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The delimitation of Poland's border in Spiš and Orava after World War I in the light of archival cartographic sources

Abstract. The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire led to the creation of Czechoslovakia and Poland, whilst the end of the Kingdom of Hungary's centuries-long rule over Spiš and Orava sparked a rivalry between the new neighbours to justify and document – including through cartography – their territorial claims to this multi-ethnic borderland. The coexistence in these regions of Poles and Slovaks, who differed in terms of nationality but were identical in terms of religion, spoke similar highland dialects, and prioritised regional identity over national identity, effectively hindered the drawing of precise territorial boundaries.

The aim of this article is to present and discuss selected maps, including hand-drawn ones, obtained during archival research, concerning the detailed course of the delimitation of the Polish-Czechoslovak border in Spiš and Orava in the 1920s. To what extent were these maps an attempt at an objective representation of the ethnic and linguistic structure of the population, and to what extent were they a subjective perception of these regions by the mapmakers, or merely a propagandistic attempt to justify territorial claims? To what extent did the production of expert ethnic and linguistic maps, along with numerous analyses, influence the decisions of the politicians who carried out the final delimitation of the border?

Keywords: borders, borderland, Spiš, Orava, ethnic cartography, Paris Peace Conference

1. Introduction

Following the end of the World War I, the process of establishing borders in Europe continued for several more years and did not conclude with the end of the Paris Peace Conference. These borders were shaped by local and regional armed conflicts, national uprisings and plebiscites, and were determined at subsequent peace conferences and diplomatic meetings. This involved active political, military and propaganda efforts by all interested parties, primarily the newly emerging states. Cartography played a significant role in these activities.

The protracted and turbulent process of shaping Poland's borders during this period, and the significance of various cartographic documents in this process, has been extensively discussed in the works of, amongst others, Piotr Eberhardt (1999, 2004, 2015), Maciej Górny (2017), Beata Konopska (2016; Konopska & Barwiński, 2021; Konopska et al., 2023). These works provide a comprehensive overview of the emerging territory of reborn Poland, and at a regional level focus in detail mainly on the borders whose delimitation aroused the greatest controversy, disputes and emotions, including those with Germany and Bolshevik Russia, the extent of Poland's access to the sea, and the division of the Vilnius region and Silesia. Much less attention is given to the issue of Poland's southern border, with the exception of the frequently discussed division of Cieszyn Silesia, which was of great economic importance.

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However, the process of shaping the Polish-Czechoslovak border in the 1920s – which now serves as the Polish-Slovak border – is less frequently discussed in detail or presented cartographically in contemporary scientific studies on the establishment of Polish borders, despite the fact that it involved a permanent division of two historical and geographical regions – namely Spiš and Orava – which persists to this day, and the final political decisions were not taken until 1924, more than four years after the conclusion of the Paris Peace Conference.

Until the World War I, Orava and Spiš lay within the borders of the Kingdom of Hungary. Since the Middle Ages, they had been inhabited by Slovaks, Poles, Germans, Magyars, Jews, Vlachs and Ruthenians. Following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the end of the war, the newly formed Czechoslovakia laid claim to the entire territory of Orava and Spiš, whilst the Polish population living in Upper Orava and northern Spiš demanded that these regions be incorporated into Poland.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the situation of the Polish population living within the borders of the Kingdom of Hungary was entirely different from that of Poles residing in Galicia, which at that time belonged to Austria. In Galicia, there was a Polish education system, Polish cultural and socio-political organisations, and the Polish language was widely used in public life. In the Kingdom of Hungary, however, Slovaks and Poles were subjected to Magyarisation, which was particularly severe in education and public life, and was intended to lead to their denationalisation and the creation of a homogeneous 'state nation'. Furthermore, the Hungarian authorities did not officially recognise the national distinctiveness of the Polish population, classifying them as Slovaks, which, amongst other things, led to conflicts between Poles and Slovaks (Roszkowski, 2018).

Following the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic on 28 October 1918 and the withdrawal of the Hungarian administration from Slovakia, Polish National Councils began to form in Orava and Spiš, which formally belonged to Czechoslovakia; proclamations calling for the annexation of the northern parts of both regions to Poland were made at rallies, and Polish military units also entered the area for several months. The southern parts of both regions were taken over by the Czechoslovak military and administration. In the face of the escalating conflict, an agreement was reached on a temporary demarcation between the two sides, leaving the final decision to the Paris Peace Conference (Jesenský, 2014; Roszkowski, 2018; Skorupa & Monita, 2021; Sobczyński & Zawadzka, 1988).

2. Research materials

This study is based on the results of research carried out in Polish and foreign archives as part of a research grant concerning the formation of the borders of independent Poland after the World War I. The focus of the research was on cartographic works and the accompanying written documentation. For the purposes of this study, from the vast and diverse cartographic material found, maps – including hand-drawn ones – were selected that dealt with the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the inhabitants of the Polish-Slovak borderland in Orava and Spiš, as well as maps depicting proposals for the delimitation of the Polish-Czechoslovak border in these regions.

These maps were created under very specific historical and political circumstances, as the Great War was drawing to a close in Europe, with one of its consequences being the collapse of multi-ethnic empires and the opportunity for the rebirth of nation states within new borders. The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire paved the way, among other things, for the creation of Czechoslovakia and Poland, whilst the end of the centuries-long rule of the Kingdom of Hungary over Spiš and Orava – regions inhabited mainly by Slovaks, Poles and Germans – sparked rivalry among neighbours over the justification of territorial claims to this multi-ethnic borderland.

To what extent were these maps an attempt at an objective representation of the ethnic and linguistic structure of Orava and Spiš, and to what extent were they a subjective perception of these regions by the mapmakers, or merely a propagandistic attempt to justify territorial claims? To what extent did scientific research, the compilation of numerous ethnic and linguistic maps, and analyses and memoranda influence the decisions of the politicians who made the final delimitation of the Polish-Czechoslovak border in the 1920s?

3. Maps of Polish territorial claims

For several hundred years, Spiš and Orava, like the whole of Slovakia, belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary. Apart from the towns of the Spiš County (the so-called Spiš Pledge), these lands did not lie within Poland's borders in modern times; consequently, Slovak (Czechoslovak) historical claims to these regions were more justified. Poland could rely mainly on the criterion of nationality, which was officially of great importance in determining the course of the new borders after the World War I. Consequently, justifying and documenting Polish aspirations required extensive scientific research, as well as analytical and cartographic studies. Hence the creation of numerous maps and memoranda illustrating and documenting the extent of Polish settlement extending south of the main Carpathian ridge, encompassing, among others, the regions of Spiš and Orava. The results of research conducted and compiled even before the outbreak of the World War I were also utilised.

In Polish scientific studies from the early decades of the 20th century concerning Spiš and Orava, the nationality of the local population was determined solely on the basis of the language they spoke. The criterion of nationality was, in practice, reduced to a linguistic criterion, which was common practice at the time and was also applied in censuses (Górny, 2017).

A hand-drawn map by an unknown author (Figure 1) depicts a section of the Polish-Slovak borderland, stretching from Cieszyn Silesia in the west, through Orava and the Tatra Mountains, to Spiš in the east. In addition to the main towns, the river network, mountain ranges and pre-1914 borders, the villages in the Spiš, Upper Orava and Čadca district are marked with particular precision.

The main feature of the map is the red line. Although there is no key, the map bears a handwritten note stating that it is a "draft of a detailed ethnographic map of the south-western Polish borderlands", and that the red line marks "the boundary of municipalities with an indigenous, purely Polish population". It was drawn up based on the study "The Polish Population in Upper Hungary" by the linguist and ethnographer Edmund Kołodziejczyk, published in 1910 in the journal "Świat Słowiański" ("The Slavic World"). Based on his own field research and an analysis of church sources, he highlights the Polish linguistic and cultural character of the inhabitants of numerous villages on the northern fringes of Hungary at that time.

