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## **The Great War in Polish Correspondence Intercepted by Austro-Hungarian Censorship: Materials of Polish Censorship Groups from 1914–1918\***

### **1. Structure and Tasks of the GZNB Censorship Department within the Censorship System of the Austro-Hungarian Empire**

In the years of the First World War in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, central government offices created a universal system of censorship, covering the most important forms of communication: the press, post office, telegraph and telephone. Already in 1906, the *Kriegsüberwachungsamt* (hereinafter: *KÜA*) was created – this, the War Surveillance Office, was a special body appointed to oversee the state's internal security through the aid of censorship. At that time, the office received legal standing and a structure providing for its immediate launch in the moment of a state crisis.

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\* *Wielka Wojna w polskiej korespondencji zatrzymanej przez cenzurę austro-węgierską. Materiały polskich grup cenzury z lat 1914–1918*, research, introd., ed. and notes by P. Brudek, J. Molenda, J.Z. Pająk, vol. 1: Introduction and Part I. *Dokumenty normatywne Oddziału Cenzury Centralnego Wspólnego Biura Rejestrowego Czerwonego Krzyża – Wydziału Informacyjnego dla Jeńców Wojennych w Wiedniu (1914–1919)* (Metamorfozy Społeczne, 13); vol. 2: Part II. *Materiały Polskiej Grupy Cenzury (luty–wrzesień 1915)*, Part III. *Materiały Polskiej Grupy Cenzury A (wrzesień 1915 – styczeń 1916)*, Part IV. *Materiały Polskiej Grupy Cenzury B (wrzesień 1915 – styczeń 1916)* (Metamorfozy Społeczne, 14); vol. 3: Part V. *Materiały Polskich Grup Cenzury A i B (luty–grudzień 1916)* (Metamorfozy Społeczne, 15); vol. 4: Part VI. *Materiały Polskiej Grupy Cenzury i Referatu XVI (styczeń 1917 – wrzesień 1918)* (Metamorfozy Społeczne, 16); vol. 5: *Bibliografia. Wykaz dokumentów. Indeksy*, prepared by J.Z. Pająk, M. Sala, Warszawa 2018 (Metamorfozy Społeczne, 17).

The censorship department of the newly-created institution for prisoners of war, the *Zensurabteilung des Gemeinsames Zentralnachweisebureau des Roten Kreuzes – Auskunftsstelle für Kriegsgefangene (GZNB)*, i.e. the Censorship Department of the Joint Central Reference Bureau of the Red Cross – Information Office for POWs, was to be the sole entity dealing with the censorship of prisoner of war correspondence.

Officially, it was an institution that remained a part of the Red Cross for Austria and Hungary, whose task was to search for, register and help prisoners of war and interned civilians. Due to its charitable nature, the *GZNB* was actually subordinated to the General Inspector of the Voluntary Sanitary Service (*Generalinspektor der freiwilligen Sanitätspflege*).

One of the tasks of the *GZNB* was to forward prisoner correspondence, which – like any other – also had to pass through censorship. The *GZNB* Censorship Department, selected for this purpose, was to be subject simultaneously to the Department 10 for Prisoners of War Affairs (*Abteilung 10. Kriegsgefangenenangelegenheiten*) in the Ministry of War in Vienna, the Army Higher Command, and the General Staff Intelligence Department (*Evidenzbureau*) – in other words, military intelligence headquarters. What was to be censored, however, was still decided by the War Surveillance Office, which had the right to intervene in the work of the Censorship Department.

According to the *KÜA*, the inexperienced censors of the department were initially restricted to stopping letters considered harmful. This changed in October 1914, when the command of the Censorship Department was taken over by a cavalry officer, Major Theodor Primavesi (b. 1871), the son of a banker, from a Germanized Italian family settled in Moravia. Primavesi sought to transform the Censorship Department into an intelligence organization which, based on the analysis of the letters intercepted, was to provide the Army Higher Command and the Ministry of War with important information that could not be obtained any other way. This information was to be compiled in the form of regular, written reports, with the initial focus on letter “leaks” regarding the situation of their own prisoners of war. Primavesi treated prisoner correspondence in a comprehensive manner, integrating it with the correspondence of internees and refugees. He considered prisoner of war mail as an extremely reliable source of information of great importance for the conduct of war. Already in November 1914, Primavesi created a hierarchical and specialized structure of the Censorship Department. The leader of the department was the Head Censor (*Zensurleiter*), who along with the entire staff of the department was subordinated to the Vienna garrison as a military unit. Subordinate to

the head was the deputy and the office, later transformed into a presidential chancellery (*Präsidialkanzlei*). The Postal Group (*Postgruppe*) was also directly subordinate to him, sorting the incoming mail and forwarding it to language groups (*Sprachgruppe*). The language group was the most important structural element, constituting an independent unit employing censors working on correspondence in a given language (usually only one, but collaboration was possible for groups working on related languages, e.g. Russian and Ukrainian) under the direction of the group leader (*Gruppenleiter*). The individual leaders constituted an advisory body for the head of department. By the end of 1914, 12 language groups were created, in December 1915, there were already 30 language groups. This number, with slight fluctuations, persisted until the end of the war. The custom was adopted that in censorship offices, lists were available with information about which office censored in what language. There were huge language groups – like German, Italian or Polish, which were divided into smaller ones, naming them by letters of the alphabet (e.g. Polish groups A and B).

A separate unit was the Removal Group (*Remedurgruppe*) dealing with the deletion of fragments of text marked out by the censors. In the field of removal, the Austro-Hungarian censorship underwent a huge evolution, from primitive text covering with the appropriate stamps to more specialized techniques.

At the end of 1915, a novelty appeared in the department's structure – the *Hyperzensur*, an authority tasked with supervising the department's work and drawing up thorough reports on its work for the censorship leadership (*Zensurleitung*).

At the end of 1914, the entire department numbered about 500 employees, among whom were officers unable to serve on the front-line, as well as civil servants and civilian auxiliary staff.

In October 1914, the *GZNB* Censorship Department in Vienna received about 8,000 pieces of correspondence a day; in June 1915, it was up to 70,000; in January 1916 – 260,000; then in December 1916, it was already 500,000 pieces per day. From 1917 until the end of the war, this amount increased slowly but surely, and at the end of the war, it certainly exceeded 500,000 pieces a day. In this situation, the department also had to expand with new personnel – at the end of May 1917, it already had 1,292 people, ultimately reaching its maximum number: 1,500 employees. Access to all POW correspondence, sent both by their own soldiers and enemy captives in the monarchy, gave the Censorship Department enormous capabilities, provided that the work was properly organized. In the course of the war, a procedure for working

on material was established: incoming mail was sorted and immediately transferred to linguistic groups for censorship or was sent further (this was done in 90 per cent of cases). A special category of correspondence was held (*Inhibierte Korrespondenz*). The reason for holding it could be hidden content in the form of a cipher, or information, which due to its nature, could not be passed on. Detailed censorship instructions issued by the central authorities, as well as by the censorship leadership and its approval by individual group heads, defined more and more new criteria for assessing the permissibility and impermissibility of correspondence. The instructions drew attention to the ways of avoiding censorship which the author of the letter could have used.

