

## ARTICLES

## The Problems Facing Czech Teachers in Polish Volhynia in the First Half of the 1930s

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*In 1932, Czech teacher Jan Kozák was expelled from Volhynia. He had taught young Czech people to love the old country and thereby incurred the displeasure of the Polish authorities which sought to increase the Polish influence in the eastern border regions populated by national minorities. The Czechs in Polish Volhynia remembered the much greater respect and esteem they had enjoyed under Czarist Russia.*

Key words: *Volhynia; the Czechs; Polish government*

The Czech teachers who were made available to the local Czech minority by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education and National Culture played a crucial role in Polish Volhynia in the years 1926 to 1939. They worked both at schools of the private Czech Educational Foundation and at a number of state schools. In the school year 1926–1927, the Ministry of Education and National Culture sent six teachers from Czechoslovakia to Volhynia, paid them, and assured them security of employment following their return to Czechoslovakia. Four teachers from Czechoslovakia were working in Volhynia in 1931 in Równne, Zdobunów, Mirohoszcza and Kupiczów.<sup>1</sup> Teacher Jan Kozák was, however, forced to leave Mirohošť on 17 January 1932 and was not permitted further residence there by the Polish authorities. His teaching work had met with resistance from Polish nationalists and had been labelled political, and he himself labelled an extreme jingoist who had no respect for his superiors or the school authorities and disturbed the peaceful co-existence of the Volhynia Czechs and the local population.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Náš Buditel*, 2, 1931, no. 1, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Archive of New Records Warsaw, f. The Ministry of the Interior, sign. 10 625, k. 31–32.

The expulsion of Kozák from Poland led to the “Kozák Affair”. The affair was discussed at the convention of foreign Czechs and Slovaks in Prague and was written about in the Polish newspapers. The opposition National Democratic newspaper *Polonia* in Katowice wrote of a worsening of the hitherto good relations between the Volhynian Czechs and the governing Sanacja (Sanitation) regime.<sup>3</sup> Chairman of the Czech Educational Foundation in Poland Vladimír Mesner complained at the convention of foreign compatriots in Prague of the expulsion of Czech teachers and of financial support being withheld by the Polish government. He demanded at least the two-fifths subsidies provided to Polish schools in Czechoslovakia by the Czechoslovak government for the Czech schools in Poland. Czech Deputy of the Polish Sejm Vladimír Meduna also expressed support for the Czech Educational Foundation and condemned the letter by three Czech polonophiles who declared that the teacher Kozák had promoted the ideas of communism and engaged in a fight against religion.<sup>4</sup> The three authors of this letter from Młodawa in the Dubno district – Antonín Čuba, Václav Šimsa and Vladimír Černohorský – protested against the “slander” that was being spread in Prague and held the view that Kozák’s actions were detrimental to the Polish state.

The incident was also noticed by the Russian newspaper *Nashe Vremya* which came out in Warsaw and Vilno and which featured a column criticising the approach taken by the Polish authorities.<sup>5</sup> The Jewish newspaper *Jüdische Tagblatt* wrote of anti-Polish acts by Czech settlers on account of the expulsion of a Czech teacher. It declared that 150,000 Czech settlers lived in Volhynia (in fact only 31,000 Czechs were living in Poland at that time). It stated that a group of two hundred resettled Czechs had accused the Polish state of persecution in the area of education (in fact, this referred to the delegation of Volhynian Czechs that had gone to the convention of foreign compatriots in Prague).<sup>6</sup>

The Volhynian province authorities charged the district mayors in Horochów, Kowel, Luck, Równe and Zdobunów with the task of submitting reports on the efforts to defend the teacher Kozák and of monitoring the people with whom Deputy Meduna was in contact and what the disloyalty of these persons to the Polish state consisted of.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Polonia*, 7. 7. 1932.

<sup>4</sup> *Hlas Volyně*, 1932, no. 29, 17. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Nashe Vremya*, 1932, no. 157, 2. 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Jüdische Tagblatt*, 1932, no. 247.

<sup>7</sup> The National Archive of the Volhynian District of Lutsk, f. 46, copy 9, file 2066, letter from the Provincial Authorities 27. 10. 1932.

Detailed information on the participation of the delegation of Volhynian Czechs at the convention in Prague was submitted by the district mayor in Dubno. The teacher Vlasta Chramostová from Zdobunów, Josef Ficek from Boholuby in the Luck district, Václav Kašpar from Hulecz, Chairman of the Czech Educational Foundation Vladimír Mesner, businessman Rostislav Mráček of Wolkow, Josef Linhart and Antonín Somol from Mirohoszcza, Vsevolod Pánek from Równa, Václav Piksa from Wolkow, Jiří Rébl from Malovane, the Czechoslovak honorary consul in Kwasilów Vladimír Svárovský, and František Tomáš and Jaroslav Vlk from Boratín took part in the convention. Meduna attempted to obtain a stenographic record of the convention from Czechoslovakia in order to verify the content of Mesner's speech, though according to the Mayor of Dubno "if Deputy Meduna receives a stenographic record, it must be admitted that it may possibly be specially falsified".<sup>8</sup> The district mayor declared that the speech by Chairman of the Czech Educational Foundation Mesner was of a subversive nature when he declared that the Polish authorities were impeding the teaching of Czech children in a national spirit and gave Jan Kozák as an example of this. Deputy Meduna was said to have lost the confidence of persons loyal to Poland, who made up the majority. According to the mayor, the deputy was often to be found in pubs and could be found in an unsober condition.