Another hand-drawn map (Figure 2) covers a very similar area of the broadly defined Polish-Slovak borderland, depicting the Polish-Czech and Polish-Slovak linguistic boundaries along with an extensive zone of transitional dialects. The author of the map is Kazimierz Nitsch, a Polish linguist and Slavist, professor at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv and the Jagiellonian University, one of the experts on the Polish delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, who had been conducting research in this region even before the outbreak of the war. The main elements of the map are the boundaries of the Czech and Slovak language areas (blue line), the southern boundary of the Polish language area (red line), and a broad zone of transitional dialects, implied to be Polish-Slovak-Czech, marked with hatching. Both the research of Kazimierz Nitsch (Figure 2) and Edmund Kołodziejczyk (Figure 1) indicate that the three main disputed regions on the Polish-Czechoslovak border after the end of the World War I, namely Cieszyn Silesia, Orava and northern Spiš, mostly belonged to the Polish linguistic area, or were situated in a transitional dialect zone (Lower Orava). On both maps (Figure 1 and 2), the southern boundary of the Polish language has a very similar extent. Its course is most complex in Spiš, with "linguistic islands" (including German ones) and a zone of transitional dialects south of the Tatra Mountains. To the east of Spiš, the areas inhabited by Polish-speaking people (in the north) and Slovak-speaking people (in the south) are separated by a wide zone of Ruthenian settlement, where the Ukrainian dialect is spoken, meaning that there was no direct contact between Poles and Slovaks in that area.

Based on earlier scientific research and a hand-drawn map compiled by Kazimierz Nitsch (Figure 2), a linguistic map of a section of the Polish-Czech-Slovak borderland was prepared in 1919 by the historian Władysław Semkowicz (Figure 3), which was appended to a detailed study in French on the history and linguistic, ethnic and economic issues of Spiš, Orava and the Čadca region, prepared by the Polska Komisja Prac Przygotowawczych do Konferencji Pokojowej (Polish Preparatory

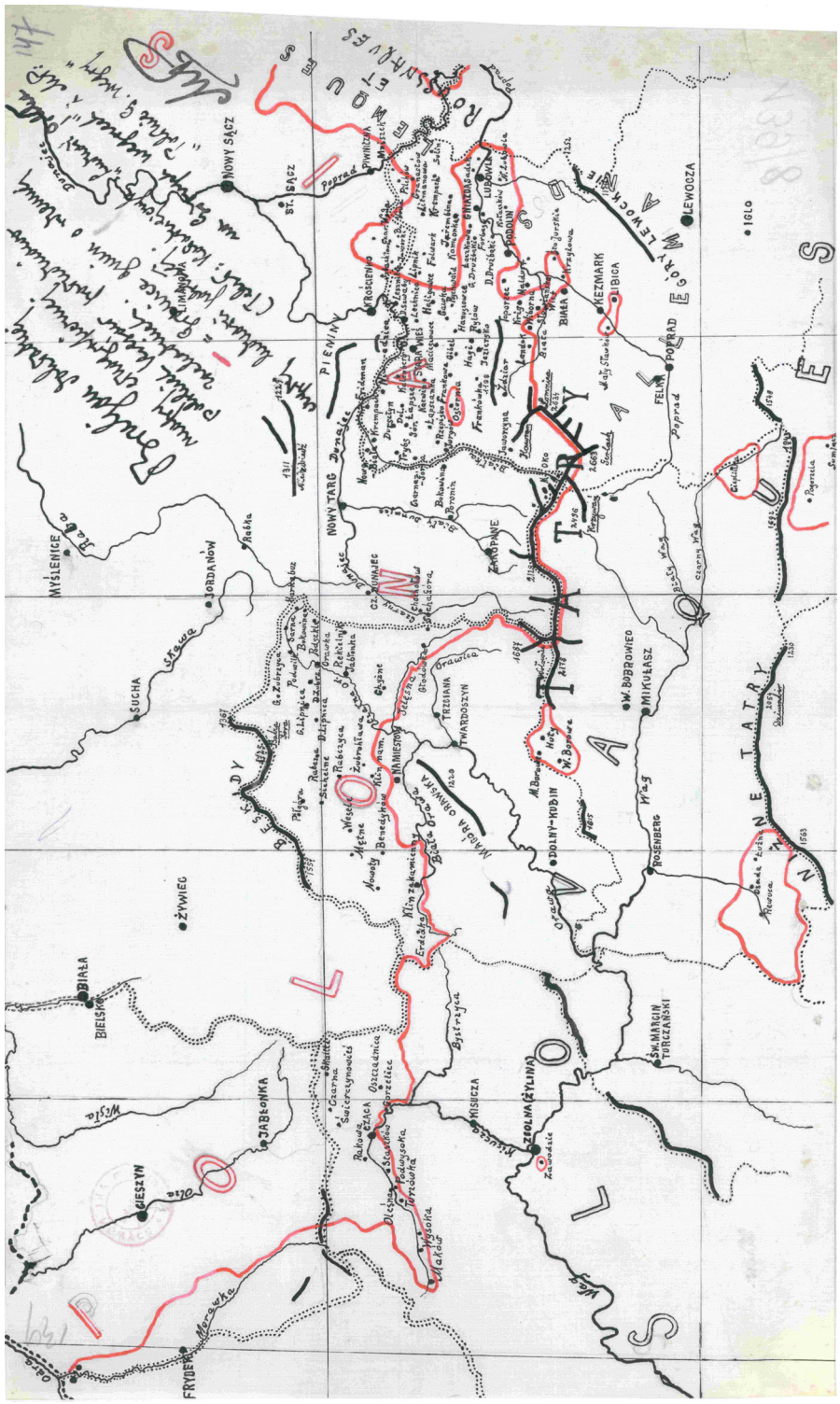


Figure 1. *Ethnographic map of the Polish southwestern borderlands* (n.d., Archive of New Files in Warsaw, Zespół 39 Komitet Narodowy Polski w Paryżu, sign. 139, k. 147)

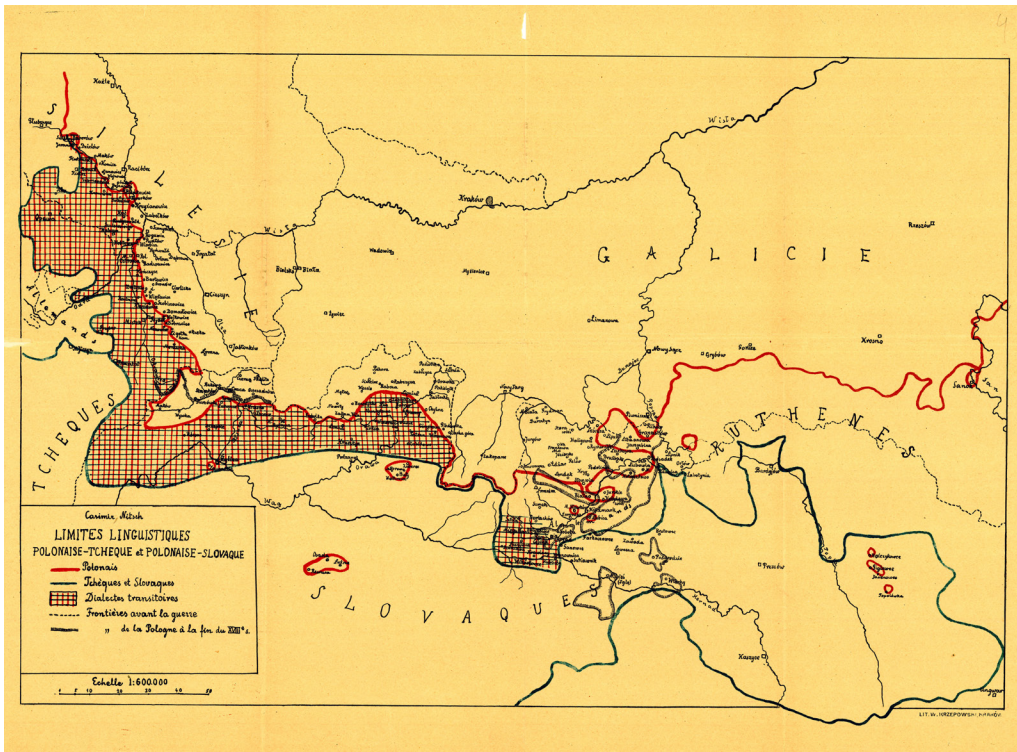


Figure 2. *Limites de Linguistiques Polonaise-Tcheque et Polonaise-Slovaque* (*Boundaries of Polish-Czech and Polish-Slovak linguistics*) by Nitsch K. (n.d., Archive of New Files in Warsaw, Zespół 39 Komitet Narodowy Polski w Paryżu, sign. 315, k. 41)

