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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.¹ 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.²

¹ *Náš Buditel*, 2, 1931, no. 1, p. 8.

² 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.³ 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.⁴ The three authors of this letter from Mlodava 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.⁵ 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).⁶

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.⁷

³ *Polonia*, 7. 7. 1932.

⁴ *Hlas Volyně*, 1932, no. 29, 17. 7.

⁵ *Nashe Vremya*, 1932, no. 157, 2. 7.

⁶ *Jüdische Tagblatt*, 1932, no. 247.

⁷ 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 Równe, 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".⁸ 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".⁹

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."¹⁰ 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.

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

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

¹⁰ 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.¹¹

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."¹² 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 1933.¹³

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

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

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

¹³ Ibid, letter from Sokol Mirohošt 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".¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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.

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

¹⁵ 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.

Educational role of Lithuanian cultural and educational associations in the Wilno region in the Second Republic of Poland

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This activity, which was under the influence of different and never stable in their assumptions and objectives of the policy of Polish and Lithuanian authorities implemented different forms and content. Cultural – educational and social associations of Lithuanian minority among their statutory objectives and tasks for education and upbringing also played a crucial role of the factor creating national identity of Lithuanians, together with expected attitudes and behaviors in political, social, religious and moral dimensions. They also played a great educational role activating in the field of education, economy and culture minorities Lithuanian. They united and strengthen the people living in the Vilnius region of Lithuanian nationality.

Key words: *Lithuanian minority; Lithuanian cultural and educational associations; Educational Association "Rytas"; St. Casimir Association*

In the autumn of 1920 the fighting between the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Lithuania ended. This did not mean, however, that the relations between the two countries were normalised. The main causes of disagreement included the unsolved problem of the nationality of Wilno and the Wilno region as well as the situation of the Lithuanian population of this area¹.

The inclusion of the Wilno region into the state of Poland – the result of the utter failure of the concept of a federation – led to the introduction of general guidelines of the policy of the Polish government, the implementation of which began as early as 1921 in the remaining north-eastern lands. In the undertaken assumptions, presuming that the assimilation of minority communities (including the Lithuanian ones) would be quick, it was proposed, among others, that non-Polish

¹ Śleszyński, W. (2009). *Świat pogranicza. Stosunki społeczno-polityczne na pograniczu polsko-litewsko-białoruskim w XX i XXI wieku*. Białystok: Wydawnictwo PRYMAT, p. 61.

(Lithuanian) schooling be dissolved, and the activities of cultural, educational, and social minority associations (including Lithuanian ones) be limited. National (Lithuanian) minority centres were being shut down under a number of formal pretexts (e.g. low level of education, too low number of students, actions contrary to the interests of the state or legal regulations). For example, in March 1923 the number of Lithuanian public schools dropped to 44 from the 62 that functioned in 1921.

This state of affairs was in fact an informal state of war between Poland and Lithuania. This was reflected in the attitude of the Polish state towards the Lithuanian minority, and the minority's attitude towards the state².

According to the 1931 population census in the wileńskie, nowogródzkie, and poleskie voivodships (provinces) there lived 82,000 Lithuanians (0.3% of the entire population) and 1,342,000 Poles (also: 1,407,000 Belarusians, 216,000 Jews, 7,000 Russians, and 61,000 other nationalities). In the wileńsko-trocki powiat (district) alone there lived 18,812 Lithuanians and 178,991 Poles which constituted accordingly 8.87% Lithuanians and 83.34% Poles in relation to the entire population of 212,117³.

From 1926 to 1927 the gminas (communes) in the wileńskie voivodship with the highest Lithuanian population were the following:

- Twerecka (out of the population of 5,256 settled in 8 villages Lithuanians constituted 92%, and Poles – 1%),
- Daugieliszki (out of the population of 11,522 settled in 11 villages Lithuanians constituted 83.2%, and Poles – 4%),
- Zabłociska (population of 8,246 in 7 villages, 83.2% Lithuanians, 11% Poles),
- Łyngmiany (population of 4,357 in 8 villages, 79.6% Lithuanians, 9% Poles),
- Dukszty (population of 5,745 in 10 villages, 70% Lithuanians, 10% Poles),
- Mielegjany (population of 7,928 in 6 villages, 67% Lithuanians, 11.3% Poles),
- Hoduliszki (population of 10,045 in 10 villages, 42% Lithuanians, 24.3% Poles)⁴.

² Ibidem.

³ Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybes Archyvas [LCVA], Wileński Urząd Wojewódzki [WUW], Ruch narodowościowy, f. 51, op. 17, Issue 53, pp. 104, 133.

In light of the latest studies the figures appear underestimated. Wojciech Sleszyński states that in the north-eastern regions of the Second Republic of Poland there lived: 1,400,000 Poles, 1,400,000 Belarusians, 308,000 Jews, 219,000 Ukrainians, 100,000 Lithuanians, 66,000 Russians and a few thousand other minorities, including 3,000 Germans.

⁴ LCVA, WUW, Ruch narodowościowy, f. 51, op. 17, Issue 53, pp. 86, 153.

Lithuanian authorities led an intensive anti-Polish propaganda campaign among the Lithuanian minority inhabiting the Wilno region. The action would reinforce the already powerful Lithuanian aversion to the Polish state. The lack of trust in the Polish state was also prominent among Lithuanian youth, who would decide to migrate to Lithuania in order to, among others, organise institutions, cultural, educational, economic, and social associations, or to join the growing anti-Polish resistance movement. The tendency was particularly strong from 1921 to 1923, and it would weaken in the following years⁵.

On 15. March 1923 the Council of Ambassadors recognised the demarcation line as the actual state border between Poland and Lithuania. This led to a change in political and diversion actions on the Lithuanian side. The aim of the resistance groups that were still being organised in Lithuania in 1924 was only to initiate minor conflicts and incidents, with no hope for a future war. The intention of the Lithuanian authorities, that did not arrive at a decision to use force, was to foster the sense of insecurity and a Polish threat among the citizens. It was announced repeatedly that Wilno would be set free. On 16. February 1925 in Lithuania there took place a referendum (in district towns) for the inclusion of Wilno in Lithuania. The goal of these actions was to keep the Lithuanian minority hostile towards the Polish state. As a result, Lithuanians would assume negative attitudes and act against the interests of the state. The state of tension between Poland and Lithuania was clearly reflected in the relations between the Polish and the Lithuanian population. There were numerous conflicts and fights between neighbours. Polish authorities, fearing an escalation of conflicts near the border, followed closely the establishment and development of social and political organisations in Lithuania and their influence in Poland⁶.

The Temporary Committee of Lithuanians of the Wilno Region [Tymczasowy Komitet Litwinów Wileńskich] was a subject of particular interest of Polish authorities. It was a social and political organisation that claimed to represent all the Lithuanian communities in Poland. The committee was established when the Polish administration was still being formed – in April 1919. Since the beginning it advocated the inclusion of Wilno and its region in Lithuania. In relation to questions of administration it would provide Lithuanians with legal counselling, consider their complaints, and it would issue permits for Polish citizens travelling to Lithuania confirming that they did not act against the Lithuanian state. The

⁵ Śleszyński, W. (2009). *Świat pogranicza...* op. cit., p. 61.

⁶ Śleszyński, W. (2009). *Świat pogranicza...* op. cit., p. 62.

committee coordinated the works of other Lithuanian organisations in Poland, chiefly social and cultural and educational ones. As the main representation of Lithuanians in Poland it would organise, among others, central observations of national holidays, anniversary celebrations, as well as lectures on history, politics, and economy. The Committee played the role of an informal representation of the Lithuanian state in Poland, and that is why Polish authorities tolerated its activities⁷, even though they were often harshly criticised. In 1929 the Committee was chaired by Konstancy Staszys and, according to Polish state administration, it was “*a political organisation, representing the general Lithuanian population (...) Unofficially it served the role of consulate. It received funds from Lithuania and the US. Its attitude towards the Polish state was exceptionally adverse. It used its funds to finance its subordinate associations: ‘Rytas’, ‘Dobroczynność’ [Charity], and ‘Św. Kazimierz’ [St. Casimir]*”⁸.

A characteristic trait of the political life of the Lithuanian minority in Poland was the lack of typical political parties. It was largely the result of the Lithuanian communities’ adversity towards the Polish state, which was fuelled by the permanent conflict between the two states. The rhetoric of the invasion and occupation of Wilno that was employed by Lithuanian propaganda was the dominant factor that reduced the ideological differences between the various national Lithuanian political groups. That is why the role of the political party of the Lithuanian minority in Poland was played by cultural, educational, and social associations that, apart from their statutory educational aims, served the role of a factor that shaped the political attitudes of the Lithuanian minority in concordance with the politics of the Lithuanian state⁹.

At the turn of the 1920s and the 1930s the following organisations functioned in Poland:

- Lithuanian Educational Association “Rytas”,
- St. Casimir Lithuanian Association Lithuanian St. Casimir Association of Education and Care for the Youth,
- Lithuanian Association “Kultura” – competing with “Rytas” for influence among the Lithuanians presenting pro-Polish stances; founded in 1927 and chaired by Daniel Olsejko; the Association ran 170 schools with classes in Lithuanian (in 1938 the number of the schools was reduced to 2 state public schools with classes in Lithuanian and 30 bilingual schools). The opinions about this situation

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ LCVA, WUW, *Ruch narodowościowy*, f. 51, op. 17, Issue 53, p. 111.

⁹ Śleszyński, W. (2009). *Świat pogranicza...* op. cit., p. 62.

were negative among Lithuanians (the so-called patriots) due to the pro-Polish stance and acceptance of the Polish authorities. The so-called patriots would claim that this undermined the unity of the Lithuanians,

- Lithuanian Farmers' Association – the most active and the largest organisation of educational and, at the same time, economic character, which would focus on the economic and farming education and training of the Lithuanian minority (established in 1926 and chaired by Mateusz Stankiewicz, in 1935 it had: 130 departments, 140 “young farmers' circles”, 14 cooperatives, 3 dairies, a chain of stores, 26 reading rooms with libraries, and 1,600 members),
- Lithuanian Charity Association – established in 1914, chaired by: Kotka, Stankiewicz, Jan Basanowicz, Franciszek Bielawski (in 1928), and since 1933 by Krzysztof Czybiras; it supported and ran orphanages for Lithuanian children, took care of poor school children and youth, provided financial and material support for the poorest among the Lithuanian minority,
- St. Zita Lithuanian Association of Catholic Servites – since 1933 chaired by Franciszek Bielawski, its aims were similar to those of a charity association, it also dealt with religious education,
- Association of Lithuanian Teachers – established in 1925, since 1929 chaired by Paweł Karazej, in 1931 there were ca. 600 members, it supported the “Rytas” and “St. Casimir” associations,
- Lithuanian Scientific Association, since 1929 chaired by Bronisław Untulis,
- Lithuanian Sobriety Association,
- Union of Lithuanian Academics,
- Lithuanian Association of Sanitary Help in Wilno¹⁰.

