Eastern Europe was an essential component of reconciling the peoples of Europe. Despite a successful military campaign in Eastern Europe, Germany was forced to hand over areas of land to the newly created minority state of Poland. The fate of the German minority was soon to become particularly relevant. Furthermore, the minority issue proved to become a disappointing political chapter for Weimar foreign policy.

In a nutshell, this paper deals with the conflict brought about by the existence of a sizeable German minority that lived in the newly created state of Poland. Matters were complicated by Germany's support for the minority and political controversy between the League of Nations and Germany, as well as Poland. What motivated German policy-makers to engage with the minority problem, and how can the issue be placed in the wider context of Weimar foreign policy? As will be seen, debates about territory, minorities, and the right of self-determination are deeply intertwined¹.

Following this introductory section mapping out the tenets of international relations in post-World War One Europe with special emphasis upon the minorities problem, I will provide an overview of both sources used and the historiography. The subsequent section will sketch out the key issues of the international minority protection system as a responsibility of the League of Nations. Furthermore, successive Weimar governments' policy of supporting the German minorities deserves closer attention. I will also discuss Germany's entry into the League of Nations and in this context the tenure of Gustav Stresemann as German Foreign Secretary. Relations between Germany and Poland will be dealt with on various occasions throughout this paper. In the final section, a conclusion will be drawn as to the nature of the minority protection system and the main

1 Joachim Wintzer, *Deutschland und der Völkerbund, 1918-1926* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006), 107.

objectives pursued by Weimar foreign policy-makers regarding the German minorities in Poland.

I argue that Weimar Germany did not use the minority problem as a direct tool for expansionism in Eastern Europe. However, certain revisionist objectives were indeed pursued and the minority issue was a bargaining factor of utmost importance in Germany's dealings with Poland.

1. THE MINORITY ISSUE AND WEIMAR FOREIGN POLICY

The World War One shake-up significantly changed the European geopolitical landscape so that the map, especially in the East, revealed noteworthy shifts compared to the pre-1914 situation. The defeated Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary suffered sizeable territorial losses, which scarred their national psyches. Commenting in 1921, a contemporary analyst observed that a: “redistribution of territory was taking place, far larger than any that had been dealt with on previous occasions. [...] [T]wo new States were being created, Poland and Czecho-Slovakia”².

Whereas before 1914 Austro-Hungarian, German, and Russian imperial rule had extended over Central and Eastern Europe, the post-1918 situation was markedly different. Various ethnic minority groups were assigned to live in different states and were expected to shift their political loyalties. In fact: “there were German communities in twenty-one of the thirty-one European states”³. Those small to medium-sized states could at any time be confronted with revisionist territorial claims by a still powerful Germany⁴ in its self-proclaimed role as guardian of the German minority's cultural autonomy⁵.

2 Harold Temperley, “The Treaties for the Protection of Minorities”, en *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris, Vol. V, Economic Reconstruction and Protection of Minorities*, ed. Harold Temperley (Londres: Henry Frowde and Hodder & Stoughton, 1921), 120.

3 Jonathan Wright, *Gustav Stresemann – Weimar's Greatest Statesman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 471.

4 Eberhard Kolb, *Gustav Stresemann* (Múnich: Beck, 2003), 96; Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik der Republik von Weimar* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985), 80.

5 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 58.

Furthermore, following the war, the victorious powers intended to create more stable political conditions in Europe. This included not only a re-mapping of hitherto existing borders but also a pledge of self-determination for the various national groupings on the European continent and for an independent Polish State. These issues formed an important part of the peace programme consisting of fourteen points that the United States President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed to Congress on January 8th, 1918. However, the straightforward nature of laudable intentions was not matched by a viable set of conditions on the ground. In Eastern and South-Eastern Europe especially, German and Jewish minorities had formed a constituent part of the resident population for a long period of time.

Moreover, any attempt at redrawing frontiers would cause grievances owing to the impossibility of separating the various ethnic minorities in Eastern Europe⁶; i.e. the “centuries-old mixture of nationalities in central and Eastern Europe” proved extremely difficult to resolve⁷. Thus, even though the victorious allies endorsed the Polish, Czech, Slovak and other nationalities’ right of self-determination, it was equally recognized that the protection of minorities existing within their territories had to be ensured. Therefore, a number of minority treaties were consequently agreed upon and the League of Nations was expected to provide a forum for the peaceful settlement of possible future disputes. Such legal instruments stipulating the protection of minorities constituted an absolute novelty in the realm of global politics⁸. The provision of a system of minority protection was welcomed. However, as will be seen, grievances among minority groups were not necessarily dealt with accordingly and satisfactorily.

The so-called *Polish Corridor* cut off East Prussia from the rest of Weimar Germany’s territory while Poland was granted access to the Baltic Sea for reasons of economic survival⁹. A member of the French delegation in Paris observed that: “[w]ithout access to the sea, Poland would be stifled”¹⁰.

6 Detlev Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik* (Fráncfort del Meno: Suhrkamp, 1987), 199.

7 Jonathan Wright, *Gustav Stresemann*, 471.

8 Carole Fink, “Stresemann’s Minority Policies, 1924-29”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 14: 3 (1979): 404.

9 Carole Fink, *Stresemann’s Minority Policies*, 404.

10 “Foreign Relations of the United States, Paris Peace Conference (a partir de ahora FRUS)”, *Vol IV, 19 de marzo de 1919*, 414. Nueva York, NY, Estados Unidos: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969.

The approximately 1.4 million strong German minority living “in lands which Poland acquired from Imperial Germany”¹¹ remained an important group in the social fabric of the Polish State. In conjunction with their economic significance, the relatively large number of Germans¹² was seen to have a destabilising effect on the Polish polity¹³. Furthermore, there were reports of the Polish authorities violating the German minority’s rights¹⁴. In this context, a contemporary witness mentioned forced liquidations of property, for instance¹⁵. On the other hand, the Polish minority in the *Weimar Republic* suffered from “unplanned and unofficial” acts of “discrimination”¹⁶.

Throughout the lifetime of the *Weimar Republic* (1918-1933), consecutive German governments pursued a double-edged policy of presenting themselves as legitimate guardians of minority rights, while also trying to leave open the door to regain territory in, and influence over, that part of Eastern Europe that had been lost as a result of the war. It could be argued that Germany did indeed have the ability to regain a position of great influence in the post-war world order¹⁷. Active support of German minorities appeared to be a suitable means to weaken the Polish State and to exert such influence.

Moreover, Weimar governments tended to carefully distinguish between the rather conciliatory conduct of foreign policy towards the victorious powers of Britain and France, and more vehement policies directed towards countries along Germany’s eastern frontier. Diplomatic success in the west would provide increased political leverage in relations with Poland. At the same time, any sign of a successful revision of the Versailles Treaty would weaken the anti-Weimar nationalistic German Right and strengthen the pro-republican, democratic forces.