Work Commission for the Peace Conference), and submitted to the participants of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

The main elements of the map are the areas of concentration of Poles "in a compact mass" (red), Slovaks (green) and Poles "scattered among other nationalities" (hatched) and the population speaking transitional dialects, implicitly Polish-Slovak (hatched). The distribution of Poles and Slovaks was determined on the basis of linguistic criteria. The map clearly shows that the regions south of the former Hungarian border, including Upper Orava and northern Spiš, were at that time dominated by the Polish population, or by people speaking transitional dialects (Lower Orava, central Spiš). The map also marks a proposed "southern border essential for Poland". This encompasses, amongst other areas, practically the whole of Orava, including the southern sections inhabited by people speaking mixed dialects, and a very extensive area of Spiš, including Poprad and Kieżmark (Kežmarok). In Orava and Spiš, this border clearly extends south of the area marked as "Poles in a compact mass". In many sections, it was drawn in isolation not only from the ethnic and linguistic criteria presented on the map, but also from historical criteria and political realities (Barwiński, 2023). This Polish proposal for a "southern border essential for Poland" from 1919 had nothing in common with the Polish-Czechoslovak border established a year later.

Another map, based on the research results of Kazimierz Nitsch, was produced in 1919 by the Polish geographer and cartographer Teofil Szumański (Figure 4). It was attached as an annex to the memorandum concerning the demarcation of the border between Poland and Czechoslovakia, prepared by the Polish del-

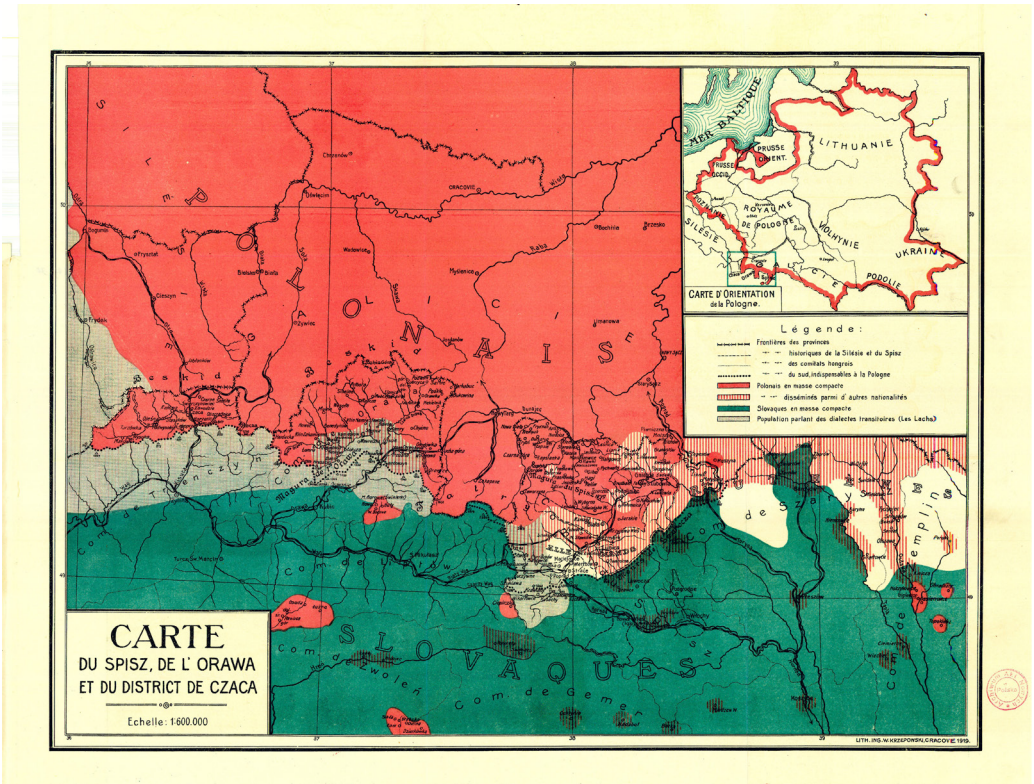


Figure 3. *Carte du Spisz, de l'Orawa et du district de Czaca* (*Map of Spiš, Orava and Čadca district*) by Semkowicz (1919, Archive of New Files in Warsaw, sign.2/100/0/4. 26/920, k. 113)

egation for the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. The map shows the Polish and Slovak linguistic territories hatched, though this time the "transitional dialect zone" was not included. Furthermore, expectations regarding the course of the southern section of Poland's border were presented. The boundary of Polish territorial claims coincides with the southern extent of the Polish linguistic territory, with the exception of Spiš, where it was clearly shifted southwards, also encompassing areas with a predominantly German population and Polish "linguistic enclaves". Nevertheless, the proposed course of Poland's southern border is, across the entire area and particularly in Orava, far more realistic and consistent with linguistic criteria than in the case of the map drawn up in the same year by Władysław Semkowicz (Figure 3).

Also drawn up in 1919 by the Narodowy Komitet Obrony Spiszu, Orawy i Podhala (National Committee for the Defence of Spiš, Orava and Podhale), established in Kraków, the map depicting the distribution of the Polish population in the northern counties of former Hungary was included in a several-page French-language brochure discussing the arguments for the annexation of parts of Spiš and Orava to Poland (Figure 5). The map uses hatching to show the distribution and percentage share of the Polish population within a single numerical range (75–90%).

According to the map's creators, Orava and Spiš were at that time, particularly in the northern part, clearly dominated by the Polish population. The map does not cite the sources of the numerical data; furthermore, it does not indicate the distribution of the Slovak and German populations, which were particularly numerous in Spiš, nor the "transitional areas" common in these regions, which were mixed in terms of



Figure 4. *Revendications Polonaises en Hongrie* (*Polish claims in Hungary*) by Szumański (1919, Polish Library in Paris/C III – zbiór kartograficzny mapy XX wiek/ S.307/6428)



Figure 5. Carte de la population polonaise dans les comitats septentrionaux de l'ancienne Hongrie (Map of the Polish population in the northern counties of former Hungary; 1919, Archive of New Files in Warsaw, Zespół 100 Archiwum J. I. Paderewskiego, sign. 920, k. 93)

nationality and language. For propaganda reasons and to document Polish territorial claims on the Polish-Slovak border, the extent of the Polish population was presented in a maximalist manner, whilst the actual ethnic and linguistic structure of the inhabitants of these regions, particularly Spiš, was certainly more complicated. Despite these objections, this study served as further confirmation of the presence of a Polish population in Orava and Spiš, as well as the aspirations of some of the inhabitants of these regions to have their lands incorporated into the reborn Polish state.

