

Celebrating the nation: the case of Upper Silesia after the plebiscite in 1921

Andrzej Michalczyk

(Max Weber Center for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies, Erfurt, Germany.)

The territory discussed in this article was for centuries the object of conflicts and its borders often altered. Control of some parts of Upper Silesia changed several times during the twentieth century. However, the activity of the states concerned was not only confined to the shifting borders. The Polish and German governments both tried to assert the transformation of the nationality of the population and the standardisation of its identity on the basis of ethno-linguistic nationalism.

The handling of controversial aspects of Polish history is still a problem which cannot be ignored. Subjects relating to state policy in the western parts of pre-war Poland have been explored, but most projects have been intended to justify and defend Polish national policy. On the other hand, post-war research by German scholars has neglected the conflict between the nationalities in Upper Silesia. It is only recently that new material has been published in England, Germany and Poland. This examined the problem of the acceptance of national orientations in the already existing state rather than the broader topic of the formation and establishment of nationalistic movements aimed (only) at the creation of a nation-state.¹

While the new research has generated relevant results, they have however, concentrated only on the broader field of national policy, above all on the nationalisation of the economy, language, education and the policy of changing names. Against this backdrop, this paper points out the effects of the political nationalisation on the form and content of state celebrations in Upper Silesia in the following remarks.

The most important issues are partly connected with the analyses mentioned above. According to Linek, the years 1922-1950 covered 'a time of dynamic activity by the nation-state' in Upper Silesia and were characterised by holistic actions by the state aimed at implementing principles of an ethnic nationalism.² Arguing along the same lines, Hobsbawm named his chapter covering the years 1918-1950 'The apogee of nationalism'.³ The question that results from those observations is to what extent state celebrations were performed for nationalising purposes. Moreover, I try to examine how far the social inclusion or exclusion that could be activated before or during the festivities depended on nationalistic principles. Finally, I aim to look at how the population of Upper Silesia reacted to the ideas created by the state authorities.

The state celebrations that constitute the core of this case study can be defined, on the one hand, as forms of the representation of the national policy in public; and, on the other, as a collective experience of the participating individuals.⁴ They are planned

¹See: Richard Blanke, *Orphans of Versailles: The Germans in Western Poland, 1918-1939* Lexington 1993; Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism reframed: nationhood and the national question in the New Europe* Cambridge 1996; Matthias Kneip, *Die deutsche Sprache in Oberschlesien. Untersuchungen zur politischen Rolle der deutschen Sprache als Minderheitensprache 1921-1998* Dortmund 1999; Bernard Linek, 'Deutsche und polnische nationale Politik in Oberschlesien 1922-1989', in *Die Grenzen der Nationen: Identitätenwandel in Oberschlesien in der Neuzeit*, ed. Kai Struve and Phillip Ther Marburg 2002:137-68.

² Linek, 140.

³ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge 1990).

⁴ See: Winfried Gebhardt, *Fest, Feier und Alltag. Über die gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit des Menschen und ihre Deutung*. Frankfurt/M 1987: 63ff.; *Inszenierungen des Nationalstaats. Politische Feiern in*

or founded, and throughout related to a concrete, usually historical occurrence. They offer the state an exceptional opportunity beyond everyday life to reflect on the origin, importance and future of the groups and/or institutions, to enact them in public and, thus, to present them on a broad social basis.⁵ The festivities have a potential strength to become an important medium for the codification, transmission and appropriation of collective models and to stress historical continuity and cultural unity.⁶

The selected case study deals with the Upper Silesian plebiscite celebrations. These celebrations represented the biggest enactments of the Polish and the German state power in Upper Silesia in the period from 1922 to 1932 and, thus, are also best documented. Most source material used for this research comes from the contemporary press and public as well as secret reports by civil servants. This case study begins in 1922. In this year, the international allied commission abandoned its governance and safety tasks in the controversial borderland, and the Upper Silesian administration was assumed by the Polish and the German states. This development facilitated the organisation of Polish and German celebrations of the anniversary of the plebiscite from 1923 onwards. The last celebration of the plebiscite organised by state authorities took place in 1932. This year marks the final date of this paper.

Nationalism and the Upper Silesians before the plebiscite

With the increase in national consciousness and a progressing polarisation of national attitudes during the 'Kulturkampf' the Upper Silesian ethnic borderland, home to strategically crucial heavy industry, changed into an area defined by nationalism in the early years of the twentieth century. After the defeat of Austria and Germany in the First World War, the new Polish state claimed the entire region on the grounds that ethnic Polish people lived there. As a result of German and Polish military actions (the so-called 'Silesian uprisings') and a plebiscite, Upper Silesia was divided between Poland and Germany in 1922, and became the borderland of two nation-states.