The attention of Polish authorities was focused primarily on the associations whose cultural and educational work was aimed to awaken and preserve the national identity:

- Lithuanian Educational Association “Rytas”, established in 1913,
- and the St. Casimir Lithuanian Association, started in 1925.

Lithuanian Educational Association “Rytas” played a major role in educating the Lithuanian minority. It was founded in 1913 by Jan Basanowicz and Antanas Smetona, the latter of whom would later become the president of Lithuania (the outbreak of World War I broke the short-lived activity of the association, which was re-established on

¹⁰ LCVA, WUW, Ruch narodowościowy, f. 51, op. 17, Issue 53, pp. 111–114, 122.

02. May 1916. It was subsidised by the Lithuanian state and it was of a national character¹¹. It was chaired by outstanding Lithuanian activists. Long-time members of the Central Board "Rytas" (the Board was located in Wilno at Antakol 6/1) were: chairman – Piotr Kraujalis (died in 1933, succeeded by Krzysztof Czybiras, head of the teacher training seminar, hostile towards Poland), vice chairman – Marceli Szyksznis, principal of a gymnasium in Wilno, treasurer – Wincenty Budrewicz, members – Krzysztof Czybiras (until 1933), Konstanty Staszys, Nikodem Rasztutis, Antoni Juchniewicz¹².

Originally (after 1918) the Association would concentrate its activities in Wilno. The problems that minority education was experiencing caused the Association to work more "in the field"¹³. Since 1922 it would establish and run private public schools for Lithuanian children. In 1929 "Rytas" maintained: 130 public schools, with 3,500 students, 80 evening courses for adults, attended by over 1,800 people. The highest number of the public schools supported by "Rytas" functioned in święciński district – 47, wileński district – 37, and 20 in lidzki and grodzieński district each¹⁴.

However, Lithuanian educational circles did not find the situation satisfying. During a meeting of Lithuanian teachers that took place in December, 1930 in Wilno they urged the "Rytas" Association to organise evening courses for the illiterate in all the schools, and demanded that Polish authorities issue special acts regulating Lithuanian schooling, and protested against discharging Lithuanian teachers by the authorities without providing any reasons¹⁵.

Introduction of the act of Minister Janusz Jedrzejewicz (11. March 1932) on private schooling provided school authorities with wide prerogatives to limit the work of schools of this type under of a number of pretexts. "Rytas" subsequently started the action of teaching at students' homes. The classes were conducted by the Lithuanian private schools teachers who had been made redundant by Polish authorities. However, in numerous cases the school authorities of the School District Board of

¹¹ Mauersberg, S. (1968). *Szkolnictwo powszechne dla mniejszości narodowych w Polsce w latach 1918–1939*, (p. 117). Warszawa–Wrocław–Kraków: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, p. 117.

¹² LCVA, WUW, Ruch narodowościowy, f. 51, op. 17, Issue 53, pp. 62–71, 111, 113.

¹³ Walasek, S. (2007). *Towarzystwa i organizacje oświatowe na ziemiach północno-wschodnich ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Wilna* In: M. Pękowska (Ed.). *Z dziejów oświaty na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, Kielce: Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Wszechnica Świętokrzyska, p. 311.

¹⁴ Ostrowski, J. (1930). *Litwini na ziemi wileńskiej*, Wilno, p. 15.

¹⁵ Mauersberg, S. (1968). *Szkolnictwo powszechne...* op. cit., p. 118.

Education (Kuratorium Okręgu Szkolnego – KOS) in Wilno did not issue homeschooling permits and would prosecute the teachers engaged in illegal education. E.g. in 1934 in święciański district ca. 300 teachers and in the wileńsko-trocki district ca. 200 teachers who ran Lithuanian language classes outside of school without the necessary permits stood accused¹⁶.

There was great public interest in non-systematic courses for illiterate adults organised by “Rytas” (systematic courses required meeting the criteria outlined in the act of 11. March 1932 on private schools and scientific and educational centres and a permit from the Board of Education and the district mayor. In 1935 such courses (in which one did not receive a diploma), conducted in Lithuanian in: Lithuanian language, history, geography, nature, arithmetic, hygiene, singing, handicraft, and farming, with groups of 8 to 15 people, were organised in nearly all the villages inhabited by Lithuanians. They would typically take place in the reading rooms owned by the Association, libraries, as well as private homes, and the courses were conducted by qualified teachers-activists of Lithuanian roots. From 1.02 to 15.05 such courses were organised in 15 villages in Olkiennicka, Orańska, and Gierwiacka gminas (communes), and in the Wilno district in Gieniuny, Pierciupie, Bucwidance, Widzieniance, Macki, Poszolice, Czyżuny, Miciuny, Gieluny, Darguże, Naniszki, Ogrodniki, Galczuny, Gajgole, Petryki¹⁷.

“Rytas” also ran two secondary schools: Vytautas the Great Gymnasium in Wilno (Gimnazjum im. Witolda Wielkiego w Wilnie) that in 1925 was attended by 360 students (the gymnasium functioned from 1915 to 1927 when it was taken over by the “Kultura” Association) and a 4-class pre-gymnasium in Święciany that in 1928 was ran by dr Aleksander Rymas. There were scouting sections in the gymnasiums, which educated youth in the national spirit¹⁸.

Until the moment when the Association was suspended by Polish authorities (28. February 1938, reactivated on 6. June 1939) it would organise public schools, support gymnasiums and a teachers training seminar in Wilno, conduct training courses for teachers and the illiterate, organise lectures, libraries, and reading rooms in many towns and villages in the area of the Wilno KOS.

The teaching level in “Rytas” schools was not very high, but the Lithuanian population would nevertheless happily send their children there,

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 119.

¹⁷ LCVA, Starostwo Powiatowe Wileńsko-Trockie, Sprawy kursów „Rytas” 1935, f. 55, op. 2, Issue 591, pp. 29–65.

¹⁸ Mauersberg, S. (1968). *Szkolnictwo powszechne...* op. cit., p. 118.

because books, notebooks, and pencils were distributed free of charge, and the school year started in October and finished in April, which was convenient for villagers because of the periods when help was needed in the fields¹⁹. However, the opinions of the Polish society about the schools were negative. They were believed to isolate Lithuanian children from Polish students and to be a source of anti-Polish education²⁰.

St. Casimir Lithuanian Association, established in 1925 and closed in 1937, dealt with extramural education of adults and youth. The organisation promoted national and fideistic ideas. Since 1928 the Association was ran by the Board consisting of chairman pr. Antoni Wiskont, vice chairman – Nikodem Rasztutis, and members Konstancy Aleksa and Ignacy Budrejko²¹.

In 1930 the Association had about 15,000 members and ca. 300 departments. As early as 1932 there were 477 departments (in almost all villages with Lithuanian population) and ca. 20,000 members. A year later there were 16,000 members and 405 departments ran by Lithuanian priests and teachers, who organised educational meetings, discussions, and lectures. They would also develop an amateur artistic movement²². For example, in August, 1933 alone in brastawski, święciański, and wileńsko-trocki district 8 meetings with lectures with 155 participants, 6 amateur plays with games for 240 participants, and a ceremony with 200 participants were organised²³.

Not all of the initiatives of the Association were approved of by and accepted by Polish authorities. In a number of cases Polish administration would see them as a threat to the Polish state and population. For example, the mayor of the Święciański district refused to issue a permit for the Association Department in Nowo-Święciany (upheld by the Wilno Province) to organise a play with dances (on 3. November 1933) in the village of Płatuny *“because the department takes prominent part in the Lithuanian action and organising a play in the gmina would be an act of agitation rather than a cultural and educational activity (...) and the idea behind it would be to do some initial work to establish a department of the Lithuanian association in the village of Płatuny”*²⁴. On 1. March 1935, in

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 118.

²⁰ Walasek, S. (2007). *Towarzystwa i organizacje oświatowe...* op. cit., p. 311.

²¹ LCVA, WUW, Ruch narodowościowy, f. 51, op. 17, Issue 53, p. 113.

²² LCVA, WUW, Ruch narodowościowy, f. 51, op. 17, Issue 53, pp. 89–91.

²³ LCVA, WUW, Sprawozdania z ruchu politycznego i społeczno-narodowego na terenie województwa, f. 51, op. 17, nr. 406, p. 18.

²⁴ LCVA, WUW, Sprawy mniejszości litewskiej 1933, f. 51, op. 7, nr. 675, p. 8.

turn, the Świąciański mayor refused the department in Nowo-Świąciany permission to organise the staging of "Red Riding Hood" with singing, recitations, and games in the home of the Association in Orzwecie. Declining the permission was justified as follows: "*Red Riding Hood' has been altered in such a way that it illustrates the liberation of Wilno (Red Riding Hood symbolizes Wilno, and the Wolf – Poland)*"²⁵.

Lithuanians had also their own press, which played a vital role in the education of the Lithuanian minority. In 1928 the following were published in the Wilno region: "Kejlas", "Vilniaus Aidas", "Jaunimo Draugas", "Dirwa", "Życie ludu", "Vorpas", and the most popular one, "Vilniaus Rytojis"²⁶. The papers typically had a clear political line, concordant with Lithuanian politics. Apart from the questions connected with shaping the national identity of the Lithuanian minority (through articles introducing history, culture, and customs of Lithuanians), as well as education, economy, and religion, the papers would also frequently address political issues. Discussing political problems and stances adverse to the Polish state often led to the intensification of conflicts between the two states and nations. Polish authorities treated such opinions and attitudes as hostile to the Polish state. They believed that the hostile stance of the Lithuanian community was largely the work of the press as well as the educational and cultural associations that awakened unwelcome emotions and shaped social and political attitudes of the Lithuanian minority that were contrary to the interests of the state. That is why the criticism of the Lithuanian press as well as the limiting of the role and the scope of the work of the cultural and educational associations was seen as a priority by Polish administration at the end of the 1920s²⁷.