The establishment of the National Committee for the Defence of Spiš, Orava and Podhale, and the publication of the aforementioned brochure and map (Figure 5), formed part of an international diplomatic offensive by Polish activists from Orava and Spiš. A delegation was formed comprising priest Ferdynand Machay, Piotr Borowy (Orava) and Wojciech Halczyn (Spiš), which was received by the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ignacy Paderewski, and travelled to the Paris Peace Conference, where, among other things, it had the opportunity to present the Polish case at a meeting with the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson. It contributed significantly to the decision, favourable to Poland, to hold plebiscites in Spiš and Orava (Machay, 1923; Roszkowski, 2018; Skorupa & Monita, 2021; Sobczyński & Zawadzka, 1988).

4. Maps of Czechoslovak territorial claims

During the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the representatives of Czechoslovakia faced a similar problem to that of the Poles – the scope of their territorial claims extended far beyond the areas dominated by the Czech and Slovak populations, and the historical and ethnic territories did not coincide. Furthermore, the largest minorities in the potential territory of the future Czechoslovakia – namely Germans, Hungarians, Ruthenians and Poles – were concentrated mainly in border areas, which made it very difficult to push through the preferred border lines. Consequently, in the cartographic materials prepared for the conference, they employed numerous methods aimed at justifying Prague's claims, on ethnic grounds, to the entirety of the former Austrian territories in Bohemia and Moravia and the Hungarian territories in Slovakia.

The main purpose of the map published in Paris by the Cartographic Service of the Czechoslovak Army was to demonstrate the dominance of the Czechoslovaks and the complete marginalisation of other nationalities living in large numbers in the area, particularly Germans, Hungarians, Ruthenians and Poles (Figure 6). Consequently, Czechs and Slovaks were depicted as a single nation, marked in red, with no distinction made for any other nationalities. Using this method, the mere 5–20% share of Czechoslovaks creates a visual impression of their dominance, which was completely at odds with reality. Furthermore, a "biological" element was added to the map, namely the border forests marked in green, described as "large forests on the border of the territory inhabited by Czechoslovaks". This applies in particular to the Sudetenland, the Ore Mountains, the Šumava and the Carpathians. Consequently, territories with a clear predominance of German, Hungarian, Ruthenian or Polish populations (Cieszyn Silesia) are depicted as heavily forested and sparsely populated areas.

Given such extensive cartographic manipulation and the desire to "conceal" the presence of very large concentrations of Germans or Hungarians, the actual ethnic diversity of the inhabitants of Orava and Spiš was of marginal importance to the map's authors. They therefore concluded that the whole of Orava and almost the entire northern Spiš were dominated by Czechoslovaks, to the extent of 80–100%.

Another map from the Czechoslovak collections, published in Paris, depicts Czechoslovakia's territorial claims and the distribution of the Czechoslovak population (Figure 7). The legend highlights, among other things, the boundaries of Czechoslovakia's territorial claims (red line) and, in blue, the regions inhabited by Czechoslovaks (deliberately without distinguishing between Czechs and Slovaks), and "mixed regions" in light blue, without specifying the proportions of the Czech and Slovak populations relative to other nationalities. As with the previous map, no data sources were provided. The "mixed regions" shown on the map encompassed all the border areas of the future Czechoslovakia, where in reality Czechs and Slovaks generally constituted a small minority of the population, and Germans, Hungarians,

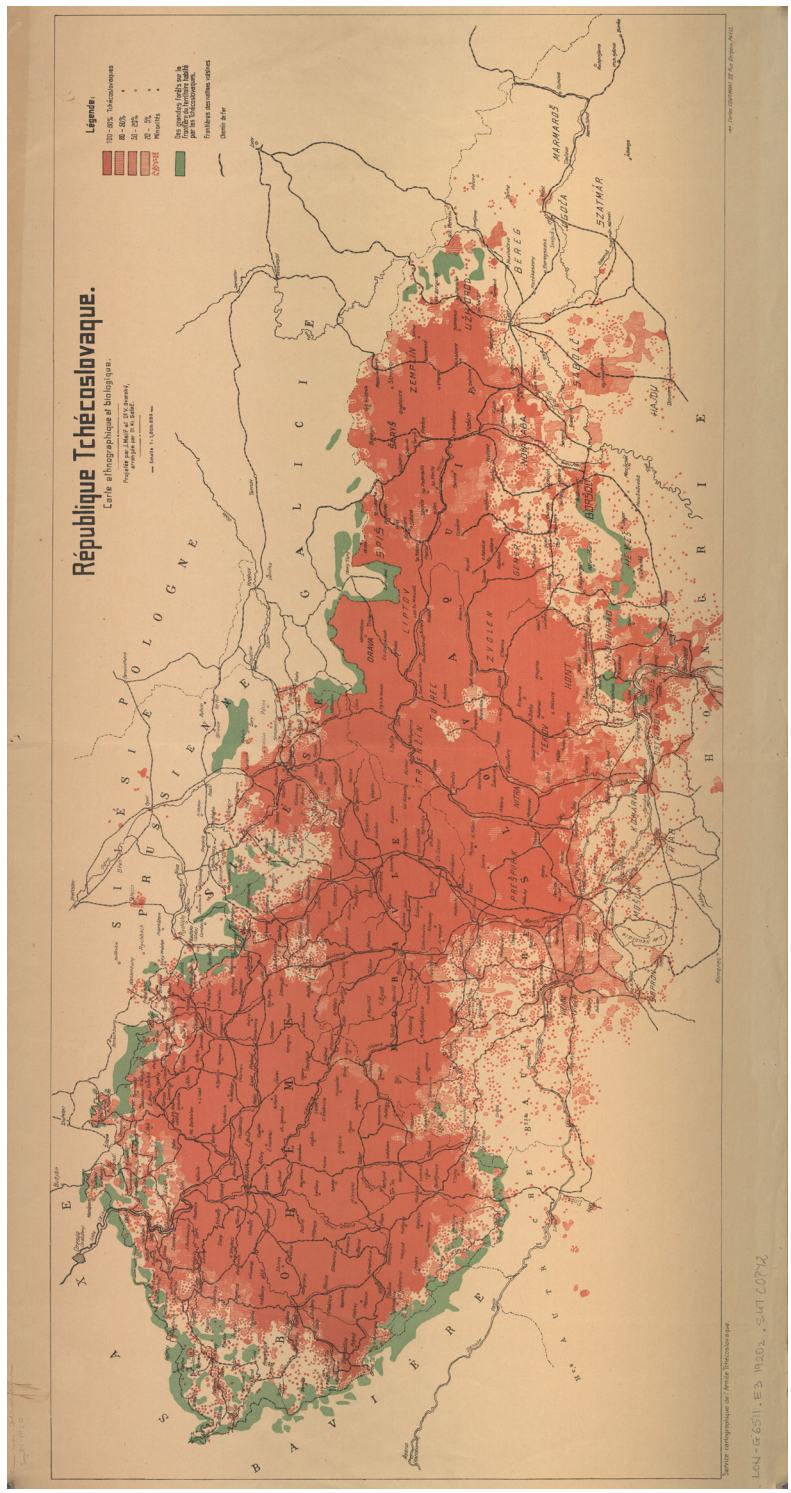


Figure 6. *République Tchécoslovaque – Carte ethnographique et biologique* (*Czechoslovak Republic – ethnographic and biological map*) by Malir, Dvorsky & Salac (n.d., United Nations Library & Archives Geneva, sign. LON-G6511.E3 1920z .S47 Copy 2)