The Mayor of Dubno received a letter from other polonophile Czechs who declared that the Czech newspaper Hlas Volyně (Voice of Volhynia), published in Dubno, was not impartial and published erroneous information: "The sympathies of the editor-in-chief (teacher Antonín Perný – note J. V.) lie on the side of demoralised individuals and not loyal citizens of the Polish Republic".<sup>9</sup>

At the beginning of 1933, the District Mayor of Dubno wrote to the province authorities in Luck that Deputy Meduna supported editor Perný and the Czech jingoists against the polonophiles, saying, "I do not know if Meduna is doing this as a matter of conviction or a lack of orientation."<sup>10</sup> Meduna convened an assembly of the Mirohoszcza Czechs, following agreement with editor Antonín Perný and the leadership of the sports organisation Sokol, at which the words of Antonín Čuba and co., who had acted in the name of the Volhynia Czechs without authorisation, were condemned. A similar assembly took place in Mlodava on 15 January 1933. Members of the leadership of Sokol were appointed spokesmen for the local Czechs. Fifty-three people were present.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, letter from the Mayor of Dubno to the Provincial Authorities of 22. 11. 1932.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, letter from the Czechs to the District Mayor in Dubno of 27. 11. 1932.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, Mayor of Dubno to the Provincial Authorities 31. 1. 1933.

Čuba and co. wrote to the District Mayor of Dubno in February 1933 that Sokol was meant to be merely a sports organisation and had no right to demand that a Polish school be replaced by a Czech school. They condemned the assembly of fifty-three Czechs of 15 January 1933, whom they labelled supporters of the Czech teacher Kozák.<sup>11</sup>

In May 1933, the province authorities in Luck reported to the Ministry of the Interior that, "until recently the Czech settlers in Volhynia had been the ethnic group most loyal to the Polish state, with which they had both material and emotional connections which they had expressed more than once. As an affluent element, they took an unfriendly stand towards communism and their endeavours were realised in independent social organisations with no political aspirations."<sup>12</sup> The existing situation was said to have been worsened by the personal ambitions of many individuals supported by people coming from Czechoslovakia, with "there being efforts made by a group of jingoists striving to control all the settlers and act as the one and only representation of the minority." Pressure was said to have been exerted by diplomatic means on the Polish Foreign Ministry, which they were urging to meet the Czech demands. These demands consisted of the establishment of a Czech school system, a request for the legalisation of the Czech National Union in Poland which "was to be an organisation of Czech jingoists", and support for Sokol which was allegedly also a jingoistic organisation. Sokol in Mirohoszcza, for example, extolled the teacher Kozák who had been expelled from Poland. The authorities also criticised Deputy Vladimír Meduna of the governing BBWR, honorary consul Vladimír Svárovský and the Sokol organisation. The province authorities demanded that the Foreign Ministry should not support the Czech demands. The organisation Sokol was, however, engaged largely in sports training and competition, requesting, for example, the holding of a convention of Czech sports clubs in Mirohoszcza in July 1933.<sup>13</sup>

The Polish authorities also objected to the missionary work of Czech priests. In spite of a warning from the province authorities in Luck, the Polish embassy in Prague granted entry visas to Chancellor of the Archbishopial Seminary in Prague Josef Beran, member of the Dominican order in Prague Sylvestr Brait and Josef Stříž of Moravská Ostrava. These clerics were joined by Mr Nepraš, editor of the magazine *Nový Svět* (New World) from Prague, Miroslav Horyna of the Ministry of

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, letter from Čuba and co. to the District Mayor of Dubno of 21. 2. 1933.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, letter from the Provincial Authorities to the Ministry of the Interior of 20. 5. 1933.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, letter from Sokol Mirohošť to the District Mayor of Dubno of 22. 5. 1933.

Education and National Culture, postal clerk Jindřich Dušek and student Štefan Rozsocha, Chairman of Catholic Youth in Prague. According to the province authorities, "the presence of so many of these people represents a political risk and the danger of the Czech settlers being drawn under the immediate influence of Prague".<sup>14</sup> The authorities objected to young people being taught Czech songs, the handing out of pictures in national colours, and invitations to study in Czechoslovakia. Polish Catholics were also worried by the efforts on the part of missionaries to convert Orthodox Czechs to the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox Ukrainians to the Greek Catholic Church. Missionaries also endeavoured to establish local Catholic youth organisations and demanded loyalty to the Polish Catholic clergy. The province authorities also objected to the convention of Sokol clubs in Mirohoszcza in July 1933. The province authorities ordered the Mayor of Dubno not to issue his agreement to the holding of the convention and requested that the Foreign Ministry refuse an entry visa to a delegate of the Sokol leadership in Prague, whose arrival "could lead to complications". In the end, the convention was held with the attendance of Deputy for the Agrarian Party Pavol Teplanský.<sup>15</sup>

The Czechs in Polish Volhynia remembered the much greater respect and esteem they had enjoyed under Czarist Russia. They had not had Czech schools, it was true, but they had not felt this to be a serious shortcoming. They had not become part of Polish political and cultural life, and felt no emotional relationship towards Poland. A part in this was played by the attitude of the Polish authorities towards national minorities in the eastern border areas. They were united with the Ukrainian majority by the Orthodox Church and maintained good relations with the Ukrainians, though they took a neutral standpoint towards their political demands and did not wish to be drawn into disputes between the Poles and the Ukrainians. The Orthodox priests maintained a Russophile attitude and a partially anti-Polish mood. This engendered a certain lack of confidence in the Czech settlers among the Polish authorities. In fact, the Czechs were a peaceable and politically diffident element.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, letter from the Provincial Authorities to the Ministry of the Interior of 3. 6. 1933.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, letter from the District Mayor in Dubno to the Provincial Authorities. I am indebted to Michał Jarnecki of the Faculty of Education of UAM in Kalisz for archive material from the district archive in Lutsk.