The extensive limiting of the influence and the role of legal Lithuanian associations began with the death of Marshall Józef Piłsudski. In the years 1935–1938 the policy of the Polish authorities regarding the Lithuanian minority became increasingly confrontational. In February 1936 at the sitting of the Council of Ministers a decision was passed to initiate the dissolution of all the Lithuanian organisation questioning that Wilno and its region belonged to Poland and failing to meet the regulations issued by the Polish authorities. It was also decided that greater emphasis was to be placed on pro-state agitation among Lithuanians. In the Wilno region the Wileńskie Voivod Ludwik Bociański was responsible for carrying out all these decisions pertaining to the "entirety of Lithuanian

²⁵ LCVA, WUW, Sprawy dotyczące stosunków polsko-litewskich, f. 51, op. 7, Issue 809, p. 42.

²⁶ LCVA, WUW, Ruch narodowościowy, f. 51, op. 17, Issue 53, p. 99.

²⁷ Śleszyński, W. (2009). *Świat pogranicza...* op. cit., p. 62.

issues”²⁸. The decisions of the government as well as the actions of Polish administration in the voivodship led to the dissolution of Lithuanian cultural and educational associations in the Wilno region.

On 3. December 1926 the St. Casimir Lithuanian Association was forbidden to work in the borderlands, and on 31. December 1937 it was ultimately dissolved with the decision of the Grodzki mayor in Wilno. In 1937 the Lithuanian Teachers’ Union was dissolved. So was the case with Association “Rytas” and with Lithuanian Scientific Association in 1938. Other Lithuanian organisations, e.g. Committee of Wilno Lithuanians (the process of its dissolution started in 1935, and the activities of the organisation were finally terminated in 1937) would soon face the same fate²⁹.

As Zigmantas Kiaupa writes, *“Lithuanian centres unified Lithuanians living in the lands that had become a part of Poland, they helped form their national identity. One of the functions of the centres was to preserve links with the independent Lithuania and to support the Lithuanian side in its conflicts with Poland. Without losing hope to regain the lost territories Lithuanian authorities unofficially supported the activities of Lithuanians in the Wilno region, which was negatively received by Polish authorities, who did all that they could to prevent it. For example, in 1922–33 Lithuanian activists were exiled to the independent Lithuania. In 1937 repressions were aimed at Lithuanian education. The situation of Lithuanians in Poland as well as Poles in Lithuania depended on the relations between the two sides and the methods that they both employed. By the half of the fourth decade, when Poland put pressure on Lithuania, repressions were aimed at Lithuanian organisations, schools, and press in the Wilno region”*³⁰.

A substantial change in Polish-Lithuanian relations took place only after diplomatic relations with Lithuania were established in the second half of 1938. This had a significant influence on the situation of the Lithuanian minority in Poland, although the situation of Lithuanians in the Polish state was still dependent on the further course of the development of the relations between Kowno and Warsaw. One of the concessions made by the Polish side was the permission for the reactivation of Association “Rytas” issued on 6. June 1939.

²⁸ Śleszyński, W. (2009). *Świat pogranicza...* op. cit., p. 63.

²⁹ Śleszyński, W. (2009). *Świat pogranicza...* op. cit., pp. 63–64.

³⁰ Kiaupa, Z. (2012). *Litwa w dwudziestym wieku. Republika litewska w latach 1918–1940*, p. 10. Retrieved September 11, 2014. from <http://www.iesw.lublin.pl/projekty/pliki/IESW-121-02-10pl.pdf>

The decision was a source of hope for the improvement of Polish-Lithuanian relations and recreation of the cultural, educational, and social organisations. Unfortunately, the development of the process of the normalisation of Polish-Ukrainian relations was broken by the outbreak of World War³¹ which led to the loss of the chance to re-establish Lithuanian cultural and educational associations in the Wilno region. Regardless of the typically critical assessments of Polish authorities, these associations played a vital educational role – they made the population more engaged in the educational processes – and they were crucially important for the economic and cultural issues of the Lithuanian minority in Poland in the interwar period.

³¹ Śleszyński, W. (2009). *Świat pogranicza...* op. cit., p. 64.

Czech primary minority education in the years of the First Czechoslovak Republic (with a view to the situation in the Brno language island)

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The “Metelka Act”, which laid out the procedure for the establishment of new minority schools, was, in terms of nationalities, the most important of the large number of educational laws issued following the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic. Although the act made it possible for all minorities to build schools, under the given political conditions it tended to accommodate the needs of Czech national education in particular. Many Czech organisations and societies, such as the Central School Foundation, branches of Sokol, professional teacher organisations and many regional women’s and youth organisations (including, in South Moravia, the National Union for Southwest Moravia), had an interest in the establishment of Czech minority education. This paper, in addition to a theoretical section on Czech minority education, also offers a concise look at the situation in minority education in three districts in the former German language island to the south of the historical centre of the City of Brno.

Key words: minority education; Czech schools; teachers; primary education; primary school; language island; school districts; school boards; Czech-German conflicts

The main Czech-German conflicts in the area of education in the border regions and in mixed localities such as part of the area immediately surrounding the south of the City of Brno were played out in the field of minority education in the linguistically mixed areas of the Czechoslovak Republic. The foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic created political conditions that altered the position of Czech primary minority education in relation to the German school system. In the former times of Austro-Hungary, German primary and secondary education was of a considerably higher standard than the corresponding Czech education in terms of both school facilities in material terms and the greater density of the network of German schools. Czech schools were

viewed with disfavour by the Austrian authorities which strived for the Germanisation of mixed Czech-German areas by means of the educational system. The Germans had a larger number of primary schools than they should have had according to the proportion of nationalities (Czech-German). The foundation and maintenance of Czech (and German) minority schools in areas of mixed nationalities was dependent on private means and the charitable support of various societies and foundations. On the Czech side, this meant branches of the *Central School Foundation* and the *National Union*; these Czech-nationality schools were known as “*foundation schools*”. The most important such society on the German side was the German School Association *Deutscher Schulverein*. The German community was far stronger economically (with a more important position in the economy and the state administration) and was therefore capable of providing its schools with more substantial support.¹

The most important legislative measure for minority education following the foundation of an independent Czechoslovakia was the passing of the law on the establishment of “schools of national and private institutions of teaching and education” of 3 April 1919, no. 189/1919 Sb., known (after its author Jindřich Metelka) as the “*Metelka Act*”, which laid out the procedure for the establishment of new minority schools and which tended to accommodate the needs of Czech national education in particular.² The most important parts of the act in this respect were Sections 1, 2 and 5–7. According to the act, a Czech public national school (with five-year attendance) could be established in each

¹ The Czech School Foundation (Ústřední matice školská) was founded in December 1880 with the aim of acquiring financial means (largely by voluntary collections and benefit events such as balls, theatre performances, etc. organised by local sections in Czech-speaking areas) for establishing and maintaining Czech minority schools. These activities were initially targeted mainly at primary and nursery schools (kindergartens), later also at secondary schools (grammar schools and vocational colleges). Responsibility for minority schools was taken over by the Czechoslovak state after 1918, with the Foundation focusing on the establishment of halls of residence, nursery schools and secondary schools in the border regions. It ceased to exist in 1948. For more detail see: Hronek, J. (1932). *Česká škola národní v historickém vývoji a v dnešní podobě (Czech National Education in its Historical Context and Modern Form)*. Praha, p. 73, also: Trapl, M. (2003). *České menšinové školství v letech 1918–1938 (Czech Minority Education 1918–1938)*. In: *České národní aktivity v pohraničních oblastech první Československé republiky (Czech National Activities in the Border Regions of the First Czechoslovak Republic)*. Olomouc, pp. 109–117.

² Jindřich Metelka (1854–1921) was a Czech secondary school professor and also a cartographer, politician and Deputy President of Prague’s Provincial School Board, who fought for the equal standing of Czech minority education in the border regions.

district in which there were at least forty children of school age according to a three-year average. Alternatively, existing schools could be expanded to include additional classes. A number of Czech minority primary schools and minority town schools (in districts in which at least 400 pupils from the school district and from districts of a distance of more than 4 km from it attended public school) were opened almost immediately in the autumn of 1919 in accordance with the new law. In the years 1919–1920 alone, 475 new Czech minority primary schools were established in the Czechoslovak Republic, of which 101 schools with 4,502 pupils in Moravia. As of 31 December 1921, 671 Czech minority schools with 59,280 pupils were recorded, of which 135 (in addition to 20 town schools) were in Moravia; in 1929 there were almost 1,200 Czech minority schools.³ The implementation regulation of the Government of the Czechoslovak Republic of August 1919 enabled the transition of children from German classes to Czech classes on a literally massive scale in many places (in Husovice in Brno, for example, where the number of pupils in the seven classes of the German school fell to just 34). A disproportionate number of German schools remained, however, in comparison with the number of Czech schools. In the 1918/1919 school year, the Germans in Brno had 204 classes for 7,429 children (an average of 36.4 pupils to a class) with an available teaching area of 14,400 m² (an average classroom size of 70.5 m²), while the Czechs had 108 classrooms available for 5,794 pupils (the average size of a class was 53.6 pupils) of a total area of 8,360 m² (an average of 77.7 m²).⁴ Nevertheless, the law was seen by the German population as an attack on the German school system. The “Metelka Act” was subsequently supplemented and amended by Act no. 292 of 9 April 1920 and later by “small educational act” no. 226/1922 of 13 July 1922 which introduced eight-year compulsory school attendance into the national school system (this had, in fact, been in existence since 14 May 1869, but now operated without concessions of any kind, with the number of pupils falling gradually from 80 to 60 children.⁵

³ Čapek, E. (1930). *Národní školství v ČSR. Statistická studie k školské reformě (National Education in the Czechoslovak Republic. A Statistical Study on Educational Reform)*. Praha, p. 62.

⁴ For more detail see: Čapka, F. (2005). *K historii brněnského obecného a měšťanského školství v prvních letech ČSR (The History of Primary and Lower Secondary Education in Brno in the First Years of the Czechoslovak Republic)*. In: *Acta Facultatis Philosophicae Universitatis Ostraviensis*, 219, *Historica*/12, pp. 175–182.

⁵ For more detail see: Trapl, M. (2001). *Přehled českých menšinových škol na jižní Moravě v letech 1918–1938 (An Overview of Czech Minority Schools in South Moravia 1918–1938)*. In: *Jižní Morava (South Moravia)*, vol. 40. Brno, p. 246.

Changes were made to the determination of school districts by the government regulation of 21 April 1921. Independent school districts, which took in several political or juridical districts, were introduced for minority schools. The political districts of Brno-venkov, Hustopeče, Mikulov, Moravský Krumlov and Vyškov fell beneath the inspectorate of the City of Brno. A total of 42 primary minority schools with 84 classes were recorded here in 1935 on the basis of figures from state minority schools inspectorates.

