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## **Press coverage of the Zabern affair (1913–1914)\* in Prussian partition and in Upper Silesia\*\***

### **Introduction**

The Zabern affair was the last major political crisis that caused public indignation in the German Empire before the Great War. A scandal broke out in a small Alsatian town of Zabern<sup>1</sup> when a young Prussian officer, Lieutenant Günter Freiherr von Forstner, spoke about the town's inhabitants in a derogatory manner. Outraged by this treatment, crowds of local residents took to the streets. The protests were ruthlessly crushed by the army. Forster and his commanding officer, Colonel von Reuter, were put on trial, and the scandal sparked a heated debate in the German Parliament. The officers' conduct, the militaristic structure of the German society, and Prussian domination in the German Reich were severely criticized. Although the officers were ultimately not punished and the censure vote against Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg did not result in his dismissal by the Emperor, the Zabern affair left a deep imprint on the German political arena in the last year before the outbreak of the Great War. The affair attracted significant public interest<sup>2</sup>.

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\* This article was supported by a 2019 grant from the College of Interdisciplinary Individual Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Warsaw. The author would like to thank Professor Piotr Szlanta for support in writing the article.

\*\* Translation services were co-financed by the Ministry of Education and Science pursuant to agreement No. RCN/SP/0245/2021/1 of 1 November 2022; value of the grant awarded as part of the „Development of scientific journals” program – PLN 80 000.

<sup>1</sup> In the analyzed source materials, the town where the conflict erupted is referred to as both Zabern (German spelling) and Saverne (French spelling) (the above also applies to Tawern/Taverne). The first variant is most widely encountered in the literature, and it was used in this article. The place names in the cited press excerpts are consistent with the original spelling.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. P. Szlanta, *Godzina Marsa w Alzacji. Afera Zabern 1913/1914*, „Prace Historyczne” 2018, Vol. CXLV, No. 4, pp. 823–840.

The aim of this article was to analyze Polish newspapers attitudes to the Zabern affair in Prussian partition and in Upper Silesia. Similarly to the inhabitants of Alsace, Polish citizens living under German rule had a keen interest in these events. Their opinions were explored based on an analysis of Polish press. The analysis covered a wide range of newspapers to elicit information about the sentiments of readers in the largest Polish communities<sup>3</sup>. The Zabern affair has been extensively researched in the literature, and the present study was not undertaken to reconstruct the relevant events, but to discuss the opinions and attitudes of the public and the press in the face of these tumultuous events.

The research covered Polish newspapers published between November 1913 and March 1914. On 28 October 1913, Lieutenant Forstner used the derogatory term *Wackes* in reference to native Alsatians. His statement was cited by local newspapers, and it stirred public outrage. In March 1914, the former Prussian Minister of the Interior, Johann von Dallwitz, was appointed the new Governor of Alsace. This event coincided with the fiasco of the parliamentary committee investigating the abuse of military power. The two events marked the end of the Zabern affair.

In this article, the Zabern affair was analyzed with the use of a thematic rather than a chronological approach. The first section of the article discusses the beginning of the conflict and its coverage in the press – when it was exposed and how it was initially described. The second section focuses on the subsequent events and the respective locations, in particular Alsace, but also the Reichstag, as well as Prussian and Bavarian Parliaments. Press articles citing the opinions of German and French journalists were also mentioned. The third section is dedicated to the press pictures of the main protagonists of the Zabern affair – Lieutenant Forstner, Colonel Reuter, as well as Kaiser Wilhelm II. The fourth section examines how Poles related the incident in Zabern to themselves.

## What happened in Zabern?

Polish newspapers reported on the events that had led to the Zabern affair with an approximately weekly delay. On 28 October 1913, Lieutenant Forstner used the derogatory term *Wackes* in reference to native Alsatians. “Zaberner Anzeiger”, the local newspaper, reported on this event on 6 November<sup>4</sup>. Local reporters probably learned about the incident from the leading German newspapers, which explains the delay. “Dziennik Bydgoski”, “Dziennik Kujawski”, “Dziennik Poznański”, “Dziennik Robotniczy”, “Gazeta Toruńska”, “Kurier Poznański”, and “Orędownik” were the first Polish newspa-

<sup>3</sup> The following newspapers were analyzed: „Dziennik Bydgoski”, „Dziennik Kujawski”, „Dziennik Poznański”, „Dziennik Robotniczy”, „Gazeta Grudziądzka”, „Gazeta Toruńska”, „Głos Śląski”, „Górnoślązak”, „Katolik”, „Kurier Poznański”, „Kurier Śląski”, „Polak”, „Wielkopoleanin”, and „Orędownik”.

<sup>4</sup> P. Szlanta, *Godzina Marsa...*, p. 826.

pers to inform the Polish public in Germany on the Zabern affair. On 12 November, they printed short news stories on Lieutenant Forstner's derogatory statement, a promise of a financial reward for pacifying local protesters with the use of force, and public outrage in Alsace. The stories emphasized Lieutenant Forstner's irrational behavior. These stories made headline news in Polish newspapers. However, none of these press releases gave any indication that the Zabern affair would continue to attract the media's interest in the long term<sup>5</sup>.

In the following days, the Zabern event was covered by other newspapers. None of the analyzed press titles remained indifferent to the affair<sup>6</sup>, which suggests that the media had already recognized the seriousness of the situation, although its consequences could not have been foreseen at the time. The news narratives made a clear reference to the infamous Prussian arrogance. Polish readers sided with the Alsations already at the beginning of the conflict.

The newspapers explained to their readers the meaning of the word *Wackes*, which was the hotbed of the conflict. This term became the epitome of the analyzed events, which were sometimes referred to as the "Wackes affair"<sup>7</sup>. The use of this insulting name was scrutinized in other German towns<sup>8</sup>. In the following days, the following commentary appeared in the press: "How can a single word (*Wackes*) have such dire consequences? None of this would have happened if it wasn't for that one word"<sup>9</sup>. The most vulgar interpretations of *Wackes* included "bastard" [*bydlę*]<sup>10</sup>, "whoremonger" [*alfons*], and "crook" [*hachar*]<sup>11</sup>. Some newspapers offered less affected definitions of the word, such as "ruffian" [*lobuz*]<sup>12</sup>, probably not to offend their readers. At present, the most accurate translation of *Wackes* would be a "boor" [*cham*] or an "oaf" [*prostack*]<sup>13</sup>.

## Escalation of the conflict

The Zabern affair would have never progressed into a serious crisis of domestic policy if the conflict had been peacefully resolved in the first days. However, the conflict

<sup>5</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 262 (12 XI), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 262 (12 XI), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 261 (12 XI), p. 2; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 264 (12 XI), p. 3; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 262 (12 XI), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 261 (12 XI), p. 2; „Orędownik” No. 261 (12 XI), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> „Górnoślązak” No. 264 (13 XI), p. 3; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 136 (13 XI), p. 1–2; „Katolik” No. 135 (15 XI), pp. 1–2; „Kurier Śląski” No. 264 (13 XI), p. 3; „Polak” No. 137 (15 XI), pp. 1–2; „Wielkopoleanin” No. 262 (13 XI), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> „Dziennik Poznański” No. 274 (28 XI), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> „Górnoślązak” No. 59 (13 III), p. 3; „Katolik” No. 32 (14 III), p. 6; „Kurier Poznański” No. 59 (13 III), p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> „Głos Śląski” No. 15 (3 II), p. 2; „Katolik” No. 15 (3 II), p. 2; „Polak” No. 15 (3 II), p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 140 (22 XI), p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> „Orędownik” No. 273 (27 XI), p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 144 (2 XII), p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> P. Szlanta, *Godzina Marsa...*, p. 826.

escalated in response to the subsequent events in Alsace. These events led to a heated debate in the Reichstag, which exacerbated the conflict. Polish newspapers reported on the discussions in Prussian and Bavarian Parliaments and cited German and foreign journalists.

## Alsace

Polish newspapers meticulously reported on further events in Alsace, not only in Zabern, but also in other towns whose inhabitants protested in the streets. These news stories relayed an atmosphere of mounting tension. They described the local inhabitants' outrage and the military's failed attempts to restore peace. Many reports contained exaggerated descriptions of military brutality. It appears that the press overplayed the army's response and sympathized with civilians. However, the decisions made by German officers justified these critical opinions. "Dziennik Bydgoski"'s report on street protests validates this observation:

On Friday night, more than ten officers brandishing swords chased a man who was detained, but ultimately managed to escape. A guard armed with a bayonet captured the man and led him to the arsenal. A great crowd had gathered in the castle square. Lieutenant Schodt and 50 soldiers arrived on the scene (...), and Schodt ordered his men to load their rifles. Armed soldiers were told to form a line in front of the crowd, and Schodt announced that they would open fire if the protesters would not leave. The drummer gave the signal for the troops to advance, and the crowd retreated (...). According to our source, the army also detained a man who had been enjoying his dinner in a second-floor apartment in one of the buildings<sup>14</sup>.