11 Richard Blanke, “The German Minority in Inter-War Poland and German Foreign Policy – Some Reconsiderations”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 25: 1 (1990): 88.

12 Harald von Riekhoff, *German-Polish Relations, 1918-1933* (Londres: John Hopkins Press, 1971), 206.

13 “Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939 (a partir de ahora DBFP)”, *Serie LA, Vol V, no. 53*. Londres, Reino Unido: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1966.

14 Harald von Riekhoff, *German-Polish Relations, 194-195*.

15 Albrecht Duwe, *Damerau – Dorf und seine Umgebung im Fordoner Weichselbogen, Schicksal von Land und Leuten durch die Zeiten* (Essen: Albrecht Duwe, 1986), 113.

16 Harald von Riekhoff, *German-Polish Relations*, 195.

17 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 80.

Furthermore, one needs to consider the interconnectedness of German foreign policy with events occurring in the domestic political domain. An overwhelmingly large share of the electorate expected Weimar governments to pursue a policy of revision¹⁸ and to demonstrate the unfeasibility of the Versailles Treaty stipulations¹⁹. Focusing primarily on the eastern frontier, actively supporting Germans living beyond the *Reich's* borders and guarding German culture against attempts at assimilation by the Polish government was seen as vital²⁰. Therefore, financial and political support was channelled to the minorities through a network of organizations and governmental bodies²¹.

In the arena of domestic politics too tensions arose between the federal government and the *Länder* (federal states). The issue at stake was over which layer of government in the federal structure of Germany was to be responsible for the conduct of minority policy. Overall it is crucial to remember that the minority question represented only one set of obstacles German foreign policy needed to face. Further issues that Weimar governments pursued included reparations, the *Anschluss* (unification with Austria), the claim to territory lost to Belgium, France, Lithuania, as well as Poland, and the withdrawal of allied troops from the Rhineland. Even radical nationalist political circles had realized that a speedy recovery of lost territories, particularly in the West, had become almost impossible; the minority question, however, constituted an opportunity for the recovery of influence in the east²².

The ceding of large parts of the Prussian provinces of West Prussia, Poznań, and Eastern Upper Silesia to Poland under the stipulation of the Versailles Treaty fuelled especially harsh sentiments against France and its eastern ally Poland amongst the German electorate and in particular the German Right. Moreover, the important seaport of Gdańsk on the Baltic coast was placed under a League of Nations mandate and thus created yet

18 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 80.

19 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 133.

20 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 92.

21 Norbert Kreckler, *Revisionsanspruch und geheime Ostpolitik der Weimarer Republik. Die Subventionierung der deutschen Minderheit in Polen* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1973), 11.

22 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 92.

another locus of dispute between Germans and Poles. The new democracies of Eastern Europe soon proved to be unstable political systems and rising nationalistic tendencies subsequently worsened the situation of minority groups²³. The failures of parliamentary democracy in Poland became apparent by Józef Pilsudski's coup d'état in May 1926²⁴.

Germany's recognition of crucial security guarantees vis-à-vis its western neighbour and long-time rival France constituted a novelty in post-war foreign policy²⁵. Despite being a victor of World War One, France was in need of an Eastern European ally, as Bolshevik Russia could not be relied upon²⁶. Therefore, France had an interest in securing a strong position for the new Polish State to counterbalance a possibly resurgent German hegemony over Eastern Europe²⁷. The policy went as far as to actually "supervise" the foreign policy of Poland²⁸. Weimar governments quickly realised the necessity of establishing sound and stable relations with France, who was the most ardent supporter of the Rhineland occupation. The occupation infuriated the German public.

Britain, France's counterpart in the *Entente Cordiale* (1904) attempted to limit German territorial loss at the Paris Peace Conference "but [...] did not achieve much" in terms of satisfying French security needs²⁹. In fact, in the course of the 1920s Britain and France were at odds on a number of issues concerning territorial arrangements in Eastern Europe³⁰ such as the controversy over Upper Silesia in 1921³¹, and the adequate treatment of German minorities in Poland³². Furthermore, cordial relations with the

23 Hans Mommsen, *Aufstieg und Untergang der Republik von Weimar* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2003), 138.

24 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat? Deutschland und der Minderheitenschutz* (Marburg, Lahn: Johann-Gottfried-Herder-Institut, 1988), 26.

25 Detlev Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 197.

26 Hans Mommsen, *Aufstieg und Untergang*, 137.

27 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 112.

28 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 92.

29 Francis Carsten, *Britain and the Weimar Republic* (Londres: Batsford Academic and Education, 1984), 27.

30 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 134.

31 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 135.

32 Francis Carsten, *Britain and the Weimar Republic*, 73; Christian Höltjen, *Die Weimarer Republik und das Ostlokarne-Problem, 1919-1934, Revision oder Garantie der deutschen Ostgrenze von 1919* (Würzburg: Holzner Verlag, 1958), 141.

United States were crucial to Germany's economic recovery. According to German *Reich Chancellor* Hans Luther, with "global public opinion" favourable to Germany, American financial resources could be successfully tapped³³.

On the other hand, during the early years of the *Weimar Republic* a faction of German foreign policy-makers advocated political and economic cooperation with Soviet Russia whilst also pursuing revisionist aims and focusing less on a settlement with the western war allies³⁴. Relations with the Soviet Union were conducted carefully, however, owing to the Soviet support for international communist revolutionary movements³⁵. The treaties of Rapallo (1922) and Berlin (1926) between Germany and the Soviet Union represented such instances of diplomatic cooperation. Regarding political relations with Poland, it is worth stressing that the Soviet Union was involved in a bellicose conflict with Poland in the direct aftermath of World War One. Any rapprochement between Germany and the Soviet Union must have caused concern in Warsaw.

When assessing Weimar foreign policy, it is crucial to focus on the policies of Gustav Stresemann. The leader of the right of centre, national liberal *DVP – Deutsche Volkspartei* (German People's Party) briefly acted as chancellor (August 3rd, 1923– November 30th, 1923) before heading the *Auswärtiges Amt* (German Foreign Office) uninterruptedly from November 30th, 1923 until his premature death on October 3rd, 1929 abruptly ended the "Stresemann era"³⁶. Stresemann was also said to have left his mark in the domestic realm of politics by attempting to stabilise the Weimar system³⁷. The period from 1918 to the year of Stresemann's passing will be set as the temporal scope of the analysis presented in this paper. After Stresemann's death, German foreign policy-makers soon began to pursue a more confrontational style entailing also ramifications for the minority question³⁸.

33 "Akten der Reichskanzlei, Weimarer Republik, Das Kabinett Luther II, 1", Boppard, Rin, Alemania: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1970, 859; traducción propia.

34 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 79; Harald von Riekhoff, *German-Polish Relations*, 272.

35 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 115.

36 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 207, traducción propia.

37 Eberhard Kolb, *Gustav Stresemann*, 118-119.

38 Christoph Kimmich, *Germany and the League of Nations* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1976), 149; Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 513.