Even though Germany had lost large parts of its eastern territories, it still contained sections of Polish-speaking or Slavophone people, and because of the readjustment of European borders after the First World War, a German minority now found itself citizens of Poland. Relations between the nationalities in Upper Silesia were already complicated at the time when the country was still part of the German empire. The intensification of political rivalry and agitation was reflected in a specific way in the consciousness of the local population, which took place before the plebiscite. Yet, many Silesians remained unimpressed despite the sharp national mobilisation and even bloody fights.

The language problem was related to the ethnic process of identification. Upper Silesians frequently had a command of both German and Polish, leading to a situation in which the language was not a decisive criterion for nationality. For a considerable part of the population the daily use of the Slavophone Upper Silesian dialect was not necessarily synonymous with Polish national consciousness. About 60% of the Upper

Italien und Deutschland seit 1860/1871, ed. Sabine Behrenbeck and Alexander Nützenadel Köln 2000; Hans-Juergen Luesebrink, 'Das Fest', in *Orte des Alltags. Miniaturen aus der europäischen Kulturgeschichte*, ed. Heinz-Gerhardt Haupt München 1994: 202-6.

⁵ See: *Celebrating Ethnicity and Nation, American Festive Culture from the Revolution to the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. Geneviève Fabre, Juergen Heidekind and Kai Dreisbach New York 2001.

⁶ See: Behrenbeck and Nuetzenadel: 13; *Festive Culture in Germany and Europe from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Karin Friedrick London 2000.

Silesian population, according to the official census of 1910, spoke Polish or regional Slavonic dialects. The plebiscite in 1921 had already shown that only 40 percent voted for Polish control of Upper Silesia. Moreover, in this region over 90% of the population were Roman Catholic. Religion often influenced the life of the inhabitants in much a stronger way than national divisions, and formed a common ground and, thus, a base for deeper understanding between both ethnic groups.

The governments of Poland and Germany realised that some people in the Upper Silesian border area were indifferent to their national identity. From the perspective of the state apparatuses, the Upper Silesians could be assigned to three national defined groups.⁷ Two of them developed clear dividing lines, i.e. the group of the 'indigenous' and the 'strangers'. However, the attitude of the third group was contradictory to the idea of the nation-state propagated in Warsaw or Berlin. These people were described - in terms of the nationalistic discourse - as national 'unstable' or 'undecided', and appeared in the reports as a group with 'unconscious national attitude'. Additionally, they often showed resistance to national declarations and preferred other forms of identification, e.g. regional or religious ones, as opposed to national identity. These circumstances formed a focus for conflict. However, propaganda measures introduced by the states covered not only the nationally 'problematical' group, but also other parts of the population which were exposed to the nationality policy. The whole population of Upper Silesia therefore became an object of mobilisation, further consolidation, assimilation, or societal exclusion. The official state celebrations of the anniversary of the plebiscite revealed this development.

The celebrations of the anniversary of the plebiscite in German Upper Silesia

On 20 March 1921, the plebiscite that was to decide upon the state affiliation of Upper Silesia took place. A total of 60% of the people voted for the annexation of Upper Silesia to Germany. For these people it meant that the whole plebiscite area would not be separated from the German Republic; the day that the results were announced, many spontaneous ceremonies were held. That the region remained divided by a state border many supporters of Germany regarded as 'unfair' and 'treacherous'. Every year in commemoration of the plebiscite, the German population organised protest demonstrations against the decisions of the allies as well as against the whole system constructed at Versailles.

The first celebration of the anniversary of the plebiscite in 1923 occurred without planning or a unified central idea. Only Alfons Proske, the Regierungspraesident in Oppeln/Opole, made an appeal to celebrate the anniversary in March 1924. As a local official of highest rank, he insinuated unambiguously that Upper Silesia and its population was torn apart by allied order against the true will of the Upper Silesian people. According to him, the division was the root of the region's poor economic situation, particularly among the German resettlers from Polish Upper Silesia. Proske called for loyalty to the lost parts of Upper Silesia and to the whole fatherland, and for commemoration of the injustice of the border area. Commemorations of the plebiscite were organised under his motto on 20 and 21 March.

