

Review of Roman Vysots'kyi. Patsyfikatsiia Halychyny 1930 roku: Dokumenty [The Pacification of Galicia in 1930: Documents]

Piotr J. Wróbel

Volume 8, numéro 1, 2021

Empire, Colonialism, and Famine in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1077137ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.21226/ewjus655>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies University of Alberta

ISSN

2292-7956 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Wróbel, P. (2021). Compte rendu de [Review of Roman Vysots'kyi. Patsyfikatsiia Halychyny 1930 roku: Dokumenty [The Pacification of Galicia in 1930: Documents]]. *East/West*, 8(1), 271–274. <https://doi.org/10.21226/ewjus655>



Roman Vysots'kyi. *Patsyfikatsiia Halychyny 1930 roku: Dokumenty* [*The Pacification of Galicia in 1930: Documents*]. Vol. 1, Vydavnytstvo Ukrains'koho Katolyts'koho Universytetu, 2019. Ukraina. Ievropa—1921-1939 [Ukraine. Europe—1921-1939]. 696 pp. Tables. Bibliography. Indexes. € 300,00, cloth.

The Second Polish Republic was established after World War I and faced numerous challenges throughout the interwar period. Composed of several territories that had previously belonged to the Russian, German, and Habsburg Empires, this new Poland had to amalgamate different legal systems, economic infrastructures, educational networks, and other modern state elements. During this period, the Polish authorities made significant progress in state integration and development. There was one area, however, in which the opposite occurred, and in the late 1930s, the situation was not only as bad as it had been after World War I but even worse. What we are talking about here is the treatment of national minorities.

The Second Polish Republic was a unitary nation-state dominated by ethnic Poles, even though Poles constituted only some 67 percent of the entire population. Numerous ethnic minorities lived in Poland, but most of these groups felt like second-class citizens deprived of fundamental rights. Ukrainians formed the largest minority. In the 1930s, over five million Ukrainians lived in Poland, that is, they comprised approximately 14 percent of the population. That being said, in some provinces, Ukrainians constituted the majority of the citizenry. One of these regions was Eastern Galicia, where in 1918-19, the independent Western Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR) was based. Many Ukrainians considered the elimination of this state by Poland to be a national catastrophe and believed that their country had been occupied by hostile forces. Some veterans of the Ukrainian wars of independence initiated underground activities, led by the Ukrainian Military Organization (UVO). In the early 1920s, they were involved in the destruction of the Polish governmental infrastructure, the burning of Polish estates, and political assassinations. The authorities in Poland curtailed Ukrainian cultural life and education and persecuted any passive or active resistance leaders. Relations between the two groups continued to be tense until 1939. By the mid-1920s, though, many Ukrainians had accepted and adapted to the interwar realities.

The summer of 1930 proved to be turbulent. In July, numerous fires broke out in Eastern Galicia, most of them on Polish-owned farms and estates. On July 30, a postal van was attacked near the town of Bibrka. After a firefight, police found the body of a young man who was dressed in the uniform of the Plast Ukrainian scouting organization. In several places, unknown individuals damaged railway and telephone installations. In

August, the number of similar incidents grew to fifty-five, but they fell to twenty-two in September (20-21). The Polish authorities classified the fires as arson. They announced that the blazes in combination with other destructive acts were a “sabotage operation” initiated by the UVO and the newly established Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). The Polish government responded with a massive and brutal ten-week-long “pacification” of Eastern Galicia. Army and police units moved into hundreds of villages, destroyed Ukrainian community centres and libraries, confiscated and/or demolished property, and beat the locals. Between seven and thirty-five Ukrainians died as a result of this “pacification,” and thousands were arrested (63). Amid all of this, the UVO-OUN confirmed that they were indeed responsible for the “sabotage operation.”

Both Ukrainian and Polish historiographies accepted this narrative uncritically—that there was a brutal “sabotage operation” that led to a brutal “pacification.” The chaos of the next one and a half decades—the 1930s, World War II, and the onset of the Communist era—and during the first years after the fall of Communism did not allow for a quiet period in which to re-examine this interpretation. However, Roman Vysots'kyi (Roman Wysocki) believes that the above conclusion is simplistic, devoid of context, and reductionist. This belief has led him to write *Patsyfikatsiia Halychyny 1930 roku: Dokumenty*.