Key foreign policy decisions, that proved unpopular in right wing quarters, fall into Stresemann's tenure as foreign secretary. These include the signing of the Locarno Treaty and Germany's entry into the League of Nations. The Foreign Secretary was always careful to point out that the Locarno Treaty did not imply recognition of Germany's border with Poland³⁹. He stressed cordial relations with Britain and France, however. Moreover, Locarno would: "[increase] accommodation by [Stresemann's] Western partners to a campaign by Germany for the expansion of minority rights"⁴⁰.

Stresemann followed a policy of: "[securing Germany's] détente with the West as well as to facilitate her economic recovery"⁴¹. The term "détente" is understood to imply: "a relaxation or a slackening of tension in the previously strained relations between states"⁴². Like many of his contemporaries, Stresemann was harshly critical of large parts of the Versailles Treaty, particularly in regard to the harmful ramifications of the nature of the German-Polish frontier⁴³. Despite very aggressive demands made during the war regarding Germany's territorial expansion, Stresemann later occupied the political centre during the Weimar period⁴⁴. Finally, the *DVP* leader had particularly close relations with representatives of German minority groups⁴⁵ and listed minority protection among the three key aims of Weimar foreign policy⁴⁶.

Having attempted to fit the issue of the German minority in Poland into the broader canvas of the post-World War One European political order, the focus of this paper now turns to dealing with the historiography of Weimar foreign policy with special regard to the German minority in Poland.

39 "Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, 1918-1945 (a partir de ahora ADAP)", *Serie B, X, Anexo II, presumiblemente redactado por Stresemann a finales de diciembre de 1928*. Göttingen, Alemania: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966-1979, 612.

40 Carole Fink, *Stresemann's Minority Policies*, 406.

41 Carole Fink, "Defender of Minorities: Germany in the League of Nations, 1926-1933", *Central European History* 5: 4 (1972): 338.

42 Graham Evans y Richard Newnham, *Dictionary of International Relations* (Londres: Penguin, 1998), 125.

43 "ADAP", *Serie B, X, Anexo II, presumiblemente redactado por Stresemann a finales de diciembre de 1928*, 612.

44 Eberhard Kolb, *Gustav Stresemann*, 118.

45 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 206.

46 Henry Bernhard, *Gustav Stresemann – Vermächtnis, Die Aufgaben deutscher Aussenpolitik, Stresemann an den ehemaligen Kronprinzen, 07 de septiembre de 1925* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1932), 553.

2. SOURCES USED AND NOTES ON HISTORIOGRAPHY

Early post-World War Two historians studied the minority question in the light of German territorial and economic expansionism in Eastern Europe. The German historian Fritz Fischer published extensively on what he claimed to be a continuation of expansionist German policy during the *Kaiserreich* and the *Weimar Republic* (as embodied in Stresemann's foreign policy) culminating in Hitler's ruthless war aims in Eastern Europe⁴⁷. Moreover, Gatzke had access to German Foreign Office papers at an early stage. He attributes to Stresemann's agenda the "ultimate aims" of providing security for Germans abroad and a "readjustment of the Eastern Frontier"⁴⁸. Turner, on the other hand, criticises Fischer's claim that the goal of Stresemann's minority policy was to demand a German State that would accommodate all people of German ethnicity in Central Europe; Fischer's approach establishes neither a thorough analysis of Stresemann's foreign policy nor, more specifically, his minority policy⁴⁹. According to Turner, Stresemann did not show distinctive hegemonic ambitions⁵⁰.

For the first time, Fink and Pieper deal with aspects of the minority issue in more detail. In a nutshell, Pieper does not detect a "strategic plan" in Weimar Germany's minority policy⁵¹. As opposed to the *Third Reich* policy of a "revolutionary change of the Versailles order", Weimar foreign policy aimed at accomplishing "evolutionary" shifts⁵². Fink argues that Stresemann's minority policies were not motivated by expansionist goals but rather by political point-scoring against nationalistic anti-Weimar forces within Germany⁵³. According to Fink, Stresemann tended to mediate between gaining the approval of German public opinion and sending con-

47 Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht. Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland, 1914-1918* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1964), 862.

48 Hans Gatzke, *Stresemann and the rearmament of Germany* (Londres: John Hopkins Press, 1965), 113.

49 Henry Turner, "Stresemann und das Problem der Kontinuität in der deutschen Außenpolitik seit 1871" en *Grundfragen der deutschen Außenpolitik seit 1871*, ed. Gilbert Zieburra (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975), 289; Christian Höltjen, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 102-103.

50 Henry Turner, *Stresemann und das Problem der Kontinuität*, 296.

51 Helmut Pieper, *Die Minderheitenfrage und das Deutsche Reich, 1919-1933/34* (Hamburg: Institut für Internationale Angelegenheiten, 1974), 336.

52 Helmut Pieper, *Die Minderheitenfrage*, 338.

53 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 40.

ciliatory messages to the western allies. However, such a volatile course of action in minority issues would not be suitable for a revisionist policy towards the eastern frontier⁵⁴. Thus Fink and Pieper's analyses are not in accordance with Fischer's view of a continuation of expansionist German foreign policy in regard to Eastern Europe.

Furthermore, Krekeler investigates the very specific aspect of a system of subsidies granted to German minorities and administered by the *Auswärtiges Amt*. The author arrives at the conclusion that the partly secret network of Weimar political parties, parliamentarians, governmental bodies, and representatives of minorities: "was an essential precondition for the *Volksstumspolitik* of the Third Reich"⁵⁵. Thus Krekeler does not specifically construe a relationship between minority policies and territorial expansionism, but highlights the nexus of certain revisionist demands and the *Reich's* interest in perpetuating German cultural identity in parts of Poland.

Moreover, Schot investigates why Stresemann devoted a fair amount of his time in office to the minority issue, at a time when the *Reich* had a greater interest in attracting foreign capital by means of seeking a closer relationship with the western allies⁵⁶. The answer could again be found in domestic politics. According to Schot, Stresemann intended to weaken the *DNVP* – *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* (German National People's Party) by appealing to nationalistic sentiments⁵⁷. After the fall of Weimar, *Third Reich* policy quickly lost the moral standing gained in the Stresemann era⁵⁸.

Additionally, the most recent scholarly contribution to the issue of German minorities in Poland during the Weimar years deals very specifically with the minority protection system under the auspices of the League of Nations. Raitz von Frenzt investigates: "the question of whether the [minority protection system] failed due to its conceptual, institutional and procedural flaws or because of a deterioration of the political environ-

54 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 41.

55 Norbert Krekeler, *Revisionsanspruch*, 150; traducción propia.

56 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 250.

57 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 251.

58 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 258.

ment”⁵⁹. Furthermore, the author raises questions about: “how well [the minority protection system] responded to the double challenge posed by Polish integral nationalism and German revisionism”⁶⁰.

