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Tytuł rozprawy doktorskiej: *Żywiec District and its inhabitants during the First World War*

Słowa kluczowe: District Żywiec; Żywiec region; First World War; Austria-Hungary; Galicia

## SUMMARY

At the dawn of the First World War Żywiec District consisted of 3 urban communes and 67 rural communes inhabited by roughly 120 000 people. The Great War had a huge impact on the Żywiec region and the lives of its inhabitants. First and foremost, it concerned men serving in the army. As a part of mobilization and conscription, which without interruption was carried out in the country in 1914-1918, at least 18 000 to 24 000 men were drafted from the Żywiec region. Due to the pre-war replenishment system of military units, the biggest groups of soldiers from the Żywiec region served in ranks of 56<sup>th</sup> inf. regt. of Common Army and as a part of 16<sup>th</sup> inf. regt. of Landwehr. The third formation, which to a large extent consisted of inhabitants of Żywiec District was 16<sup>th</sup> inf. regt. of Landsturm, which; however, was dissolved at the beginning of 1915. His former soldiers and some of the new recruits were taken over by the 32<sup>nd</sup> inf. reg. of Landsturm and the 31<sup>st</sup> inf. reg of Landsturm. During the war, a large number of soldiers from the Żywiec region were also found in other formations belonging to the I. Army Corps before the conflict, and due to the adjustment of the replenishment system to war needs, also in selected regiments, mostly from the eastern and central part of Galicia, mainly in 89<sup>th</sup> inf. reg., 77<sup>th</sup> inf. reg. and 90<sup>th</sup> inf. reg. During the war, conscripts considered fit for service were first sent to supplementary units of the formation, in which they were to perform military service. Since the early September 1914 supplementary battalion of 56<sup>th</sup> inf. regt. was stationed in Moravia, first for a short time in Hohenstadt, from where he was transferred to the town of Drahotusch in the same month. At the turn of October and November 1915, the battalion was moved to Kielce, where it was stationed until the end of the war. In the case of 16<sup>th</sup> inf. regt. of Landwehr, its supplementary battalion at the turn of summer and autumn of 1914 was in Wagstadt in Austrian Silesia, and at the end of 1914 Neutitschein in Moravia. In the last year

of the war it was moved to Opava. Throughout the war, supplementary units trained new recruits who were sent to the front in tight formations to replace the losses of the fighting units. Residents of the Żywiec region serving in the Austro-Hungarian army fought on all European fronts of the Great War. In the first place, however, these were the eastern front and the Italian front. Particularly important is the contribution of those men who, being soldiers of the 56<sup>th</sup> inf. reg., participated, among others in the Gorlice-Tarnów Offensive, which began on May 2, 1915, at the very beginning, capturing Pustki Hill, which was the most important point of Russian defense on the attacked section of the front. Among those serving in the army there were at least a dozen professional officers and a much larger number of reserve officers. In the case of the latter group, their numbers increased significantly during the conflict. Thousands of soldiers from the Żywiec region suffered as a result of warfare. Only on the lists of losses of the Austro-Hungarian army - that is - in a very incomplete source because it does not include the missing, there is information about 1,116 killed and dead inhabitants of the district, as well as about 3,148 wounded and over 1,500 taken prisoner. In the interwar period, it was estimated that there were over 2,000 disabled soldiers from 1914-1921 in the Żywiec District.

World War I also had a significant impact on the lives of the civilian inhabitants of the district. Although no fights occurred in the Żywiec region, from autumn 1914 until spring 1915 it was quite close to the frontline which resulted in increased military movement, especially in the Sucha region, but also in the Żywiec region. At that time, the army used a number of large and medium-sized buildings in both towns for hospital purposes. The most important military medical unit operating in the district was K.K. Reserve Hospital No. 1 Jaroslau, which from November 1914 to June 1915 occupied 3 large school buildings located in Żywiec. Apart from the increased activity of the army, the hostilities also led to the emergence of a large number of refugees. Especially many of them came to the Żywiec region in the autumn of 1914. In Żywiec alone, by May 1915, more than 2,000 refugees registered themselves, many of whom stayed in the city for a long time. In the first months of the war, about 1,200 people from Galicia, located east of the Żywiec region, registered in Sucha. Refugees could be found in almost every town of the district, and large number of them, at the beginning of the war had a noticeable impact on the local provisioning situation. Importantly, refugees from the towns most damaged during the war stayed in the Żywiec District until the end of the war.