A way of dealing with letters was established: the letters of senders or addressees who were listed in an index of suspect characters were taken by the sorting group and passed on to the intelligence group; the rest of the mail was sent to the language groups in parcels of 1,000 items. From this pool, individual letters were sent to censors. Irrelevant correspondence was initialed by censors and went to the outgoing mail group, where it received the censor's stamp. Usually, every censor had his own individual stamp, bearing a number. In this way, thanks to the signature (usually initials) and the number of the stamp, it was always possible to determine who censored the letter, as the initials were associated with a specific number.

Then the censors proceeded to work with the letters. Not only was their content examined, but also their form (manner of writing, suspicious characters), as well as the envelope. Suspicious letters were sent to the decryption group, while those with fragments marked for removal by the censor were sent to the Removal Group. Letters designated to be held were forwarded to individual departments together with all the requisite correspondence material requiring examination. Letters, which for important reasons were excluded from further mailing, were to be held. The censor's work consisted of meticulously extracting from every piece of correspondence information of a political, military or economic character that drew attention. They were then presented as "remarks" or "observations" (*Wahrnehmungen*) and passed to the head manager. The manager analyzed them and prepared a synthesized report (*Bericht*) based on a sufficiently large sample. In turn, the censorship chiefs, having the reports of the managers, created their own reports for the central authorities – mainly for the Army Higher Command and the Ministry of War.

Primavesi ordered a systematisation of the reports of language group leaders. According to these guidelines, the first part of the report was to focus on the treatment of prisoners at home and abroad; the second part was to be dedicated

to the situation of interned and confirmed persons, and contain information on military and political offences committed by civilians; the third part was to consist of a report on military and political matters. The group heads were to decide for themselves what to include in special reports (*Sonderbericht*), although Primavesi stipulated that they should mainly focus on important political and military information, as well as particularly pronounced cases of ill-treatment of prisoners and internees.

The original purpose of the monthly reports was to provide information about the location and mood of their own prisoners of war in enemy countries, and enemy prisoners of war in the monarchy. With time, more subjects emerged: the economic situation in the country and abroad (e.g. news on the flow of goods and capital, harvest forecasts, etc.), the social situation (state of supply, health situation). The most important, however, were reports on the political mood of the domestic population (with particular emphasis on the attitude and loyalty of individual nations of the monarchy towards the state and the dynasty), on separatist tendencies, war fatigue, and especially revolutionary tensions, e.g. threats of rebellions, strikes, and in the case of soldiers – desertions.

The enormity of the material, its significance and the high expectations of supervisors placed great responsibility on the censor. Censors were trained by group heads with the help of instructors assigned to them, who were in possession of constantly updated, partly published instruction books and censorship handbooks. The *Hyperzensur* closely checked the work of censors, from whom even scholarly accuracy and maximum efficiency was required. Only experienced censors predestined for this task were allowed to engage in management activities in each censorship group. The *Hyperzensur* was able to correct deficiencies, detect censors whose work was unreliable – if they repeated the same mistakes, they risked punishment. The awareness that their work would be additionally checked was intended to motivate the censors.

In the Censorship Department, “K-Groups” (*K* – *Kundschaftsdienst*, i.e. Intelligence Service) were selected, dealing with broadly understood activities in the spirit of offensive intelligence. They recorded the names of people involved in espionage, accused of high treason or desertion, and their correspondence ended up with the K-Groups, where they were subjected to a particularly thorough examination for ciphers or hidden text. Its greatest success was the accurate identification of the order of battle of the Serbian Army in 1915, on the eve of the offensive of the Central States in the Balkans, so to be able to make the most of this information.

Primavesi's concept was continued by his successor, Otto Kick, who tried to raise the efficiency and regularity of the work of the leaders of language groups even more. Kick put more emphasis on economic and internal political information about the monarchy itself. He announced his program at the meeting of the heads of the language groups on 19 January 1917, when a new structure was joined to the existing 31 groups – units, 24 in total, and marked by Roman numerals, devoted to particular specialties. These were headed by leaders chosen from among the heads of the language groups. The most important were **Units XIV–XXII** that were referred to as “political units”. These were to work on internal economic information from the monarchy regarding: the Czech issue (national policy, anti-state tendencies, moods of the Czech nation on the front and in the rear – Unit XIV), Italian irredentists in the country and abroad (XV), the Polish issue (XVI), the Ukrainian issue and Russophiles (XVII), the Romanian issue (XVIII), the issue of the southern Slavs of Austria and Slavs in Hungary (apart from the Serbian issue – XIX), the Serbian issue (XX), the moods and economic situation in the rear and in allied countries (XXI) and the peace issue (XXII).

Political correspondence also provided valuable evidence for the police, hence these units worked closely with the investigative authorities. As a rule, the eminent heads of censorship groups became political unit analysts, hailing from intellectual circles and the political elite.

From this point, the language groups handed over all the materials they had worked on to relevant analysts, then on their basis the analysts prepared short, cross-sectional, monthly reports for the unit heads with an emphasis on their regularity. The most important were the political unit reports from Units XIV–XXI, hence they were given special content and form.

The analysts were reminded that their task was to give the most faithful picture of “views, moods and attitudes of the population”, the censorship chiefs wanted to achieve this by compiling only the information that appeared with high frequency. Censors were sensitized to the idea that even a very interesting viewpoint is worthless if it occurred only in a limited amount of correspondence; it became important only when hundreds of examples appeared. Therefore, each of the comments made in the report needed to be clarified with an annotation whether it was an individual opinion or a statement confirmed by a larger volume of correspondence from across social strata, not just in one group. The censors were to pick up the differences between particular nationalities, describe the moods towards allies and enemies, focus on the expressed emotions of the certainty of victory, but also the fatigue of

war. Of particular importance were statements about the internal situation of the monarchy, nationality policy, and the issues of compulsory military service and parliamentarism. Anti-state statements of the Czechs, southern Slavs, Italians, Romanians and “Rusophiles” were searched out. The Polish issue, as well as any statements about the future borders of the monarchy, were among the sensitive matters.