Czech cultural organisations and national societies took an interest in the formation of the Czech primary minority school system, most notably the aforementioned Central School Foundation, branches of the physical education organisation Sokol, professional teacher organisations, and many regional women's and youth organisations. The National Union for Southwest Moravia⁶ and the Central Society of Teachers' Associations, with 59 associations in Moravia, also played an important role in South Moravia. These organisations often initiated the foundation of minority schools themselves on the grounds of their necessity and continued to work with them following their foundation. They even provided socially weaker pupils with material support where necessary. The main financial burden in the foundation and operation of these schools was understandably carried by the state budget. The gradual increase in the number of minority schools was good evidence of their necessity and usefulness.

The majority of the existing minority schools were located in entirely unsatisfactory and cramped premises in old houses (and factory buildings), and frequently in unhygienic conditions. The local Germans in many places in the border regions placed continual obstacles in the way of the establishment of minority schools; initially the chairman or deputy chairman of the provincial school board was responsible for ruling on their foundation, though this duty passed to the Ministry of Education from 1920 onwards. For this reason, negotiations on their opening often dragged on for several years. Czech parents were often pressured into

⁶ A system of "protectors of minority associations", which was to "contribute towards improving Moravia in national, spiritual and material terms", was created after 1918 within the framework of the National Union for Southwest Moravia, founded in 1886. The organisation of various lectures and cultural performances, support for libraries and regional publications, the provision of cheap credit, care for orphans from Czech families, support for pupils from poor families, etc. was to lead to the achievement of the stipulated goals. See, for comparison: Bařínka, J. (2000). *Národní jednota pro jihuřzápadní Moravu (The National Union for Southwest Moravia)*. Diploma, The Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University. Brno.

withdrawing their signatures from applications for the founding of a Czech school and into continuing to send their children to a German school. The situation in the strongly German border regions was rather different from that in the “German islands” (such as that in Brno). In areas of predominantly German settlement, continuing pressure was exerted by German businessmen on their Czech employees (as had been the case up to 1918) for them to enrol their children in German schools.

There were differences between the foundation of primary schools in purely Czech areas and Czech minority primary schools in German parts of the country, and there were also fundamental differences in the work and standing of teachers at these schools. Young teachers from the interior of the country were largely recruited for work in minority schools. Teachers could be placed at any such school in accordance with the law on minority schools of 3 April 1919; those who failed to take up the positions allotted to them were faced with disciplinary proceedings.⁷ In practice, there tended to be more cases of teachers who took up their position and worked actively at the school allotted to them than cases of teachers seeing their place as ill fortune or even a form of punishment, taking a passive approach to their work and trying to find work elsewhere. In addition to their direct teaching responsibilities, teachers at minority schools also regularly acted as representatives of the local Czechs and took an active part in the political, public, cultural and sporting life of the Czech minority. They organised local theatre companies, acted as instructors for the physical education organisation Sokol, and worked in public education and as public librarians. The school environment itself, however, had a negative effect on their extracurricular activity. School buildings tended to be among the ugliest and most neglected buildings in the district, with antiquated and unhygienic facilities. There was a great lack of teaching aids, and the classrooms were often overcrowded. Teachers also often complained in the teachers’ magazines of the time of the lax approach taken towards them by parents who failed to devote the corresponding attention to their children in the area of school education. The following example from the period press at the beginning of the nineteen twenties gives a good indication of the situation at these schools: “Teaching is an occupation twice as hard in the minority schools, and literally murderous for young and inexperienced people. Work in a school is immensely difficult, since German children, spending all their time in an environment more or less German, are poor material in school

⁷ Polánek, K. A. (1928). *Průvodce správce školy, zvláště menšinové (Guide for School Administrators, Minority Schools in Particular)*. Praha.

practice. Summon up all your patience and perseverance, as troubles and difficulties of which teachers in the Czech regions have little inkling await you. You can also put the idea of the humble village school out of your mind! The classrooms of Czech minority schools are often to be found in the rooms of inns or in former workshops, and where they are put up by a German school, they are always in the very worst of rooms. Proper teaching rooms almost nowhere, school facilities poor. Two classes are often squeezed into a single classroom. You will be demoralised by half a day's teaching; you will despair of your tired and exhausted pupils every afternoon.”⁸

The example of the “Brno language island”, which took in ten districts immediately adjoining the southern part of the City of Brno formed in the period of medieval colonisation, i.e. during the reign of Wenceslas I in the first half of the thirteenth century, serves to provide a more detailed picture of minority education after 1918.⁹ We will focus on the situation in three adjacent districts within the given German locality in Brno: Modřice, Želešice and Přízřenice.

The largest proportion of the population declaring itself as speaking the German colloquial language in the last pre-war census (1910) was found in Přízřenice (93 %), with a slightly smaller figure in Želešice (92 %) and the smallest proportion in Modřice (76 %). A slight fall in the German population (of around 3–5 %) was seen in all three districts in the census of 1921. The given districts can be said to be largely agricultural and industrial in nature (influenced by the vicinity of industrial Brno). The majority of the local firefighting, physical education and cultural education societies were German. Branches of the National Union for Southwest Moravia and the physical education organisation Sokol were not to begin to be formed here until the nineteen twenties.

The largest of the three districts was Modřice, where 2,205 people (of whom just 55 were Czechs) lived in 333 houses before the war. For this reason, every attempt to found a Czech school in the district ended in

⁸ *Český učitel (Czech Teacher)*. The Gazette of the Provincial Central Federation of Teachers' Associations in Bohemia. Prague. The Provincial Central Federation of Teachers' Associations in Bohemia, 1921–22, XXV, p. 10.

⁹ There were six major German language islands in what is now the Czech Republic before the resettlement of the Germans after the Second World War, in Brno, České Budějovice, Jihlava, Olomouc, Svitavy and Vyškov. The Brno language island was made up of the following villages: Černovice (Czernowitz), Komárov (Kumrowitz), Dvorská (Maxdorf), Modřice (Módrütz), Moravany (Morbes), Brněnské Ivanovice (Nennowitz), Horní Heršpice (Ober-Gerspitz), Dolní Heršpice (Unter-Gerspitz), Přízřenice (Priesenitz), Želešice (Schöllschitz). For more detail see: BĀRTA-ZAHRÁDECKÝ, J. (1912). *Německý ostrov brněnský (The German Island in Brno)*. Zábřeh.

failure, and the Czech children (along with children from neighbouring Přízřenice) attended the local German primary school, which was joined by a German town school in 1911. The provincial school board approved the establishment of a public Czech primary school with two classes in Modřice on 1 April 1919 in a ruling of 23 March of the same year (this was not yet a minority school, for which reason all costs had to be paid by the district); the first Czech local school board was also established here on the same day.¹⁰ The school initially has two classes (with 92 children enrolled), though it had three classes from the 1922/1923 school year onwards. As the school did not, at first, have its own building, teaching took place in a classroom loaned by the German Winter School of Agriculture. The attitude taken to the new school by the German population is best documented by an extract from the school chronicle: "The school had been founded and had rooms, though there was no furniture in them. So the new local board had to get hold of some furniture. After great squabbling with the local council and the German local school board, seven old school benches from the German school were given to it; they were brought in front of the school of agriculture and thrown in a ditch to ridicule the Czech school."¹¹ The situation improved dramatically following the ceremonial opening of the new school building (of what was now a minority primary school) on 28 August 1921, which was a great event far and wide. The words on the memorial plaque best encapsulate the atmosphere of the event: "This school building was built for you, young Czech people, in 1921 to give you an education in your mother tongue." A Czech nursery school was located in the basement of the school building, while in the autumn of 1923 several schoolrooms were lent without charge to the newly established Czech Trade School of Adult Education. The life of the Czech minority school in Modřice was altered fundamentally by the events of March 1939. Immediately after 15 March, the building was taken over by the German primary school and its Czech pupils had to move to its school. The school chronicle gives a colourful description of the atmosphere at that time: "A large crowd of people from Modřice came to the Czech school with the fire brigade. The militiamen climbed up the fire brigade ladders onto the school and bit-by-bit tore down the words National School to the accompaniment of enormous cheers from the crowd standing beneath them. They smeared lime over the inscriptions on the school building and hung a flag with the

¹⁰ Kalvodová, G. (2011). *Modřice. Město v pohybu (Modřice. A Town in Motion)*. Modřice, p. 115.

¹¹ The Brno-venkov State District Archive, collection H-151, journal no. 135. *Školní kronika Modřic 1921–1930 (The Modřice School Chronicle 1921–1930)*, unpagged.

swastika from a roof window. They hung a sign on canvas with the words Deutsche Volksschule written on it in big letters on the front of the school. Then the whole crowd of Germans, adults and children alike, broke into the school and went round the classes destroying everything they could get their hands on.”¹² Teaching was severely restricted at the Czech minority school throughout the Protectorate period, and German soldiers were quartered in the building on a number of occasions. The altered political situation led many Czech parents to begin sending their children to German primary school.

The district with the second largest population (a population of 1,076, of which just 102 were Czechs, in 1921) was Želešice. The Germans had a primary school with two classes in the district that was also attended by Czech children. A Czech minority primary school (with two classes) was not opened here until September 1926. A “town school using Czechoslovak as its teaching language” was opened at the same time, initially having four classes, though this number increased to eleven classes as the school began to be attended by increasing numbers of pupils from the surrounding area. Rooms in a former factory of the company Felbinger served as classrooms for both schools, though they were entirely unsatisfactory and this was soon reflected in the health of the pupils and teachers. The most frequent illnesses were pulmonary diseases, particularly of the upper respiratory tract. An inspection report by the school inspector of May 1929 states that, “the exterior of the school has got even worse since last year... The classrooms are so small, and some of them so dark, that proper work is impossible here. The pupils have to stand by the washbasin for drawing, as there is no room at the tables.”¹³

The journey towards a new school building was not so simple and direct here as it had been in neighbouring Modřice. Želešice had to fight a long bureaucratic battle. The local Germans strived ceaselessly for the school to be cancelled and incorporated into another nearby Czech district that already had a school. Approval for the construction of a purpose-built school building, which was opened in September 1935, was, however, finally won, thanks in part to lobbying at the very highest level in the form of letters to President T. G. Masaryk, his daughter Alice Masaryková and then Minister of Education Ivan Dérer. The building contained nine classes of the town school, two classes of the primary

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The Brno-venkov State District Archive, collection H-145, inv. no. 149. *Školní kronika Želešic 1926–1951 (The Želešice School Chronicle 1926–1951)*, unpagged.