Proske's call contributed to the announcement of the fundamental points of the German government's propaganda during the ceremonies. Above all the division of the territory was deemed unacceptable and regarded as Franco-Polish revenge. The celebration of the plebiscite's anniversary gave the German authorities a perfect

⁷ Linek, 144.

opportunity to show the world that their country had the right to govern the whole of Upper Silesia after March 1921. Accordingly, voices for a removal of the 'unfair' border became very clear and explicit. Appealing to the solidarity of their nation, the government pointed out that the Germans remaining in the Polish part of Upper Silesia were not forgotten, and that they were a valuable part of the nation. The emphasis on national consolidation was directed toward both, the German Diaspora in Upper Silesia, and toward the Polish state that dominated there. The authorities also styled everyday life in Upper Silesia as daily national combat and as experienced patriotism.⁸

Over the years, the course and contents of the festivities display a rising interest by the authorities. In 1923, high officials did not show much interest in organising commemorations; however, patriotic events with a unified programme were already propagated by a set of newspaper articles that published the call of Proske in 1924. A year later, the anniversary of the Upper Silesian vote took a genuinely official form, and included large events in many cities, framed by festive speeches given by civil servants.⁹

The fifth anniversary of the plebiscite in 1926 formed a temporary zenith of state participation in the celebrations. The changed international situation of Germany, and internal developments in Upper Silesia contributed to the fact that the periphery of the German empire moved to the centre of public life. A year before, two political events took place and produced an additional burden for German-Polish relations, in particular for the Upper Silesian issue. The so-called custom war which concentrated on the export and import of Upper Silesian coal broke out and escalated on the new German-Polish border in the summer of 1925. A few months later, diplomatic negotiations in Locarno were completed and confirmed the international acknowledgment of the French-German and the Belgian-German borders; however, they kept open the future of the East German border. The two occurrences gave rise to a very emotional exchange of arguments between the German and Polish governments which was expressed, *inter alia*, in official celebrations of the plebiscite, and had direct influence on the form and content of the ceremonies.

All political parties represented in the government as well as various paramilitary and homeland associations, such as *Vereinigte Verbände Heimattreuer Oberschlesier* [The United Federations of Homeland-Faithful Upper Silesians] and *Jungdeutschland* [Young Germany] responsible for nationalist propaganda among the Upper Silesian people took part in the arrangement of the celebrations. The first ceremonies took place in various Upper Silesian cities on 21 March and consisted of processions joined by representatives of the regional elite which became the speaker of the state government. The fifth anniversary of the plebiscite was crowned in the capital of the German Upper Silesia with costly official celebrations one week later.¹⁰ National flags were put up everywhere in the city as a welcome and an honour gate with the inscription 'Gedenke, dass du ein Deutscher bist' [Commemorate that you are a German] was erected on the main street. Over two hundred prominent personalities of Upper Silesia, among them representatives of the local government, municipalities, clubs and societies as well as all local clergy and military participated in the

⁸ *Oberschlesische Volksstimme* 81/21.3.1924; *Oberschlesische Zeitung* 68/20.3.1924; Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie [Archive of New Records in Warsaw] (AAN), Konsulat Generalny RP w Opolu, Sign. 162, Consul Szczepański's report to the foreign office No. 82 / 26.3.1924, and No. 118 / 26.3.1925.

⁹ *Oberschlesische Morgenzeitung* 68/20.3.1925; *Ostdeutsche Morgenpost* 82/23.3.1925.

¹⁰ *Oberschlesische Volksstimme* 75/29.3.1926.

ceremonies. However, it was the numerous guests from Berlin, such as the German Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Kuelz and the Prussian Minister of the Interior Carl Severing, that gave the whole event its importance. At the market square, they were greeted by the public from all windows, balconies, and even roofs. The first part of the official ceremony took place in the well decorated city theatre and was framed by musical presentations of local choirs and orchestras, as well as by a speech from Kuelz. Later, the second ceremony at the market square was followed with a speech by Severing.

The two speakers thanked the Upper Silesians for the national fight during the plebiscite and stressed the territorial integrity of the nation.¹¹ Subsequently, they emphasised ties to their compatriots who lived as national minorities in other states. The ministers also pointed out the 'great, united, internally connected community' of the Germans. Severing used martial rhetoric and gave the Upper Silesian plebiscite the character of a military victory that has to be commemorated festively like the other glorious battles of the German nation. In this way, he tried to confirm a political myth and to declare the participants of the battle for the nation as national heroes. On the other hand, he contrasted the cultural superiority of the Germans with the Poles who he pictured as violent Slavonic people, and as the enemy who had to be overcome with weapons of the higher German spirit. A common singing of the *Deutschlandlied* completed the celebrations.

