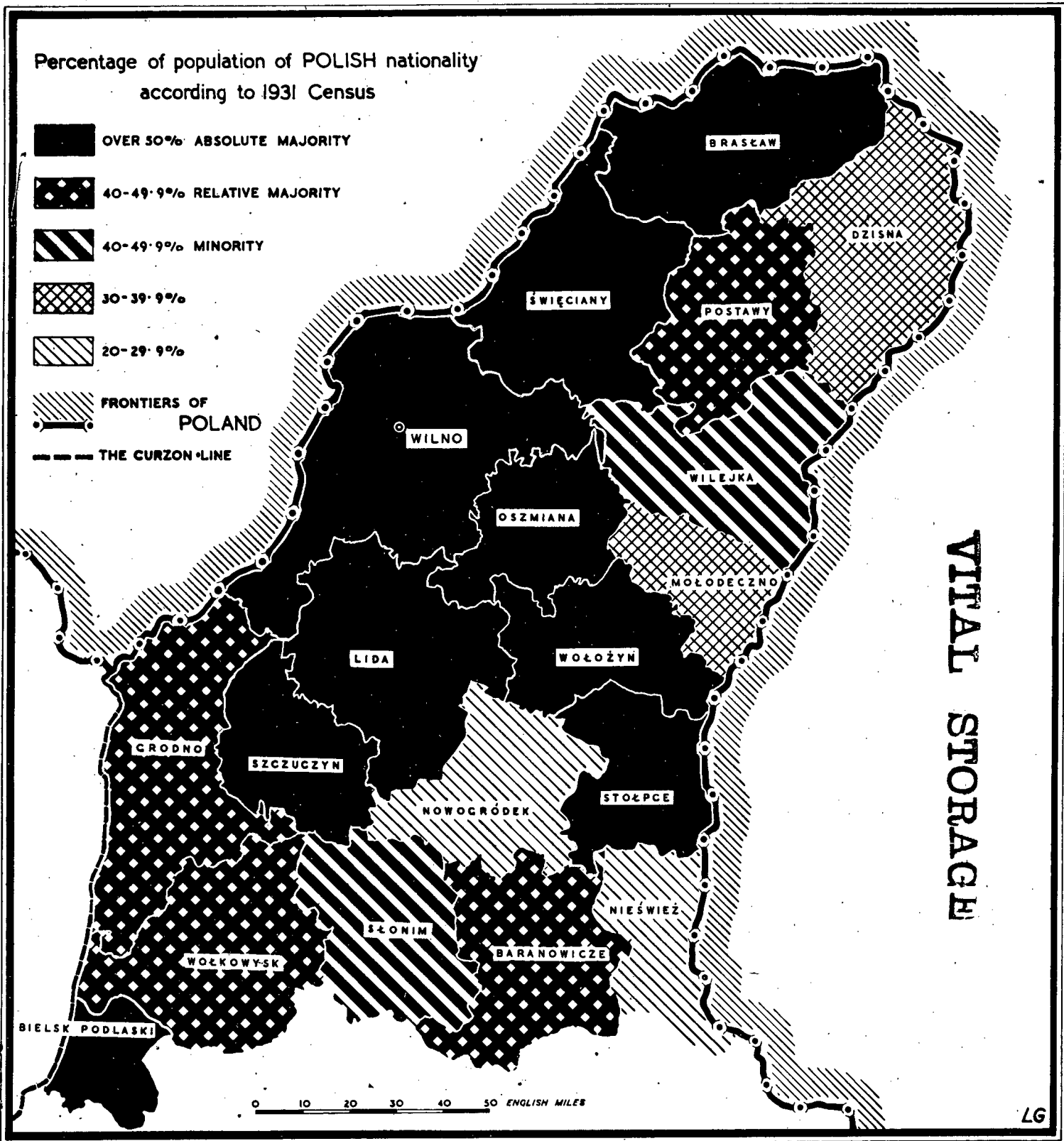


WILNO AND NORTH-EASTERN POLAND



London, March 1944.

WILNO AND NORTH-EASTERN POLANDWilno Is not a Polish "Island"

The opinion that Wilno is merely a Polish "island" surrounded by areas with a majority of White Ruthenian /or Lithuanian/ population does not correspond with the truth. Wilno lies in a country which possesses a Polish majority and which is ethnically closely bound to the main body of the Polish nation.