The *GZNB* Censorship Department ceased to exist in November 1918, but the *GZNB* itself, as an institution of the Red Cross, survived the end of the monarchy and was dissolved only in the spring of 1919.

## 2. The Polish Censorship Group and Unit XVI – the Polish Question Within the *GZNB* Censorship Department

The instruction of 2 November 1914 provided for the creation of a Polish language group, which was organized in the beginning of 1915 and from 15 February was led by Major Juliusz Żydło. From that point, it worked on incoming correspondence in Polish. The result of this work was the documents they created: general reports (*Bericht*), which were presented in monthly reporting periods from the 20th of each month to the 20th of the next. They were usually prepared in four identical copies, one of which was kept on file, while the others were sent to: the War Surveillance Office, Department 10 for Prisoners of War Affairs of the Ministry of War and to the General Staff Information Office.

In the general reports, based on the attached correspondence, in the years 1914–1915, one common topic of discussion was the situation and moods of the Polish population located in the part of Galicia occupied by the Russians and Polish military units forming in Russia. Over the course of 1915, matters of interest to censors increased to include the situation and moods prevailing among: 1) civilian hostages from Galicia, 2) Polish POWs from the Austro-Hungarian Army who were in Russia, Italy and Serbia, 3) Polish POWs within the Habsburg monarchy, as well as information about the situation of Poles in other Entente countries. The general reports were supplemented by special reports (*Sonderbericht* or *Spezialbericht*), usually concerning individual matters, but in terms of content and issues, related to the general ones.

In the first period, the number of letters and postcards worked on by the Polish Censorship Group grew steadily, between 20 February and 19 March 1915 – 31,116 pieces of correspondence were censored, between

20 March and 20 April – 35,680, between 20 July and 20 August – already 78,235 and in the next reporting period, it reached 154,806.

Due to the growing influx of correspondence in Polish requiring censorship, in September 1915, the decision was made for a reorganization. Created alongside the existing Polish Censorship Group, which was renamed the Polish Censorship Group A, still headed by Major Juliusz Żydko, a second group: Polish Censorship Group B, was created. It was taken over by the former head of the Slovak Censorship Group, Captain Milan Boubela.

The form and volume of general reports changed and the period that they covered expanded. At that time, each group created their reports separately and sent them separately to the same institutions as before the reorganization. These reports, although they had the same thematic layout, in fact differed in both volume and the treatment of the content they contained. We do not have data on Group A. As for Group B, in November 1915 it consisted of 29 censors, who in the September–October period worked on 106,990 pieces of correspondence. Captain Boubela argued that the main thing interfering with their work was the quality of censorship cadres.

In early 1917, both Polish groups totaled 82 staff members (including 14 officers). Most of the 44 delegated soldiers as well as 24 civilians worked as translators and censors. Among them were “four censors less fit for service due to advanced age and sickness”. It placed the Polish Unit XVI among the large language groups of the *GZNB* Censorship Department. As mentioned before, Unit XVI, founded in January 1917, as one of the “political units”, prepared short, cross-sectional monthly reports for the leadership of the Censorship Department, which dealt with the broadly understood “Polish issue” (including the newly-forming Polish military formations). In addition, it worked on issues regarding:

- 1) the moods and attitudes of Poles on the territory of the Habsburg monarchy (with particular emphasis on Galicia and Silesia);
- 2) soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian Army on the front;
- 3) soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian Army and prisoners of war in the Entente countries (in particular in Russia, Italy and France);
- 4) inhabitants of the part of Galicia occupied by Russia;
- 5) inhabitants of the Kingdom of Poland, occupied by the Central Powers;
- 6) civilians from the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia residing in Russia;
- 7) soldiers of the Russian Army and prisoners of war on the territory of the Habsburg monarchy.

The basis for the reports, as in the previous period, was the Polish-language correspondence censored by the Polish Censorship Group. Its scale is evidenced



by the numbers in the archived correspondence statistical reports. They show that the amount of correspondence censored from April 1917 to February 1918 was more or less constant, oscillating between 450,000 and 500,000 reviewed postcards and letters on average. In March 1918, this number dropped by more than half and, from that time, remained at a level of about 180,000 pieces of correspondence reviewed. This decline was mainly due to the lack of letters from Russia, which at that time ceased flowing on such a large scale, as after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk an overwhelming mass of prisoners of war from the Austro-Hungarian Empire returned home from Russia.

The majority of the correspondence consisted of postcards. In the period from January 1917 to February 1918, they represented 93–94 per cent and in the period from March to September 1918, about 85 per cent of the total correspondence. On average, over half of the correspondence censored in the Polish Censorship Group was correspondence to or from prisoners of war.

### **3. Characteristics of Documentation of the GZNB Censorship Department**

The main goal of the presented source edition is to remember and document the fate of Poles. This includes citizens and soldiers of the armies of the partitioning powers – mainly Austria-Hungary and in a smaller part, Russia – fighting on all fronts in the First World War. After being taken prisoner, the Polish soldiers of the Great War were sent to prisoner-of-war camps around the world.

According to the latest data on the number of prisoners of war, the number of Poles from the Austro-Hungarian and German armies held in camps in Russia and employed in industry, agriculture and road and railway construction, amounted to over 300,000. A significant part of the Polish POWs from the Austro-Hungarian Army found themselves in Italy, where their number reached at least 60,000. They lived mainly in camps, but they were also employed in various parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in agriculture and industry. Their exact number is unknown, but it can be estimated that there were about 130,000. Reading the correspondence of the prisoners, their only connection with the outside world, is an excellent source for locating these camps. Besides those “obvious” ones, on the territory of the Habsburg monarchy and the Russian Empire, the camps could also be Serbian, Italian (including Asinara in Sardinia), British (Isle of Man on the Irish Sea, camps in Canada, Australia

or the island of Trinidad), and French. The correspondence compels us to look again at the First World War and the forgotten fates of Poles entangled in it; even of former Austro-Hungarian citizens who emigrated from Galicia to the United States and then landed in France or Italy in the uniforms of the American Expeditionary Forces. The enormous legacy of the correspondence of prisoners of war and interned persons, as well as the civilians who wrote to them, preserved in the *Kriegsarchiv* (War Archive) in Vienna, remains, thus far, an untapped source in Polish and world historiography.