school, one class of the nursery school and a school gym. The events of March 1939 also spelt the end for the Czech minority school here. A foretaste of the fatal 15 March came two days earlier with a mass attack by Germans from Želešice who satisfied themselves with “just” breaking the windows. Two days later, however, the consequences of their hateful behaviour were far worse. Principal V. Marek described the dramatic hours with the following words in the chronicle, “A crowd of people (around three hundred) charged towards the school at half past five in the morning, the young, the old, women and children, all armed with rifles, revolvers, sticks, staves, fence posts, pitchforks and other farm tools... they broke down the school gates... they swarmed into the building like wild animals. They threw pictures of the president, Czech pictures and files out of the rattling windows.” They dragged the principal out of the school, gave him a beating and dragged him to the local authority building where he was interrogated by the Gestapo. The school building was occupied by the Germans who made it home to their German primary school. The Czech primary minority school in Želešice ceased to exist the same day and the town school moved to neighbouring Ořechov.¹⁴

Přízřenice was the smallest of the three districts (with a population of 543 in 1921). A decision was not made on the opening of a Czech minority school here until 1922 with the help of an initiative from the National Union for Southwest Moravia; just six children enrolled in the school, for which reason a lease was obtained for one classroom in the building of the German public school. This was, however, merely a provisional situation, as construction of a new school building began in July of the same year. The attitude of the local Germans is best documented by the fact that the windows in the new building were smashed shortly after building work began. Construction of the school caused tension not merely between the local Germans and Czechs, but also within the Czech community. Growing social tension in the years of the deepening economic crisis contributed to this. Perhaps the only positive aspect set against the overall bad atmosphere in the district was an increase in the number of pupils in the Czech minority school which was enlarged to two classes from 1931.¹⁵ The story in Přízřenice in March

¹⁴ The Brno-venkov State District Archive, collection Želešice Local National Committee, C 310. *Kronika obce Želešice 1945–1958 (The Želešice Chronicle 1945–1958)*, p. 4.

¹⁵ The Archive of the City of Brno, collection M 32/88. *Školní kronika Přízřenice 1922–1935 (The Přízřenice School Chronicle 1922–1935)*, unpagged.

1939 was similar to that in the preceding two districts. The school building was taken over for quartering German soldiers.¹⁶

The Czech minority schools established in German areas were generally seen by the German population as one of the main risks to their development under the new political conditions following the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy and the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic. The Germans considered the law on Czech minority education (the “Metelka Act”) as a “school plague” and an open attack on the Sudeten German nation that was “democratically legitimated” and became the agent of all German educational misfortune. During the First Republic, the law was often seen by the Germans as a means of Czechifying the Sudetenland.

¹⁶ Recmaníková, M. (2013). *Z historie českých menšinových obecných škol na Brněnsku (se zaměřením na první republiku)* (*The History of Czech Minority Primary Schools in the Brno Area (focusing on the First Republic)*). Diploma, The Faculty of Education, Masaryk University. Brno.

Cultural education of the Hutsuls. Historical and contemporary contexts

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The Hutsuls – an ethnic highlander group inhabiting Eastern Carpathians in the Ukraine have constantly made efforts to organise cultural education of their young generations. Throughout the ages the level of involvement of families, local communities, professional circles, and schools in culture and education has varied. Until the second half of the 20th century the duty of forming cultural identity lay with families, as well as local communities and professional circles. The work of schools was made difficult by ideological and political factors. It was only in the 1990s that schools have become free to engage in the development of regional education. The curricula related to the Hutsul culture on the preschool level, as well as all the other levels of education, can serve as an example of the efforts that Hutsuls have made to preserve their culture and ethnic identity and to promote the traditions that they have shaped through the ages in their country as well as abroad.

Key words: *cultural education; ethnic group; ethnic identity; Hutsuls*

The Hutsuls are one of the ethnic groups inhabiting the Carpathians. They inhabit their eastern part, which currently belongs to the Ukraine. In this picturesque region, marked by lines of brooks, rivers, mountain ranges and which is covered with forests they have created an enormously rich culture. And despite the fact that the Hutsuls just like all the other groups of Carpathian highlanders are the descendants of Wallachian shepherds who have inhabited the Carpathians since the 15th century their culture has developed numerous distinct traits.

It is not only ethnicity, but also nationality that shape the culture of a region, and, as it is commonly known, the Hutsul lands and their inhabitants were frequently required to change their nationality throughout the ages¹. Being a part of a particular state is also one of the fundamental elements influencing the cultural education of an ethnic

¹ The Eastern Carpathians used to be a part of Hungary, Poland, Moldova, Austria and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Czechoslovakia, Romania, the USSR.

group. Changing borders often lead to changes in culture and the education that includes it. It can be stated that despite these changes in nationality the characteristic location of the Hutsul region lead to a certain isolation in which their culture could be created, to a large extent, away from outside influences. Families and villages were the cradles of culture. In the rather primal conditions the culture developed without written sources, which limited its opportunity to spread outside the original region.

When analysing the process of how a culture is passed down to subsequent generations one ought to first and foremost take into account the environments that take part in education. Such environments include, i.a., families, local and professional communities, schools, cultural and educational organisations, etc. What is of crucial importance to cultural transfer is also whether an ethnic group inhabits its indigenous territory, or whether it inhabits an “alien” one (e.g. because of migration or forced resettlement).

The basic and the primal environments responsible for cultural education were and should still be families and local communities. Families, especially in rural areas, until the turn of the 20th century served the role of the fundamental community in which the transfer of tradition, customs, ideas, knowledge, and ways of thinking took place. Thus, they constituted the most important unit in the social structure that made the preservation of ethnic culture possible².

Children’s first encounter with the traditions, rituals, and norms of social life took place in a family environment, that is why the non-formal duty to introduce children to culture lay with the parents and the grandparents, with the members of the nuclear and the extended family. Fathers, as heads of household, were responsible for all the family members’ abiding of the customary law. That is why it was their duty to pass the law down to their children³. They were also required to uphold the traditions and rituals accompanying, e.g., religious celebrations, work, and farm and household chores. In their efforts they were supported by mothers, who were responsible for the household, household customs, rules, and norms. Even though in the households the women/mothers had many duties, it was the men who dominated the social life, rich in traditions and customs, and that is why it was their

² Чмелик, Л. (1999). *Мала українська селянська сім’я другої половини ХІХ – початку ХХ ст. (Структура і функції)*. Львів, pp. 138–139.

³ Гошко, Ю. (1999). *Звичаєве право населення українських Карпат та Прикарпаття ХІV–ХІХ ст.* Львів, p. 262, pp. 230–231.

responsibility to pass the culture down to boys. However, because of the natural order of things it was the mothers who introduced the youngest to the world of the culture of the household and the family. Fathers were busy working on the farm or elsewhere to provide for their wives and children, that is why their opportunities to participate directly in upbringing were limited. What constituted another problem was the specificity of the work that the Hutsuls were typically engaged in. They would deal with shepherding as well as logging and rafting, which is why they were often away from home. These professions were also a part of the lifestyle and the culture of this ethnic group, that is why that fact that men would be temporarily not present at home became one of their elements; an element to which children and other family members had to get used to.

The families were supported by the local communities that functioned according to the norms and traditions instilled in children by their parents and relatives. In the case of the Hutsuls the family was certainly of primary importance because of, among others, the large distances between households. The distances between neighbours were so vast that they resulted in minor cultural differences, e.g., in speech (“in each cottage a different tongue”), singing, playing musical instruments, etc⁴. Apart from families, the cultural development of boys was significantly influenced by the professional group of shepherds. A substantial part of the adult male population used to deal with shepherding, and minors would often help out in the works on the meadows. Shepherding was associated with a richness of rituals, so boys not only learned their future job, but also traditions and customs. Among the shepherds a flock master called “baca” or “watah” played the role of an educator. He became the guardian for adult shepherds as well as their young (often very young) helpers. Taking great care to make sure that they followed customs and rituals he used to shape the shepherd culture and to instil it in all those working on the meadows. The rules that the shepherds had to abide often had to be followed by other inhabitants of the villages, as well, which not only proves that the influence of the “watahs” was substantial, but also that the men educated by the “watahs” passed their knowledge on to their families at home.

It was much later that cultural education was shaped by other professional groups, such as lumberjacks and “kermyczans” (raftsmen). That was because these occupations were particularly dangerous and they required physical strength, agility, and maturity.

⁴ Witwicki, S. (1863). *Rys historyczny o Hucutach*. Lwów, p. 98.

Children, when taking part in various celebrations, rituals, and holidays, learned traditions and thus shaped in a natural way their cultural identity. Schooling in Eastern Carpathians was underdeveloped until nearly the second half of the 20th century, which resulted in families and the local communities playing the key roles in cultural education of the Hutsuls. The existing schools were often far away from where children lived and they only provided elementary level education and that without any regard to the cultural character of the region, which is why they did not have an opportunity to become involved in the regional culture and in shaping ethnic identity. Taking into account that until the second half of the 20th century most of the inhabitants of the Hutsul region were illiterate, oral tradition became natural in the immediate family environments, neighbourhoods, and professional circles.

Until 1939 there was only one secondary school in the Hutsul region – it was a gymnasium in Vyzhnytsia – and it had no part in shaping ethnic identity, because it was attended by few Hutsuls. Most of the students came from the śniatyński and the horodenkowski regions. What was another problem in spreading the regional culture in schools was that the different parts of the Hutsul lands were inhabited by different nationalities, among others, Poles (the Halicka part), Romanians and Germans (Buchenland), Hungarians (Subcarpathia), and Jews⁵. Each of these nations was better educated than the Hutsuls and that is why they established schools in which their national languages were used in class, rather than Ukrainian. As a result, it was their own national cultures that they promoted, not the Hutsul culture. The lack of educated individuals of Hutsul ethnicity led to the fact that the schools were ran by “alien” staff who did not know the cultural character of the region, and who were loyal to the contemporary governments⁶.

The first serious attempts to teach in Ukrainian were made after 1918, but the aim of the education was to shape Ukrainian identity, rather than the Hutsul one. This was caused by a short-lived attempt made by Ukrainians to establish their own independent state. The only element that connected education with the Hutsul culture was the directive to design and build schools in the Hutsul style⁷.

⁵ Курищук, В. – Пелипейко, І. (2001). *Освіта на Гуцульщині. Історія Гуцульщини*, vol. VI, Львів, p. 221.

⁶ *Товариство Взаїмна Поміч Українського Вчительства 1905–1930 (1932)*. Львів, p. 15.

⁷ Курищук, В. – Пелипейко, І., op. cit., p. 222.