On a more general note, Krüger’s analysis of Weimar foreign policy is probably one of the most prolific studies published so far by a German scholar. Regarding attempts to revise Versailles, Krüger asks whether the avoidance of such a policy could have been a realistic expectation of any German government so soon after the war. Public hostility towards the settlement and the existence of stipulations demanded of the Weimar state created “political unity” amongst the German population⁶¹. Furthermore, Krüger strongly doubts claims that Stresemann would have pursued “a more active policy of revision towards the east” following the Rhineland occupation⁶².

Primary source material is drawn from British, German, and United States foreign office papers, papers from the *Reichskanzlei*, and transcripts of *Reichstag* debates, as well as newspaper publications.

3. MINORITY PROTECTION UNDER THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

On January 25th, 1919 delegates at the Paris Peace Conference called for the creation of the League of Nations. Proponents of the international organization trusted the League to ensure the execution of the peace treaties arrived at in Paris⁶³. According to the Versailles Treaty, one of the League’s responsibilities was to protect: “the educational, cultural, and religious rights of the German minorities in the new states in eastern Europe”⁶⁴. However, the treaty did not make special provisions on the minority issue, so that a further legal settlement between the allied powers and Po-

59 Christian Raitz von Frenzt, *A Lesson Forgotten: Minority Protection under the League of Nations, The Case of the German Minority in Poland, 1920-1934* (Hamburg: LIT, Arbeiten zur Geschichte Osteuropas, Vol 8, 1999), 2.

60 Christian Raitz von Frenzt, *A Lesson Forgotten*, 3.

61 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 80-81, traducción propia.

62 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 504, traducción propia.

63 Joachim Wintzer, *Deutschland und der Völkerbund*, 102.

64 Christoph Kimmich, *Germany and the League*, 23.

land would be required⁶⁵. Article 93 of the Versailles Treaty provided for that future arrangement⁶⁶.

The impossibility of assigning each nationality to a separate state had become clear, so that minorities were to enjoy guaranteed rights and protection⁶⁷. The League Covenant did not make any special provision for a minority protection system, but a set of treaties for the protection of minorities was concluded “in great haste at the end of the Peace Conference”⁶⁸ in 1919 and 1920, gearing the League towards acting as a power guaranteeing minority rights⁶⁹. The minority treaty with Poland was signed on June 28th, 1919. In the words of Woodrow Wilson, the aim of the Paris Peace Conference with regard to minorities was the attempt: “to make a peaceful settlement, [...], to eliminate those elements of disturbance, so far as possible, which may interfere with the peace of the world, and [...] to make an equitable distribution of territories according to the race, the ethnographical character of the people inhabiting those territories”⁷⁰. President Wilson continued by stating that: “nothing, [...], is more likely to disturb the peace of the world than the treatment which might [...] be meted out to minorities”⁷¹.

In a written communication to the German delegation, first Georges Clemenceau, French Prime Minister and President of the Peace Conference, highlighted the “special obligation” the war allies had to: “re-establish the Polish Nation in the independence of which it was unjustly deprived more than one hundred years ago”⁷². This highly ambitious claim alone was difficult to put into practice successfully. One French diplomat explained

65 Helmut Pieper, *Die Minderheitenfrage*, 6.

66 The Avalon Project. Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. *Tratado de Versailles, 28 de junio de 1919, Sección XIII, Artículo 93* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2014), consultado el 02 de junio de 2014, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/partiii.asp>.

67 Helmut Pieper, *Die Minderheitenfrage*, 5.

68 Christian Rätz von Frentz, *A Lesson Forgotten*, 1.

69 Joachim Wintzer, *Deutschland und der Völkerbund*, 108.

70 Woodrow Wilson, “President Wilson’s Speech at the Plenary Session of the Peace Conference, 31 de mayo de 1919” en *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris, Vol. V, Economic Reconstruction and Protection of Minorities*, ed. Harold Temperley (Londres: Henry Frowde and Hodder & Stoughton, 1921), 130.

71 Woodrow Wilson, *President Wilson’s Speech*, 130.

72 “FRUS”, *Vol VI, 16 de junio de 1919*, 945.

that the inhabitants “[were] very mixed as was usual in Central and Eastern Europe”, adding that: “the frontier adopted [...] gave the Poles less than they asked for”⁷³. Thus the territorial settlement arrived at would neither satisfy the Poles nor their western neighbours⁷⁴. To Stresemann, finding a settlement of the German-Polish frontier issue was: “probably the most important challenge of European politics”⁷⁵.

Stressing the “endeavours and sacrifices” of the western powers that led to the creation of Poland, as well as the vital role those powers would in future times assume regarding her security, Clemenceau articulated his strong conviction that minority issues are best placed in the hands of the League of Nations, as opposed to remaining the western powers’ sole responsibility⁷⁶. Hence, article 12 of the Polish minority treaty⁷⁷ firstly, decoupled the protection of minorities from the political interests of a single power, and secondly, placed the issue into the arena of international politics⁷⁸. The minority treaty was to be inextricably linked to the “establishment of the Polish State”⁷⁹ and to act as a cornerstone of peaceful relations among European nations⁸⁰.

The Poles saw a special minority treaty such as was drawn up by the war allies as meddling with Polish domestic politics⁸¹ and an “[infringement] on their sovereignty”⁸². The treaty was seen to be motivated by political rather than judicial, or even idealistic, considerations⁸³. In 1921 Temperley noted that, unlike Poland, Germany “was [not] subjected to an invidious

73 “FRUS”, *Vol IV, 19 de marzo de 1919*, 413; Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 114.

74 Ralph Schattkowsky, *Deutschland und Polen von 1918/19 bis 1925* (Fráncfort del Meno: Peter Lang, 1994), 59.

75 “ADAP”, *Serie B, II, i, no. 150*, 19 de abril de 1926, 363; traducción propia.

76 Georges Clemenceau, “Letter of Clemenceau to Paderewski, 24 de junio de 1919”, en *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris, Vol. V, Economic Reconstruction and Protection of Minorities*, ed. Harold Temperley (Londres: Henry Frowde and Hodder & Stoughton, 1921), 434.

77 “Poland Minorities Treaty, 28 de junio de 1919”, en *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris, Vol. V, Economic Reconstruction and Protection of Minorities*, ed. Harold Temperley (Londres: Henry Frowde and Hodder & Stoughton, 1921), 442.

78 Helmut Pieper, *Die Minderheitenfrage*, 9.

79 Harold Temperley, *The Treaties for the Protection*, 133.

80 Helmut Pieper, *Die Minderheitenfrage*, 8.

81 Christoph Kimmich, *Germany and the League*, 132.

82 Christoph Kimmich, *Germany and the League*, 132; Christian Raitz von Frenztz, *A Lesson Forgotten*, 35.

83 Helmut Pieper, *Die Minderheitenfrage*, 7.

control of its internal affairs”⁸⁴, even though a minority of 1.2 million people, most of them Poles and Danes, resided in Germany⁸⁵. The loss of territory: “had virtually eliminated [Germany’s] internal minorities”⁸⁶. Moreover, there was no minority treaty with Italy, despite the presence of a German minority in South Tyrol, for instance⁸⁷.