The volume of the collected source material exceeded expectations and at the same time the possibility of publishing them in a single consolidated publication. The most interesting materials are found in the structures of the Polish Censorship Groups and Section XVI (which formed part of the *GZNB* Censorship Department) – on one hand, and three censorship offices in Feldkirch, Vienna, and Budapest, that were subject to the military censorship, on the other. The documentation produced by both of these censorship groups, despite thematic similarities, constitutes, in terms of structure, separate and indivisible wholes that were not subject to any arbitrary selections and divisions. In this situation, the strongest arguments are for the publication of the documents produced by the Polish Censorship Groups and Section XVI. These structures dealt exclusively with the collection of correspondence in Polish and the preparation of various types of reports and dispatches. They were able to compile these to the fullest extent, compared to similar types of sources concerning Polish matters created by the censorship offices in Feldkirch, Vienna and Budapest. In sources produced by the Polish Censorship Groups, the vast majority of original correspondence in Polish, as a whole, has also been preserved. The internal structure of individual reports, especially monthly ones, consisting of an analytical part and what constituted its basis, is indivisible. Both monthly reports and dispatches were created at irregular intervals, marked with consecutive numbers, and given an identical or similar theme. These formed a structural and thematic whole, serving the implementation of specific goals and tasks set for the censorship by the Austro-Hungarian supreme authorities. The documentation created in this way requires it to be published in a definite whole and not in selected fragments.

The reports of the Polish Censorship Group reflected the views on Polish issues mainly in light of many hundreds of pieces of correspondence of Polish POWs from all three partitioning armies, staying in camps, mostly in Russia, Austria-Hungary and Italy, and letters and postcards that their families and friends sent to them. The reports named “Polish Question” (*Polenfrage*) based on

correspondence coming mainly from Switzerland, France, Sweden and Russia, and received from families back home, present their views and actions related to the Polish question. Both types of monthly reports complement each other and form a whole. Therefore, the *Polenfrage* as well as other documentation concerning Polish matters, prepared by censorship offices in Feldkirch, Vienna and Budapest, should be published. It is also worth informing that these three censorship offices, apart from writing various kinds of supplements devoted exclusively to Polish issues, also cited several, several dozen or more pieces of Polish correspondence, translated into German, also in many other monthly reports dealing with nationality issues.

However, the most censored correspondence written by Polish prisoners of war, staying mainly in camps in Russia, Austria-Hungary and Italy, was included in the monthly reports prepared by the above-mentioned sections V, VIII, VI, parts of the *GZNB* Censorship Department.

The correspondence of Polish prisoners of war contains the most information about the difficult living and sanitary conditions in the camps: the hunger prevailing there, and in winter, the cold, lack of clothing and footwear, and forced labour in agriculture and industry.

Especially deserving of a separate study is the Ukrainian and Hebrew-language correspondence, and the monthly and one-time reports prepared on their basis. This documentation concerns the living conditions and the high social, national and political activity of the Ukrainian and Jewish populations, mainly in the areas of Galicia and the part of the Kingdom of Poland under Austro-Hungarian occupation. This documentation is most unique and completely unknown to researchers.

The richness of the material, as well as the history of the structures that created them, led to the publication based on this research, *The Great War in Polish Correspondence Intercepted by the Austro-Hungarian Censorship*, to be divided, in a chronological and subject arrangement, into five volumes:

1) consists of an **Introduction** containing: an outline of the history of the formation of Austro-Hungarian censorship during the war and a sketch of the history of the *GZNB* Censorship Department and the Polish censorship groups included in it. It also includes a discussion of the type of documentation produced and the condition of its preservation, and an exposé of the principles adopted when editing sources. At the end is presented the state of historical research in the field covered by the presented source publication. **Part I** contains documents regulating the activity of the Austro-Hungarian censorship;

2) consists of **Part II** containing materials of the Polish Censorship Group in the period between February and September 1915, **Part III** containing the materials of Polish Censorship Group A in the period from September 1915 to January 1916, and **Part IV** containing materials from Polish Censorship Group B in the period between September 1915 and January 1916;

3) consists of **Part V** containing materials of Polish Censorship Groups A and B in the period between February and December 1916;

4) consists of **Part VI** containing materials of the Polish Censorship Group and Section XVI in the period between January 1917 and September 1918;

5) contains a list of literature and indices: personal, localities and geographical names, as well as institutions and organizations.

The following two types of sources came into this publication as a result of the research conducted and their state of preservation. In the first part of volume 1 were entered the above-mentioned topics, thus defining: the goals and principles of the censorship of correspondence; the implementation of the censorship instructions serving their realization; determining the scope of content subject to censoring and the ways it was handled. In volumes 2 (Parts II, III and IV), 3 (Part V) and 4 (Part VI), there are various types of reports and dispatches and the correspondence they were based on. The documents published in volume 1 and in three others, despite their variety, constitute an integral whole, because they were created by specially established censorship structures pursuing the goals and principles of the Austro-Hungarian authorities. This is of fundamental importance in the selection of sources, their internal layout and their method of editing in the publication.

Let us take a closer look then at the content and state of preservation of the sources contained in volume 1 and in volumes 2–4, constituting a separate whole produced by the Polish Censorship Groups, being part of the *GZNB* Censorship Department.

The presented volume 1 includes 184 documents originating mainly from the closed collection of the *GZNB* Censorship Department (1914–1918), and in small part from the *Kriegsüberwachungsamt* (War Surveillance Office) and the Intelligence Department of the Army Higher Command (*Evidenzbureau/Nachrichtenabteilung des Armee-Oberkommandos, Evb./NA*), stored in the *Kriegsarchiv* (War Archive) in Vienna. The *GZNB* Censorship Department collection contains 108 bundles (formerly known as *Faszikel*) of documents and books, numbered from *Res. 1* to *Res. 5242* (*Reservatakten*) assigned to the so-called *Abteilung D* and *Res. 1 – Res. 12,448* (*Abteilung E*). Separately numbered are the so-called Liquidation Files of the Censorship Department. The following

documents mainly cover the legislative legacy of the Censorship Department and the authorities regarding the scope of censored content, methods and techniques of analyzing correspondence in terms of stopping unauthorized information, obtaining information valuable in terms of intelligence, and utilizing correspondence for offensive intelligence (imitation of correspondence, inserting information in them encrypted or hidden by means of invisible ink).

On the basis of regulations developed at various levels and passed on in various forms, the goals and principles of the censorship of correspondence were formulated, and a certain amount of incoming and outgoing mail was stopped. The secondary, but no less important assumption of this volume is also the presentation of the characteristics of the Censorship Department. The documents gathered here show not only the legal bases but also the practice of the functioning of the Censorship Department during the First World War, its organization and transformations, its efficiency and effectiveness, as well as the impact of war events on its mode of work. The documents have been compiled in chronological order, due to the need to maintain the cause-and-effect sequence between them, and their mutual influence in the course of the debate on censorship between different offices.