In the commemorative speeches and during the course of the celebrations the rank of the Polish minority in the German national policy is very characteristic. The national minorities within the German borders did not represent a substantial problem for the German state in domestic politics. Both groups of people, those not yet nationalised, and those Upper Silesians who subscribed to Polish national consciousness, were perceived by the German government as politically and economically harmless. The Upper Silesians with 'unconscious national attitude' had no representation of their own with clear political outlines and were in the arms of the Catholic Centre Party. Moreover, over 70,000 Polish speaking or Slavophone people among them nearly all the members of the native elite left the German part of Upper Silesia after the plebiscite.¹² The immigration of the Polish leaders was caused to a certain degree by excesses and assaults of the paramilitary and nationalist German associations and contributed to the fact that the members of the Polish minority that remained in Western Upper Silesia were regarded as 'germanizable' [eindeutschungsfähig], meaning that they would be able to become German; therefore, they were neither excluded from the ceremonies nor attacked during the national celebrations. The local authorities strove rather to encourage the members of the Polish minority and the 'nationally undecided' Upper Silesians to subscribe to the German spirit [Gesinnung] by the state celebrations.¹³

The celebrations of the anniversary of the plebiscite continued until the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. Hitler introduced important modifications in the Upper Silesian holiday calendar. Above all, he cancelled the local festivities of the anniversary of the plebiscite and shifted the main focus to the national celebration of May Day as an additional means of *Gleichschaltung* in Germany. As soon as the Nazis came to power, they initiated propaganda for a complete separation of Slavonic and Germanic

¹¹ According to a newspaper article by Schadewald in *Ostdeutsche Morgenpost* in: AAN, Consul Szczepański's report to the foreign office No. 147 / 30.3.1926.

¹² Linek 147.

¹³ See for example the speech of the Landrat in Beuthen, Kurt Urbanek in: *Oberschlesische Zeitung* 68/20.3.1924, or the article on the title-page in *Oberschlesische Volksstimme* 75/29.3.1926.

elements according to their racial policy and the mechanisms of exclusion were applied at the national socialist celebrations. The takeover of power by the NSDAP had a significant influence on the festive culture in Western Upper Silesia. Hitler's idea of a pure German race had weakened measures of nationalisation in the borderland for several years, even though the long-term purpose was the liquidation of the Polish/Slavonic minority. Yet, regarding oneself as a member of the Polish minority became more popular in the first years after the takeover, when the Nazis had dissolved the German Catholic party and many other organisations whose activists had experienced the situation in the Upper Silesian borderland. At the same time, those activists regarded the Polish minority as not worthy of being part of the German community, the 'Volksgemeinschaft'. As a result Catholics in particular found a niche within Polish organisations where they could continue their activities and holidays.

However, these conditions did not last for long, because the situation of the Polish minority became precarious as German-Polish relations deteriorated further. Open terror reigned in Upper Silesia in 1939. Public festivities as well as public church ceremonies held in the Polish language were forbidden. Those who opposed government decisions were exposed to persecution by the state. Yet, the situation in the last twelve months before the outbreak of the war was untypical of Upper Silesian relations between the world wars. It has to be emphasised that celebrating national holidays in the German part of Upper Silesia served the unification of the people without regard to ethnic affiliation for a considerable time. The confrontational efforts during the national celebrations were introduced with the race policy of Nazi-Germany in the late 30s.

The Polish minority issue was not the centre of attention for the governing elite of the Weimar Republic. The national policy was focused on solidarity with the German minority beyond the borders. The German *Volksgemeinschaft* in Poland could be used for the purposes of foreign policy and passed as a justification for revisionist demands in the East.¹⁴ For these reasons, state authorities aimed to develop the picture of a 'bleeding border' which always emerged in the celebrations of the anniversary of the plebiscite. In this way, they intended to emphasise alleged or real suffering of the Germans under the rule of the majority nation. The maintenance of the relationships to the German Diaspora and the national fight for the Germans abroad [Auslanddeutschtum] performed a compensating role in the Weimar Republic, which suffered from the consequences of the war and the economic crisis.

The commemorative speeches and the course of the anniversary of the plebiscite in Western Upper Silesia clarified the principles and the political myth of the German nation-state. At the same time, they were an expression of the nationalising character of the celebrations. They stressed the character of German homeland nationalism which was directed 'outward', across the boundaries of territory and citizenship, toward members of 'their own' ethnic nationality, that is toward persons who 'belong' (or can claim to belong) to the external national homeland by ethnonational affinity, although they reside in and are (ordinarily) citizens of other states.¹⁵ The revisionist programme coded in the German celebrations released an opposite reaction on the Polish side of the border, where the nationalising nationalism was directed 'inward' by the state, toward its own territories and citizenship.¹⁶ In this constellation of two types of nationalising states, they had to clash head-on. Therefore, the Polish

¹⁴ Linek 148; Brubaker 123f.

¹⁵ Brubaker 111.

¹⁶ Ibid.

government introduced its own propaganda plan and announced it during the Polish festivities of the anniversary of the plebiscite.