The area with indisputably Polish majority extends like a belt from Białystok /situated west from the "Curzon Line"/ north-eastwards to the Dvina River and it embraces the north-eastern part of the Białystok Province /the city of Grodno and its region/, the larger part of the Wilno Province including the city of Wilno, as well as a large portion of the Province of Nowogródek.

According to the census of the population in 1931 the situation as regards nationalities in the provinces of Wilno and Nowogródek was as follows :

	<u>Province of Wilno</u>	<u>Province of Nowogródek</u>
Poles	59.7 %	52.4 %
White Ruthenians	22.7 "	39.1 "
Jews	8.5 "	7.3 "
Lithuanians	5.2 "	0.0 "
Russians	3.4 "	0.7 "
Other and undeclared nationalities	0.5 "	0.5 "

The western and central counties of both provinces show a particularly high percentage of Poles. First on the list comes the county Wilno-Troki /84.2 per cent Poles and 7.9 per cent Lithuanians/, then follow the counties of Szczuczyn /83.5 per cent Poles and no Lithuanians/; Oszmiana /81.2 per cent Poles, 1.5 per cent Lithuanians/; Lida /79.4 per cent Poles, and 1.3 per cent Lithuanians/; Wołożyn /66.4 per cent Poles and no Lithuanians/; Brasław /65.5 per cent Poles and 2.4 per cent Lithuanians/; Święciany /50.2 per cent Poles and 31.5 per cent Lithuanians/. In the city of Wilno itself the Poles represented 65.9 per cent of the total population in 1931, while the remainder were mostly Jews whereas the number of Lithuanians /0.8 per cent/ and of White Ruthenians /0.9 per cent/ was quite negligible.

For the counties situated farther east, the 1931 census demonstrated the absolute majority of Polish population in the county of Stolpce /52.2 per cent/; in other counties of the Wilno and Nowogródek provinces the Poles represented either a relative majority or an important minority. The relative majority of Poles lived in the counties of Postawy /48.0 per cent/ and Baranowicze /46.5 per cent/.

In that part of Wilno Province /including the city of Wilno/ which the Soviet illegally ceded to Lithuania following the agreement signed on October 10th, 1939, the proportion of nationalities according to the 1931 census was :

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<u>Total population</u>	489.000		
Poles	337.000	i.e.	69.0 %
Jews	66.000	"	13.5 "
Lithuanians	55.000	"	11.3 "
Russians	16.000	"	3.2 "
White Ruthenians	12.000	"	2.4 "
Other and undeclared nationalities	3.000	"	0.6 "

At the end of August 1939, that is to say, on the outbreak of war, the respective figures were, according to an estimate, as follows:

<u>Total population</u>	537.000		
Poles	371.000	i.e.	69.2 %
Jews	71.000	"	13.1 "
Lithuanians	61.000	"	11.3 "
Russians	17.000	"	3.3 "
White Ruthenians	14.000	"	2.5 "
Other and undeclared nationalities	3.000	"	0.6 "

These figures demonstrate clearly how contrary to that territory's actual ethnical structure was its "cession" by the Soviet to Lithuania which soon afterwards was itself incorporated into the USSR as the Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republic. The Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Molotov, in his speech at the 5th Session of the Supreme Council of the USSR on October 31st, 1939, admitted, that:

"The Soviet Union decided to hand over the city of Wilno to the Lithuanian Republic not because it is inhabited by a Lithuanian majority. No, - Wilno has a majority of non-Lithuanian population".

Statistics compiled in 1916 and 1918 by German authorities of occupation unfavourable to Poland proved beyond doubt the existence of a majority of Polish inhabitants in the whole stretch of land extending from the country of Grodno and embracing a large portion of the Wilno and Nowogródek provinces. The aim of those authorities was to create a Lithuanian vassal Kingdom with Wilno as its capital. The following are the results of the German census /the administrative division of that period does not completely correspond with the present one/ :

<u>County</u>	<u>Poles</u>	<u>Lithuanians</u>	<u>Jews</u>	<u>Various</u>
Grodno-county	78.1 %	2.4 %	11.7 "	7.8 %
Grodno-city	31.1 "	0.5 "	63.7 "	4.7 "
Raduń x/	87.4 "	7.9 "	3.9 "	0.8 "
Wasiliszki x/	57.8 "	0.9 "	10.2 "	31.1 "
Wilno-county	89.8 "	4.3 "	4.3 "	1.6 "
Wilno-city	50.2 "	2.6 "	43.5 "	3.7 "
Podbrodzie x/	72.1 "	10.2 "	9.3 "	11.8 "