The documents assessed here constitute a whole, composed of various types of documents intermixed with each other. They differ substantially in terms of form, content and volume. The following types of documentation were presented in the volume, compiled in terms of their rank and number of documents:

**1. Internal announcements (so-called *Kundmachungen*) of the Censorship Directorate for all censorship staff: 44** (including 10 announcements cited in one document – the arrangement of census regulations by the Romanian Censorship Group from 21 June 1915). A selection of announcements is presented here, in terms of their content; the ones that contained specific instructions for censors, having an immediate effect on their current work, were considered important. The *Kundmachungen* were numbered, they appeared with varying frequency, and they regulated the work of the Censorship Department by passing on the most-up-to-date instructions in the mode of short work orders, thus directing the attention of the censors to particularly significant phenomena. An important element of the *Kundmachungen* was the order of their appearance; often the newer ones invalidated the older ones, forcing censors to constantly update their knowledge of the regulations.

**2. Official letters: 41** – official correspondence between the central authorities (mainly the Military Control Office, the Army Higher Command, and the

Information Office) and the GZNB Censorship Department (including letters from censors with proposals to update the applicable provisions).

**3. Programs of scheduled meetings/consultations and reports of those already held, of the group leader assembly (*Gruppenleiterversammlung*):**

**21.** This is a specific type of unofficial document of an internal character, as evidenced by numerous handwritten annotations in the text, lack of initials and stamps. They constitute a kind of “rough draft” – an *ad hoc* discussion of topics for planned meetings and the decisions made there.

**4. Official Instructions (named: *Instruktion* – Instruction, *Zensurvorschriften* – Censorship Regulations, *Instruktionsbuch* – Instructional Book, *Zensurbestimmungen* – Censorship Guidelines) of the Censorship Department leadership regarding procedures used in censorship of prisoner of war correspondence: 21.** This is the main part of the volume, covering both planned censorship instructions, presented by individual censorship groups, with corrections made by the censorship authorities, and then printed the resulting censorship textbooks. They have a formal nature, with the ordered structure of a legal act; they are written in official, bureaucratic language and usually such instructions were not shorter than 20–30 pages of typescript.

**5. Reports on the activities of the Censorship Department for the Authorities: 17.** These are the so-called *Tätigkeitsberichte*, extensive reports, tens of pages long, with numerous attachments, prepared by the head of the Censorship Department for the central authorities, affixed with the necessary stamps and initials.

**6. KŮA guidelines on censoring press information about prisoners of war: 13.** In 1917, they were issued in print in the form of a several-dozen page booklet. For the purpose of the volume, the guidelines regarding the work of the Censorship Department were selected, they were distributed in the volume according to their dates of appearance.

**7. Legislative acts of the central authorities – special KŮA ordinances, listings of regulations: 10.** Legislative acts, varied in terms of form and volume, referring to censorship regulations, also in the form of service books (*Dienstbuch J-25 A*, issued by the *Kriegsüberwachungsamt*).

**8. Internal regulations of the Censorship Department, other than the carrying out of censorship procedures: 7.** Various in terms of the form and content of the leadership’s instructions regarding organizational transformations of the department and special guidelines regarding the handling of correspondence.

**9. Reports of the *Hyperzensur* from inspections of the activities of the Censorship Department:** 7. From the beginning of its activity at the end of 1915, the *Hyperzensur* prepared their reports in an increasingly extensive manner, similar to the department reports. They were written with the inclusion of statistics, also using the most official language, and stylized directly on legal jargon. They were chosen according to a chronological perspective, as the idea of including all of them was abandoned. It was more important to show the specifics of this source.

**10. Orders of the Censorship Leadership (*Zensurleitungsbefehl*) to the censorship staff:** 6. Surprisingly rare orders that often referred to trivial or purely administrative matters, such as who will replace the head of the department during his business trip.

**11. Thematic reports based on correspondence analysis:** 4. These did not have a fixed form; rather, they resembled confidential and specific intelligence reports. They were personally made by group leaders on the special order of the Head of the Censorship Department.

**12. Critical remarks of the heads of groups on the reports of individual censorship sections:** 3. Written in literary language, reminiscent of polemic political commentary; they are an interesting contribution to getting to know the mentality of heads of the censorship, often severe towards their colleagues.

**13. Press articles authored by censors about their work (published shortly after the war):** 2. An important complement to the volume are press columns published in the pages of *Der Friede* – literary and cultural writings. These are the oldest publications revealing the activities of the Censorship Department towards correspondence, written by the censors themselves at the turn of 1918–1919. They are written with eloquence and journalistic engagement, they show censors from a different side, more as sociologists or philologists proud of their achievements, than bureaucrats working for intelligence.

**14. Parliamentary question time:** 1. The questioning of a member of parliament of Vienna, Dr. Stefan Licht, from 1917, illustrates the language of this type of source, constituting the first statement of a deputy regarding the harmfulness of the censorship of correspondence. It also has a complementary function here. However, due to its length, only fragments are included in the volume.

Regarding volumes 2, 3 and 4, the aim of the editors was to publish various reports and dispatches prepared by the Polish Censorship Groups together with the correspondence attached to them, in their entirety. They constitute – as has already been pointed out – a structural and thematic whole that is not subject to divisions and selections. In total, 522 documents were collected

in volumes 2–4, 30 of which are periodic (monthly) reports and the remaining 492 are special reports and dispatches.

Reports and dispatches prepared by the Polish Censorship Groups at irregular intervals had various titles: special report (*Sonderbericht* or *Spezialbericht*), dispatch (*Meldung*), special dispatch (*Sondermeldung*), or single dispatch (*Einzelmeldung*). By convention, we called all of these categories special reports or dispatches. They were usually shorter in volume than periodic reports and normally concerned one issue: e.g. the attitude of different national or socio-professional groups to the death of Emperor Franz Joseph I; the attitude to the Act of 5th November; the marriages of Polish prisoners from the Austro-Hungarian Army in Russia; as well as the situation of Polish prisoners of war in Russia, Austria-Hungary and Italy. A separate, large group of special reports or dispatches used information from censored correspondence and signaled various irregularities in the functioning and proceedings of the Austro-Hungarian state authorities, especially in relation to prisoners of war and interned persons. Despite the differences between the monthly reports and special reports and dispatches, their internal structure was identical. Each of the two types of reports constitutes a separate and comprehensive source material. Within its framework, however, there are two different components: information-analysis and the correspondence used as its basis as an annex (*Beilage/Anhang*). Both are closely related thematically and structurally. The volume of both parts is usually more extensive in periodic and monthly reports. Whereas in dispatches, to which sometimes only one piece of correspondence is attached, the first part is usually limited only to concise information about its content, referred to as the “case” (*Gegenstand*).