The Celebrations of the Anniversary of the Plebiscite in Polish Upper Silesia

There were political groups on both sides of the border in Upper Silesia who were ideologically close, and whose leaders had first-hand experience of government in the Prussian state. They gained their political know-how under similar circumstances and were advocates of the constitutional state and parliamentary system. The Catholic Centre Party governed in the province of Oppeln until the National Socialist seizure of power. All heads of the local government: Joseph Bitta (until 1923), Alfons Proske (until 1929), and Hans Lukaschek (until 1933) came from the local German elite. In contrast to this, in Polish Upper Silesia another practice developed and local officials of the highest rank *wojewoda* came from outside the area. Nevertheless, the Christian Democrats played an important role in the political development in Kattowitz/Katowice. Their leader Wojciech Korfanty had political allies in Józef Rymer, the first *wojewoda*, and in Konstanty Wolny, the first marshal of the local Silesian parliament.¹⁷ However, the ideological propinquity had no impact on the political activity of both governments, which did not make attempts for an approach across national boundaries. This was expressed in the official celebrations, which reflected upon the recent fights and the national goals of the governments from Warsaw and Berlin. Consequently, existing similarities had no chance to come to the fore during the commemorations of the plebiscite.

Only the fourth anniversary was marked with occasional celebrations in the Polish province of Silesia. Two reasons can be given for this. On the one hand, the authorities were not interested in bringing back the memory of the disappointing result of the plebiscite in the light of the post-war expectation of the Polish side. On the other hand, only the considerable activity of the government in Oppeln and its direct involvement in carrying out German festivities generated the organisation of propagandistic countermeasures. The most important press organs massively campaigned for the broad participation in the rallies in Katowice, Tarnowitz/Tarnowskie Góry, and Rybnik and in other protest actions against the revisionist German policy.¹⁸ According to the press, over 50,000 people took part at the procession in Katowice on 15 March 1925 and passed a common resolution of the combat readiness of the Silesian people for inviolability of the Polish borders and for unity with the Polish motherland. Furthermore, the German minority was mentioned as an internal danger.¹⁹ Large-scale Polish celebration was provoked only one year later after the ceremonies for the fifth anniversary in the German Upper Silesia.

Similarly to the German part, nationalistic associations, such as The Federation for Defence of the Western Areas (*Związek Obrony Kresów Zachodnich*) and The Federation of Silesian Insurgents (*Związek Powstańców Śląskich*) took an active part in the preparation of the celebrations. This confirmed the close symbiosis between the national movement and the state and gave reliable means of influence on the society to the governing elite. The well-developed nationalistic associations and federations

¹⁷ Maria W. Wanatowicz, *Historia społeczno-polityczna Górnego Śląska w latach 1918-1945* Katowice 1994): 47ff.

¹⁸ *Polonia* 74/16.3.1925.

¹⁹ Bogdan Cimała, 'Obchody rocznic plebiscytu na Górnym Śląsku w latach 1924-1927', *Kronika Katowic* 6 1994: 121-2; Edward Mendel, 'Obchody rocznic powstań śląskich przez społeczeństwo polskie do 1939', *Encyklopedia powstań śląskich* 1982: 336

were always helpful in relations with the state and, in the end, so effectively subjugated the needs of the nation-state that gradually they became parts of national structures. Accordingly, the arrangement of state celebrations and the procurement of national propaganda were entrusted to nationalistic organisations.²⁰

The ceremonial procession took place in Katowice on 21 March 1926 and, according to the Polish press, it drew together almost 80,000 people, among them over 400 standard-bearers and nearly 100 musical bands. After commemorative speeches, a common resolution was accepted in which the inviolability of the Polish borders, the guarantee of the minority rights for Polish people in Germany, and the exclusion of Germany from the League of Nations' council was demanded once more. Moreover, the resolution's authors required to dissolve the most important umbrella organisation of the German minority in the Polish part of Upper Silesia, The German National Association for Polish Silesia (*Deutscher Volksbund fuer Polnisch-Schlesien*).

The German minority in Polish Silesia held a stronger social and financial position than the Polish one on the other side of the border. Reproaching the German minority and the demand for the dissolution of the minority associations which appeared during the celebrations, reflected the principles of Poland's national policy. Accordingly, the German minority in Western Poland was regarded as one of the biggest dangers for state integrity. The first Polish government of Ignacy Paderewski had already developed a framework for the relations to the Germans settled in Poland in January 1919:²¹ (1) removal of the Germans from the administration, (2) measures against the education of Polish children at German schools, (3) fight against the germanisation of the Protestant population, (4) support for Polish organisations in the fight against the Germanism [*niemieckość*], and (5) economic balance between the Polish and the German population. The governments kept to these guidelines of the nationalising state and, consequently, the national celebrations in the borderlands often had an anti-German character. In Upper Silesia, this meant that the people with a German national consciousness were regarded as 'state strangers', and excluded from participation in the events of the nation-state.