Above all, press reports emphasized the army's unjustified use of force against civilians. Reporters used military terminology to describe the rapid turn of events, and words associated with violence with printed in bold or italic text. The soldiers' irrational behaviors were also stressed. Even civilians who had not participated in the protests were arrested.

Polish newspapers also reported on social unrest in other parts of Alsace after the news of the Zabern incident had spread throughout the region. The reporters' attention focused on Strasburg, the capital city of Alsace, where numerous meetings and protests were held<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 278 (I XII), p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 274 (27 XI), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 273 (26 XI), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 272 (26 XI), p. 3; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 273 (27 XI), p. 2; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 274 (27 XI), p. 3; „Kurier Poznański” No. 272 (26 XI), p. 1; „Orędownik” No. 272 (26 XI), p. 3.

These events were received with clear concern. The press did not offer any justification for forceful solutions and the military's appropriation of power in the city. Headlines rallied: "Military rule in Zabern"<sup>16</sup>, "Protests Continue in Zabern"<sup>17</sup>, "The Army Takes Over"<sup>18</sup>, or more ironically: "A Merry War in Zabern"<sup>19</sup>. The military was unequivocally blamed for the chaos and despotic methods: mass arrests, sometimes made hastily, and demonstrations of force. The atmosphere in Zabern was grim in late November and early December<sup>20</sup>. An article in "Gazeta Grudziądzka" read:

The riots in Alsace are making headline news. On the evening of 28 November, the military authorities acted against the people (...). [One of the junior officers - author's note] went to the guardhouse, ordered the soldiers to attach bayonets to their rifles and attack passersby in the street. Many people were arrested, including several judges and a prosecutor who had just left the court building after hearing a trial. The mayor of the city filed a complaint with the military authorities<sup>21</sup>.

The first news of de-escalation appeared in the press around 5 December. The conflict began to abate, probably because both sides were exhausted, a parliamentary debate on the Zabern affair was scheduled to begin in the Reichstag (3 December)<sup>22</sup>, and Germany was preparing for Christmas.

The military resorted to repression, and recruits who shared information about their superiors' misconduct were disciplined. They were detained and brought before court. Collective responsibility was also applied, and the entire regiment stationed in and around Zabern (99<sup>th</sup> regiment) was denied Christmas leave. Press reports made a clear distinction between innocent recruits and their "typically Prussian" officers. The press regularly reported on such incidents and the military's illegal attempts to cover up its misuse of power<sup>23</sup>. According to journalists, the aggressive measures initiated by

<sup>16</sup> „Górnślązak” No. 280 (3 XII), p. 1; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 278 (2 XII), p. 1; „Kurier Śląski” No. 280 (3 XII), p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> „Orędownik” No. 276 (30 XI), p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> „Kurier Poznański” No. 277 (2 XII), p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 280 (2 XII), p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 278 (2 XII), pp. 1–2; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 278 (2 XII), pp. 1–2; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 279 (3 XII), pp. 1–2; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 277 (2 XII), pp. 1–2; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 277 (2 XII), pp. 1–2; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 277 (29 XI), p. 3; „Górnślązak” No. 280 (3 XII), p. 1; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 144 (2 XII), p. 9; „Głos Śląski” No. 144 (2 XII), p. 1; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 278 (2 XII), p. 1; „Katolik” No. 144 (2 XII), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 276 (30 XI), p. 2; No. 278 (3 XII), pp. 1–2; „Kurier Śląski” No. 279 (2 XII), pp. 3; „Kurier Śląski” No. 280 (3 XII), p. 1; „Orędownik” No. 275 (29 XI), p. 1; „Orędownik” No. 276 (30 XI), p. 2; „Polak” No. 144 (2 XII), p. 1; „Wielkopolanin” No. 274 (28 XI), p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 144 (2 XII), p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> P. Szlanta, *Godzina Marsa...*, p. 832.

<sup>23</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 287 (13 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 296 (24 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 285 (12 XII), p. 3; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 289 (13 XII), pp. 2, 4; „Górnślązak” No. 274 (27 XI), p. 2; „Górnślązak” No. 297 (24 XII), p. 3; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 150 (16 XII), p. 3; „Głos Śląski”

the army forced many Alsatian recruits to desert and join the French Foreign Legion<sup>24</sup>. There was also news of conflict among soldiers and in other regions<sup>25</sup>.

The press reported on repressions against the press and all citizens who criticized the military. The absurd reasons behind the searches, requisitions, and arrests (alleged violations of the law) were emphasized. The newspapers argued that disciplinary measures were disproportionately severe (searches, seizure of property, detentions, and trials against informants who were simply doing their duty)<sup>26</sup>.

In turn, the press praised the tough stance of the Alsatian authorities which objected against the military's abuse of power. The Alsatian government's tough stance received support and recognition in Polish newspapers. Local government officers, from the Governor to city mayors, expressed their support for the citizens in the press. Newspapers wrote about the mounting tension between the Chancellor and the Governor of Alsace. Rumors concerning the ostentatious resignation of the Alsatian government were widely circulated. When local government officers finally resigned in a gesture of protest, they were portrayed as the true representatives of the people, in contrast to the authorities in Berlin and their representatives<sup>27</sup>.

The debate in the Alsatian Parliament also received considerable attention. The members of the local assembly vehemently objected against the violence and lawlessness in Zabern, and their bravery was lauded in Polish newspapers. The press briefly report-

No. 150 (16 XII), p. 2; „Głos Śląski” No. 155 (27 XII), p. 3; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 281 (5 XII), p. 3; „Katolik” No. 142 (27 XI), p. 2; „Kurier Poznański” No. 286 (13 XI), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 295 (24 XII), p. 5; „Kurier Śląski” No. 288 (13 XII), p. 3; „Orędownik” No. 287 (12 XII), p. 1; „Orędownik” No. 295 (24 XII), p. 3; „Polak” No. 154 (25 XII), p. 5; „Wielkopolanin” No. 275 (29 XI), p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 275 (28 XI), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 274 (27 XI), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 290 (17 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 289 (17 XII), p. 2; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 292 (17 XII), p. 6; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 290 (17 XII), p. 2; „Górnoślązak” No. 292 (18 XII), p. 2; „Głos Śląski” No. 143 (29 XI), p. 1; „Katolik” No. 143 (29 XI), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 289 (17 XII), p. 3; „Kurier Śląski” No. 292 (18 XII), p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 289 (16 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 288 (16 XII), p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 283 (7 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 293 (19 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 282 (6 XII), p. 2; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 281 (6 XII), p. 2; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 284 (2 XII), p. 4; „Górnoślązak” No. 295 (21 XII), pp. 2–3; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 141 (25 XII), p. 1; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 272 (25 XI), p. 3; „Kurier Poznański” No. 281 (6 XII), p. 3; „Kurier Śląski” No. 295 (21 XII), pp. 2–3; „Orędownik” No. 281 (6 XII), p. 3; „Orędownik” No. 18 (23 I), p. 4; „Wielkopolanin” No. 10 (14 I), p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 25 (31 I), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 24 (30 I), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 17 (22 I), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 27 (4 II), p. 1; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 27 (4 II), p. 2; „Górnoślązak” No. 14 (18 I), p. 1; „Górnoślązak” No. 26 (1 II), p. 1; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 8 (17 I), p. 3; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 14 (31 I), p. 3; „Głos Śląski” No. 7 (15 I), p. 1; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 13 (17 I), p. 3; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 27 (4 II), p. 3; „Katolik” No. 15 (3 II), p. 2; „Kurier Poznański” No. 13 (17 I), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 27 (4 II), pp. 2–3; „Kurier Śląski” No. 14 (18 I), p. 1; „Kurier Śląski” No. 27 (4 II), p. 2; „Orędownik” No. 14 (18 I), p. 1; „Orędownik” No. 30 (7 II), p. 3; „Polak” No. 7 (15 I), p. 1; „Wielkopolanin” No. 27 (4 II), p. 1.

ed on parliamentary debates during which most deputies openly criticized the military's actions<sup>28</sup>.

The Catholic bishop's support for the local population was reported mainly, but not exclusively, in Catholic newspapers<sup>29</sup>. Given the clergy's authority, this declaration must have been a strong argument for siding with the Alsatians.

The press also denounced the military's attempts to bribe people who had been wrongfully arrested and detained in dire conditions during the pacification of Zabern<sup>30</sup>. The plaintiffs were to be offered 50 marks each for withdrawing suit<sup>31</sup>. "Kurier Poznański" and "Orędownik" referred to these efforts, probably ironically, as "a smooth end to the Saverne affair"<sup>32</sup>.