The state of preservation of various types of reports and dispatches prepared by Polish censorship groups at irregular intervals is difficult to precisely establish. This is due to the fact that special reports in the period February–September 1915 were not numbered. It was not until after the establishment of the Polish Censorship Groups A and B that the numbering of all documents created within each of these groups was introduced. After the merger of the two groups in March 1917, the Polish Censorship Group continued the numbering of Polish Censorship Group B. The numbering of this group of documents indicates that 484 special reports or dispatches out of around 1290 were found, which is 37.5 per cent of the total, which means of course that most of the documents in the group were not found. However, the question arises: why did the results of the research query conducted in the same collection of files in which both types of documentation are stored, yield a near one hundred per cent state of



preservation of periodic and monthly reports? A certain explanation of this case may be the fact that, as already mentioned, some of the special reports or dispatches regarding very specific cases were sent directly to institutions dealing with them due to their competences.

In 1917–1918, these two basic groups of documents were supplemented by a new type of document – monthly reports on correspondence statistics. The first two of them for January and February 1917 were drawn up by Polish Censorship Group B, and the following reports up to September 1918, by the merged Polish Censorship Group. Only one of them was not found – for March 1917. This type of document allows to precisely determine the volume of censored correspondence, the size of its constituent parts, and to determine their geographical origin and grouping according to senders and addressees.

The state of preservation of fragments of correspondence censored and translated into German, as well as the original letters and postcards, that were attached to both monthly reports and special reports and dispatches, also varies. The first of them are preserved in the vast majority for the period from February 1915 to March 1916. For the period from January 1917 to September 1918, with the exception of 26 missing pieces of correspondence in the report for the period from 1 January to 15 February 1917, they are preserved in their entirety. Access to the full documentation, which is the basis of all reports and dispatches, gives us the opportunity to view the censorship work and assess the reliability of its analyses of important social phenomena occurring in various Polish social milieus on Polish lands and beyond in the years of the First World War.

The total amount of the original letters and postcards written in Polish that have been preserved, is much smaller compared to their counterparts in the form of censored fragments. This is due to the fact that primarily, according to the accepted rules, all of the correspondence which was considered hostile to the monarchy was retained in full. Probably also for this reason, the *GZNB* censorship authorities more often sent them as attachments to reports and dispatches to the supreme military authorities: *KÜA*, Army Higher Command and the Ministry of War, and sometimes to other offices like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Another explanation may also be that in the files of the Polish Censorship Groups, Section XVI and the *GZNB* Censorship Department, there are gaps in the archived originals of the correspondence in Polish. Checking whether they survived in large collections of files of the above-mentioned military authorities would require a time-consuming search.

It is worth noting here that original postcards and preserved envelopes of original letters, on which there are imprinted various correspondence censorship stamps, especially Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Italian, as well as postal stamps and the various types of postcards used at the time, are rich source material for separate specialist studies.

Correspondence in Polish, as results from its content and preserved addresses, was written in the largest number by Poles, which is why we sometimes use terms: 'Polish letters' and 'Polish postcards' interchangeably. However, the authors in part were also Ukrainians and Jews. Most of them probably wrote in their own languages: Ukrainian, Yiddish and Hebrew. This is evidenced by the rich collections of this correspondence preserved in the censorship structures, primarily in the two Ukrainian and Hebrew language groups. After all, some of the Poles wrote letters in both German and French, which according to the rules of their selection were subject to censoring by three German language groups and an Anglo-French group. Some of the authors of the letters chose a different language of correspondence, hoping that this would confuse the censorship and allow it to reach the addressee sooner. This linguistic heterogeneity of correspondence of Poles had already caused problems for censors working on these issues. As the head of the Polish Censorship Group A, Milan Boubela wrote:

From the attached [...] observations results a characteristic picture regarding the treatment of Jewish prisoners of war in Russia. There are 78 unquestionable complaints about ill-treatment among the submitted observations. Of these 78 complaints written in Polish, 20 come – judging by name and other indicators – from Jews, that is 27 per cent in total. Although Jews account for only 10 per cent of the population of Galicia (50 per cent Poles, 40 per cent Ukrainians), the correspondence of Galician Jews is linguistically divided, and only a fraction of it is written in Polish. It is Jews who account for 27 per cent of complaints written in Polish in correspondence coming from Russia. From this number it follows that by using a joint assessment of all the letter material written in Polish, that is, taking into account letters written by Jews, a comprehensive picture of the treatment of Polish prisoners of war held in Russia could be presented in a way that would not correspond to the reality of the living conditions of Polish prisoners of war in Russia. If this picture is to be correct from a national point of view, then the correspondence of Jewish prisoners of war, who according to experience are treated completely differently in Russia, should be set apart from the participating language groups and developed separately as a whole. This approach would primarily apply to groups of censors suitable for Poles and Ukrainians living in Galicia...

Hence, in the later practice of Polish censorship groups, some of the correspondence in Polish, after it was worked on, was sent back to other censorship groups. However, this was done inconsistently, because in the

reports presented in 1916–1918, according to the analysis of their content, correspondences in Polish were still present, in the original and as extracts in German, evidently belonging to the Jewish and Ukrainian language groups according to established principles.

Correspondence in Polish preserved in the form of originals in their entirety, has a particular and unique value. Letters and postcards written in the years 1914–1918 in such a large number by prisoners of war – Poles from three armies of the partitioning powers, especially the Russian and Austro-Hungarian, and families and friends corresponding with them, are introduced for the first time in academic and social circulation, restoring at the same time the memory of the anonymous and so far forgotten participants of the Great War. This great collection is an invaluable source for characterizing Poles' attitudes towards numerous political, social and economic issues of the time. It also highlights the problems of everyday life and contemporary customs of various social strata.

An important part of the materials, such as reports and correspondence, refers to civilian prisoners (*Zivilgefangenen*) also called internees (*Internierten*), for a total of 40 reports and 384 pieces of correspondence. The category of civilian prisoners included various, very different, categories of civilians, for whom the common denominator was to be under the special supervision of the police and military authorities of the warring countries. On the territory of Austria-Hungary, this group included two categories of persons: interned citizens of states fighting the Habsburg monarchy and their own interned citizens who were suspected of sympathizing with the enemy. In Russia, the matter was more complicated, as two groups of people from Galicia (deported Jews and so-called hostages) were attached to the above two categories during the war. The situation of civilian prisoners was also varied, as some of them was placed in barrack camps, while others were allowed to live free, though under police supervision. Considering that information about internees included in the published materials, apart from Austria-Hungary and Russia, pertain to France, England and Canada, and even Australia, they constitute a significant supplement to current information about the fate of civilians during the war in the countries taking part in it.