The situation of the schooling system was to change after the Second World War, when a new political and administrative order was established in Europe. There was now hope that schools may become an environment shaping national, regional, ethnic, and cultural identities. Unfortunately, the Ukraine and with it the Eastern Carpathians were under the Soviet rule. Throughout a few post-war decades the schools in the Hutsul regions promoted the “only true” Soviet ideology, diminishing the importance of ethnic culture. All expressions of cultural identity that were not connected with the culture of the USSR were not accepted, which is why the Hutsuls, with their individuality, their strong sense of cultural identity, and even of national identity, so to say (they would call the region where they lived “the Hutsul Country”), were looked down on by the authorities. The Soviet administration took steps to marginalise the Hutsul culture.

The USSR government had a particularly destructive influence on the Hutsul culture. The Hutsul were forced to participate in collective farming and they were resettled, which is why their villages became depopulated. It should, however, be clearly stated that all the actions of Soviet authorities were to no avail, because the Hutsul highlanders, people of strong personality and powerful will, kept their traditions, customs, and lifestyle of old, and they preserved all the elements of the material and spiritual culture of their ancestors.

Even though the soviet authorities allowed schools to use Ukrainian throughout the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and there were many individuals of Hutsul ancestry among the teaching staff, the dominating ideology limited the opportunities of regional education to develop. To reinforce Soviet order and culture the authorities sent people from the furthest regions of the USSR to work in schools in the Hutsul region. The Hutsul traditions were altogether alien to them. Teachers used to fear and loathe being sent into the “wild” and unfamiliar mountains (the fear was fuelled by official propaganda). If the teachers fulfilled their duties perfectly (in the eyes of the highlanders), if they worked hard and treated the children well, they were soon accepted by the local population. However, they did not contribute to the development of the regional education, because they themselves had to learn the very basics of the culture within which they would start the new stage of their lives. Unfortunately, the teachers who were “sent into exile” to “the Hutsul Country” accepted the local culture and integrated with the indigenous people. Many of the staff were formed by the ideology of the communist authorities and they would fully devote themselves to educate the children and the youth in the Marxist-Leninist spirit. They would instil in

their students the idea that the USSR was the one and only perfect country⁸. In accordance with these notions, the children were forbidden to follow regional and religious traditions, the local authorities were undermined, and attempts were made to eliminate local patriotism and substitute it with the idea of the one great motherland. Cultural and ideological education organised by the families and the local communities on the one hand, and the education at school on the other, were entirely contradictory. This situation made it necessary for the Hutsul community to keep their ideas secret, and, to a certain extent, to keep secret their own culture.

In the 1940s and the 1950s the students were not only forced to take part in ideological initiatives that were contrary to their traditions, but also the parents who tried to teach their children some rules and norms contrary to communist values were persecuted⁹. Although many teachers distanced themselves from regulations of the authorities, these conditions nevertheless made it difficult to develop regional cultural education in schools. The first step that was taken at the beginning of the 1990s was to cleanse the teaching staff of communist party members and the curricula of communist ideas. In spite of numerous problems, typically of economic nature (the lack of funds to build schools – many construction projects were halted – and to pay teachers' salaries), the Hutsuls used their chance to help regional education develop. That is why now the educational and cultural efforts of families and local communities are supported by pre-school and school institutions. The model examples are the kindergarten "Hucufeczka" in Ivano-Frankivsk and 3rd Stage Secondary School in Yavoriv. Both these institutions organise education on the basis of original curricula rooted in the Hutsul culture.

The kindergarten has been established in the 1970s by the initiative of Tamara Hrycaj and although it is located in an urban area, among post-soviet blocks of flats, its interior resembles that of a Hutsul house. The rooms in the kindergarten are almost fully equipped in the Hutsul style. The furniture is made according to the designs found in the highlanders' cottages and sheds, and children become familiar with the functioning of a traditional household, of shepherding, and of lumbering.

The didactic and educational work is conducted in accordance with the original curriculum developed by Tamara Hrycaj, Lubomira Kałuska, and Ludmiła Czmetyk. It is on this basis that children broaden their knowledge of the region, they learn of the culture, the living conditions,

⁸ Ibidem, p. 223.

⁹ „Освітняський вісник” (1995), pp. 2–4.

traditional regional occupations, the regional craftsmanship and artistic handiwork, elements of material and spiritual culture, and form bonds with their small motherland¹⁰. In the forms of fun and the games the children are provided with knowledge about the history of the region, the natural environment of the Carpathians, dialects, customary law, tales and legends, traditions and customs, etc. The kindergarteners practice folk art by learning to dance and sing, to play musical instruments, to make simple decorations and do simple handiwork (e.g. painted Easter Eggs, decorations on pottery, weaving, embroidery, making decorations from beads and leather). In their leisure time they can play with dolls in traditional Hutsul outfits, utensils used in the households, and wooden tools and utensils made by Hutsul craftsmen as well as the members of the kindergarten staff. The children, then, use hand-made utensils and toys: sculptured, sown, embroidered, or made of clay, cheese, and straw, etc.

The kindergarteners are also provided with food that helps them become accustomed with the culture of the region. On the menu one can find traditional Hutsul dishes, among others: pierogi, banosz (hominy), vegetable salads, borscht, cheesecake, cabbage rolls, fruit cream, etc¹¹.

All the kindergarten facilities are somehow connected with the region: the changing rooms, the classrooms, and the bedrooms. There are children-sized replicas of chests, cradles, furniture, wells, horse carriages, etc., and the kindergarten groups have regional names, such as “Pisanka”, “Hucułka”, “Wyszywanka” (“Easter Egg”, “The Little Hutsul”, “Embroidery”).

In comparison with the previous decades, the participation of the contemporary Hutsul schools in cultural education has also increased substantially. A number of initiatives have been undertaken in cooperation with the local communities and the families. Hutsul educational activists have made a successful attempt to establish regional schooling and to prepare the teaching staff to work with original and experimental curricula.

Thanks to the initiative of Petro Łosiuk – headmaster in a secondary school in Yavoriv – the local schools have become an environment that supports families and local communities in cultural education. A number of Hutsul activists led by P. Łosiuk have started the Hutsul Educational Council [HEC], which focuses on developing curricula and teaching

¹⁰ Калуска, Л. – Чмелик, Л. – Грицай, Т. *Програма ознайомлення дітей старшого дошкільного віку з Гуцульщиною*. Івано-Франківськ, undated typescript, pp. 1–3.

¹¹ Interview with Tamara Hrycaj, Ivano-Frankivsk, 31. 08. 2006.

standards concurrent with the character of the region. With the HEC a research laboratory named "Hutsul ethnopedagogics and Hutsul studies" has been established. The centre supervises regional education and publishes books in the "Hutsul school library" series. These publications are used by teachers in the didactic process.

Fundamental to the didactic and educational work of the region is the idea of the "Hutsul studies", that is, knowledge about the Hutsul region, including problems of folklore, dialects, history, nature, economy, folk art, customs and traditions, social relations, living conditions, as well as material and spiritual culture¹². Elements of Hutsul studies have been included in the curricula of nearly all the school subjects, e.g. Ukrainian, history, geography, biology, music, art, physical education, IT, etc.

What has become the basis of regional education in schools is first and foremost the decision of the HEC activists to introduce the subject named "Hutsul studies" in all the schools of the Hutsul region. Its curriculum named **"Орієнтовна програма з гуцульщинознавства для загальноосвітніх шкіл, гімназій, ліцеїв та вищих навчальних закладів"** (Core curriculum in Hutsul studies for lyceums, gymnasiums, and universities) gives the teachers the opportunity to introduce their own original curricula. Taking into account the fact that the Hutsuls are also Ukrainians, the curricula of the Hutsul studies has been included in the idea of the Ukrainian national school.

The implementation of the curriculum is made easier for the students and the teachers by course books such as: **"Плай"** (1996, a collection of works of literature about the Hutsul region, with its history, culture, and nature), **"Флояра"** (1999, a collection of the works of regional oral tradition), **"Хрестоматія з гуцульщинознавства"** ("Chrestomathy of Hutsul studies", 2001, a collection of fundamental information about the region), **"Гуцульщинознавство в українській національній школі"** ("Hutsul studies in the Ukrainian national school", 2001, includes papers in many disciplines), **"Мій рідний край"** ("My motherland"), **"Гуцульська різьба та інкрустація"** ("Hutsul sculptures and incrustations"), etc.

It has been stated that the fundamentals of Hutsul pedagogy come from the great grandparents, grandparents, fathers, mothers, families, local communities, the mother tongue, mountains, meadows, forests, rivers and brooks, the bright sky and the sun, the heart, the spirit, and the human sensitivity, the brigand tradition, and devotion to the small motherland¹³. The regional cultural education can be called ethnopedagogy. Rooting education in the tradition of the local

¹² Лосюк, П. (2001). *Гуцульщинознавство в українській національній школі*. Косів, p. 8.

communities does not imply the backwardness of the schools, because the latter are open to the needs of the students and to all the innovations of modern technology. The Hutsul studies curriculum can also be implemented in many different ways, among others in the form of a separate schools subject, extra or facultative classes, or during the regular classes of other subjects as part of the standard education process¹⁴. There are three variants of the curriculum: “Systematic course in Hutsul studies” (typically for classes of older children, from lyceums and universities), “Hutsul studies in the process of teaching different subjects”, and “Literature of the small motherland”. It needs to be emphasised that the full implementation of the curriculum requires certain facilities such as rooms for dance classes, workshops for classes in handiwork and art, soil for gardening, and even barns for farm animals.

The activists of the Hutsul Education Council have emphasised the enormous influence of folk art on the forming of the attitudes towards the region. That is why educational institutions implementing the ideas of Hutsul studies have been supplied with works of Hutsul handicraft, e.g., wooden sculptures, tapestry, *lizniks* (wool blankets), embroidered towels, pottery. Regional rooms are also set up in schools. These are often historical and ethnographic museums of particular villages and towns, and a lot of effort is put into development of children’s artistic skills in the didactic process. Education in regional art is supported by two colleges of fine and applied arts in Vyzhnytsia and Kosiv. Students of these schools have the opportunity to learn traditional methods of manufacturing and decorating of the objects that Hutsuls worked with and which they used to decorate the space they inhabited.

The staff of the institutions organising Hutsul regional education cooperate with their students’ families in order to support the educational influence and promote the love for the region and its culture among adults¹⁵. The school teachers in the Hutsul region, apart from their didactic work, are also engaged in research, art, and social actions. They are authors of numerous scientific papers, they create Hutsul works of art and they are amateurs of the activities of the population of mountain villages.

The educational work of the families, the society, and the schools is contemporarily supported by cultural and tourist centres, art schools, and

¹³ Ibidem, p. 20.