The news that Berlin was preparing to introduce harsher measures against Alsace was interpreted as the central government's desire to bring the affair to a speedy closure. Johann von Dallwitz, the former Minister of the Interior, was appointed the Governor of Alsace. For the press, Dallwitz was a symbol of a tyrannical regime. The news of his appointment, initially unconfirmed, reached the press in late March 1914<sup>33</sup>.

## German Parliament

The parliamentary debates concerning Zabern undoubtedly reflected widespread interest in the issue. The Reichstag convened to resolve the crisis, but the debate merely exacerbated the problem. Siding with the military, the government attracted fierce opposition from the citizens.

<sup>28</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 13 (17 I), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 5 (8 I), p. 2; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 13 (17 I), p. 3; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 273 (27 XI), p. 2; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 13 (17 I), p. 3; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 6 (9 I), p. 2; „Górnoślązak” No. 294 (20 XII), p. 3; „Górnoślązak” No. 14 (18 I), p. 1; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 8 (17 I), p. 3; „Głos Śląski” No. 152 (20 XII), p. 3; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 13 (17 I), p. 3; „Katolik” No. 152 (20 XII), p. 3; „Katolik” No. 9 (20 I), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 3 (4 I), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 15 (20 I), p. 1; „Kurier Śląski” No. 14 (18 I), p. 1; „Kurier Śląski” No. 27 (4 II), p. 2; „Orędownik” No. 298 (20 XII), p. 3; „Orędownik” No. 14 (18 I), p. 1; „Polak” No. 152 (20 XII), p. 3; „Wielkopolanin” No. 13 (17 I), p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 27 (4 II), p. 1; „Głos Śląski” No. 17 (7 II), p. 2; „Katolik” No. 17 (7 II), p. 2; „Polak” No. 17 (7 II), p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> P. Szlanta, *Godzina Marsa...*, p. 829.

<sup>31</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 34 (12 II), p. 1; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 23 (12 II), p. 3; „Kurier Śląski” No. 35 (13 II), p. 3; „Wielkopolanin” No. 34 (12 II), p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> „Kurier Poznański” No. 34 (12 II), p. 6; „Orędownik” No. 35 (13 II), p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 68 (24 III), p. 2; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 66 (21 III), p. 2; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 68 (24 III), p. 2; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 65 (20 III), p. 2; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 67 (22 III), p. 2; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 35 (21 III), p. 13; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 65 (20 III), p. 3; „Górnoślązak” No. 69 (25 III), p. 3; „Kurier Poznański” No. 66 (21 III), p. 1; „Kurier Śląski” No. 69 (25 III), p. 3; „Wielkopolanin” No. 68 (24 III), p. 2.



The first debate, initiated by deputies who lodged a “interpellation” with the Minister of War, received press coverage ahead of time<sup>34</sup>. This clearly indicates that the debate was regarded as an important and much anticipated event.

The Minister of War addressed the question in a speech delivered on 28 November. He downplayed the events in Zabern and laid the blame on the young lieutenant’s lack of experience and defiance. Obviously, the statement did not meet public expectations and was received with astonishment and disapproval in the press. The newspapers emphasized that the Minister’s stance was criticized by other deputies who requested the Chancellor’s opinion on the matter<sup>35</sup>.

Recognizing the gravity of the matter, the Chancellor decided to address the parliament. On 1 December 1913, he announced that the affair would be thoroughly investigated. At the time, the Chancellor seemed to side with the civil authorities, and he earned sympathy from the public. In contrast to Falkenhayn’s speech, Bethmann Hollweg’s statement called for optimism. His words were cited in the press: “The events that took place in Zabern are highly regrettable, and it is my duty to address these incidents in parliament”<sup>36</sup>.

The Chancellor’s official response, delivered two days later, was disappointing. The parliamentary session during which the Chancellor made his speech received wide press coverage. Public and political tension mounted. The second (and last) event to attract such attention from the media was Forstner’s and von Reuter’s trial in January 1914. Bethmann Hollweg was portrayed as an irresponsible and unjust man. In his speech, the Chancellor strongly sided with Forstner and the army, and he criticized Alsatian civilians and recruits. The Chancellor’s speech, described as agitated and harsh (but seen as conciliatory by historians nowadays<sup>37</sup>), was met with outrage. The press demanded that the parliament call for a vote of no confidence against the Chancellor. The Minister of war took the podium after the Chancellor, which only made matters worse. The Minister’s

<sup>34</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 275 (28 XI), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 275 (28 XI), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 274 (28 XI), p. 2; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 277 (28 XI), p. 2; „Górnślązak” No. 277 (29 XI), p. 1; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 142 (27 XI), p. 11; „Głos Śląski” No. 143 (29 XI), p. 1; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 274 (27 XI), p. 2; „Katolik” No. 143 (29 XI), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 273 (27 XI), p. 7; „Kurier Śląski” No. 277 (29 XI), p. 2; „Orędownik” No. 272 (26 XI), p. 3; „Polak” No. 143 (29 XI), p. 1; „Wielkopolanin” No. 275 (29 XI), p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 277 (30 XI), p. 2; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 277 (30 XI), p. 2; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 276 (30 XI), p. 1; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 281 (3 XII), p. 1; „Górnślązak” No. 279 (2 XII), p. 1; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 144 (2 XII), p. 9; „Głos Śląski” No. 144 (2 XII), p. 2; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 277 (30 XI), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 275 (29 XI), pp. 5–6; „Kurier Śląski” No. 279 (2 XII), p. 1; „Orędownik” No. 276 (30 XI), p. 1; „Polak” No. 144 (2 XII), p. 2; „Wielkopolanin” No. 276 (30 XI), p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Citing: „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 279 (3 XII), p. 2; also: „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 279 (30 XII), pp. 1–2; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 278 (3 XII), p. 5; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 281 (3 XII), pp. 1–2; „Orędownik” No. 278 (3 XII), p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> P. Szlanta, *Godzina Marsa...*, pp. 832–833.



speech was radically militant<sup>38</sup>, and Falkenhayn was described by “Dziennik Poznański” as “a typical, stern Prussian officer” and “another Forstner”<sup>39</sup>. In its report on the parliamentary session, “Dziennik Bydgoski” wrote that “Bethmann Hollweg had probably the most disastrous day of his entire career”<sup>40</sup>. In turn, “Dziennik Kujawski” observed that “a policy of the iron fist – this is the only thing that the government had to offer its citizens (...) By putting the army above the law and subjecting civilians to the arbitrary rule of the military, the government has in fact put an end to civil rule in Germany”<sup>41</sup>. “Kurier Poznański” added fuel to the fire in the following headline: “The Government Supports the Army’s Misuse of Power!”<sup>42</sup>.

Seething with indignation, the press supported the vote of no confidence and argued that Bethmann Hollweg had completely lost public support. “Gazeta Grudziądzka” wrote:

According to our source in parliamentary circles, the Chancellor’s position had been considerably undermined. The motion of no confidence was passed by an absolute majority of 293 votes with only 54 votes against. We were also told that (...) the left would not cooperate with the Chancellor, and opposition is also mounting among the socialists (...). On Friday, there were even rumors that the Chancellor would be replaced<sup>43</sup>.

The uproar was unwarranted because in the light of the German Constitution, the Chancellor was not accountable to the Reichstag<sup>44</sup>. His statements were closely monitored in vain hope that he would listen to the deputies. The press also speculated that Bethmann Hollweg would resign from office due to mental fatigue. These rumors were widely and triumphantly circulated by in the press. “Górnoślązak” offered a more sober view by arguing that the Chancellor was unlikely to resign because he enjoyed considerable support from the Emperor<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 281 (5 XII), pp. 1–2; „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 282 (6 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 281 (5 XII), pp. 1–2; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 283 (5 XII), pp. 2–3; „Górnoślązak” No. 282 (5 XII), p. 3; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 146 (6 XII), pp. 1–2; „Głos Śląski” No. 146 (6 XII), pp. 1–2; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 281 (5 XII), pp. 1–2; „Kurier Poznański” No. 280 (5 XII), pp. 1–2; „Kurier Śląski” No. 283 (6 XII), pp. 1–2; „Orędownik” No. 280 (5 XII), pp. 2–3; „Polak” No. 146 (6 XII), pp. 1–2.

<sup>39</sup> „Dziennik Poznański” No. 280 (5 XII), p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 281 (5 XII), p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 281 (5 XII), p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> „Kurier Poznański” No. 280 (5 XII), p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 147 (9 XII), p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> J. Wąsicki, *Związek Niemiecki i Druga Rzesza Niemiecka. 1848–1914*, Poznań 1989, pp. 468–469.