The results of this census came as a complete surprise to the German authorities. Captain von Beckerath wrote in his report to the German High Command on January 3rd, 1917:

"The importance of the Polish element both numerically, politically and economically was underestimated in Berlin. Russian official statistics... do not comply with the requirements of modern science and certainly have been distorted to the disadvantage of the Poles, whose real strength thus became more apparent".

x/ Counties of Raduń and Wasiliszki were later included in the Lida county of the Nowogródek Province; the county of Podbrodzie became a part of the Święciany county of the Wilno Province.

xx/ Including 26.9 per cent of White Ruthenians.

xxx/ Including 6.8 per cent of White Ruthenians.

According to another census carried out by the German occupying authorities two years later in 1918, the Polish population in the city of Wilno represented 53.3 per cent of the total; Jews 41.9 per cent; Lithuanians 1.9 per cent. In the county of Wilno the Poles represented 91.2 per cent and the Lithuanians only 3.7 per cent of the total population.

The Polish character of Wilno and of the Wilno Province has been openly admitted by General Ludendorff in his memoirs of the First World War. Not without regret does he stress the fact that the Wilno territory is "very Polish in spirit", also that "Wilno, Grodno and other towns are Polish" x/. In another part of his memoirs Ludendorff quotes the opinion expressed by the German Secretary of State, von Hintze, on the 28th of August, 1918; according to von Hintze's words Wilno "would always constitute a foreign element in any Lithuanian State" owing to its Polish character. For this very reason Hintze was opposed to the incorporation of Wilno in the Lithuanian State which the Germans were creating at the time, and the German G.H.Q. in an instruction dated August 30th, 1918, inclined to this opinion xx/.

German statistics compiled during the present war give the same evidence as those compiled in 1916 and 1918. Despite deporta-

x/ Ludendorff Fr.: "My War Memories, 1914-1918", London 1919; p.471.
xx/ Ibid., pp.704-705.

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tions of the Polish population carried out by both Soviet and German authorities, the Poles, according to the census of May 26th, 1942, continue to hold an absolute majority in the city of Wilno.

The Polish Population in the Wilno and Nowogródek Provinces is Essentially Composed of the Native Element and not of Immigrants

Already in the Middle Ages, long before the Union of Poland with Lithuania, those territories were inhabited by three nationalities: Lithuanians, Poles and White Ruthenians. The Grand Duke Gedymin wrote a letter in 1323 to the Saxon Franciscans asking them to send four priests speaking the Polish, Lithuanian /Samogitian/ and Ruthenian languages to be appointed to the churches in Wilno and Nowogródek, and the Polish language was the first he mentioned. There are many historical documents which even as early as that period testify to the existence of a considerable number of Poles inhabiting those territories.

The present Polish majority in the Wilno and Nowogródek provinces consists of Poles as well of a section of Catholic White Ruthenians who became Polonized in the course of ages and are now no less fervent Polish patriots than the Poles by birth.

Wilno as a Centre of Polish Culture

As early as the 16th century Wilno was one of Poland's capitals not only in a political, but also in a cultural sense.

It had 16 Polish printing and publishing houses; this number increased in the 17th century to 19. In the second half of the 16th century the Polish King Stefan Batory founded the Academy which later, as Wilno University, became one of the leading centres of Polish cultural life in the first decades of the 19th century. Mickiewicz and Słowacki, two of the greatest Polish poets, studied there; prominent scientists lectured there and many political, scientific and spiritual movements, such as the Societies of Philomats and Philarets flourished in Wilno. Prince Adam Czartoryski conducted from there his extensive cultural and educational activity which radiated its influence all over Polish Eastern territories by means of a network of elementary, secondary and professional schools.

The Wilno University, closed down by the Russians in 1832, was reopened in 1919 by the Polish authorities. Thanks to that University, as well as to a number of other academies and educational institutions and to its Press and publishing firms, Wilno regained its position as one of the spiritual capitals of liberated Poland.

The Catholic Character of the North-Eastern Territories of Poland

According to the census of 1931 Catholics represented 62.2 per cent of the total population of the Wilno Province; in its western and central parts the proportion is as high as 85 per cent. In the western portion of the Nowogródek Province the Catholics are in an equally large majority.