The absence of government representatives from the state capital, particularly on the fifth anniversary, was a remarkable contrast to the German ceremonies. Some parts of the Silesian press reprimanded this 'scandalous' absence, and the Polish consul in Beuthen/Bytom criticised the government agencies.²² Szczepański compared the propaganda means used on the fifth anniversary of the plebiscite in both states and in the report to the Polish minister of foreign affairs demanded to use propaganda measures more effectively and resolutely. This report illustrates that the Warsaw government had a moderate interest in the nationalisation of the Upper Silesian celebrations and, at this time, used them only occasionally in order to give the national policy more expression.

The sixth anniversary of the plebiscite in 1927 took place under a new government. After the May revolution of 1926, the Sanacja group, rather left-oriented and linked to Marshal Józef Piłsudski, came to power and the post of the Silesian *wojewoda* was assumed by Michał Grażyński, who came from Galicia, but had participated in the Upper Silesian uprisings. However, this change did not contribute to mitigation of national policy regarding the German minority in Upper Silesia. In contrast to the conception of Marshal Piłsudski, who aimed to establish a Polish nation consisting of different nationalities and to assimilate the existing minorities with state pressure,

²⁰ *Biuletyn Związku Obrony Kresów Zachodnich* 11(16)/14.3.1926.

²¹ Dariusz Matelski, *Niemcy w Polsce w XX wieku*. Warszawa 1999: 66.

²² AAN, Consul Szczepański's report to the foreign office No. 147 / 30.3.1926.

Grażyński pursued his own political blueprint with respect to national issues. In his welcoming speech, he declared the goal of the unification of Upper Silesia with the Polish state without compromise.²³ Subsequently, he carried out staff changes in his office and filled the posts with people from nationalist associations.

As a consequence, the celebrations of the sixth anniversary of the plebiscite were organised by the nationalist federations and expressed the nationalist character of the new Upper Silesian political elite.²⁴ The festivities on 20 March 1927 included a large rally of paramilitary organisations before the representatives of the central government and the parliament. Commemorative speeches were delivered by the Polish Minister of Finance, Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, *wojewoda* Grażyński, and other members of the Polish and local parliament. The content of these communications confirmed the goals of the national policy of the Polish republic in the western areas. The speakers strove for a serious and patriotic note, but without unnecessary aggression in relation towards the German state.²⁵

The sixth anniversary of the Upper Silesian vote represented the pinnacle and, at the same time, the end of the plebiscite's celebrations organised by the state authorities in Polish Upper Silesia. The new Silesian *wojewoda* had other conceptions of the national policy in his area of responsibility. Grażyński concentrated harder on the stimulation of the anti-German uprising's tradition and shifted the main focus of the state ceremonies to 3 May. The importance of the celebration of this day was two-fold in Upper Silesia. On the state level, it was the anniversary of the first Polish Constitution of 1791; on the local Upper Silesian level, it was the celebration of the third and biggest Polish uprising in 1921. The modified celebrations displayed an extremely military character, and were obviously directed against the Germans. The former insurgents, i.e. the most dogged pursuers of the German minority, became the leading performers of the celebrations. Moreover, Grażyński could also fall back on the increased opportunities of an authoritarian Polish state. This led to many incidents on the national level in the first days of May after the introduction of its celebration, all the more because the insurgents felt unpunished under the protection of the *wojewoda*. Furthermore, the powerful military anti-German manifestations on 3 May generated a further split in society because they did not meet any support in the circles of the Christian democrats, who were still powerful in Catholic Upper Silesia.

However, decisive for Grażyński's hard and confrontational policy with regard to the German minority was the character of his political milieu, whose backbone constituted The Federation for Defence of the Western Areas and The Federation of Silesian Insurgents. These groups belonged to the new, young and powerful elites of independent Poland and were shaped by common armed fights for the establishment of a Polish state. This life experience made them assume an attitude that preferred the nationalising form of nationalism to the principles of the constitutional state and of the democratic system in Upper Silesia.²⁶ Therefore, the political and social pressure on the German minority in the Polish Upper Silesia became stronger, and was reflected in the militarised celebrations of the uprising's tradition.

²³ *Polonia* 246/7.9.1926.

²⁴ Archiwum Państwowe w Katowicach [State Archive Katowice] (APK), Urząd Wojewódzki Śląski, Wydział Prezydialny, Sign. 18/ p. 8-10.