Consequently, it could be argued that the Poles were justified in speculating about the double standards applied by the war allies. At the same time, Polish: “sovereignty [...] depended on the co-operation of the great powers”⁸⁸. However, if a more peaceful Europe was to be created, the protection of minorities could not simply remain a laudable goal, but needed to be based on a judicial framework that would provide the minorities with an appropriate venue to express their grievances. Moreover, placing the protection of Germans in Poland onto the international, rather than a bilateral, agenda⁸⁹ by means of a treaty was welcomed in Germany⁹⁰ and meant: “a new era in minority rights”⁹¹. A minority treaty had essentially to strike: “the delicate balance between legitimate leadership and hegemonic imposition [casting] doubts on the practicality of collective security in principle”⁹².

Interestingly, commenting on the proceedings of the Paris Peace Conference in more general terms, a high-ranking British official criticised the American delegation in particular for “developing utopian plans” for Europe⁹³. The statement expressed a sense of bitterness felt over the ill-suited nature of some arrangements arrived at after the war and the state of European affairs during the 1920s generally.

A case in point was the inconsistent application of the Wilsonian “self-de-

84 Harold Temperley, *The Treaties for the Protection*, 141.

85 Joachim Wintzer, *Deutschland und der Völkerbund*, 109.

86 Carole Fink, *Defender of Minorities*, 332.

87 Helmut Pieper, *Die Minderheitenfrage*, 7.

88 Christian Raitz von Frentz, *A Lesson Forgotten*, 66.

89 Helmut Pieper, *Die Minderheitenfrage*, 9.

90 Joachim Wintzer, *Deutschland und der Völkerbund*, 108.

91 Carole Fink, *Defender of Minorities*, 332.

92 Christian Raitz von Frentz, *A Lesson Forgotten*, 6.

93 “ADAP”, *Serie B, I, i, no. 173*, 19 de marzo de 1926, 421; traducción propia.

termination principle”, as was the case with large parts of the German minority in Poland, for instance⁹⁴. Moreover, the minority issue was “left [...] with a fatal legacy” following the American refusal to ratify the peace settlement⁹⁵. According to a British diplomat, European political and economic reconstruction depended on American power⁹⁶. America’s war allies accepted “a little local suffering”⁹⁷ of minorities as a result: “of the new order in Eastern Europe”⁹⁸.

It should be emphasized that Germany did not become a member of the League of Nations until September 1926. Hence Weimar governments could not participate in League procedures, including the minority issue, and pursued: “a defensive [...] policy on minorities”⁹⁹. The allied powers had already given assurances to Germany over the protection of minorities¹⁰⁰. Poland, on the other hand, had been a founding member of the League and had fought hard for a permanent council seat¹⁰¹. Fink claims that Britain and France backed: “Poland’s application for a permanent Council seat to neutralize Germany’s presence”¹⁰². However, a British diplomat directly disputed Fink’s analysis. Tyrrell argued that France supported the Polish bid, so that Germany and her eastern neighbour could cooperate in the League and free France from the responsibility of arguing on Poland’s behalf¹⁰³.

Minorities were provided with the opportunity to raise awareness of mistreatment by means of a system of petitions that could be addressed to a council member state¹⁰⁴. Article 12 of the minority treaty with Poland stipulated that “any Member of the Council of the League of Nations

94 Christian Raitz von Frenzt, *A Lesson Forgotten*, 35.

95 Christian Raitz von Frenzt, *A Lesson Forgotten*, 72.

96 “ADAP”, *Serie B, I, i, no. 173*, 19 de marzo de 1926, 421.

97 Geza Paikert, “Hungary’s National Minority Policies, 1920-1945”, *American Slavic and East European Review* 12:2 (1953): 210-218, como citado en Carole Fink, *Defender of Minorities*, 335.

98 Carole Fink, *Defender of Minorities*, 335.

99 Christoph Kimmich, *Germany and the League*, 135.

100 Helmut Pieper, *Die Minderheitenfrage*, 10.

101 Christoph Kimmich, *Germany and the League*, 78.

102 Carole Fink, *Defender of Minorities*, 338.

103 “ADAP”, *Serie B, I, i, no. 173*, Tyrrell al embajador alemán en Londres *Sthamer*, 19 de marzo de 1926, 419.

104 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 7.

shall have the right to bring to the attention of the Council any infraction, or any danger of infraction”¹⁰⁵ of a minority’s rights. The petition system’s procedures were criticised for alleged secrecy¹⁰⁶, and international opinion strongly doubted the League’s ability to act as a guardian of minorities¹⁰⁷.

Furthermore, officials of a League member state “[having] an immediate [...] interest in a particular minority dispute” were barred from participating in a council session on such a minority issue¹⁰⁸. The League’s General Secretary Sir E. Drummond communicated the unwelcome council decision to the Secretary of State in the *Auswärtiges Amt*, von Schubert¹⁰⁹. Hence the council placed a limit on German influence in December 1925 shortly before the *Weimar Republic* entered the League¹¹⁰. From Stresemann’s point of view, this was proof of the allies’ “fear” regarding future German membership¹¹¹. Furthermore, consonant with minority representatives, Germany supported notions of cultural autonomy coupled with loyalty towards the new homeland, as opposed to the policy of minority assimilation clearly favoured by the western allies¹¹².

The minority groups soon called for a stronger role for their representatives¹¹³. The League Secretariat denied demands to that effect; the minority treaty would not cover such forms of participation¹¹⁴. Moreover, minority representatives were not granted the same legal status as possessed by a state¹¹⁵. Hence, German minorities would almost inevitably have to turn to the Weimar government in order to increase their influence on the dealings of the League¹¹⁶.

105 “Poland Minorities Treaty, 28 de junio de 1919”, 442.

106 Harald von Riekhoff, *German-Polish Relations*, 224.

107 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 10.

108 Harald von Riekhoff, *German-Polish Relations*, 224.

109 “DBFP”, *Serie 1A, I, no. 276*, 16 de febrero de 1926, 438-439.

110 “Britain and France reach agreement on Disarmament”, *The New York Times*, Nueva York, NY, 10 de diciembre de 1925.

111 “ADAP”, *Serie B, I, i, Anexo II*, 14 de diciembre de 1925, 751; traducción propia.

112 “ADAP”, *Serie B, II, i, no. 21*, 73-74; “Akten der Reichskanzlei, Weimarer Republik, Das Kabinett Müller II”, *1, no. 137, note 3*, Boppard, Rin, Alemania: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1970, 452-453.

113 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 12.

114 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 12.

115 Helmut Pieper, *Die Minderheitenfrage*, 13.

116 Helmut Pieper, *Die Minderheitenfrage*, 13.

4. GERMANY IN THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Having established the key tenets of the international minority protection system, I now analyse the steps Germany took on becoming a member of the League.