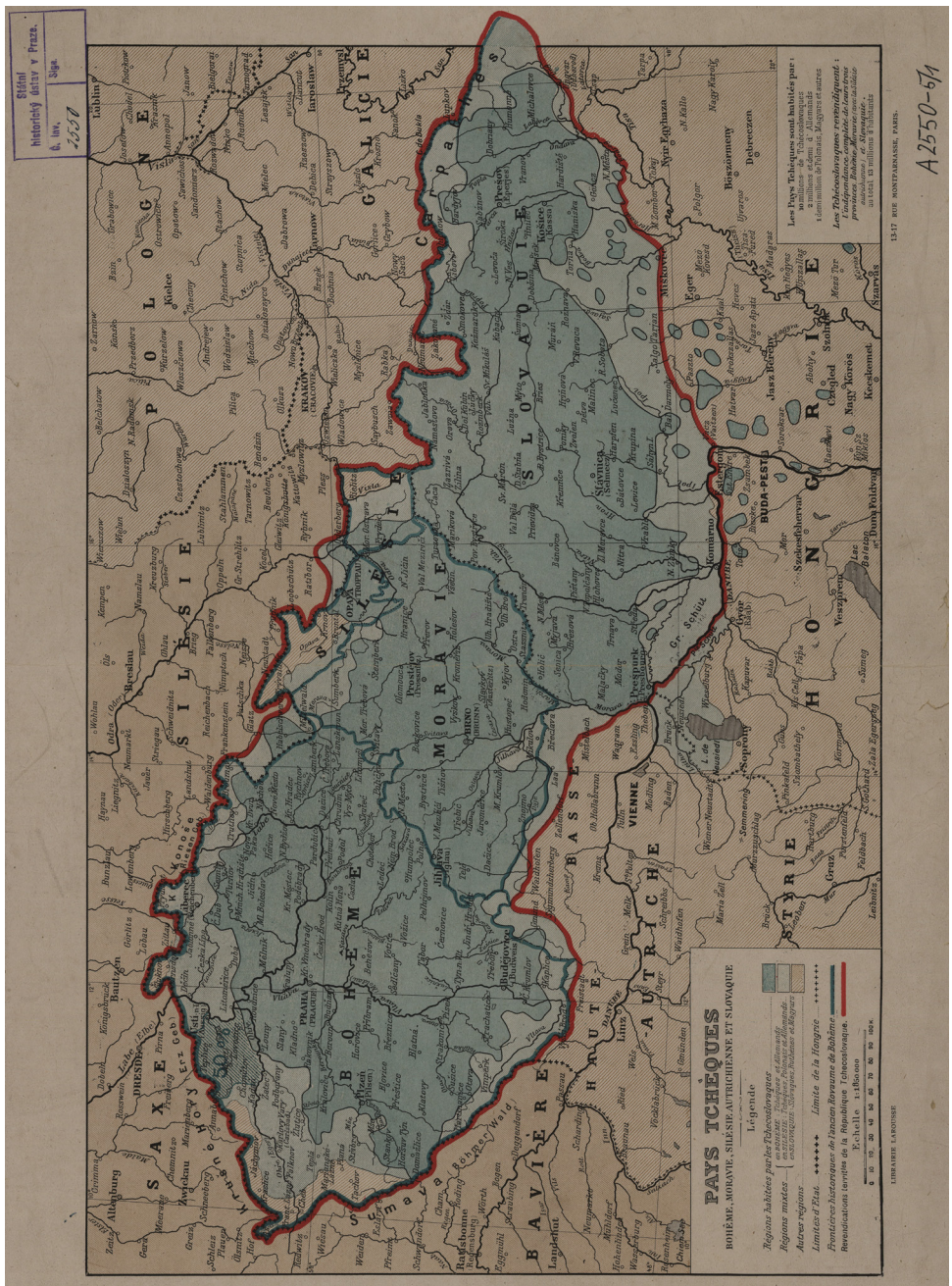


Figure 7. Pays Tchèques: Bohême, Moravie, Silésie autrichienne et Slovaquie (Czech countries: Bohemia, Moravia, Austrian Silesia and Slovakia; n.d., Archives of the Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague, Historický ústav AV ČR, v.v.i. Prague, sign. MSHU-MAP-A-2550)

Ruthenians or Poles clearly dominated there. However, this method of presenting ethnic diversity, particularly the absence of percentage ranges and the use of very similar colours (blue and light blue), was intended to effectively suggest to the potential viewer a monoethnic Czechoslovak national character for the entire area. This was inconsistent with the reality of the time and demonstrates the propagandistic nature of this cartographic work.

If the authors of the map regarded southern Slovakia, then dominated by a Hungarian population, and the part of the northern Carpathians inhabited overwhelmingly by Ruthenians, as "mixed regions", it is difficult to accept that they would treat Orava and Spiš in the same way. Both these regions were depicted as monoethnic areas, inhabited exclusively or almost exclusively by Czechoslovaks, i.e. in a manner completely different from that shown on Polish maps of the time.

On many Czechoslovak ethnic and linguistic maps from that period, Orava and Spiš were consistently depicted as ethnically Slovak (Czechoslovak) regions, and the proposed future border of Czechoslovakia in these regions coincided exactly with the former northern border of the Kingdom of Hungary. This resulted not only from a desire to present a maximalist view of the "Czechoslovak ethnic range" in the disputed borderlands, but may also, to a large extent, have been a consequence of the omission of the Polish population from Hungarian censuses of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries (Roszkowski, 2018). Hungarian statistics from 1895 and 1910 showed that the population of Spiš and Orava was almost exclusively of Slovak nationality, at over 98% (Ciągwa, 1997). Poles were last recorded in Slovakia in the 1850 census. From that time onwards, they were classified by Hungarian officials as Slovaks, mainly on the basis of their Slavic origin, Catholic faith and linguistic (dialectal) criteria. In this way, the Hungarian government sought to prevent the emergence of yet another nationality issue on its northern border. These measures were facilitated by a weak sense of Polish national identity and the use of Polish-Slovak highland dialects. The only exception was the Hungarian authorities' consent to the registration of the Polish population during the 1910 census, but exclusively in the district of Trzciana (Trstená) in Upper Orava. The census revealed that 15,500 Poles lived in the 14 villages of this district at the time, constituting over 95% of the population (Roszkowski, 2018).

5. The delimitations of borders in Spiš and Orava between 1920 and 1924

In September 1919, during the Paris Peace Conference, a decision was taken to hold plebiscites in July 1920 to determine the political affiliation of, amongst others, Orava, Spiš and Cieszyn Silesia. On the Polish side, the plebiscite committee was headed by Walery Goetel, a geologist and geographer. Both the Polish and Czechoslovak authorities launched a fierce propaganda campaign among the inhabitants of these regions. It drew on religious, patriotic and economic themes. The result of this intense agitation was an increase in divisions and aggression among the inhabitants, leading to casualties on both sides. Fearing defeat in the plebiscite, the Czechoslovak authorities engaged in active diplomatic efforts to have it cancelled. In doing so, they exploited the very difficult political and military situation in Poland at the time, which was embroiled in a war with Bolshevik Russia, resorting to blackmail and threatening to block the transit of arms from France to Poland (Roszkowski, 2018; Skorupa & Monita, 2021; Sobczyński & Zawadzka, 1988).

Ultimately, on 10 July 1920, during a conference in Spa (Belgium), representatives of Poland and Czechoslovakia abandoned the idea of holding plebiscites and handed the decision on the partition of these regions over to the Council of Ambassadors. Acceptance of these terms was effectively forced upon the Polish Prime Minister, Władysław Grabski, who was persuaded of the necessity of such a decision by the governments in Paris, London and Prague. The Council of Ambassadors very quickly, as early as 28 July 1920, took an arbitrary decision – one that came as a complete surprise to the Polish authorities – to grant Poland only small fragments of the disputed territories (Figure 8), which did not resolve the Polish-Czechoslovak territorial disputes (Jesenský, 2014; Nowinowski, 1998; Roszkowski, 2018).