<sup>45</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 283 (7 XII), p. 2; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 282 (6 XII), pp. 1–2; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 286 (12 XII), pp. 1–2; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 281 (6 XII), pp. 1–2, 5; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 282 (7 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 284 (6 XII), p. 2; „Górnoślązak” No. 283 (6 XII), pp. 1–2; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 147 (9 XII), p. 3; „Głos Śląski” No. 147 (9 XII), pp. 1–2; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 282 (6 XII), pp. 1–2; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 289 (16 XII), p. 3; „Katolik” No. 146 (6 XII), pp. 1–2; „Katolik” No. 147 (9 XII), pp. 1–2; „Kurier Poznański” No. 281 (6 XII), pp. 1–2; „Kurier Poznański”

The speech delivered by deputy Trąpczyński during the parliamentary debate attracted particular attention. Siding with the parliamentary majority, Trąpczyński sharply coitized the Chancellor. Newspapers published excerpts or even the entire speech delivered by the Polish deputy to the Reichstag<sup>46</sup>.

The echoes of this tumultuous session continued to resonate for a long time in parliament and the press. The vote of no confidence made headline news for several weeks. However, there was no evidence to substantiate the rumors that the Chancellor would resign. Deputies who commented on the Zabern affair in their speeches were widely cited. New proposals were put forward for debate, but they lacked the original momentum. The atmosphere gradually cooled, and the press had to tacitly admit that the case was lost<sup>47</sup>.

The last major debate concerning the Zabern affair and the Chancellor took place in late January. The discussion centered on the Kaiser's son's controversial telegram relating to the Zabern affair and the acquittal of Forstner and Reuter<sup>48</sup>. The atmosphere of scandal began to die down, either due to the passage of time, the absence of any progress in the matter, or the subsequent course of parliamentary debates.

The establishment and speedy dissolution of a parliamentary commission tasked with investigating the Zabern incident marked a symbolic end of the affair. The commission deliberated briefly and without results, but the press did not place high hopes in its operations. Newspapers reported briefly and without much enthusiasm on both the creation and dissolution of the commission<sup>49</sup>. "Kurier Poznański" openly commented on the commission's fiasco:

No. 283 (10 XII), p. 2; „Kurier Śląski” No. 283 (6 XII), p. 3; „Orędownik” No. 281 (6 XII), p. 3; „Polak” No. 147 (9 XII), pp. 1–2; „Wielkopolanin” No. 14 (18 I), p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 283 (7 XII), p. 2; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 282 (6 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 280 (5 XII), p. 4; „Górnoślązak” No. 284 (7 XII), p. 5; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 147 (9 XII), p. 1; „Głos Śląski” No. 147 (9 XII), p. 2; „Katolik” No. 147 (9 XII), p. 2; „Kurier Poznański” No. 281 (6 XII), p. 2; „Kurier Śląski” No. 283 (6 XII), p. 3; „Orędownik” No. 281 (6 XII), p. 3; „Polak” No. 147 (9 XII), p. 2; „Orędownik” No. 2 (3 I), p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 287 (13 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 288 (14 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 290 (17 XII), p. 2; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 299 (20 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 287 (14 XII), p. 6; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 289 (13 XII), pp. 1–2; „Górnoślązak” No. 288 (13 XII), p. 3; „Górnoślązak” No. 289 (14 XII), p. 1; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 149 (13 XII), p. 3; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 150 (16 XII), p. 3; „Głos Śląski” No. 150 (16 XII), p. 2; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 287 (13 XII), p. 1; „Katolik” No. 150 (16 XII), p. 2; „Kurier Poznański” No. 287 (14 XII), p. 2; „Kurier Poznański” No. 298 (30 XII), p. 2; „Kurier Śląski” No. 289 (14 XII), pp. 1–2; „Orędownik” No. 289 (17 XII), p. 1; „Polak” No. 149 (13 XII), pp. 2–3.

<sup>48</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 21 (27 I), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 20 (25 I), pp. 1–2; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 20 (25 I), pp. 4–6; „Górnoślązak” No. 22 (28 I), pp. 1–2; „Górnoślązak” No. 23 (29 I), p. 1; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 12 (27 I), p. 3; „Głos Śląski” No. 12 (27 I), pp. 1–2; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 20 (25 I), pp. 1–2; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 21 (27 I), p. 1; „Katolik” No. 12 (27 I), pp. 1–2; „Kurier Poznański” No. 20 (25 I), pp. 2–3; „Kurier Poznański” No. 21 (27 I), p. 2; „Kurier Śląski” No. 20 (25 I), p. 3; „Polak” No. 12 (27 I), pp. 1–2.

<sup>49</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 41 (20 II), p. 1; „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 43 (22 II), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 41 (20 II), p. 2; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 48 (28 II), p. 1; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 43 (22 II), p. 5; „Górnoślązak” No. 49 (1 III), p. 2; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 41 (20 II), p. 3; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 44 (24 II), p. 3; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 48 (28 II), p. 3; „Kurier Poznański” No. 41 (20 II), pp. 1–2; „Kurier Poznański” No. 48 (28 II), p. 2; „Orędownik” No. 42 (21 II), p. 1; „Orędownik” No. 48 (3 III), p. 1.

The Saverne affair? The event was largely forgotten in the midst of the rapid flow of events in the political arena! The opposition against arbitrary military rule has grown silent and died like a stream in the sand. The oratorical thunderbolts in the parliament passed unnoticed<sup>50</sup>.

## Prussian and Bavarian Parliaments

The statements made by the representatives of the upper house of the Prussian Parliament in connection with the Zabern affair also attracted the interest of some newspapers. The Prussian Parliament passed a resolution calling on the Chancellor to abandon his allegedly too submissive attitude toward the German Parliament. Obviously, this resolution did not find favor with Polish newspapers which argued that the speech delivered by the Chancellor in the House of Lords on 10 January was bland<sup>51</sup>. Despite the above, journalists recognized that Bethmann Hollweg had found himself in a difficult position by trying to please both sides of the conflict. “Kurier Poznański” inadvertently praised the Chancellor by mocking the hard-lines who attacked him: “[One of the deputies – author’s note] criticized the Chancellor for his attempts to exercise justice in the Zabern affair. After all, the head of the state should be guided solely by the expediency of his orders in such matters”<sup>52</sup>. This opinion piece clearly illustrates that Polish readers’ attitudes towards the Chancellor changed rapidly, as previously noted in the description of the Reichstag debate.

The Bavarian Parliament acted as a counterbalance to the Prussian one. Bavarian deputies sharply criticized the military’s involvement in Zabern and regarded it as an instrument of Prussian hegemony in the Reich<sup>53</sup>. Compared with “Prussian arrogance”, Bavaria appeared to be a mainstay of normality. “Dziennik Bydgoski” posited that “Bavarian Ministers would have never sided with the army because Bavaria has a completely different notion of civil rights, freedoms, and human dignity”<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> „Kurier Poznański” No. 49 (1 III), p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 9 (13 I), p. 2; „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 11 (15 I), pp. 2–3; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 9 (13 I), p. 2; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 13 (17 I), p. 2; „Górnoślązak” No. 11 (15 I), p. 1; „Górnoślązak” No. 13 (17 I), pp. 1, 3; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 9 (13 I), pp. 1–2; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 17 (22 I), p. 1; „Kurier Śląski” No. 11 (15 I), p. 1; „Orędownik” No. 9 (13 I), p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> „Kurier Poznański” No. 11 (15 I), p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 277 (30 XI), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 277 (30 XI), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 276 (30 XI), p. 2; „Górnoślązak” No. 279 (2 XII), p. 2; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 144 (2 XII), p. 9; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 277 (30 XI), p. 3; „Kurier Poznański” No. 12 (16 I), p. 1; „Kurier Śląski” No. 279 (2 XII), p. 2; „Wielkopolanin” No. 276 (30 XI), p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 283 (7 XII), p. 2.

## Main protagonists of the Zabern affair

The portrayal of the main protagonists of the Zabern affair, namely Lieutenant Forstner, Colonel Reuter, and Emperor Wilhelm II, in the press is presented below. Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg's role has been discussed previously in descriptions of parliamentary sessions.

### Lieutenant Forstner

The attention of the press focused mainly on Lieutenant Forstner, the main instigator of the Zabern affair. Newspapers reported widely on both the incident and Forstner himself. According to journalists, Forstner was not just a boisterous officer or a reckless youth, but he personified the worst traits of the "Prussian spirit". Forstner was portrayed as a member of a group rather than an exceptional individual. These facts and opinions were cited in all reports on Forstner's actions, and the press also emphasized that the lieutenant continued to receive support from the German far-right movement during the entire affair<sup>55</sup>.