In early February 1926 the German cabinet unanimously agreed on a note to apply for entry into the League of Nations¹¹⁷. Called the self-styled “protector of minorities”¹¹⁸ by the *New York Times* in December 1925, Germany entered the League nine months later. Membership was pursued “despite [...] resistance abroad”¹¹⁹ and domestic opposition during a *Reichstag* debate in November 1925¹²⁰, as well as reservations voiced in the Free State of Bavaria and a number of other *Länder*¹²¹. In a similar vein, the right-wing German press accused Stresemann of an “uncontrolled” rush into the League¹²².

One needs to bear in mind the importance of the League of Nations, for the international organization was designed as the venue at which to settle minority issues¹²³. Stresemann realized the advantages League membership would yield for German foreign policy and his own standing in the domestic political arena. “[W]hen wielded skilfully and with restraint”, the minority issue would present Germany as a proponent of “Wilsonianism” as well as strengthen the badly needed sense of political unity within the Weimar system¹²⁴.

Stresemann was optimistic about the opportunities German membership

117 Henry Bernhard, *Gustav Stresemann – Vermächtnis, Vol II, Das Eintritts-Ersuchen* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1932), 557.

118 “Britain and France reach agreement on Disarmament”, *The New York Times*, Nueva York, NY, 10 de diciembre de 1925.

119 Carole Fink, *Defender of Minorities*, 338.

120 “Verhandlungen des Reichstages”, *Sesión 124, Vol 388*, 24 de noviembre de 1925, 4496, archivo en línea.

121 Henry Bernhard, *Gustav Stresemann – Vermächtnis, Vol II, Bayrische Bedenken* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1932), 557.

122 Joachim Wintzer, *Deutschland und der Völkerbund*, 495.

123 Jonathan Wright, *Gustav Stresemann*, 466.

124 Carole Fink, *Stresemann’s Minority Policies*, 407-408.

would provide for the settlement of the minority issue and made ample use of the argument to convince and persuade the electorate¹²⁵. Only by participation in the League could Germany contribute to the transformation of European politics¹²⁶. This could only be in the interest of the Germans living outside the *Reich's* frontiers¹²⁷.

Stresemann confidently expressed such optimism during an applauded speech to minority representatives in December 1925¹²⁸. The Foreign Secretary and *DVP* leader wisely used such occasions to gain: “support for his policy against attacks from the *DNVP* (German National People's Party)”¹²⁹. It is interesting to note that the high-ranking *DNVP* politician, Alfred Hugenberg, had himself lived and worked in Poznan in pre-war times¹³⁰. However, Wintzer does not fully share Stresemann's optimism, as “effective support for minorities” was only possible with a permanent seat on the council¹³¹.

Having joined the League, Germany took a back seat with respect to the minority problem and thus partly retreated from the role of protector of minorities. The *Auswärtiges Amt* had been urged by the British Foreign Secretary to adhere to this policy for the time being and to build trust instead¹³². Stresemann's rather passive stance towards the minority issue enabled him to achieve “cordial relations with his Council colleagues”, including those of “Minority States”¹³³. Whilst close relations with other representatives were definitely advantageous, German diplomats did not often encounter colleagues as well informed as themselves about minority issues¹³⁴.

125 Joachim Wintzer, *Deutschland und der Völkerbund*, 441.

126 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 150.

127 “ADAP”, *Serie B, I, i, Anexo II*, ‘Rede Dr. Stresemanns vor der Arbeitsgemeinschaft deutscher Landsmannschaften in Gross-Berlin’, 14 de diciembre de 1925, 746.

128 “ADAP”, *Serie B, I, i, Anexo II*, 751-752.

129 Jonathan Wright, *Gustav Stresemann*, 343.

130 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 89.

131 Joachim Wintzer, *Deutschland und der Völkerbund*, 109; traducción propia.

132 “DBFP”, *Serie I A, I, no. 245*, *Chamberlain to D'Abernon*, 04 de febrero de 1926, 399.

133 Carole Fink, *Defender of Minorities*, 340.

134 Joachim Wintzer, *Deutschland und der Völkerbund*, 117.

The *Auswärtiges Amt* had already begun to devise a system of “clandestine subsidies”¹³⁵ supporting German minorities in Poland before Stresemann’s tenure¹³⁶. Moreover, the German Foreign Office had to struggle with the Home Office over the competencies regarding adequate financial support for German schools, associations, and newspapers that were primary propaganda tools¹³⁷. Any dependence of German minorities on the Polish State or Polish banks had to be avoided, so that the minority remained a strong force enabling the *Auswärtiges Amt* to continue to demand territorial revision¹³⁸. The existence of a robust German presence would also help to undermine the Polish State¹³⁹. The German Foreign Office managed to create secret organizations, as well as the so-called *Hollandsche Buitenbank* in the economically stable Netherlands to channel financial support to the ceded territories¹⁴⁰. Minority associations such as the *Deutsche Stiftung* acted within the *Reich* to coordinate activities¹⁴¹.

Motivated also by domestic policy objectives, Stresemann turned his attention to bringing an end to the French-led occupation of the Rhineland¹⁴² that was to ensure Germany met her reparations obligations¹⁴³. The British diplomat G.N. Barnes had already predicted in 1919 that: “[t]he French soldiery are probably the least suitable persons [...] to occupy German territory”¹⁴⁴. Stresemann did not, however, rest in his attempts to tackle the minority problem. He faced further resistance from the *Land* of Prussia over the issue of granting cultural autonomy to the mostly Polish minority groups living inside the *Reich*; the struggle would drag on until December 1928¹⁴⁵. Stresemann hoped to lead the minority cause by “[setting] a good

135 Jonathan Wright, *Gustav Stresemann*, 466.

136 Norbert Krekeler, *Revisionsanspruch*, 41.

137 Norbert Krekeler, *Revisionsanspruch*, 44-46.

138 Norbert Krekeler, *Revisionsanspruch*, 46; John Hiden, “The Weimar Republic and the Problem of the Auslandsdeutsche”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 12:2 (1977): 278.

139 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 305.

140 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 174, 177.

141 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 177.

142 Jonathan Wright, *Gustav Stresemann*, 466; Carole Fink, *Defender of Minorities*, 339-340.

143 Christoph Kimmich, *Germany and the League*, 118.

144 “FRUS”, *Appendix V to CF-61, Vol VI*, 10 de junio de 1919, 343.

145 Carole Fink, *Stresemann’s Minority Policies*, 407.

example”¹⁴⁶ thus gaining international credibility¹⁴⁷.

By 1928, the German government had become the object of criticism due to its allegedly tentative attempts to make headway on the minority problem¹⁴⁸. Stresemann relied for domestic political support on progress in this issue¹⁴⁹. The League had received numerous petitions from both German and Polish minority representatives and a new procedure was sought to deal with the difficult task of settling disputes in the League¹⁵⁰. Tensions between Germany and Poland finally erupted at the December 1928 assembly meeting¹⁵¹. Reacting to a rather harsh speech by the Polish Foreign Secretary August Zaleski, Stresemann: “[pounded] his fists on the Council table”¹⁵².