The effect of the Council of Ambassadors' decision is clearly visible on the map (Figure 8), developed by the Czechoslovak Military Geographical Institute. The territorial extent of Spiš,

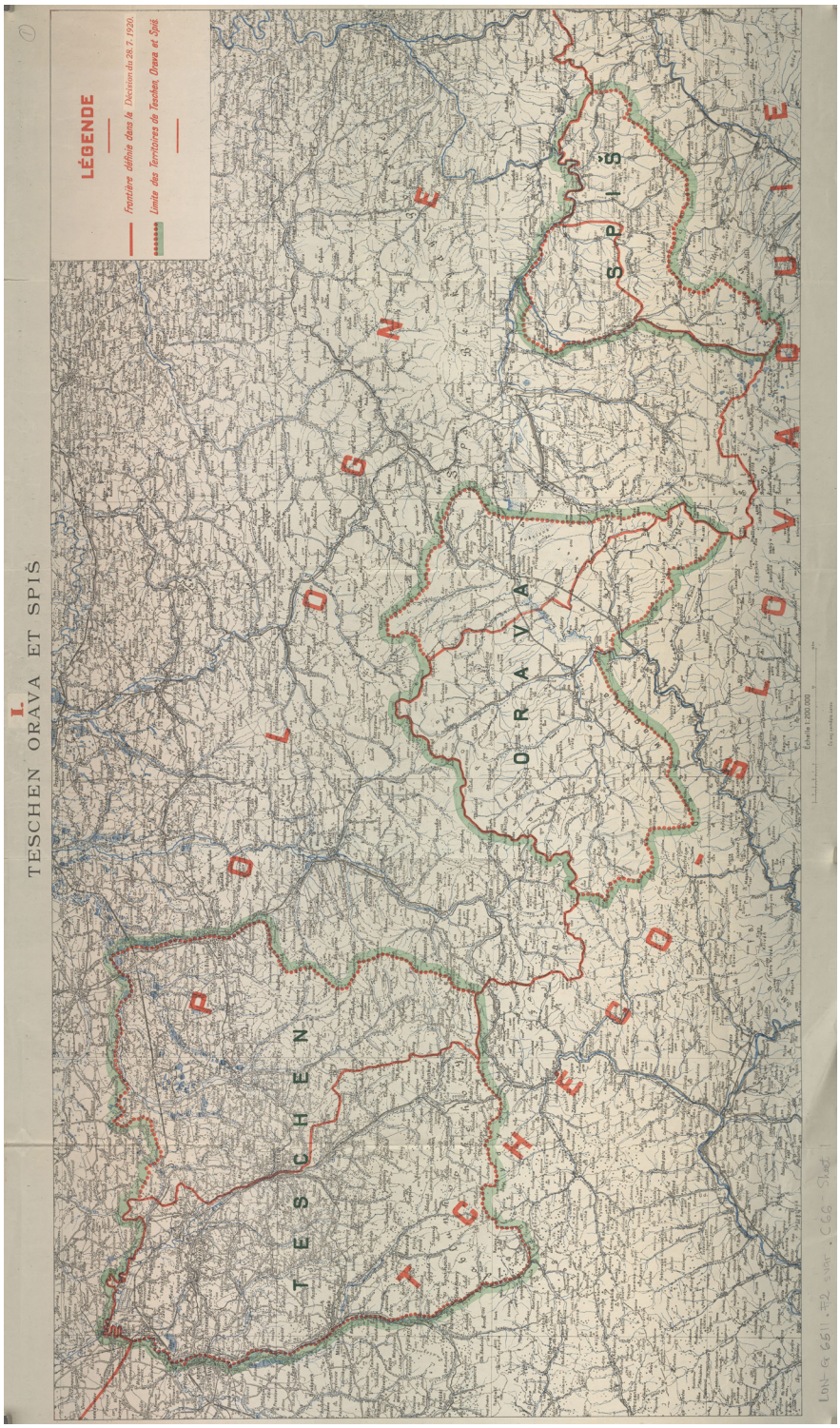


Figure 8. *Teschen, Orava et Spiš* (Teschen, Orava and Spiš; 1920, Archive of New Files in Warsaw, Zespół 100 Archiwum J.I. Paderewskiego, sign. 928, k. 105)

Orava and Cieszyn Silesia is marked in green (though in the case of Spiš, this applies only to its northern part), whilst the red colour indicates the borders drawn on the basis of the Council of Ambassadors' decision of 28 July 1920, i.e. the so-called "Ambassadors' lines", which were to become the borders between Poland and Czechoslovakia. In the case of the partition of all three regions, the Council of Ambassadors' decision was unfavourable to Poland and met with protests from the Polish authorities. It was undoubtedly also a failure of Polish diplomacy. Ignacy Paderewski, forced to sign the Council of Ambassadors' resolution, stated that "this decision has dug a chasm between the nations that nothing can fill" (as cited in Nowinowski, 1998, p. 193).

In Spiš and Orava, the border was delimitation without regard to the well-founded ethnic and linguistic criteria repeatedly presented by Polish scientists and delegates to the Paris Peace Conference. This applied in particular to the numerous Polish villages in the north-western part of Upper Orava and to the Polish enclaves in Spiš. The arbitrary decisions of the Council of Ambassadors, dividing these areas between Poland and Czechoslovakia without giving priority to linguistic and ethnic criteria, were unfair and unjust to Poland and to the population living in the Polish-Slovak border region. This division also met with opposition from part of the Slovak population in the areas that fell to Poland, mainly in Spiš.

However, in none of these regions did the final Polish-Czechoslovak border follow the exact course shown on the map in question (Figure 8). Various modifications, generally minor, were introduced in subsequent years and finally approved in 1924 by the Delimitation Commission, and subsequently accepted by the League of Nations and the governments of Poland and Czechoslovakia.

Another map was published in 1923 in Lviv by the Biuro Techniczne Delegacji Polskiej (in English: Technical Office of the Polish Delegation), graphically designed by Józef Machej, a Polish politician and member of the Silesian Sejm from 1922 to 1935 (Figure 9). It depicts various versions of the Polish-Czechoslovak border in Spiš and Orava, proposed and established between 1920 and 1922. These are: the former Hungarian border (yellow), the borders of the plebiscite areas (blue), the so-called "Ambassadors' Line" of July 28, 1920 (red), the border line in Orava following the decision of the Delimitation Commission of April 25, 1921 (orange), the border line in Spiš proposed by the Polish delegation (light blue), and the border line in Spiš approved by the Delimitation Commission on September 25, 1922 (green).

By granting Poland only small parts of Spiš and Orava in 1920, the Council of Ambassadors did not resolve the Polish-Czechoslovak territorial disputes. In April 1921, the international Delimitation Commission approved a new version of the border in Upper Orava (orange). Poland ceded two villages (Głodówka and Sucha Góra) west of Chochołów to Czechoslovakia in exchange for part of the village of Lipnica Wielka (Figure 9). This involved the western part of the village and the vast majority of farmland belonging to the residents of Lipnica Wielka, which the earlier division had left on the other side of the state border. In this established form, this border still exists in Orava today, currently as the Polish-Slovak border.

A year later, in September 1922, the International Delimitation Commission made changes to the course of the border in Spiš (green). It proposed incorporating into Poland the part of the High Tatras east of Rysy and Morskie Oko, and divided the Jaworzyna Valley between Poland and Czechoslovakia (the border was to run along the valley floor). This proposal was more favourable to Poland than the previous decisions of the Council of Ambassadors. However, the same 1922 proposal by the Delimitation Commission divided northern Spiš in a manner even more disadvantageous to Poland, leaving the municipalities of Kacwin and Niedzica on the Czechoslovak side. Interestingly, the same division of northern Spiš – which was highly disadvantageous to Poland – was also included in Poland's proposal (light blue), which simultaneously called for the incorporation into Poland of a much larger area of the High Tatras, including the entire Jaworzyna Valley. The Polish side clearly sought a territorial exchange – the Jaworzyna Valley for Kacwin and Niedzica (Figure 9). However, this effort was unsuccessful. None of the proposed border lines in Spiš marked on this map was ultimately approved exactly as shown.