In that part of Wilno Province /including the city of Wilno/

which by the agreement of October 10th, 1939, was "ceded" by the Soviet to Lithuania the figures illustrating the religious denominations are the following:

	<u>1931 census</u>	<u>31st August 1939</u> <u>/estimate/</u>
Catholics	78.7 %	78.7 %
Jews	14.0 "	13.9 "
Orthodox	3.9 "	4.2 "
Other creeds	3.4 "	3.2 "

The Catholic population, deeply religious, patriotic and attached to individual property, is particularly opposed to the Soviet ideology and system of government.

The Economic and Cultural Development of North-Eastern Territories

These territories played an important part in the economic life of Poland whose successive governments spared no effort in order to raise and develop their standards.

In agriculture, flax was of considerable importance; its cultivation area in the Wilno and Nowogródek provinces and in the part of the Białystok Province, situated east of the "Curzon Line" amounted in 1938 to 67.200 ha, or 45.5 per cent of the total flax-yielding area in Poland /147.800 ha/.

The extensive industrialisation of both provinces, carried on by the Poles - these areas were, from this point of view, completely neglected by the Russians - may be illustrated by the fact that many new factories were constructed: e.g. bacon curing factories

in Nowo-Wilejka and Baranowicze; a rubber products factory in Lida; one of the largest and most modern Polish factories for wireless sets in Wilno and furthermore, also in that city, fur workshops, a tannery and an oil-mill, not to mention a number of electric power generating stations saw-mills etc in both provinces.

Between 1924-38 a total of 3.163 km. /1965 miles/ of hard surface roads and highways were constructed in those areas, which is no less than three times the amount built during a period of over 120 years of Russian rule.

Towns which, particularly as regards municipal public services and hygienic conditions, were in a state of complete decay due to the inefficiency of Russian administration, were developed and modernized by the Poles. The streets were paved, electricity installed everywhere, new parks and squares opened, numerous buildings erected for schools, hospitals, cultural institutions, offices, State and municipal banks etc. The population of smaller towns such as Lida, Baranowicze, Slonim increased considerably under Polish rule /over 100 per cent in some cases/.

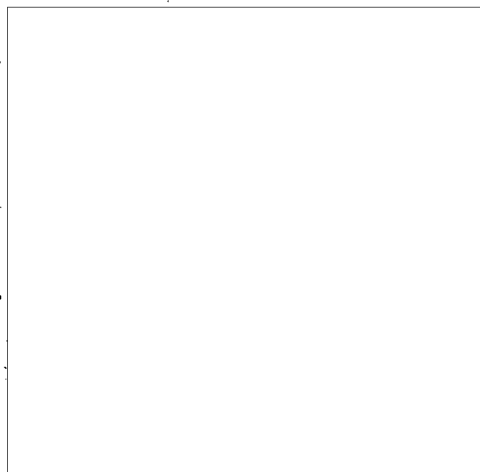
Besides reopening the University of Wilno, the Polish administration set up a great number of elementary, secondary and professional schools, libraries and village club houses, recreation rooms etc. The proportion of illiterates, which in 1921 amounted to 58.3 per cent in the Province of Wilno, fell in 1931 to 29.1 per cent. In the Province of Nowogródek the respective figures are 54.6 per cent and 34.9 per cent. On the outbreak of this war the

proportion of illiterates has no doubt decreased to just over 10% in both provinces, but no exact figures are available.

The Treaty of Riga and the Attitude of the Western Powers

Article 3 of the Treaty of Riga concluded on March 18th, 1921, by Poland and the Soviet stated clearly that the settlement of the territorial problem which was the object of dispute between Poland and Lithuania /i.e. the Wilno areas/ must be left exclusively to the two parties concerned. Thus the Soviet Government itself nullified the previously concluded Soviet-Lithuanian treaty signed on July 12th, 1920, by which Wilno and the adjacent territory was "conceded" to Lithuania with utter disregard of what Poland - the other party directly interested - had to say on the subject.

The status of Wilno and the Wilno territory as an integral part of Poland was finally recognized - including the frontier line drawn by the Riga Treaty - by the Principal Allied Powers in the resolution of the Ambassadors Conference of March 15th, 1923, and on April 5th of the same year by the Government of the United States.



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