Fink claims that: “[t]he *Faustschlag* marked the close of Germany’s apprentice period in the League, and nineteen twenty-nine became known as ‘the year of minorities’”¹⁵³. Stresemann proposed a “reform of existing League procedures” and demanded greater involvement of minority representatives¹⁵⁴. The Council did not follow the Weimar Foreign Secretary’s suggestions, however¹⁵⁵. Conversely, members of his own staff regarded their superior’s intervention as a positive step because the minority issue had to be pursued further, so that eventually a degree of territorial revision could be achieved¹⁵⁶. Stresemann claimed his outburst was motivated by his initial hopes for the upcoming conclusion of a trade treaty that would have improved German-Polish relations¹⁵⁷. Stresemann committed himself to act as Foreign Secretary until the minority problem was settled¹⁵⁸.

146 Carole Fink, *Stresemann’s Minority Policies*, 406.

147 Auswärtiges Amt, *No. VI a. 65/25*, B. 2089, *Anexo*, ‘Die außenpolitische Notwendigkeit einer den Bedürfnissen der deutschen Minderheiten in Europa entsprechende Regelung des Minderheitenrechts innerhalb des Reiches’, como citado en Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 292.

148 Jonathan Wright, *Gustav Stresemann*, 467.

149 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 181.

150 Carole Fink, *Stresemann’s Minority Policies*, 410.

151 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 210.

152 Carole Fink, *Stresemann’s Minority Policies*, 410.

153 Carole Fink, *Stresemann’s Minority Policies*, 412.

154 Jonathan Wright, *Gustav Stresemann*, 470.

155 Jonathan Wright, *Gustav Stresemann*, 471.

156 “ADAP”, *Serie B, XI, no. 73, note 4*, 15 de febrero de 1929, 146.

157 “ADAP”, *Serie B, X, Anexo II, presumiblemente redactado por Stresemann a finales de diciembre de 1928*, 612.

158 Henry Bernhard, *Gustav Stresemann – Vermächtnis*, Vol III (Berlin: Ullstein, 1933), 438.

Minority representatives received the *Faustschlag* (punch) gesture very positively¹⁵⁹. However, in January 1929 Kurt Tucholsky wondered whether Stresemann's emphatic gesture had actually won him a victory, as his primary goal should have been to impress the representatives at the League and not the German public¹⁶⁰. Moreover, the German press gave a rather cold reception to Stresemann's efforts at the Council meeting in March 1928; the negotiations were reported to have been "depressing"¹⁶¹. Yet, the mood in the *Auswärtiges Amt* improved because Stresemann's more forceful efforts in the League would at least for some time weaken the "radical nationalistic opposition"¹⁶².

5. THE GERMAN MINORITY IN POLAND

The importance of German membership in the League and the difficulties arising from domestic, as well as foreign, policy constraints, is clear from the previous discussion. Now the experiences of German minorities under Polish rule require our attention in order to bring specific issues regarding the minority problem to light. German minority groups inhabited the areas of the so-called *Polish Corridor*, Upper Silesia, as well as the former Austrian Galicia and Congress Poland. The fate of the German minority in the *Corridor* was the most controversial, however, because the group was: "the most vocal and active of all in its revisionist demands"¹⁶³.

We learn from the case of the village of Damerau how embittered the inhabitants were about what they regarded as a violation of the principle of self-determination proclaimed at Versailles¹⁶⁴. The new Polish government took actions primarily aimed at reducing the cultural and economic foundation of the village population¹⁶⁵. According to Duwe's account of the history of Damerau, relations between Poles and Germans were not

159 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 212.

160 Kurt Tucholsky, "Ein Betrunkenener in der Wilhelmstraße", *Die Weltbühne*, Berlin, 01 de enero de 1929, 13.

161 "Die Minderheitenfrage vor dem Völkerbundsrat", *Nation und Staat – Deutsche Zeitung für das europäische Minderheitenproblem*, Berlin, abril de 1929, 441.

162 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 213.

163 Harald von Riekhoff, *German-Polish Relations*, 206.

164 Albrecht Duwe, *Damerau*, 114.

165 Albrecht Duwe, *Damerau*, 112.

particularly bitter. However, political decisions taken by the Polish government deeply troubled the German population¹⁶⁶. In fact, by 1922 about two thirds of Germans from the former West Prussia and Poznanian had left for the *Reich*¹⁶⁷.

It is necessary to provide a brief account of developments in Upper Silesia. The future of the area was also heavily and bitterly contested mainly due to its economic importance since: “23 percent of the total coal output of the German Empire [had been produced]” in the area¹⁶⁸. Following a plebiscite, Upper Silesia was partitioned into the German (Western Upper Silesia) and the Polish (Eastern Upper Silesia). Under international pressure, the opposing sides agreed to sign the Geneva Protocol on Upper Silesia (1922)¹⁶⁹. The Polish right to exercise their culture and language freely in Western Upper Silesia was thus guaranteed¹⁷⁰.

During a German foreign affairs select committee session in 1926, a Centre Party parliamentarian from Western Upper Silesia, Carl Ullitzka, claimed that the German minority would like to be loyal citizens to the Polish State provided they could practice their culture freely¹⁷¹. Equally, however, Ullitzka described the hardship suffered by the German minority, and the effects of strong Polish propaganda in the run-up to elections¹⁷². The Minority Treaty between the allies and Poland was meant to guarantee the rights of Germans in Eastern Upper Silesia¹⁷³, which included raising awareness of mistreatment: “*directly* to the League Council”¹⁷⁴. Von Riekhoff

166 Albrecht Duwe, *Damerau*, 115.

167 Norbert Krekler, *Revisionsanspruch*, 48.

168 “FRUS”, *Vol XI*, 03 de junio de 1919, 207; Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 134.

169 Harald von Riekhoff, *German-Polish Relations*, 49.

170 Joachim Wintzer, *Deutschland und der Völkerbund*, 108-109.

171 “Geheimer Rat Dr. Quarck, Bayerische Gesandtschaft in Berlin, an das Bayerische Staatsministerium des Äußeren in München, Betreff: Auswärtiger Ausschuß des Reichtags”, 27 de noviembre de 1926, en Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Múnich, Abt. Geheimes Staatsarchiv; Politische Berichte, Múnich, Alemania.

172 “Geheimer Rat Dr. Quarck, Bayerische Gesandtschaft in Berlin, an das Bayerische Staatsministerium des Äußeren in München, Betreff: Auswärtiger Ausschuß des Reichtags”, 27 de noviembre de 1926, en Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Múnich, Abt. Geheimes Staatsarchiv; Politische Berichte, Múnich, Alemania.