¹⁴ *Орієнтовна програма з гуцульщинознавства для загальноосвітніх шкіл, гімназій, ліцеїв та вищих навчальних закладів* (1999), p. 3–4.

¹⁵ Лосюк, П. *Гуцульщинознавство ...*, op. cit., p. 37.

folk music bands that promote the regional culture not only among the youngest generations of the Hutsul lands.

The necessity to organise cultural education that shapes ethnic identity has also occurred among Hutsul immigrant communities in Canada (many Hutsuls migrated because of economic reasons in, e.g., the 19th century). When one migrates to a culturally different country it is difficult to expect much of the education provided by local schools (unless it is possible to set up a school for a group of immigrants). Educational work must thus be done by family environments and cultural and educational organisations outside the school system. In order to preserve their identity in a country of a different culture the Hutsul diaspora have intensified their cultural education within families and in cultural associations and organisations (e.g. in folk music bands), and they have organised education in their native language.

Regardless of the time, the place, the political situation, and the ideologies imposed by governments the Hutsuls, like all highlanders, of whom O. Kolberg wrote that they are “slow” to accept anything that is contrary to the traditions that they follow in spite of persuasions to abandon their customs¹⁶, and regardless of all the difficulties that they had to face, they have been successful in preserving their ethnic culture. Ambitious and honourable, they have never surrendered to the pressure of people and governments that have tried to impose their will upon them and undermine the importance of their culture. They have taken care to develop ethnic education of children and youth in the age of globalisation and the attempts made by the Ukraine to become a part of multicultural Europe.

¹⁶ Kolberg, O. (1970). *Dzieła wszystkie. Ruś Karpacka*, pt. I, vol. 54. Warszawa, pp. 47–48.

The voice of ethnic minorities on issues of education in interpellations of the members of the Parliament of the Second Republic of Poland (1919–1939)

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In the Second Polish Republic the interpellations were one of main instruments of the political contention, with lever on the government, moreover showed with eyes of Members of Parliament fundamental gaps, weaknesses, deformations in the national life, social relations and economic. It depicted conditions, in which it revived the contemporary Polish state, reflected postures of individual social groups and professional and of national minorities. The outlined problems concerning the education and educations brought up in interpellations by Members of Parliament belonging to national minorities (Jewish, German, Ukrainian and Belarusian minority) stayed in the article interpellations concerned the reconstruction and the repair of schools in different towns, of salaries of teachers incessantly becoming poor with effect of inflation, problems of discrimination against minority rights in the issue of teaching in the one's mother tongue, the culture and the religion.

Key words: *Second Republic of Poland; the Parliament; interpellations; ethnic minorities*

Interpellation is an inquiry of a number of members of parliament to the government pertaining to issues of its interior and international politics, the functioning of government administration, and all the other problems that the members of parliament believe require explanation or government intervention. It is an element of the parliamentary control over the state and the method that draws the public attention to negative phenomena that often result from mistakes in lawmaking.

It is an intervention of a repressive character, because the interpellants demand that those responsible for the losses be punished, or of a preventive character, when its aim is to prevent breaching someone's rights. The procedure of submitting an interpellation was defined by the statutes of the Sejm in its subsequent terms. Generally

speaking, an interpellation included in the agenda of the daily proceedings of the Sejm was sent to an appropriate department, or to a number of departments, where the issue was investigated.

According to a constitution expert Andrzej Ajnenkiel, starting with the first sittings of the legislative Parliament [Sejm Ustawodawczy – SU] (1919–1922) interpellations were one of the main instruments of political contention, they placed pressure on the government, and, what is more, allowed the members of the parliament to present substantial shortcomings, weaknesses, and deformations in the life of the state, as well as social and economic relationships in the Second Republic of Poland. Interpellations illustrated the conditions in which the contemporary Polish state was reborn, reflected the attitudes of the particular social and professional groups and ethnic minorities, informed about the living conditions of the population, and sometimes of individual tragedies. Frequently interpellations constituted attempts to prompt the government to make favourable decisions in individual cases that could not be addressed in any other official way, or they were a method of precipitating the proceedings of some cases that were already being considered. Occasionally a single interpellation would be submitted a number of times under different headings, and it would sometimes exaggerate the issue in question, and bend reality to the aims that the interpellant wanted to achieve. This brings to mind the limited opportunities to achieve the goals set by the members of the parliament, their cunningness and consistency, as well as the lack of good will of the state administration officials. Interpellations would also become an element in contention between political groups or members of parliament competing for influence.

In the archives of the parliaments of the Second Republic of Poland interpellations constituted the greatest collection of documents. It consists of about 10,169 documents. On the basis of queries in a number of archives it is being meticulously recreated after the destruction that World War II wreaked in the Parliament Archive.

The following numbers of interpellations were submitted in the subsequent Parliament terms:

- Legislative Parliament (Sejm Ustawodawczy – SU) 1919–1922 – 3730,
- Parliament of the 1st term 1922–1927 – 4493
- Parliament of the 2nd term 1928–1930 – 997,
- Parliament of the 3rd term 1930–1935 – 350,
- Parliament of the 4th term 1935–1938 – 336,
- Parliament of the 5th term 1938–1939 ca. 83¹.

¹ <http://bib.sejm.gov.pl/>

It is easy to notice how the number of interpellations rose rapidly in the first decade – after 1930 their number is stabilised at the level of ca. 350. As early as the second sitting of SU on February 25, 1919 Speaker of the Sejm Wojciech Trąpczyński appealed to the MPs: “I must draw the attention of the respectable MPs to one particular problem. You have been flooding the Parliament with interpellations and immediate motions, so that it would require two years of honest work to address them all. You must limit yourself if you wish the motions to be taken seriously. I hereby appeal to the parliamentary clubs to submit motions in a number that the Parliament is capable of coping with²”. Although the appeal was repeated a number of times, it did not help. It was only with the introduction of Sejm procedures and constitutional regulations that the number of interpellations was significantly limited. These regulations also defined the duties of the addressees of the interpellations³. The decrease in the number of interpellations was also influenced by political factors such as the shortened term of the parliament, limiting its role in the life of the state, and the rise of the number of the signatures required to submit an interpellation to 30 (formerly 15), which, first and foremost, made it impossible for the representatives of ethnic minorities to issue interpellations. From now on, ethnic minorities had to ask other parliamentary clubs for support⁴. While it is true that the Parliament of the 4th term changed the conditions again, allowing for interpellations issued by single MPs, but it was the decision of the Speaker of the Parliament to accept them or not, which greatly limited the independence of the MPs. What is more, the clubs of the ethnic minorities were weakly represented in the Parliament and it was difficult for them to make their voice heard. It needs to be emphasised, however, that in none of the terms of the Parliament were interpellations censored.

In SU, among the 3730 interpellations nearly 160 pertained generally to the subject of education, e.g., the necessity for the Treasury to grant organisational funds to the newly established higher schools, provide schools with fuel for heating, schooling for ethnic minorities, tailoring the train schedule to school hours and granting teachers train ticket price

² Stenographic record of the 6th sitting of Feb 25, 1925, column 202.

³ Art. 33 of the Constitution of Mar 17, 1921 and art. 45, 72 and 73 of the Constitution of 1935 mentioned the duty of the government to reply to an interpellation within a defined period, or to issue a plea (explanation) of the lack thereof, and the opportunity to make it a subject of debate and resolution of the Sejm.

⁴ In the Parliament of the 3rd term BBWR [Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rządem – Non-Party Bloc of Cooperation with the Government] changed the conditions of submitting interpellations by increasing the number of required signatures.

reduction, and stabilising teachers' incomes. The MPs of different political groups would speak about help for students from poor peasants' and workers' families. In the immediate motions and interpellations appeals were made to grant scholarships to poor students of secondary schools, to establish dormitories for them, to allow them to purchase course books and notebooks at reduced prices, to grant them train ticket price reduction. There was a substantial number of interpellations pertaining to construction or renovation of school buildings in various villages and towns, and they were full of indignation about how the financial situation of teachers and schools constantly deteriorating because of inflation was being ignored.

The population of the multiethnic Republic of Poland consisted of national minorities in one third. These were represented in the Parliament by members of the lower house of the parliament and senators of Ukrainian, Jewish, and German nationality – Russians and Belarusians were fewer. The manifested lack of trust in the Polish state resulted in the lack of representation of the Lithuanian minority in the Parliaments of the Second Republic of Poland⁵. In SU and in the Parliament of the 1st term, when the National Minorities Bloc [Blok Mniejszości Narodowych] was established, only Ukrainian, Belarusian, German, and Jewish educational and cultural organisations such as “Proswita”, “Mizrasz”, or “Haskala” were represented. To the group of these representatives belonged the people's school teacher Sergiusz Kozicki (1883–1941) and the gymnasium teacher Maksym Czuczma (1887–?), chairman of the Cultural and Educational Association “Proswita”. In the years 1918–1919 Sergiusz Kozicki was a poviato education commissar of the Ukrainian People's Republic in Kamieniec Podolski. When with the Treaty of Riga the Eastern Borderlands were returned to the Republic of Poland he became a strong advocate of teaching Ukrainian in Polish schools and establishing Ukrainian schools. As a member of the Sejm of the 1st term (1922–1927), a member of the Commission of Education and a senator of the Senate of the 2nd term (1928–1930) he was a co-author of the act on the official inclusion of the Ukrainian university and university of technology in the state system. Both of the higher schools had been functioning in secret in Lwów. For this purpose he submitted 190 interpellations, which was a record number in the history of the Parliament, but these failed to produce expected results. The reason for the interpellations that included complaints about failures to respect

⁵ The situation of Lithuanians was somewhat improved, because their schools and socio-cultural organisations would receive financial help from the Republic of Lithuania (1918–1939).

children's rights to education in their "mother tongue" was the so-called "act on languages" (*ustawa językowa*)⁶ of Władysław Grabski, which theoretically provided opportunity of such education, but made it dependent on the number of children in the area where parents would demand it. In the regions where people's ethnic identities were weak and people would simply declare themselves "locals" speaking a "local" language an identity struggle began between Ukrainian and Polish officials, the latter of whom would frequently be accused of producing difficulties for those willing to submit declarations about the need for education in a minority language⁷.