Newspapers accentuated Forstner's role during the first riots in Zabern and blamed him for the unrest. The young officer's irrational and cruel conduct was emphasized in all press reports. The press alleged that the affair had not changed Forstner's contemptuous attitude towards native Alsatians. He continued to advocate for ruthless treatment of Alsatians, albeit in a more covert (or cowardly, according to some newspapers)<sup>56</sup> manner. "Berlin Morgenpost" received numerous letters from outraged readers, and their opinions were widely cited by other newspapers. Forstner was not only criticized and cursed for his disrespectful behavior and his shameful offer for the "heads" of the citizens of Zabern, but he was also blamed for the military's brutal and illegal actions during the riots, for causing a political crisis in the Reich, and disgracing the German army and state<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 290 (17 XII), p. 1; „Górnoślązak” No. 266 (15 XI), p. 1; „Górnoślązak” No. 271 (22 XI), p. 1; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 140 (22 XI), p. 1; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 141 (25 XI) p. 1; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 144 (2 XII), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 290 (18 XII), p. 5; „Kurier Śląski” No. 266 (15 XI), p. 1; „Orędownik” No. 265 (16 XI), p. 1; „Orędownik” No. 290 (18 XII), p. 3; „Wielkopolanin” No. 272 (26 XI), p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 281 (5 XII), pp. 1–2; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 262 (12 XI), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 261 (12 XI), p. 2; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 264 (12 XI), p. 3; „Górnoślązak” No. 265 (14 XI), p. 1; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 136 (13 XI), pp. 1–2; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 262 (12 XI), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 261 (12 XI), p. 2; „Kurier Śląski” No. 265 (14 XI), p. 1; „Orędownik” No. 261 (12 XI), p. 3; „Wielkopolanin” No. 262 (13 XI), p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> „Górnoślązak” No. 280 (3 XII), p. 1; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 278 (2 XII), p. 1; „Kurier Śląski” No. 280 (3 XII), p. 1.

At the beginning of the affair, the press enthusiastically reported that Forstner would be punished for using the word *Wackes* in reference to native Alsatians. In late November and early December 1913, the readers were informed that the lieutenant had been reprimanded and strictly forbidden from insulting the locals. Forstner was held in custody for a short time, and there were rumors that he would be transferred to another unit. However, many of these rumors were never confirmed. Forstner was reprimanded and placed under house arrest for several days, but this information had been initially concealed from the public. In fact, this was his only punishment for disrespecting Alsatians<sup>58</sup>.

One of Forstner's offenses attracted particular attention in the press. In early December 1913, the lieutenant wounded a shoemaker's disabled apprentice in the town of Dettweiler. The apprentice mocked Forstner and was stabbed by the lieutenant for disrespecting a military officer<sup>59</sup>. This event probably sparked the greatest outrage in Polish press because it blatantly undermined the army's chivalrous heritage – a soldier's duty is first and foremost to defend the weak and the infirm<sup>60</sup>. The press drew the readers' attention to Forstner's disproportionate response – the shoemaker's apprentice suffered great bodily harm merely for laughing at the officer (in the eyes of the press, Forstner had only himself to blame for this reaction). Unable to take revenge on those who criticized his actions, Forstner took his anger out on a weak and defenseless individual. This incident appalled and disgusted the public<sup>61</sup>. "Gazeta Toruńska" sarcastically congratulated the lieutenant on "scoring a victory over the lame shoemaker"<sup>62</sup>, whereas "Kurier Poznański" and "Orędownik" reported on the adventures of the "valiant knight"<sup>63</sup>.

Following the incident in Dettweiler, Forstner was put on trial which attracted considerable interest in the press. The trial was held in mid-December 1913. Some newspapers published detailed reports on the hearings and witness statements that clearly demonstrated that the officer had grossly abused his powers. The first sentence of 43 days in prison was received with moderate enthusiasm, and journalists observed that this was

<sup>58</sup> P. Szlanta, *Godzina Marsa...*, p. 827; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 274 (28 XI), pp. 2–3; „Górnosłazak” No. 276 (28 XI), p. 2; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 143 (29 XI), p. 11; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 274 (27 XI), p. 3; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 276 (29 XI), p. 3; „Katolik” No. 143 (29 XI), p. 2; „Kurier Poznański” No. 272 (26 XI), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 274 (28 XI), p. 1; „Kurier Śląski” No. 276 (28 XI), p. 2; „Orędownik” No. 274 (28 XI), p. 3; „Polak” No. 143 (29 XI), p. 2; „Wielkopolanin” No. 274 (28 XI), p. 1; „Wielkopolanin” No. 275 (29 XI), p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> P. Szlanta, *Godzina Marsa...*, p. 832.

<sup>60</sup> M. Ossowska, *Ethos rycerski i jego odmiany*, Warsaw 2000, pp. 74–75.

<sup>61</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 280 (4 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 279 (4 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 282 (4 XII), p. 4; „Górnosłazak” No. 282 (5 XII); „Głos Śląski” No. 145 (4 XII), p. 3; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 284 (10 XII), p. 1; „Katolik” No. 145 (4 XII), p. 3; „Kurier Poznański” No. 279 (4 XII), p. 2; „Kurier Śląski” No. 281 (4 XII), p. 3; „Orędownik” No. 279 (4 XII), p. 3; „Polak” No. 145 (4 XII), p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 280 (4 XII), p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> „Kurier Poznański” No. 278 (3 XII), p. 6; „Orędownik” No. 279 (4 XII), p. 1.

the minimum mandatory punishment<sup>64</sup>. However, the fact that the court's verdict angered the extreme far-right elicited a certain degree of *schadenfreude*<sup>65</sup>. "Kurier Poznański" pointed out that while Forstner was sentenced to only 43 days in prison for seriously wounding a defenseless person, a Polish private had been condemned to three and half months of prison merely for speaking Polish off-duty<sup>66</sup>.

Public enthusiasm, already waning, finally died down. Forstner filed an appeal and was tried again in January 1914. Once again, the trial received considerable press coverage. Forstner was cleared of all charges, and the court's decision came as a hard blow for the lieutenant's opponents who regarded the verdict as a triumph of military power over civil rights<sup>67</sup>. "Gazeta Grudziądzka" reported that the people of Alsace were deeply embittered by such gross injustice<sup>68</sup>.

The press was less interested in two other lawsuits that had been simultaneously filed against Forstner. In both cases, the lieutenant was accused of insulting the French national flag and recruits. Despite solid evidence against the defendant (as emphasized by the press), the officer was cleared of all charges<sup>69</sup>.

Despite the above, the Polish press was reluctant to give up its dislike of Forstner. Some newspapers even resorted to spreading unconfirmed rumors claiming that the lieutenant had been ridiculed in public by the Alsations, especially children<sup>70</sup>. Rumors were circulated about Forstner's lewd behavior, and on several occasions, the officer had been accused of seducing young women<sup>71</sup>. Newspapers also reported on the lieutenant's brutal

<sup>64</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 292 (18 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 294 (21 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 291 (19 XII), p. 3; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 295 (20 XII), p. 2; „Górnoślązak” No. 293 (19 XII), p. 3; „Górnoślązak” No. 295 (21 XII), p. 3; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 153 (23 XII), p. 9; „Głos Śląski” No. 156 (30 XII), p. 1; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 296 (23 XII), p. 2; „Katolik” No. 156 (30 XII), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 292 (20 XII), p. 7; „Kurier Śląski” No. 299 (28 XII), p. 1; „Orędownik” No. 290 (18 XII), p. 3; „Polak” No. 156 (30 XII), p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> „Dziennik Poznański” No. 293 (21 XII), p. 4; „Kurier Poznański” No. 295 (24 XII), p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> „Kurier Poznański” No. 293 (21 XII), pp. 2–3.

<sup>67</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 9 (13 I), p. 1; „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 10 (14 I), p. 2; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 9 (13 I), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 8 (11 I), p. 2; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 9 (13 I), pp. 1–2; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 11 (15 I), p. 1; „Górnoślązak” No. 9 (13 I), p. 3; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 7 (15 I), pp. 3, 5; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 9 (20 I), pp. 1–2; „Głos Śląski” No. 6 (13 I), p. 3; „Głos Śląski” No. 7 (15 I), p. 1; „Głos Śląski” No. 9 (20 I), p. 2; „Katolik” No. 6 (13 I), p. 3; „Katolik” No. 9 (20 I), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 9 (13 I), p. 2; „Kurier Śląski” No. 9 (13 I), p. 3; „Orędownik” No. 9 (13 I), p. 5; „Polak” No. 6 (13 I), p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 6 (13 I), p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> P. Szlanta, *Godzina Marsa...*, p. 834.

<sup>70</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 6 (9 I), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 32 (10 II), p. 2; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 6 (9 I), p. 4; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 32 (10 III), p. 3; „Kurier Poznański” No. 32 (10 III), p. 3; „Orędownik” No. 5 (8 I), p. 7; „Orędownik” No. 33 (11 II), p. 4; „Orędownik” No. 52 (5 III), p. 7; „Wielkopolanin” No. 33 (11 II), p. 2.