173 Harald von Riekhoff, *German-Polish Relations*, 49.

174 Carole Fink, *Defender of Minorities*, 340.

concludes that: “[never] in an international treaty had so much attention been paid to the human element involved”¹⁷⁵.

6. UNDERLYING TENSIONS: AGRARIAN VS. INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY AND THE GERMAN MINORITY PROBLEM

It has been noted that the presence of a strong and influential German minority in the new state of Poland was of vital interest to the *Weimar Republic*. According to Raitz von Frentz: “the size of a minority not only determined its electoral success but also its entitlement to public funds and, on an international level, its visibility and ability to attract foreign support”¹⁷⁶. The problem of Germans migrating from the agricultural east to the country’s more industrialised western zones had already become apparent before the outbreak of World War One¹⁷⁷. During the early Weimar period, matters had deteriorated to the extent that the refugees from the east had to be supplied with financial support¹⁷⁸. The measure that was intended to ease the integration into a new life in the *Reich* resulted only in attracting further German migration from the ceded territories¹⁷⁹.

In pre-war times, the Prussian authorities offered incentives for new settlements in the eastern part of the *Reich*¹⁸⁰. A French representative at the Paris Peace Conference confirmed such efforts; while speaking of an area north of Poznan, Cambon described the incentives: as “intense German colonization that had been pursued of late years”¹⁸¹. The policies included practices such as: “forcible expropriation of the Poles”¹⁸².

From their strongholds in the German east, conservative political circles posed a continuous threat to the Weimar state of which the *Kapp-Putsch*

175 Carole Fink, *Defender of Minorities*, 340.

176 Christian Raitz von Frentz, *A Lesson Forgotten*, 35.

177 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 306.

178 Norbert Krekeler, *Revisionsanspruch*, 48.

179 Norbert Krekeler, *Revisionsanspruch*, 48.

180 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 306.

181 “FRUS”, *Vol IV*, 19 de marzo de 1919, 413.

182 “FRUS”, *Vol IV*, 19 de marzo de 1919, 413.

(1920) and the *Oststaat-Projekt* (1919)¹⁸³ serve as examples¹⁸⁴. Consecutive Weimar governments subsidised the owners of large agricultural estates, including those situated in the Polish territories after the war¹⁸⁵. A case in point was Stresemann's proposal of large-scale subsidies for East Prussia to prevent Germans from leaving the province and to strengthen agriculture¹⁸⁶. However, such financial support did not necessarily reach German farmers in small communities whose position was further weakened by Polish land reforms¹⁸⁷. Republican administrations attempted to shield themselves from right wing critics by means of subsidies. Weimar representatives were accused of having given up the claim to West Prussia, as well as Poznan¹⁸⁸, and in more general terms of pursuing a policy of fulfilment.

The challenge of encouraging settlements in the east could be regarded as a predicament brought about by modernity¹⁸⁹. Was Germany to become, first and foremost, an industrial society, or would the *Weimar Republic* benefit from a stronger focus on agriculture?¹⁹⁰ Decreasing levels of imports by promoting domestic agricultural activities was a policy proposed to undermine the cause of industrialisation and to increase the *Reich's* self-sufficiency¹⁹¹. Hence claims could be furthered to territory along Germany's eastern border that was ideal for agricultural cultivation and settlement¹⁹².

According to Krüger, however, assisting Polish attempts at industrialisation would have provided the German minority with an incentive to actually remain in the newly created state of Poland¹⁹³. Germany's bargaining power vis-à-vis Poland would thus have increased. In this context, it is

183 Ralph Schattkowsky, *Deutschland und Polen*, 69-80.

184 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 251.

185 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 251.

186 "ADAP", *Serie B, X, Anexo II, presumiblemente redactado por Stresemann a finales de diciembre de 1928*, 613.

187 Albrecht Duwe, *Damerau*, 118.

188 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat?*, 252.

189 Detlev Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 87-91.

190 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 306.

191 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 469.

192 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 469.

193 Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik*, 306.

interesting to note that the *Auswärtiges Amt* speculated that in April 1926 a peaceful settlement regarding the frontier question could only be brought about in case Poland found herself in severe economic and financial difficulties¹⁹⁴.

CONCLUSION

When examining any aspect of Weimar foreign policy, one is confronted with a set of complex political issues arising from the horrendous events of World War One and its direct aftermath. The German parliamentary democratic system was to suffer from numerous changes of administration and a whole set of other political, economic, social, and cultural issues had to be resolved. The revision of parts of the Paris Peace Conference agreements stipulating the loss of territory, industrial capacity, and the payment of reparations presented itself as a key task for any Weimar government.

Germany's relationship with her new eastern neighbour played a decisive role in foreign policy considerations, for the chances of revision of the German-Polish frontier were seen by many in German society as an opportunity to regain a position of strength. The practicality of the peace settlement's outcome regarding the former German territories that would become part of the Polish State was called into question. The right to self-determination was in fact not granted to the German minority in Poland and both Germans and Poles attacked the minority protection system on numerous occasions.

Gustav Stresemann's tenure as Foreign Secretary gains special significance owing to the unusually long period of time he served in various administrations, as well as a set of policies that remain highly contested until, this day. What were Stresemann's actual goals and how did he set out to achieve them? Fischer clearly sees him as envisaging German expansionist plans leading to the horrors of the *Third Reich*. However, this paper

194 "ADAP", *Serie B, II, i, no. 150*, 19 de abril de 1926, 363.

paints a far more complex picture. It is very difficult to establish the true nature of Stresemann's plans for Germany's role in Eastern Europe, but they were surely more multifaceted than an outright revision of the German-Polish frontier for which the minority problem would simply provide an instrument.

Doubtless, under Stresemann's leadership Germany sought accommodation with Britain and France with the intention of reaching a settlement over the Rhineland and the reparations question. Moreover, policy issues were deeply interconnected both in domestic and foreign politics. Stresemann had to rely on public approval, as well as the goodwill of the western allies, and this might explain why he refused to push for a swift settlement of the minority problem whilst showing increased interest at other times. As a matter of fact, he led Germany into the League for he realised that the minority issue might be settled in international, rather than bilateral, negotiations.

There is evidence to suggest the existence of the well-engineered network maintained by the *Auswärtiges Amt* to secretly channel subsidies to the German minority. That could have been designed for two reasons: to weaken the Polish State from within so to extract concessions, or to mitigate the political influence of anti-Weimar parties. This paper has presented several sources for both assumptions. However, authorities under the *Third Reich* would potentially be able to abuse the secret apparatus.

The overall effectiveness of the international minority protection system under the League of Nations can be called into question, although the intention of settling minority disputes through peaceful negotiation was laudable. Also, Germany was provided with a venue to express minority grievances, but Stresemann failed to dispel Polish fears of German attempts at frontier revision. However, the minority problem clearly shows that Germany had to confront a historical dilemma in that the agricultural East together with its socio-economic and political power structures in particular had to be accommodated to an emerging, modern, and increasingly industrialised society.

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