²⁵ *Gazeta Robotnicza* 62/17.3.1927, 64/19.3.1927, 65/20.3.1927; *Polska Zachodnia* 17., 18., 20.3.1927; *Polonia* 79/21.3.1927.

²⁶ Linek 149.

Reactions towards nationalising propaganda

The last point of this article discusses the attitude of the Upper Silesian population towards the propaganda of nationalisation presented during the celebrations of the anniversary of the plebiscite. These remarks are only based on official state documents and local newspaper articles and can therefore not present a complete attitude of the Upper Silesians, and the extent of their involvement in the holidays. It is also extremely difficult to examine different forms of the perception of the state propaganda, when the objects of this propaganda produced only few historical sources.

An approximate number of the participants can be drawn from official documents. The national celebrations, particularly those of the fifth or tenth anniversary of the plebiscite, were mostly very well attended, even by a hundred thousand people.²⁷ The authorities organised the festivities at the most important central places of the cities, market squares, or sports stadiums for instance, which were technically the most suitable places for big events. Access to the places of the event was usually made easier by free or reduced carriage, and people were sometimes encouraged to participate in the ceremonies by receiving a free meal. This probably had a certain influence on attendance figures, particularly in times of economic crisis. Accordingly, the stadiums and market places were filled with large crowds. The official documents indicate only very slightly whether these people were truly interested in the celebrations or whether different motives induced them to take part in public enactments of the nation-state. I can only assume that there were various perceptions, extended from an extremely patriotic, if not chauvinistic position, up to an attitude indifferent towards nationalism. This inhomogeneous image confused the authorities. The Polish and German authorities that followed the plebiscite, or the Nazis, as well as the Polish authoritarian government, had tremendous problems in determining the national identity of some parts of the population that took part in the celebrations, although they strove for a highly differentiated image of the nationalities in this region.

It cannot be determined easily how far the propagandised image of the two conflicting nations corresponded to reality, but even official documents suggest that there were many situations in Upper Silesia when the nationalising purposes did not come to the fore during festivities. An occurrence from everyday life may serve as a flagrant example. A regional leader of the NSDAP reported to Berlin – exactly on the second anniversary of the Nazis takeover of power - on a wedding celebration, which was well attended by Polish and German speaking people and which lasted over two days. It alarmed his superior that his deputy in the regional structure of NSDAP Hans Witolla got married to a radical pro-Polish activist's stepdaughter. He wrote:

I consider this [wedding] impossible for reasons of the secrecy of different political procedures in the district leadership, particularly Buhl [bride's stepfather] must be called prominent and the most radical Polish minority leader. His name appears again and again in the features of the Polish press as well as in the reports of the secret state police. All Polish meetings take place in Buhl's house. It is said that Wittola also was in

²⁷ See pictures and commentaries in the local newspapers on 20-23 March 1926 or 1931 e.g. in *Ostdeutsche Morgenpost*, *Oberschlesische Zeitung*, or *Polska Zachodnia*.

Buhl's house during Polish meetings. However, I do not know anything about facts which Witolla noticed or experienced there and which are important for the responsible authorities.

Approx. 150 people participated in the wedding reception in the Hotel Lax. [...] The following day, the wedding was celebrated at Buhl's house.

I cannot imagine that Witolla would have received the consent to this marriage from the regional NSDAP-apparatus, particularly according to the situation in the Upper Silesian plebiscite area.²⁸

The population in ethnically mixed Upper Silesia had the opportunity to choose from a rich spectrum of civilization and culture and to decide circumstantially which side of identification was better to prefer. There are many examples in official reports, particularly concerning the activities and holidays of youth associations. Even in the late 1930s, there were such cases in the Upper Silesian borderland, which were unheard of in the Central Polish or German regions. In a report from one village, a policeman wrote that several members of the local Hitler Jugend, including its leader, took part in festivities of their rival Polish youth association.²⁹ At the end of the letter he admitted that there was no-one in the village who would qualify as the leader of the HJ. In general, youth and sport associations' holidays were a sphere where nationalism played a limited role. The members of Polish clubs participated in German meetings until the outbreak of the war and those Upper Silesians, who tended towards German identity, in Polish events. The authorities were extremely indignant about this. They did not notice that the national affiliation of associations designed by them was not adopted by the Upper Silesians. In the eyes of the native population, most associations were linked to their homeland, or were simply Silesian.