<sup>71</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 27 (4 II), p. 2; „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 39 (18 II), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 26 (1 II), p. 2; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 39 (18 II), p. 3; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 40 (19 II), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 6 (9 I), p. 3; „Górnoślązak” No. 40 (19 II), p. 2; „Głos Śląski” No. 22 (19 II), p. 3; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 7 (10 I), p. 3; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 39 (18 II), p. 3; „Katolik” No. 22 (19 II),

treatment of his subordinates<sup>72</sup>. The press intended to discredit Forstner completely, not only punish him for the Zabern affair. Even if Forstner's actions were deplorable, such rumors could be regarded as acts of media manipulation. The press went to great lengths to elicit public disgust towards the officer<sup>73</sup>.

As a result, Forstner was not only the protagonist of a formally reported event, but he also gained celebrity status, albeit in a relatively limited way. The officer became a widely recognized symbol of corruption. Readers not only develop an interest in such people, but also demand to be provided with new evidence of their guilt<sup>74</sup>. The public wanted information confirming their belief that Forstner, a symbol of Prussian oppression, lacked any moral values. The news of his affairs and brawls did not contribute important information about the Zabern affair. However, the readers derived satisfaction from that fact that by criticizing the officer's excesses, they were standing on the side of justice.

## Colonel Reuter

While many of Forstner's misdeeds could be blamed on his young age and ill manner, the same could not be said of his superior, Colonel Reuter. Forstner epitomized the moral corruption of young and uneducated soldiers, whereas Reuter was guilty of the same misconduct, but among an older and more experienced generation. In a way, the two men complemented each other. In the eyes of the press, it was the lieutenant who triggered the conflict, while the awkwardness and vehemence of his superior contributed to its escalation<sup>75</sup>.

Many journalists argued that Reuter's difficult personality had significantly contributed to the Zabern incident. The colonel was a harsh, implacable man who was steeped in militarism. These vices, in particular Reuter's decision to pacify the protests with the use of violence, came to light during the Zabern affair<sup>76</sup>. The colonel attempted to usurp

p. 3; „Kurier Poznański” No. 26 (1 II), p. 3; „Orędownik” No. 40 (19 II), p. 4; „Polak” No. 22 (19 II), p. 3; „Wielkopolanin” No. 7 (10 I), p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 53 (6 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 53 (6 III), p. 2; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 54 (7 III), p. 4; „Górnoślązak” No. 54 (7 III), p. 3; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 29 (7 III), p. 13; „Głos Śląski” No. 29 (7 III), p. 3; „Katolik” No. 29 (7 III), p. 3; „Kurier Poznański” No. 53 (6 III), p. 6; „Orędownik” No. 53 (6 III), p. 5; „Polak” No. 29 (7 III), p. 3; „Wielkopolanin” No. 53 (6 III), p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. R. Grochowski, *Semiotyczna manipulacja w przekazach medialnych*, „Naukowy Przegląd Dziennikarski” 2015, No. 2, pp. 38–39.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. U. Kornmeier, *The famous and the infamous. Waxworks as retailers of renown*, „International Journal of Cultural Studies” 2008, No. 11(3), p. 285; Ch. Rojek, *Celebrity*, London 2001, pp. 10–15, 93.

<sup>75</sup> „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 153 (23 XII), p. 9; „Głos Śląski” No. 144 (2 XII), p. 1; „Głos Śląski” No. 145 (4 XII), p. 1; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 296 (23 XII), p. 2; „Katolik” No. 144 (2 XII), p. 1; „Katolik” No. 145 (4 XII), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 277 (2 XII), p. 1; „Kurier Śląski” No. 278 (30 XI), p. 3; „Polak” No. 144 (2 XII), p. 1; „Polak” No. 145 (4 XII), p. 1.

<sup>76</sup> P. Szlanta, *Godzina Marsa...*, 826.



power by dispersing the protesters and making illegal arrests<sup>77</sup>. The press emphasized that Reuter's actions had attracted significant criticism. To his dismay, the colonel received many abusive letters from members of the public<sup>78</sup>.

The public demanded justice, which contributed to a keen interest in Reuter's trial in January 1914. He was accused of abusing military power in pacifying the protesters in Zabern. Many newspapers published extensive, nearly page-long accounts of each day of the trial in the Strasbourg court. Reporters meticulously picked out witness testimonies that put the colonel in a bad light. For example, "Orędownik" printed the following sentences from Reuter's testimony in bold: "Yes, let there be blood; in some cases, this is the only solution. This is how we command respect for the army and the government"<sup>79</sup>. These excerpts were cited to suggest that Reuter was a "typical Prussian", but the colonel's actions spoke louder than words. Reuter was acquitted, and the court's verdict was met with disapproval<sup>80</sup>. Headlines rallied: "Rule of the Sword"<sup>81</sup> and "Rule of Law or the Sword?"<sup>82</sup>. The trial attracted significant press interest, which clearly indicates that the Zabern affair and Reuter himself stirred up strong emotions in the public.

For the press, the fact that Reuter received a state decoration from the Emperor was a bitter pill to swallow<sup>83</sup>. The colonel clearly enjoyed the government's support. An award presented by Wilhelm II, the greatest enemy of the Polish people, only strengthened the public's conviction that Reuter's behavior was entirely corrupt and immoral<sup>84</sup>.

<sup>77</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 282 (6 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 283 (7 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 281 (5 XII), p. 2; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 280 (5 XII), p. 3; „Górnoślązak” No. 282 (5 XII), p. 2; „Górnoślązak” No. 285 (10 XII), p. 2; „Głos Śląski” No. 142 (27 XI), p. 2; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 283 (7 XII), p. 2; „Kurier Poznański” No. 280 (5 XII), p. 3; „Kurier Poznański” No. 282 (7 XII), p. 2; „Kurier Poznański” No. 293 (21 XII), p. 3; „Kurier Śląski” No. 285 (10 XII), p. 2; „Orędownik” No. 280 (5 XII), p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 266 (16 XI), pp. 1–2; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 266 (16 XI), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 265 (16 XI), p. 2; „Górnoślązak” No. 268 (18 XI), p. 2; „Głos Śląski” No. 139 (20 XII), p. 2; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 266 (16 XI), p. 3; „Katolik” No. 139 (20 XI), p. 2; „Kurier Poznański” No. 36 (14 II), p. 5; „Kurier Śląski” No. 268 (18 XI), p. 2; „Orędownik” No. 36 (14 II), p. 1; „Polak” No. 139 (20 XI), p. 2; „Wielkopolanin” No. 265 (16 XI), p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> „Orędownik” No. 5 (8 I), p. 7.

<sup>80</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 5 (8 I), p. 1; „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 6 (9 I), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 5 (8 I), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 5 (8 I), p. 2; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 11 (15 I), p. 1; „Górnoślązak” No. 7 (10 I), p. 1; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 4 (8 I), p. 3; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 6 (13 I), p. 3; „Głos Śląski” No. 6 (13 I), p. 3; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 5 (8 I), p. 1; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 6 (9 I), pp. 1–2; „Katolik” No. 6 (13 I), p. 3; „Katolik” No. 9 (20 I), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 4 (6 I), p. 2; „Kurier Poznański” No. 5 (8 I), pp. 2–3; „Kurier Śląski” No. 7 (10 I), p. 1; „Polak” No. 6 (13 I), p. 3; „Orędownik” No. 6 (9 I), p. 2; „Wielkopolanin” No. 7 (10 I), pp. 1–2.

<sup>81</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 9 (13 I), p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> „Kurier Poznański” No. 10 (14 I), p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 16 (21 I), p. 1; „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 28 (5 II), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 15 (20 I), p. 2; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 28 (5 II), p. 2; „Górnoślązak” No. 15 (20 I), p. 3; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 9 (20 I), p. 3; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 16 (21 I), p. 3; „Kurier Poznański” No. 29 (6 II), p. 1; „Orędownik” No. 30 (7 II), p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> P. Szlanta, „*Polakożerca kontra „wrogowie Rzeszy”*”. *Cesarz Wilhelm II i Polacy 1888–1918*, Warsaw 2019, pp. 169–194.

## Emperor Wilhelm II

The German monarch was also one of the main actors in the Zabern affair. As the head of the state, Wilhelm II had the utmost authority to influence the course of events.

Although the Polish public did not sympathize with the Emperor, Wilhelm II was initially regarded as a force that could mitigate the conflict and bring justice. At first, the Emperor refrained from issuing an official statement on the Zabern affair, but he was purported to have considerable interest in the case. The Kaiser ordered a thorough investigation, which was reported in the press. This raised some hopes for a successful resolution of the conflict<sup>85</sup>. There were even rumors that the Zabern affair had aroused the monarch's indignation<sup>86</sup>. However, Wilhelm II had firmly sided with the military from the beginning of the conflict<sup>87</sup>. This fact was concealed from the press, creating the illusion that the Emperor was weighing his options.