The last of the maps presented was published by the Technical Office of the Polish Delega-

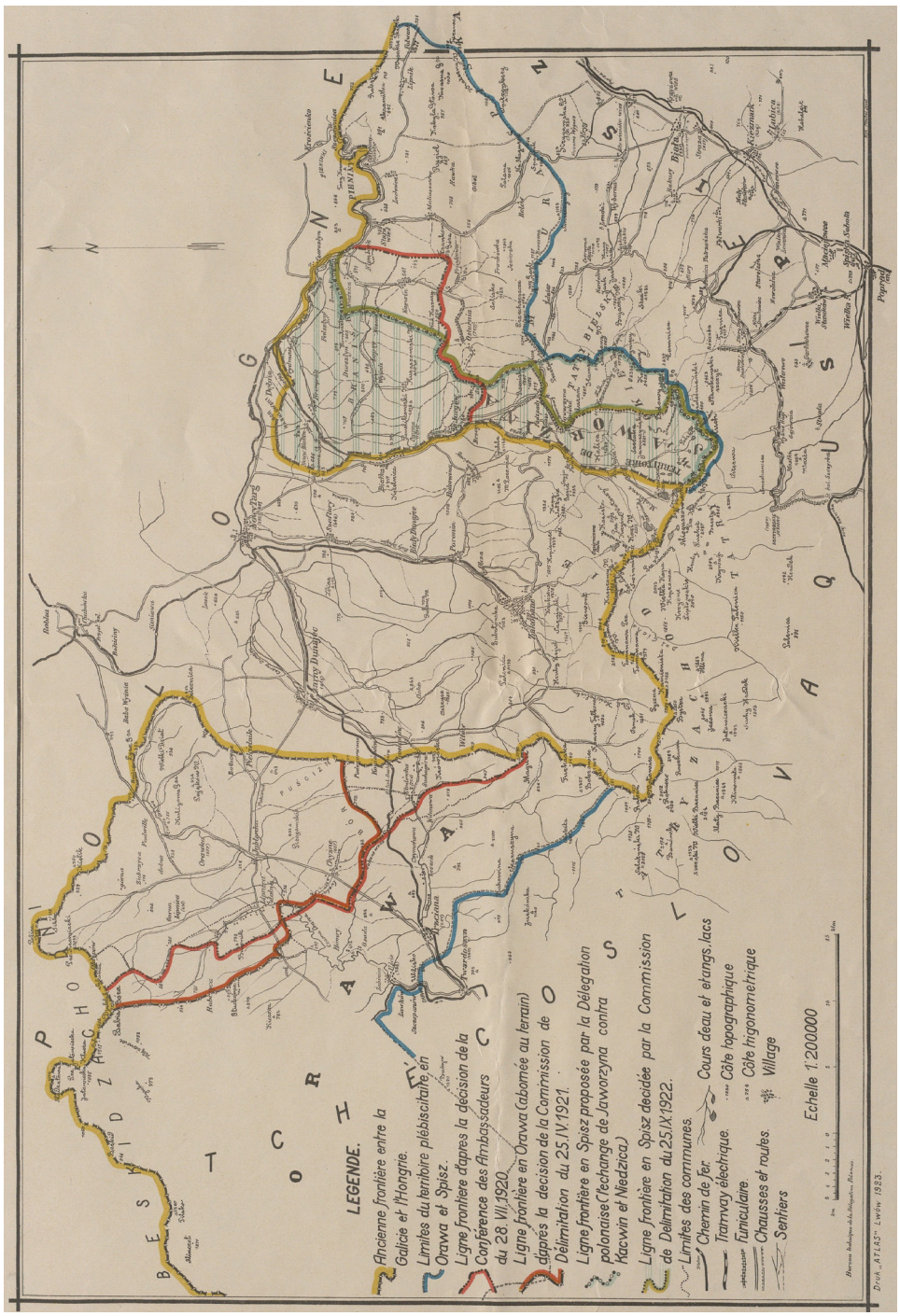


Figure 9. *Territory of Teschen, Spisz and Orawa* (Territory of Teschen, Spiš and Orava) by Machej (1923, United Nations Library & Archives Geneva, sign. LON-G6511.F2 svar .C66 Sheet 4)

tion in 1923, while the hand-drawn elements date from February 1924 (Figure 10). It covers the Polish-Czechoslovak border area in northern Spiš and the High Tatras. It consists of a printed section and hand-drawn, colour-coded versions of the border lines. It also has two legends; the second (on an attached sheet) pertains to the hand-drawn elements. The printed version presents various proposed and established versions of the Polish-Czechoslovak border from 1920–1922. These are: the border line based on the Treaty of Sèvres (August 10, 1920), the so-called "Ambassadors' Line" (following the decision of July 28, 1920), the border line proposed by Poland, the border line not designated by the decision of July 28, 1920, the border line approved by the Delimitation Commission (September 25, 1922), and the Polish proposal for a railway line to Nowy Targ – Jaworzyna – Roztoka. In contrast, the hand-drawn, coloured border lines are a later version and were – according to the information provided in the map's supplementary legend – added following the meeting of the Delimitation Commission in Brno (Czechoslovakia) on February 11, 1924. The colours indicate the course of two borders existing prior to 1924: the former border between Galicia and Hungary (green) and the border established based on the decision of the Council of Ambassadors in July 1920 (red). More significantly, however, three additional variants of the Polish-Czechoslovak border, not shown on the earlier printed version, were added: variants of the Polish-Czechoslovak border – the Polish proposal, which differs in part from the one included in the printed version (yellow), the Czechoslovak proposal prior to the Delimitation Commission's meeting (blue), and a modification of the Czechoslovak proposal as interpreted by the Delimitation Commission (black).

The map shows a very high degree of overlap between the border lines – marked in colour in February 1924 – that divided northern Spiš between Poland and Czechoslovakia. The Polish proposal (yellow) and the Czechoslovak proposal (blue) from February 1924 are completely identical in this section, and there are only a few minor differences between them and the course of the earlier "Ambassadors' Line" from July 1920 (red). The only significant modification in the later Czechoslovak proposal (black) concerned the area south of the villages of Jurgów and Brzegi and was favourable to Poland. Importantly, the Polish-Czechoslovak border in northern Spiš, hand-drawn on this map in February 1924, has survived to the present day, now as the Polish-Slovak border. However, significant differences visible on the map concern the course of the border in the High Tatras. The Polish proposal included the Jaworzyna Valley (yellow), which was not accepted by the Czechoslovak side, despite the fact that the February 1924 proposal called for the annexation of this section of the Tatras on a smaller territorial scale than the earlier Polish proposal from 1920, visible on the printed version of the map (Figure 10). Nevertheless, the new, territorially limited proposals by the Polish side regarding the eastern part of the High Tatras were not accepted by the Czechoslovak side or the League of Nations, which, a month later, awarded the entire Jaworzyna Valley to Czechoslovakia. Currently, the valley belongs entirely to Slovakia.

Of all the proposals for the delimitation of the state border from 1920–1924 presented above, the most disadvantageous for Poland was the first decision of the Council of Ambassadors on July 28, 1920, dividing Spiš and Orava according to the so-called "Ambassadors' Line." This decision had the greatest influence on subsequent meetings and agreements over the next four years. The final version of the Polish-Czechoslovak border in Spiš and Orava, established by the Delimitation Commission in February 1924 in Brno, most closely resembled the course of the "Ambassadors' Line". The changes were minor, often involving the mutual exchange of small territories (villages), and in no case did they significantly alter the decision of July 1920, which was unfavourable to Poland. This border was approved by the League of Nations on March 12, 1924, and – despite changes between 1938 and 1945 – remains in this form to this day.