The context is the first issue that should be emphasized in this new interpretation. In 1930, there was growing opposition against the dictatorial rule of Marshal Józef Piłsudski. The regime responded with suppression. It dissolved the Parliament, scheduled new elections for November, and arrested a group of former MPs, including Ukrainian parliamentarians. The Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (BBWR) based its electoral platform on the promise of Polish national unification against internal and external enemies. These enemies included the Germans, who questioned the validity of Poland's western borders, and the “Ruthenian anarchy” (“*ruska anarchia*”) in Eastern Galicia. A comparison of the number of Ukrainian MPs and senators elected in 1930 with the number elected in prior times shows that this approach was an effective strategy for the short term (74).

Vysots'kyi claims that there was no planned or organized action by the Ukrainian underground in 1930 (8, 97). He calls the theory that this was the last operation of the UVO and the first action of the OUN a myth (17). Fires were not an uncommon occurrence in Eastern Galicia and the rest of Poland, particularly during summertime, which in 1930 was especially hot and dry. Sometimes, when trade was not favourable, like during the Great Depression, dishonest farmers would burn their products in order to receive insurance. Also, acts of revenge were not unheard of, and young Ukrainians, in particular, were ready to fight against the regime on their own, independent

of, or even counter to, the UVO-OUN leadership. The authorities quickly started disseminating propaganda about the enemy's "sabotage operation" after the first six arson cases (20). This occurred despite the fact that throughout the entire summer of 1930, the police were mostly unable to establish the identities of those who had started the fires and damaged state installations. Also, the mass arrests of Ukrainians began prior to the announcement of the "pacification."

At the same time, the OUN did not deny the accusations, and it even took responsibility for the anti-Polish violence. It used the regime's propaganda to gain more support, authority, and prestige (16-18). The alleged "sabotage operation" and the "pacification" radicalized the Ukrainian underground. To paraphrase Vysots'kyi's words, the OUN did not shape the events, but the events influenced the OUN (39). Polish police also claimed that the Communist Party of Western Ukraine (KPZU) was involved. However, the Communists, like the OUN, did not start the events but used them to their advantage and claimed that they were a part of the class war in Poland (27-31).

The "pacification" ignited mass protests in Poland and abroad. Metropolitan Andrei Sheptyts'kyi and the Greek Catholic Metropolitanate protested against these brutalities and the accusation that anyone of Ukrainian descent was responsible for the actions of these fringe groups. Widely publicized Ukrainian complaints to the League of Nations triggered international condemnation of the Polish policies. The Warsaw government tried to minimize the damage to its image. It started up the propaganda machine while trying to convince Ukrainian MPs to withdraw their claims of oppression from the League of Nations.

The "pacification" of Eastern Galicia became a symbol of Polish-Ukrainian relations of the 1930s. Vysots'kyi rightly claims that the topic deserves more scholarly attention. His background also makes him an excellent choice for re-examining that period. He is a professor at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, a distinguished specialist on Polish-Ukrainian relations, and the author of many valuable works, including the widely discussed book *W kręgu integralnego nacjonalizmu: Czynniki nacjonalizmu Dmytra Doncowa na tle myśli nowoczesnych Romanów Dmowskiego; Studium porównawcze (In the Sphere of Integral Nationalism: The Active Nationalism of Dmytro Dontsov Compared to the Modern Thoughts of Roman Dmowski; A Comparative Study)*. In the book under review, in order to encourage the study of the "sabotage operation" and the "pacification," Vysots'kyi has published eighty-five documents, which fill most of the book—approximately five hundred pages. These records, which are primarily in Polish, but also in Ukrainian, English, and French, cover the last four months of 1930. Some of them, like the reports of the Polish Ministry of the Interior on the activities of the OUN, are extremely interesting. Also, the

sixteen British documents contained in the volume add an extra layer to the research. The book, which has been published as a part of the renowned series *Ukraina. Ievropa—1921-1939* (Ukraine. Europe—1921-1939), is an obligatory read for professional and armchair historians of Ukraine and Polish-Ukrainian relations.

Piotr J. Wróbel
University of Toronto

Work Cited

Wysocki, Roman. *W kręgu integralnego nacjonalizmu: Czynny nacjonalizm Dmytra Doncowa na tle myśli nowoczesnych Romana Dmowskiego; Studium porównawcze*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2014.