The lack of chauvinism among the Upper Silesians also manifested itself in cultural events, which were attended by German speaking and Slavophone people. What was more important to them was the quality of the event or the ease of access. Their negligence to subscribe to national slogans was noticed by the German government as well as by the Polish authorities in their part of the region. Contrary to the central parts of the nation-states, one could not find apparently objective bases of national consciousness like language, religion, or descent. An identity related to the homeland remained the most important in Upper Silesia and usually dominated a secondary German or Polish national consciousness until 1945.³⁰ The bi-linguistic and bi-cultural competence of the Upper Silesian population could appear even during the same evening. In 1929 the chief of police in Gleiwitz/Gliwice reported on a Polish singing choral society from a suburb of the city. The society had organised a celebration with a guest choir which sang Polish songs. Subsequently, most guests as well as the organisers, who all belonged to the Slavophone part of the population, took part in a party and talked German most of the time. Having had a couple of

²⁸ Report from the Landrat in Oppeln to the Regierungspraesident on 31.1.1935, in *Deutsche und Polen zwischen den Kriegen. Minderheitenstatus und "Volkstumskampf" im Grenzgebiet*, ed. by Rudolf Jaworski and Marian Wojciechowski München 1997: 911 (translated by author).

²⁹ Report from the Polizeipraesident in Gleiwitz to the Regierungspraesident in Oppeln on 12.4.1938, in *ibid.*: 949.

³⁰ Philipp Ther, 'Die Grenzen des Nationalismus: Der Wandel von Identitäten in Oberschlesien von der Mitte des 19. Jhs. bis 1939' in *Nationalismen in Europa. West- und Osteuropa im Vergleich*, ed. Ulrike von Hirschhausen and Ute Leonhard Göttingen: 2001: 332.

drinks, the participants began singing some German drinking and soldier songs. The police officer continued to report:

The two Polish minority leaders [Lapa and Aulich] persuaded people not to sing German songs; but their interference was not considered. Some invited guests –members of the Polish minority – were offended by Lapa's behaviour. [...] Finally, Lapa antagonised so many among his fellowmen that he did not have enough courage to go home to Ostroppa after the party, but he went to the city centre in company of political police officials in order to avoid an assault.³¹

Finally, one must underline that the emphasising of the national identities was changeable or not fixed in wide sections of the population of Upper Silesia. The decisive factor here was the attractiveness of the national and political offers, which were attentively observed by Upper Silesians. Accordingly, their (temporal) accentuation of the German or Polish national identity corresponded to the economic and political situation in Germany and Poland. However, these possibilities of identification did not exclude one another and could be activated, maintained, or also concealed depending on the context of everyday life.³²

Conclusions

By analysing the German and Polish celebrations of the anniversary of the plebiscite, I have tried to follow up the nationalising activity of the states expressed in the form and content of the ceremonies. I can give an affirmative response to the question posed at the beginning, whether the German and Polish authorities used the celebrations for purposes of national policy. The structures of the two states were dominated by national movements and, accordingly, the state realised their political goals. Examining celebrations, we could see that although both governments of Upper Silesia were ideologically close, none made attempts for an approach. The Polish and German Christian democrats did not develop an alternative programme; moreover, they encouraged ethnic nationalism and thereby intensified the separation of a 'bleeding border'. After the political revolutions in both parts of Upper Silesia, extreme nationalising groups came to power and as a result clashed head-on. New nationalising guidelines were expressed in the state celebrations, which became more militarised and tended to exclude members of the national minority.

The state celebrations in particular turned out to be a place of social exclusion or inclusion. In the Polish part of Upper Silesia, they were created or modified to integrate Silesian society into the Polish nation-state and its culture after more than five centuries of separation. In principle, this concept did not include members of the German minority. In addition, the Silesian *wojewoda*, Grażyński, contributed to a further discouraging of the societal integration within the Polish population. The inappropriate state policy during holidays did not solidify the society as a whole, but only one group that supported the government. The way the holidays were celebrated depended on the existing policy and was a result of this policy.

Summing up, I can maintain that Germany and Poland used similar instruments of state propaganda in the conflict over Upper Silesia. One of them was the celebration

³¹ Report from the Polizeipraesident in Gleiwitz to the Oberpraesident in Oppeln on 5.1.1929 in *ibidem*: 933 (translated by author).

³² Ther, 344.

of the anniversary of the plebiscite, which took the form of the representation of the national policy in public. But the efforts to use celebrations in a definite way had different effects on society. Upper Silesians reacted very differently towards national holidays. Their response ranged from a complete acceptance or enthusiasm for national ideas proclaimed during festivities to a passive attendance or, in a few cases, even disturbances. Yet, this is not unusual for peripheral regions such as Upper Silesia, where history has fixed the phenomena typical for a majority of ethnic borderlands. One such phenomenon is indifference or even resistance against ethno-linguistic nationalism frequently manifest in circumstantial and pragmatical identification and determined by the practical wisdom of everyday life in the borderland of nation-states.