The results of the conflict were also observable in all branches of the economy. The main factor causing problems in that field was a huge scale of mobilization and conscription which resulted in a lack of workforce in the market. As a result, craftsmen's workshops and smaller industrial plants suffered the most. Significant problems related to this factor also

occurred in the forest management sector. Larger industrial plants were much better at finding workers necessary for the job. Some of them realized large orders for the army or performed other state contracts, and 3 plants - ironworks in Węgierska Górka, a factory of dry wood distillation located in the same village, and the Factory of Screws and Forged Products in Sporysz - were therefore under the management military, which additionally facilitated functioning in wartime conditions.

The war also led to the terrible situation in the area of agriculture, with large land properties suffering less and numerous small farms belonging to local peasants more. In addition to the military service of many farmers, an important problem in the field of agriculture was, first of all, the compulsory purchase of part of the crop, which became increasingly ruthless as the conflict continued and which in many cases caused serious shortages of seeds for sowing and famine, which became a serious problem in late winter and spring periods. The situation was further aggravated by the requisition of animals, in which the army took over a large part of the horses at the beginning of the war.

Even at the beginning of the war availability of most goods decreased noticeably. Prices rose rapidly and there were futile attempts to stop it by the means of introducing maximum prices which resulted in the creation of an uncontrollable black market aggravated by the fact that originally the tariffs of maximum prices differed from one commune to another. Difficulties with the availability of basic goods were tried to be dealt with by means of a rationing system. Its introduction, however, did not affect the constantly recurring problems of the lack of bread, flour, or sugar, reported by different communes in the district. Due to these problems, representatives of the intelligentsia professions, especially teachers and civil servants, who did not have easy access to agricultural products, found themselves in a particularly difficult situation. Attempts were made to improve the situation of the population by granting various allowances and by conducting campaigns to provide free or cheap food, which, however, brought little effect.

The conflict also had an impact on many other areas. Before the war, foreign trips for commercial purposes, especially to the USA and neighboring Germany, were very popular in the district. The hostilities prevented such trips and, moreover, cut off hundreds of families from money normally sent by men overseas. The war had also a negative impact on the moral condition of society, which was particularly noticeable in connection with the deepening of the problem of alcohol abuse, which more and more often affected women and youth deprived of paternal supervision. Also, the problem of epidemic threat remained especially significant although it was dealt with quite successfully by the authorities, humanitarian organizations and

local physicians. In order to prevent epidemics, constant supervision over the health of the population was carried out. Vaccination campaigns were also carried out, the largest of which took place in 1916. From February to April, 78,765 people were vaccinated against smallpox, i.e. about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the district's population.

During the time of war education played an important role. Particularly important during the war was the K.K. Higher Real School in Żywiec, which provided education at a level enabling military service as a candidate for an officer (the so-called one-year volunteer). Teachers and students of folk schools operating in the district were repeatedly engaged in various activities for the state, such as performing information functions or participating in collections of materials necessary to wage war. The functioning of education at that time was very difficult, mainly due to military service, which involved at least 40 teachers working in the district, i.e. 15% of all teachers.

Due to the forced purchase of goods, supervision over agriculture, breeding, provisioning, and some branches of production, as well as due to the significantly increased scale of activities of conscript commissions compared to the period of peace, the K.K. District Office in Żywiec, headed by dr. Tadeusz Moszyński, as well as individual commune's authorities were burdened in the years 1914-1918 with a big amount of additional duties that were imposed on them by state regulations or orders of the Governorship. They also had a negative impact on the attitude of the local population towards district's and commune's authorities, which was particularly visible in the case of blaming the heads of individual communes for the constantly deteriorating situation. This resulted in numerous cases of resignation by mayors fearing for their safety, which took place almost immediately after the end of the war.

From the very beginning of the conflict, many residents of the Żywiec region were involved in various activities to support the Polish Legions and the Supreme National Committee. Local elites led to the creation of two District National Committees, whose seats were in Żywiec and Sucha. In conjunction with the functioning of pre-war paramilitary organizations, their activities resulted primarily in the formation of many volunteer units for the Polish Legions, which included over 800 men. District National Committees were also responsible for collecting significant financial resources, which were transferred to the Supreme National Committee. At the same time, two important processes were taking place during the conflict. The first of them was the spread of the awareness of belonging to the Polish nation among the inhabitants of the rural parts of the Żywiec region, and the second was the complete and widespread change in the attitude of the local population towards the Austro-Hungarian

state, which was sealed by the events related to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and mass protests of Galician Poles, which also took place in Żywiec District. Therefore, at the turn of October and November 1918, many inhabitants of the Żywiec region took part in taking over power from the Austrians. Their participation in this process took place not only in the Żywiec District. It is also visible everywhere where larger groups of soldiers from the Żywiec District stayed, e.g. in Kielce, or in military formations located at the front, such as 56<sup>th</sup> inf. reg.

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