The first officially announced Kaiser's decision was to organize military exercises for the 99<sup>th</sup> regiment in Zabern, which was reported in early January 1914. This decision evoked a generally negative response. However, some journalists argued that it was meant to punish the officers rather than the recruits. Therefore, the Emperor's opinion was still not clearly communicated to the public<sup>88</sup>. Allegedly, William II remained evasive in the following months of the conflict<sup>89</sup>.

In late January and early February 1914, Wilhelm II took a more decisive stance on the matter. Above all, he openly expressed his support for the Chancellor<sup>90</sup>. On the other hand, he displayed his contempt for the stubbornness of the parliament and ignored its president at official meetings<sup>91</sup>. The Emperor also presented Reuter with a state decoration and invited the colonel to attend a private meeting, which was a clear sign of political allegiance<sup>92</sup>.

<sup>85</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 279 (3 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 281 (3 XII), pp. 1–2; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 279 (3 XII), p. 1; „Górnoślązak” No. 281 (4 XII), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 278 (3 XII), p. 2; „Kurier Śląski” No. 281 (4 XII), p. 1; „Orędownik” No. 279 (4 XII), p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 281 (3 XII), p. 1.

<sup>87</sup> P. Szlanta, *Godzina Marsa...*, pp. 830–831; idem, *Wilhelm II. Ostatni z Hohenzollernów*, Warsaw 2015, pp. 58–60.

<sup>88</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 283 (7 XII), p. 2; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 283 (7 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 282 (7 XII), pp. 1–2; „Orędownik” No. 282 (7 XII), p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> „Górnoślązak” No. 5 (8 I), p. 2; „Głos Śląski” No. 5 (10 I), p. 1; „Katolik” No. 5 (10 I), p. 1; „Polak” No. 5 (10 I), p. 1; „Wielkopolanin” No. 4 (6 I), p. 2.

<sup>90</sup> „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 17 (22 I), p. 1; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 17 (22 I), p. 4; „Kurier Poznański” No. 17 (22 I), p. 3; „Orędownik” No. 18 (23 I), p. 4; „Wielkopolanin” No. 17 (22 I), p. 2.

<sup>91</sup> „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 24 (30 I), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 25 (31 I), p. 2; „Górnoślązak” No. 26 (1 II), p. 2; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 15 (3 II), p. 3; „Kurier Poznański” No. 24 (30 I), p. 1; „Kurier Poznański” No. 25 (31 I), p. 2; „Kurier Śląski” No. 26 (1 II), p. 2; „Orędownik” No. 24 (30 I), p. 5; „Wielkopolanin” No. 25 (31 I), p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 16 (21 I), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 15 (20 I), p. 2; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 28 (5 II), p. 2; „Górnoślązak” No. 15 (20 I), p. 3; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 9 (20 I), p. 3; „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 16 (21 I), p. 3; „Orędownik” No. 30 (7 II), p. 1.

The Polish public responded negatively to the Emperor's resolute speeches on the Zabern affair. The monarch's seemingly balanced approach to the conflict initially raised some hopes. However, his public statements did not truly reflect his intentions. The events that followed only confirmed the Polish public's conviction that the Emperor was a ruthless tyrant.

### Zabern and the Polish question

The nationalist ideology was beginning to crystalize at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and it resonated strongly with members of the Polish community. Citizens were expected to focus on the affairs of the nation as the central issue in public life<sup>93</sup>. The Zabern affair only exacerbated these sentiments. Press reports drew parallels between Alsace and the fate of Poles living in Germany. German officers' actions in Zabern were compared with the oppression of Polish nationals living under German rule.

The fate of Alsatians and Poles was juxtaposed in various contexts. Above all, journalists argued that the Prussian army's treatment of Alsatians was nothing new, and these statements were probably made to indicate that Alsatians were not the only minority that was oppressed by the German state. *Wackes*, the derogatory term used by Lieutenant Forstner in reference to Zabern residents, was compared with the term *polnisches Schwein* (Polish swine). The press observed that *Wackes* was a relatively polite term in comparison with *polnisches Schwein* (which was undoubtedly true). According to the press, military misconduct was not encountered only in Alsace, and Polish recruits also faced discrimination. Newspapers published many stories on the abuse of Polish recruits and the German authorities' mistreatment of civilians. They purported that Alsatians and Poles had similar experiences of oppression and suffering (the phrase "Alsatia suffers Poland's fate" appeared in some newspapers<sup>94</sup>). However, the burden faced by Poles was incommensurable<sup>95</sup>. "Dziennik Robotniczy" even printed a satirical poem mocking Alsatians' outrage at being called *Wackes*. Its author was clearly embittered by the fact that it was Alsatians rather than Poles who were in the center of attention<sup>96</sup>. "Kurier Poznański"

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<sup>93</sup> B. Porter, *Democracy and discipline in late nineteenth-century Poland*, „The Journal of Modern History” 1999, No. 71(2), pp. 392–393.

<sup>94</sup> „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 16 (21 I), p. 3.

<sup>95</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 282 (6 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Kujawski” No. 10 (14 I), p. 1; „Dziennik Poznański” No. 292 (20 XII), p. 1; „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 275 (26 XI), p. 3; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 144 (2 XII), p. 1; „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 148 (11 XII), pp. 1–2; „Głos Śląski” No. 137 (15 XI), p. 2; „Kurier Poznański” No. 293 (21 XII), p. 3; „Orędownik” No. 8 (11 I), p. 1; „Polak” No. 137 (15 XI), p. 2; „Wielkopolanin” No. 32 (10 II), p. 1.

<sup>96</sup> „Dziennik Robotniczy” No. 284 (6 XII), p. 6.

alleged that “if Saverne were a part of Poznań region, Forstner and Reuter would have resorted to even more violence and would escape any punishment”<sup>97</sup>.

Newspapers also reprinted the speeches delivered by Polish deputies to the Reichstag. While denouncing the scandalous events in Zabern, Polish deputies also took the opportunity to address the Polish question. Prussian aggression against the Alsatians was compared with the German authorities’ chauvinistic attitude towards the Polish population. According to “Gazeta Grudziądzka”, anti-Alsatian sentiments were a derivative of anti-Polishness: “The German state first turned its haltered toward Poland, and this antipathy gave rise to a hatred of everything that was not German. This hatred has perpetuated all the problems we are facing today”<sup>98</sup>. The same newspaper referred to the main protagonists of the Zabern affair as “Pole-eaters”<sup>99</sup>. These editorials and reprints of parliamentary speeches contained a note of resentment that the public’s attention focused on Alsatians and not Poles. This martyrdom complex, a phenomenon that has been extensively researched in the social sciences<sup>100</sup>, prompted Polish journalists to search for “Polish Zaberns”. For example, “Gazeta Toruńska” used the term “Saverne in Starogard” when reporting on the discrimination against Polish soldiers in the German army stationed in Starogard<sup>101</sup>.

The bid over which minority group, Poles or Alsatians, suffered more from the hands of the Prussian authorities is reminiscent of the contemporary narrative in political history, where the greatest respect is bestowed on those who have suffered most. In the Zabern affair, Polish newspapers relied on the same mechanism to build the victimization narrative: the enemy was portrayed as a degenerate force, whereas the victim was painted in a purely positive light to evoke sympathy and exacerbate sentiments of martyrdom<sup>102</sup>.

At times, the Alsatians were portrayed as a model minority group that stood firmly for its rights and was able to stir the public’s attention. Journalists admired Alsace for fiercely defending its interests. The press urged the readers to follow the Alsatian example, while at the same time castigating “Polish meekness”<sup>103</sup>.

The news of Forstner’s transfer to Bydgoszcz led to public indignation. According to the press, the local population was disgusted by this turn of events. There were fears

<sup>97</sup> „Kurier Poznański” No. 7 (10 I), p. 1.

<sup>98</sup> „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 144 (2 XII), p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 152 (20 XII), p. 1.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. M. DeSoucey, J. Pozner, C. Fields, K. Dobransky, G. Fine, *Memory and sacrifice. An embodied theory of martyrdom*, „Cultural Sociology” 2008, No. 2(1), pp. 100–101.

<sup>101</sup> „Gazeta Toruńska” No. 286 (12 XII), p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. J. Chamount, *Du culte des heros a la concurrence des victimes*, „Criminologie” 2000, No. 33(1), pp. 167–183; A. Landsberg, *Ameryka, Holocaust i masowa kultura pamięci. W stronę radykalnej polityki empatii*, [in:] *Antropologia pamięci. Zagadnienia i wybór tekstów*, eds. P. Majewski, M. Napiórkowski, Warsaw 2018, pp. 165–172.

