

Summary

National Police in Krakow voivodship from 1920 to 1939

The paper presents the organisation, conditions of the police service and activity of the National Police in the territory of the Krakow voivodship, starting from the creation of this administrative division until the outbreak of World War II. This issue has not been the subject of such detailed studies so far.

The dissertation consists of nine chapters, the first of which is introductory, depicting the history of the Polish police traditions, with a strong emphasis on the historical conditions of Małopolska. The main part of the paper refers to two areas of the functioning of the National Police. Chapters II-V cover the issues of the formation and transformation of the structures, personnel and resources of the National Police in this area. The remaining four chapters focus on the implementation of its statutory tasks: "maintaining security, peace and public order." An attempt to assess the level of security as well as to indicate the main threats in the voivodship have been made. The paper presents such duties of the police as crime prevention, maintaining order, fighting criminal and economic offences and describes the activity of political police. The paper also presents a controversial problem, despite the passage of time, of the police being made [by the government] to get involved in limiting the activity of the political opposition in the 1930s. The issue of engaging the police in dealing with the collective violation of order and an example of one such intervention with fatal consequences were discussed.

The district of the National Police in Krakow showed great differences in comparison to the other parts of the country. It was created on 1st December 1919. Due to the existence of the Police Directorate in Krakow, it was not until mid-1921 that the National Police in this city took over investigative agencies. A full unity was achieved in 1928, when the Police Directorate in Krakow was transformed into Grodzkie District. The police personnel in Małopolska were numerous and experienced in police service, which resulted in the transfer of a significant part of them to other regions of the country. A characteristic feature in this area was also a wide recruitment to the police service and intensive training based on a network of institutions created in several centres of the region. A strong emphasis was put on keeping officers disciplined. The equipment and weaponry used for service were modest, they were mainly used during the war but also remembered older times. In the conditions of post-war poverty, which troubled police and their families, the attempts at self-help were undertaken.

After the establishment of the second level administration, the police authorities were strictly subordinated to the political authorities. In the following years, the police of the Krakow voivodship experienced the changes characteristic of the whole country, including attempts at the limitation of the scope of police tasks and personnel specialization process. In this voivodship women's police, among others, functioned.

After the May Coup (1926) the management was dominated by legionnaires and officers from the army. In the 1930s the profession stabilized, the equipment modernization process was carried out and the service conditions as well as the standards of life of the police families improved. There was the development of cultural and social initiatives in the police environment.

Fighting crime in the Krakow voivodship was determined by a high level of threat for the police. Throughout the analyzed period, banditry was a major problem requiring particularly intensive activity in the first years after the World War. Interventions during which clashes with criminals using firearms took place, were typical of everyday police service. In the interwar period, over thirty police officers of Krakow voivodship died carrying out their official duties. The preventive service was characterized by regression. An insufficient number of police officers resulted in serious deficiencies with regard to police tasks. Over time, police activity was increasingly reactive, focused on repression.

The National Police were an important element of the national defence system. Throughout the period, they performed civil counterintelligence tasks and supervised social and political life. They effectively limited the activity of communists as well as the anti-national activity of other circles. The supervision also included the activity of legal organizations. During the Sanacja period, the National Police were increasingly engaged in the objectives of the government's current policy towards the opposition.

In Krakow Voivodship, in the interwar period, very frequent anti-government demonstrations and strikes took place. These events resulted in police and army interventions. Some of them had a tragic finale. At that time, there were several clashes between sub-units and demonstrators, which sometimes resulted in the death of the latter. The course of these events is presented basing on the rich source material. The author questions a widespread historiographical thesis regarding the police striving to confront and take major responsibility for the dramatic effects of demonstrations and speeches.