It should be borne in mind that the authors of approximately half of the correspondence presented here as prisoners of war were peasants, because as the most numerous social layer at that time, they mainly supplied the partitioning armies. That is why the number of peasants taken as prisoners was large. The collection of peasant letters presented in our publication is undoubtedly

the largest of any found so far. The number of previously known collections of peasant correspondence regarding the period before 1918 is small. In the works discussing rural themes, references are made mainly to peasant letters published in the folk press. They cannot be called fully original, because the publishers of the journals abbreviated and made stylistic corrections in them. Their authors were peasants, still few in the country, who as a result of self-education became the first readers of the folk press and its first correspondents. The originals of peasant letters and postcards were, in comparison with letters in the press, at a much lower level in terms of sentence formulation and the ability to use the Polish language correctly. They probably reflected the level of education that they retained after two or three winters in a village elementary school.

The level of peasant language proficiency in the original correspondence intercepted by the Austro-Hungarian censorship of 1914–1918 is very similar to the style of writing of Polish emigrants to the United States and Brazil in the nineteenth century. These difficult-to-read letters were characterized by unbelievable spelling errors, the lack of punctuation, and complete chaos in the use of capital letters. This showed that it was not just writing them that required a lot of effort, but also the addressees would not have had an easy time reading them.

This way of expressing and formulating thoughts was characteristic in the originals of the presented collection of letters and postcards of prisoners of war – peasants and corresponding families and acquaintances. We publish the preserved originals of this correspondence in its entirety. Any doubts concerning individual words or fragments of texts that were difficult to read or understand are explained in the text footnotes and in square brackets. The desire to read all the originals of the correspondence did not always end in success. In fortunately few letters, even after reading individual words or phrases, it was impossible to understand their meaning and the author's thoughts; in these cases they were abandoned for inclusion in the publication. There are also texts that are written with poor handwriting or densely and in small letters, especially so on limited-sized postcards, that cannot be read. The published correspondence originals are, among other uses, a valuable source not only for specialists in history and the sociology of culture, which is often addressed, but also for literary and linguistic researchers. Such collections of original letters may form the basis of linguistic research without reaching for manuscripts, only in the event of their full fidelity (transliteration) without editing for clarity. The published originals, as mentioned, can be a source both

for peasant language researchers and those researching the effectiveness of Polish teaching in rural elementary schools.

The originals of correspondence are, in particular, a valuable supplement to information and data published in censored fragments. On the original texts there are markings of one or several fragments to censor, usually in the form of the delimitation "> <". These we distinguish in the versions of documents we publish using another font. This way of marking, instead of textual footnotes, reduces the volume of the study, and moreover, makes clear the censor's work in practice. These marks are also an indication of which fragments of correspondence were translated into German. They provide rich material to track the reliability of translations. At this point, we only emphasize that the censorship authorities appreciated the question of the reliability of translations. Under each part of the translated correspondence attached to all reports and dispatches there was the formula: "for the conformity [of the translation]" and the original signature of the deputy head of the group responsible for the team of translators; thus certifying the compatibility of the translation with the original text. The correspondence, written in a local dialect or in incorrect Polish, posed a particular difficulty for the translators. These types of letters and postcards could not be translated exactly, which is why they tried to convey the sense of individual words or fragments of the original. Such translations needed attention because they created the possibility of ambiguity. Initial inspection indicates that translators generally did well with these types of free translations. Comments on this topic were sometimes given in the text notes for some of the correspondence.

The data contained in the original letters and postcards allows for, above all, the broadening of potential research topics. It is worth paying attention to just two more general issues. The censors, by marking fragments of correspondence to be held, usually limited themselves to providing only the position of their authors regarding a given issue. Less interesting to them were, for example, the motivations of prisoners of war or family members writing to them. An example here may be the issue of marriages of Polish prisoners of war from the Austrian Army in Russia, and the usually negative assessment of this fact by their families. Equally interesting and diverse motivations accompanied the entering of prisoners of war into Polish military formations – Poles from the Russian Army staying within the Habsburg monarchy. In particular, much new data is included in the original uncensored correspondence on the subject of the family and customs of various socio-professional backgrounds and environments. They mainly concern the mutual relationships between the wife

and children at home/the farm and the husband/father in captivity. There is also a large correspondence between fiancées – young men in the army and POW camps and young women back in their family homes.

The forms and types of documents chosen and discussed above, as well as the state of their preservation, determine their internal layout and methods of editing and compilation. In volume 1 – as already indicated – there are 14 types of sources created by various offices and military structures arranged in a chronological order. Into volumes 2–4, more dense documentation is included, prepared by homogenous censorship groups working on correspondence in Polish, whose changing structures during the war period was previously discussed. Reports and dispatches produced by them have been compiled in chronological order. This puzzle begins with the interim report as a fundamental one, whose time frame, usually covering a month, was sometimes extended. After that there are special reports and dispatches drawn up at irregular intervals during the period of the preceding monthly report, as its important substantive complement. In the years 1917–1918, a given reporting period ends with monthly reports on correspondence statistics, which passed through the Polish Censorship Group in a given period.

#### 4. The Principles of Editorial Work and Indices

We used editorial instructions for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the archaeological work on the source texts, especially the preparation of the heading and the legend of each document. The possibility of using the recommendations in publishing instructions depends, however, on the type of source material preserved and the data they contain. This is necessary, especially when making headings and legends. Documentation in the form of censorship instructions and evaluations of their practical application, found in volume 1 of the presented publication, enables a fuller implementation of editorial rules. Another type of documentation accumulated in volumes 2–4, also determines a slightly different way of presenting them, especially headings and legends. Each type of report and dispatch included in volumes 2–4 contains, as already indicated, two different components: information-analysis and the correspondence serving as its basis in the form of attachments (*Beilage/Anhang*).

The issues discussed in the initial, analytical part of the monthly report, include references to correspondence marked with the same Arabic numeral in

the second part. The Arabic numerals here serve as a unique notation referring to one or more identical issues, marked with the same numerals in the analytical part and in the annex. Both of these parts are therefore closely related both thematically and structurally and have titles and sequential numbers, they constitute one separate document.

This dichotomy of the source material also determines the components of the header and attachment. The heading of each report and dispatch encompasses the first part: the analytical-information; and the second with the correspondence in the attachment. Thus this includes consecutive elements: the sequence number of the publication item marked with an Arabic numeral, the date of issue of the document (year, month, day), place of publication (if given), the type of document in the form of various reports and dispatches, the issuer of the document – which was one of the successive heads of the Polish Censorship Group, or less frequently a deputy (usually his deputy), the recipient of the document (which was usually the *GZNB* Censorship Department), from where it was most often sent to the War Office of Control, the Army Higher Command and Department 10 for Prisoners of War Affairs and finally, the last part of the heading containing summary information about the correspondence, indicating the sender and recipient.