<sup>103</sup> „Górnolązak” No. 278 (30 XI), p. 1; „Górnolązak” No. 291 (17 XII), p. 1; „Kurier Śląski” No. 291 (17 XII), p. 1; also: „Orędownik” No. 8 (11 I), p. 1.

that the young lieutenant would continue to display extreme nationalistic sentiments in the new regiment<sup>104</sup>. „Gazeta Grudziądzka” commented on Forstner’s transfer with irony: “these people [people of Bydgoszcz – author’s note] are not familiar with the term *Wackes*”<sup>105</sup>. The rumors that the lieutenant could be transferred to Gliwice elicited a similar response<sup>106</sup>. The fact that Forstner would live in the midst of Poles was regarded as an insult.

## Conclusion

The Zabern affair captured the attention of the public the German Empire in late 1913 and early 1914, and it also attracted considerable interest among Poles living in the Reich. Polish newspapers were free to report on the incident thanks to liberal press laws<sup>107</sup>. Similarly to the vast majority of German periodicals, Polish newspapers kept a watchful and critical eye on these events, including the protests in Zabern, heated parliamentary debates, and the far-reaching consequences of Forstner’s actions. Polish newspapers published in Prussian partition and in Upper Silesia were well integrated with the German press. Polish and German journalists had similar attitudes to the conflict (excluding the far-right press). However, only Polish newspapers drew parallels between the Zabern affair and the Polish cause.

It should also be noted that Poles residing in Prussian partition and in Upper Silesia were strongly united in their opinions. Polish newspapers spoke with one voice, and minor differences were observed only in the way they accentuated certain facts and events. However, the overall tone was identical. All newspapers, including conservative and liberal dailies, papers addressed to the elite or the common folk, expressed similar opinions, sided with the Alsatians, and opposed the Prussians. This is not surprising – Poles could easily empathize with Alsatians because both groups shared a similar political fate. In the discussed period, all ideological and political movements opposed Prussia’s discriminatory practices and misuse of military authority<sup>108</sup>.

Although the reported events were true and shocking, the press elicited highly emotional responses from the readers by manipulating the content and tone of the articles. The conduct of the villains, especially Lieutenant Forstner, undoubtedly deserved severe criticism, but the press went even further. Journalists made every effort to exacerbate the

<sup>104</sup> „Dziennik Bydgoski” No. 27 (4 II), p. 2; „Kurier Poznański” No. 27 (4 II), p. 3; „Orędownik” No. 27 (4 II), p. 5.

<sup>105</sup> „Gazeta Grudziądzka” No. 16 (5 II), p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> „Górnoślązak” No. 286 (11 XII), p. 1; „Kurier Śląski” No. 286 (11 XII), p. 1.

<sup>107</sup> W. Jakóbczyk, *Prasa w Wielkopolsce (1859–1918)*, [in:] *Prasa Polska w latach 1864–1918*, ed. J. Łojek, Warsaw 1976, p. 199.

<sup>108</sup> E. Stadtmüller, *Polskie nurty polityczne wobec Niemiec w latach 1871–1918*, Wrocław 1994, pp. 79–81, 101–102, 128–130, 174–180, 210–212.

vices of the protagonists of the Zabern affair. Some articles were intended to shock the public, and rumors were widely circulated in the press<sup>109</sup>. These emotional pieces could have been a genuine expression of the editors' outrage (and it is possible that some editors gave credence to the rumors), but also a clever marketing ploy to increase readership.

Forstner and members of the state apparatus who sided with the young officer became symbols of Prussian oppression. The lieutenant's vices were exaggerated by the press, and his negative character traits, including possessiveness, impertinence, prejudice, blind militarism, lack of respect for others or the social order, were regarded as quintessential of all Prussians<sup>110</sup>.

Despite the fact that the press was clearly opposed to Prussians, it did not promote equally negative attitudes towards all Germans. The Zabern affair revealed that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Poles clearly distinguished between Prussians and other German tribes<sup>111</sup>. Only the Prussians were regarded as barbarian invaders. The press frequently criticized the "Prussian spirit" (Prussian, not German), but it also widely commented on the internal divide in Germany. For example, the Bavarian Parliament received considerable praise for siding with the Alsatians. "Orędownik" published a short article on the differences between Germans and Prussians in the context of the Zabern affair: "To be German means to be kind to the people. To be Prussian means to be unkind to the people"<sup>112</sup>.

In late 1913 and early 1914, the Zabern affair captured the attention of Poles living in Prussian partition and in Upper Silesia. However, just like all political storms, memories of this event faded with time. In the spring of 1914, public attention turned to the incidents in St. Paul's church in Berlin<sup>113</sup>. This conflict also faded from public memory at the outbreak of the Great War which eclipsed all previous political crises in the Second Reich.

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<sup>109</sup> Cf. M. Palczewski, *Selekcja informacji w mediach – zasady, wartości, manipulacje*, „Naukowy Przegląd Dziennikarski” 2015, No. 2, pp. 87–88.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. W. Wrzesiński, *Niemiec w stereotypach polskich XIX i XX wieku*, [in:] *Narody i stereotypy*, ed. T. Walas, Kraków 1995, pp. 185–187.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Z. Mitosek, *Literatura i stereotypy*, Wrocław 1974, p. 73.

<sup>112</sup> „Orędownik” No. 32 (10 II), p. 1.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. P. Szlanta, *Odepchnięci do Stołu Pańskiego. Zajścia w kościele św. Pawła w Berlinie w 1914 r. oraz ich reperkusje*, „Przegląd Historyczny” 2012, Vol. CII, No. 2, pp. 333–346.

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**Press coverage of the Zabern affair (1913–1914) in Prussian partition and in Upper Silesia**

**Summary:** The article analyzes the coverage of the Zabern affair (1913–1914) in selected Polish newspapers published in Prussian partition and in Upper Silesia. The affair was a crisis of domestic policy in the German Empire shortly before the outbreak of World War I. The portrayal of the events and the main protagonists of the Zabern affair, including Emperor Wilhelm II, in Polish press was also examined. The



article discusses the parallels between the published accounts of the Zabern affair and the fate of Poles living in Prussian partition. Attempts were also made to identify cultural factors and stereotypes that could have influenced the tone of press articles.

**Keywords:** Zabern affair, Prussian partition, public opinion, press, newspapers

### **Die polnische Presse im preußischen Teilungsgebiet und in Oberschlesien angesichts der Zabern-Affäre (1913–1914)**

**Zusammenfassung:** Der Artikel behandelt die Reaktionen ausgewählter Titel polnischer Zeitschriften im preußischen Teilungsgebiet und in Oberschlesien auf die Zabern-Affäre (1913–1914), die die politische Szene des Deutschen Reiches an der Schwelle zum Ersten Weltkrieg bewegte. Der Beitrag beschreibt die Berichterstattung der Zeitschriften über die wichtigsten Ereignisse im Zusammenhang mit der Affäre und das Bild, das sie von den Protagonisten, darunter Kaiser Wilhelm II erstellte. Der Text zeigt auch auf, wie die polnischen Zeitschriften die Ereignisse von Zabern mit der polnischen Gemeinschaft im deutschen Staat in Verbindung brachten – zum Beispiel, wie sie die Ereignisse der Affäre mit der Situation der preußischen Herrschaft in den polnischen Gebieten verglichen. Es wird auch der Frage nachgegangen, welche kulturellen Tropen oder Stereotype bei der Gestaltung der Presseberichte eine Rolle gespielt haben könnten.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Zabern-Affäre, preußisches Teilungsgebiet, öffentliche Meinung, Presse, Zeitungen

### **Polska prasa zaboru pruskiego i Górnego Śląska wobec afery Zabern (1913–1914)**

**Streszczenie:** W artykule przeanalizowano reakcje wybranych tytułów polskich czasopism zaboru pruskiego i Górnego Śląska na aferę Zabern (1913–1914), która poruszyła scenę polityczną cesarstwa niemieckiego u progu I wojny światowej, a także relacjonowanie przez periodyki głównych wydarzeń związanych z aferą oraz kreowany przez nie wizerunek jej bohaterów, w tym cesarza Wilhelma II. Tekst zwraca uwagę na to, jak wydarzenia z Zabern polskie czasopisma odnosiły do społeczności Polaków w państwie niemieckim – chociażby jak porównywała wydarzenia afery z sytuacją pruskiego panowania na ziemiach polskich. Poruszono również kwestię tego, które tropy czy stereotypy kulturowe mogły być czynnikami w kształtowaniu prasowych narracji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** afery Zabern, zabór pruski, opinia publiczna, prasa, gazety