6. Conclusions

The efforts undertaken in 1918 to incorporate parts of Orava and Spiš into the Polish state were based on strong arguments that were extensively documented, both in narrative form and through maps. First and foremost, the northern parts of these regions constituted

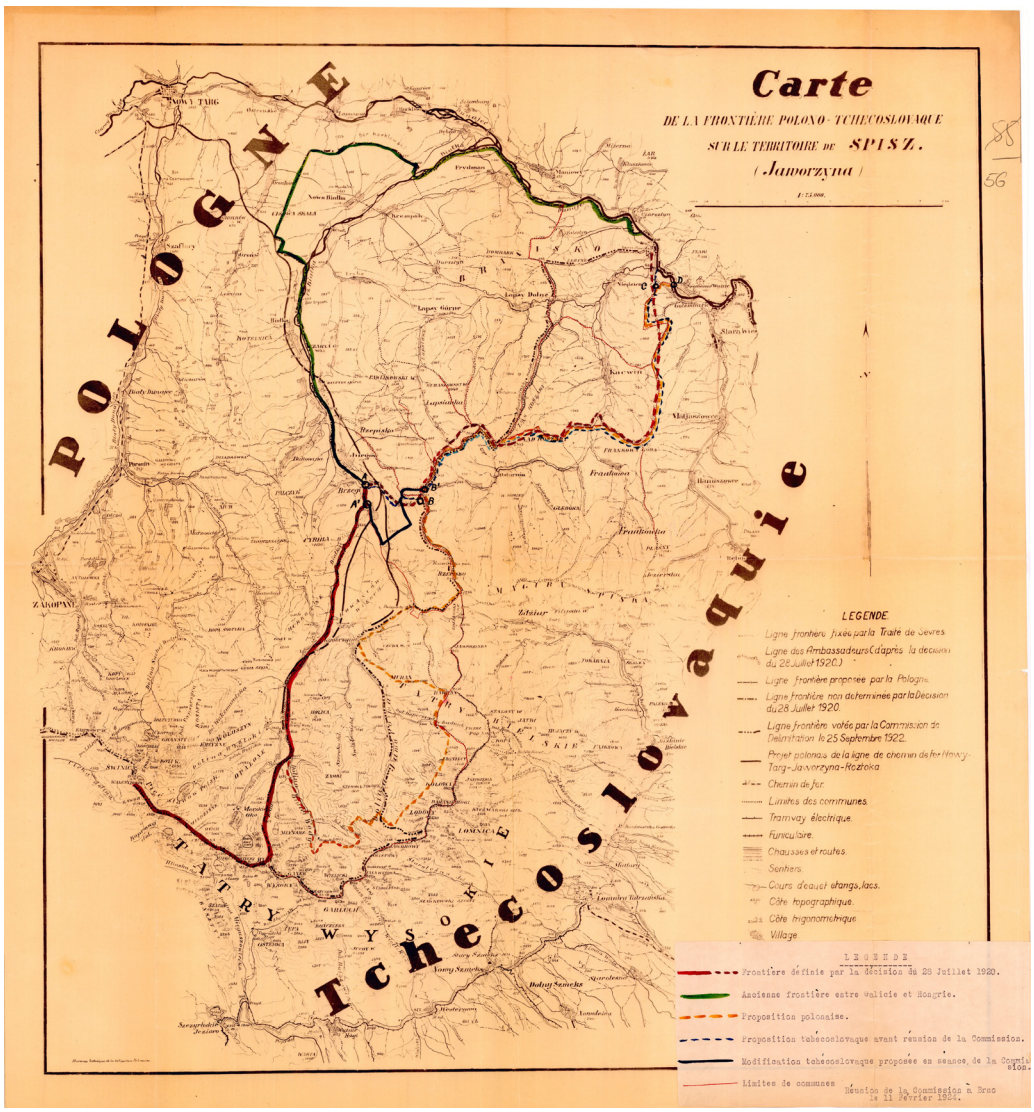


Figure 10. Carte de la frontière Polono-Tchecoslovaque sur le territoire de Spisz Jaworzyna (Map of the Polish-Czechoslovak border in the territory of Spiš Jaworzyna; 1923, Archive of New Files in Warsaw, Zespół 463 Ambasada RP w Paryżu, sign.107, k. 56)

a compact area of Polish settlement, resulting from migratory movements dating back to the Middle Ages. However, the population there was overwhelmingly peasant, often unaware of their origins and nationality, subject to strong Slovak and Hungarian influences, and deprived of support from Poland, which was under foreign partition.

As a sense of national identity and distinctiveness took shape among the peasant population, and as a consequence of the cultural and assimilation processes that had been ongoing since the 19th century, broad borderland zones emerged in Central Europe, inhabited by people with diverse or not fully developed national identities. When linguistic proximity

was compounded by the absence of religious differences, distinguishing between the two related communities became very difficult. This was the case, for example, on the Polish-Slovak borderland, in Orava and Spiš.

Furthermore, the peripheral location of both regions, geographically, economically, and socially, and the clear predominance of a poor and uneducated rural population meant that the already slight national and cultural differences were further blurred by the languages shared by the inhabitants of Spiš and Orava – specific highlander dialects. These dialects served as the primary tool of local communication, blurring identity differences (Kulak, 2025).

Although national issues were officially among the key topics during negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference, it was impossible at the beginning of the 20th century to draw precise ethnic boundaries in Central Europe. This was mainly due to the overlap of ethnic territories, the ambiguity and fluidity of national identity, and the existence of extensive national and linguistic border zones.

However, the 1920 decision of the Council of Ambassadors deviated so far from the actual ethnic structure of Spiš and Orava and from the analytical and cartographic materials provided by both parties to the territorial dispute that it cannot be explained solely by the objective difficulties of delimiting these regions. It was the result of effective diplomatic efforts by the Czechoslovak side, the exploitation of Poland's very difficult political and military situation at the time, as well as the weaknesses and mistakes of Polish diplomacy. The established borders were an arbitrary creation of diplomats, not a consequence of the ethnic structure or the will of the inhabitants. Furthermore, the numerous works of Polish scientists, including cartographic studies, had a very limited influence on the decisions of politicians.

Small portions of Orava and Spiš, which were ultimately incorporated into Poland in 1924, were the only areas of the former Kingdom of Hungary that became part of the reborn Poland. Nevertheless, Polish authorities unequivocally criticized the decisions of the Council of Ambassadors and the Delimitation Commission, deeming them far from sufficient and unfair. Prague's assessment was also negative, as it demanded the entire territory of northern Slovakia, up to the former Galician-Hungarian border. Throughout the interwar period, Polish-Czechoslovak political relations were tense, mainly due to the partition of Cieszyn Silesia, but also because of the dispute over the division of Orava and Spiš. Between 1938 and 1945, the territorial dispute resurfaced, and the borders in these regions were altered several times, but they subsequently returned to the configuration established in the 1920s and remain in that form to this day.

Spiš and Orava are regions which, over 100 years ago, fell victim to a policy that led to the division not only of the territory, but also of the inhabitants, infrastructure, and mutual social and economic relations. It also forced the inhabitants to take sides in a political dispute, to emphasise their identity and their distinctiveness from 'others'. This sparked conflicts, intensified assimilation on both sides of the border and led to the introduction of new national symbols into the borderland landscape. Today, no one – including national minorities – questions the course of the border, Poland and Slovakia emphasise the multiculturalism and uniqueness of their border regions, and both regions have become, in a sense, 'symbols of remembrance', though mainly for those who are familiar with their past (Elbel, 2023).

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