The legend consists of the following consecutive parts: the type of source material, usually in the form of originals or, more rarely, copies and transcripts; the method of recording (as either a typescript or manuscript); the storage location (almost exclusively in: the Austrian State Archives, Department of War Archive in Vienna). Due to the different types of source material and the method of recording in both parts of the document, the legend is usually given separately. The first part of the reports and the dispatches usually appear as “original, typescript, translation from German”, less frequently “copy, typescript”, and in the second part, the originals of correspondence in Polish as “original, manuscript”.

The second part of the reports and dispatches, however, has a certain autonomy. The correspondence contained in these attachments therefore has a characteristic heading consisting of the sequence number of the correspondence, the address of the sender and the recipient, and the place and date of writing the letter or postcard. The information contained in these specific headings for each piece of correspondence was supplemented with data from the original postcards and letters. Above all, they allowed the names of prisoner-of-war camps to be established, which, as commonly known at that time, were often omitted in the texts of reports and dispatches in German.

From the information contained in the censorship and postal stamps appearing on the cards and letters, we have filled in the gaps of missing dates and places of writing in some correspondences.

The exact dates placed in letters and postcards have a special value for both recipients of correspondence and researchers. The recipients usually associated these dates with the lengthening waiting time for the longed-awaited-for messages about the fate of their loved-ones; especially those numerous individuals in the years of the Great War on Polish lands. These individuals were in dangerous and most difficult conditions as soldiers in the partitioning states' armies, prisoners of war, interned civilian prisoners or migrants of various types, that were usually forced to leave their family homes and local homelands in a hurry. In correspondence, we encounter numerous complaints about long waiting times for letters and postcards or the lack of answers to subsequent requests for messages. For the researcher, the dating information in mass correspondence also contains valuable data on the timespan separating the event from its description in the correspondence. This is important, as are dates in diaries, when assessing the credibility of personal documents.

The place of origin of the correspondence is given together with the full addresses of their senders, because they contain a lot of additional information about the geographical and social environments in which they were staying. Of special note in this respect are the names of prisoner-of-war and internment camps. In the return addresses of city dwellers, there are names of cities, streets and numbers of houses and flats in which they lived. Addresses of letters and postcards leaving villages also contained their names and house numbers. In correspondences emanating from the villages, settlements and small towns, there was also information about their state and administrative affiliation: to communes, districts, provinces, countries, etc. Some senders, apart from residential addresses, also provided addresses of their place of work. This data is extremely valuable for the reconstruction of geographical and administrative affiliation and range, and especially of the socio-professional environments of authors of mass correspondence, preserved in hundreds of copies. They constitute the main basis for the study of important phenomena in the political, national, social and regional history of Poland in the years of the Great War. The mass correspondence of various social groups expressing themselves on the above issues, gives the opportunity to tell the story of the wartime fate of Poles in a personal way. This data is also important to the historian's craft. They allow, among other things, for the exact identification and location of numerous villages that bore the same names. They also allow us to correct



the incorrect spelling of the names of many villages and even smaller towns, which were often spelled according to local, dialectal pronunciations, and not the official name. It is possible to indicate social values included in the correspondence presented in this publication. Lovers of small homelands will find in it a wealth of sources missing from Polish archives about the wartime fate of their ancestors. More and more people researching their family genealogy will be able to delve into the rich correspondence of relatives and friends, many of which never reached their addressees.

Among the letters and postcards in Polish, correspondence written by prisoners of war constitutes the most numerous group. Each individual item, sent from prisoner-of-war camps and from the places of their employment, contained the prisoner's military status next to the name and surname. The term "prisoner of war" (*Kgf. – Kriegsgefangener*) usually indicated a soldier. Officers and non-commissioned officers had a different status and next to their names were given the words "prisoner of war" and the term "officer" (*Offizier*) or "non-commissioned officer" (*Unteroffizier*) or also sometimes military ranks and functions performed in the camps. Information about the employment of Polish prisoners in industry and agriculture is also quite substantial – both on land estates as well as in large peasant farms and in the construction of railway lines.

Prisoners of war usually addressed their correspondence to inhabitants of villages, which were then almost exclusively peasants. Residents of the Galician and Kingdom of Poland villages were also the second largest group of authors in this collection addressed to prisoners of war – Poles located mostly in prisoner-of-war camps and workplaces in Russia, Austria-Hungary and Italy. Peasants who, together with agricultural workers, in 1921 still constituted over 65 per cent of the population, were also the largest group serving in the partitioning powers' armies. At the same time, in comparison with other social groups, they were granted the fewest exemptions from military service within the existing possibilities afforded by war regulations. Therefore, peasants represented the highest percentage of prisoners of war. In correspondence sent from villages to prisoners in Russia, there are several dozen copies of baptismal records (only in volume 4). They were requested by prisoners who wanted to get married. The letters written by members of the intelligentsia, stopped entirely by the censorship, contain only a few copies of their secondary school leaving certificates (*matura*) and certificates of qualifications to perform a profession. We have not published these documents. The data contained therein was used in biographical footnotes.

This collection of correspondence, the richest of its kind found so far, is an important source for historians. It will enable the study of the impact of the experiences of the First World War gained in many different European countries on the shaping of national and social consciousness of different milieus, their attitude to the beginning germination of the state and the Polish Army, as well as changes in customs, families and the growing position of women. This collection of documents also allows for a fuller answer to one of the most important questions at the time: to what degree did the changes on the eve of the revival of Poland accelerate or hamper the integration processes of the modern Polish nation?

In correspondence written mainly by families to soldiers and prisoners of war, including addresses, there is data on the socio-professional status of their senders, similar to that discussed above. The content of the combined information complements each other, especially in terms of shedding light on the social origin of the soldiers and prisoners of war who wrote them. Especially valuable for the researcher are the mini-collections of letters between two close relatives which concern the exchange of views on current political and national subjects. Correspondence along with the addresses of senders and recipients attached to them are usually the only source of biographical information about their authors and, when placed in the headers of letters and postcards, also serve as personal footnotes.

The multivolume source edition is closed by volume 5, which is an integral part of our publication. With such a large amount of data contained in the documents published by us, we wanted to make it easier for the reader to use them. Therefore, we have prepared three indices: personal, cities and geographical names, as well as institutions and organizations. The index of personal names contains all the surnames of people in the publication. The names of the authors of the cited works are highlighted in italics, the pages on which biographical entries of given persons occur are in bold. The index of institutions and organizations contains all names of institutions, organizations and publications appearing in the published text. The pages on which the entries referring to individual institutions appear are marked in bold as well.