German Club [Klub Niemiecki], that is, the German People's Party [Niemieckie Stronnictwo Ludowe] included two MPs. They were Karol Daczko (1860–1928), a secondary school teacher and, subsequently, inspector of German schools in Pomerania, the founder of numerous German cultural and educational organisations, and Józef Spickeman (1870–1947), who endeavoured after German minority rights. Their situation was much better due to the rules of the *Edict* that granted the German-speaking population the right to schools with German, and due to the Upper Silesian Geneva Convention⁸. In SU and the Sejm of the 1st term Karol Daczko was a speaker of the German Unity Club [Klub Zjednoczenie Niemieckie] on issues pertaining to education and farming. In 1923 together with the MP Robert Gustaw Piesch they submitted an interpellation on respecting the rights of parents to decide about the upbringing of their children⁹. Unlike MP Daczka, MP Piesch (1871–1954), a journalist and a teacher in the German Teachers' Seminar in Cieszyn, as an advocate of German interests was much more radical in demanding cultural autonomy for Silesia, with a clear inclination towards

⁶ Dz. U. RP, of July 31, 1924, Issue 49, pos. 766.

⁷ E.g. interpellation on failing to accept declarations from Ukrainian population in the Wołyń region, submitted on the 190th sitting of the Parliament of the 1st term on 27. 03. 1925, Interpellation of the Belarusian Club on sabotaging the minority languages schooling act, Interpellation on the unlawful change of Ukrainian language to Polish in Ułhniów and Żupania, Interpellation on the closing of two private Ukrainian schools in Lwów, Interpellation of the Member of the lower house of parliament Czuczmań on failure to meet the legal term to issue schooling declaration by the Ukrainian population of Bielszowa village because of unlawful actions of the village-mayor, etc.

⁸ *Edict on German language in schools* issued on Feb 7, 1919 by the Head of State, Dz. Praw R. P. 1919, Issue 14, pos. 192.

⁹ Interpellation submitted at the 34th sitting of the Parliament of the 1st term. See: Hausner, P. (1981). *Mniejszość niemiecka w województwie pomorskim w latach 1920–1939* [German minority in the Pomeranian voivodship in the years 1920–1939]. Wrocław: Towarzystwo Naukowe, and Hausner, P. (1998). *Mniejszość niemiecka na Pomorzu w okresie międzywojennym*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM.

German culture. During the War he became a member of the NSDAP. It were also Jewish publicists Samuel Hirszhorn (1876–1942) and Izaak Grünbaum (1878–1970) as well as lawyers Ignacy Schipper (1884–1943) and Feliks Perl (1871–1927) who, although they represented different political options of the Jewish minority in the Parliament¹⁰, in fighting for the rights of their minority were of a single mind and devoted their undivided attention to making certain that the passed education and schooling laws do not breach the minority regulations of the Treaty of Versailles. After the passing of the March Constitution they would concentrate on its regulations, for which they had fought a veritable battle. In the interpellations addressed to Minister of Religious Confessions and Public Enlightenment (MRCPE) they mentioned questions pertaining to the persecution of Jewish schooling with Jewish language¹¹, the lack of agreement of the authorities to establish a pedagogue training centre at the Jewish minority district in Warsaw (Izaak Grünbaum)¹² and, a number of times, to the persecution of the Jewish language.

In the Sejm of the 2nd term among the 961 interpellations 308 were submitted by the Ukrainian Club, and 191 by the remaining clubs of Slavic minorities (Russians, Belarusians). However, only 6 of these concerned educational and school issues and were addressed to the MRCPE. Half of these were submitted by the Ukrainian Club and pertained to the discrimination of Ukrainian language and youth. The number of interpellations submitted by the Jewish Club was relatively low¹³.

In the 4th term of the Parliament the number of interpellations dropped significantly, but out of the 276 interpellations 53 were addressed to the MRCPE, as they pertained to educational and schooling questions. The majority of their authors belonged to the Jewish Club, who filed complaints about persecution of Jewish youth, and the Ukrainian Club, who informed about cases of violence against Ukrainian children, about

¹⁰ The Free Association of the Jewish Members of the Sejm consisted of 4 Jewish fractions: the national-Jewish club, people's party supporters, the Orthodox, the Zionists, with 10 representatives altogether.

¹¹ Interpellation on the failure to execute the duties accepted in the Treaty of Versailles and guarantees of the March Constitution, Interpellation on public schooling for national and religious minorities, etc.

¹² Interpellation on the school authorities preventing the establishment of pedagogue training centre at the Jewish minority district in Warsaw.

¹³ Ajnenkiel, A. (1989). *Historia sejmu polskiego* [History of the Polish Sejm]. Warszawa: PWN. Vol. II, pt. 2, p. 151.

being forced to use Polish language exclusively, even in prayers, about discrimination of Ukrainian teachers, difficulties in submitting declarations of education in Ukrainian in state schools when the number of students exceeds that required by the Act.

In the last term of the Parliament that was interrupted by the outbreak of the War there were only 2 interpellations addressed to the MRCPE. One of them concerned the burning of the library and the reading room of "Proswita", and the other was submitted by Emil Sommerstein (and others)¹⁴, pertaining to the lack of security for Jews studying in higher schools. In relation to the persecutions and the acts of brutal violence taking place at universities interpellations were addressed to the Ministry of the Interior. Since schools with Russian and Czech language were few, there were no interpellations concerning their problems.

In most of the cases the Parliament would favourably address the issues mentioned in the interpellations and pass acts that met the expectations of the authors of the interpellations and that obliged the government to address the problems. The appropriate ministers could not always fulfil the obligations, especially those pertaining to financial issues in the period of rising inflation and economic crisis. The lack of statutory legal regulations concerning minorities was yet another obstacle. The failure of Polish legislature to develop statutory regulations protecting the rights of minorities and appropriate executive acts had a negative impact on the history of Poland. Subsequent cabinets executed assimilation policies aimed at minorities which were not very efficacious and that was not accepted by Belarusians and Ukrainians who were seeking their identity, and who, influenced by the USSR, included nationalist slogans in their communist political programmes. After 1935 the failure to introduce solutions asked for in the interpellations and the failure of the changes in the policy concerning the Belarusian minority lead to the Belarusian boycott of parliamentary elections, which is why they had no representation in the Parliament of the 4th and the 5th term.

The confrontation of the interpellations with the answers of the appropriate ministers allowed for the comparison of different stances. Unfortunately, few of the answers have survived until today. In spite of the obligations the government often failed to answer interpellations. If it did so it would always defend the criticised low government officials, replying that no mistakes were made. Unfortunately, the government also provided such answers in the cases when the law was evidently broken.

¹⁴ Interpellation on the lack of security in higher schools and the vicious crimes committed on their premises.

A Siberian Bietystok – the Polish small homeland in the Tomsk gubernya (turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries)

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The free Polish colonisation of Siberia at the turn of the 19th and the 20th century is a small page in the history of the region. The colonisation was caused by, among others, the land reforms that did not fully address all the problems, the edict of 1889 allowing a free settlement beyond the Ural, the start of the construction of the Siberian railway, and the great hunger in Russia. The village of Bietystok is a typical example of the resettlement action and the resulting establishment of Polish villages in Western Siberia. In 1916 its population numbered over 500. The settlers came from western Russian gubernyas, among others those of Wilno, Grodno, Warszawa, and Siedlce. The people farmed the land, and the Catholic church that they constructed helped them preserve their Polish identity, their religion, and morality. After the tragic events of the late 1930s the national character of the population began to change, and the Polish population started to undergo the process of forced integration with the Russians. Currently all that is left in the Siberian village of Bietystok is the awareness of the Polish roots of its founders and a Catholic church repossessed after 1990.

Key words: *Siberia in the 19th century; colonisation; Poles, Bietystok (in Siberia); national identity*

The history of the Polish inhabitants of Siberia was until now discussed almost exclusively in the context of their torment. They were seen as chained to wheelbarrows and sentenced to a life of hard labour in the mines of the Ural. What remained of them was only lonely crosses in the middle of the ice-covered “barbarous land”. This image was formed by 19th century romantic literature and art and some time had to pass before a discussion about these common myths could be started, and the romantic myth could be supplemented with crucial facts¹. Since the

¹ Dżakow, W. (1974). Udział Polaków w badaniach i zagospodarowaniu Syberii w XIX wieku. *Przegląd Historyczny*, vol. 65; Śliwowska W. (1991) Polscy zesańcy polityczni na

1990s numerous studies of historians, ethnographers, geologists, specialists of different branches of natural studies, scholars of literature have been undertaken, and they present the Polish contribution to the building of civilisation in Siberia, their role and significance in science, culture, and the economy².

The less “impressive” page in the history of Siberia is the voluntary colonisation of this region by Poles that took place at the turn of the 19th and the 20th century. The Polish migration began after the land reforms at the end of the 1860s failed to solve all the problems. Nevertheless, for the following two decades this voluntary settlement was still less significant than the forced one that was implemented through exiles (lifelong or temporary settlements). While in the years 1861–1874 an average of 1,000 people migrated annually (mostly peasants), it was only with the construction of a railroad that the resettlement intensified and in the years 1893–1899 it surged to nearly 100,000. After the difficult time of stagnation in the times of the revolution statistics show that in the years 1906–1914 over 200,000 peasants would settle annually beyond the Ural³. The situation was influenced by numerous factors, first and foremost by the directive published in 1889 allowing for a free selection of the place of settlement and the aforementioned construction of the Siberian railway in 1891. At the same time, the following year the great hunger in Russia began and the population started to migrate East. For the Tsarist administration populating Siberia was one of the crucial aims. In its attempts to use the local resources in the second half of the 19th century Russia was already conducting free peasant settlement on a major scale. The peasants would mostly arrive from European gubernyas. The information also reached Polish villages where, as a result of the division of farms that had been going on for generations, the phenomenon of the “hunger of land” could be seen. This situation was the cause of the first significant peasant migrations in the 1890s⁴.

Syberii w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku. Mity i rzeczywistość, *Przegląd Wschodni*, z. 2.; Jędrzychowska, B. (2000). *Polscy zesłańcy na Syberii 1830–1883. Działalność pedagogiczna, oświatowa i kulturalna*, Wrocław 2000.

- 2 Established in the 1990s, the Centre for Eastern Studies of the University of Wrocław organised a series of international scientific conferences dedicated to this subject. The papers published in connection with these conferences have served to greatly broaden the knowledge about the Polish presence in Siberia in numerous aspects, not only their torment. The following post-conference publications can serve as examples: *Kościół katolicki na Syberii. Historia. Współczesność. Przyszłość* (2002). Wrocław; *Polacy w nauce, gospodarce i administracji na Syberii w XIX i na początku XX wieku* (2007). Wrocław.
- 3 *Zestanie i katorga na Syberii w dziejach Polaków 1815–1914* (1992). Warszawa, p. 33.
- 4 Masiarz, W. (1998). Migracja chłopów polskich na Syberię w końcu XIX i na początku XX wieku. In *Syberia w historii i kulturze narodu polskiego*, Wrocław, pp. 230–231.

In the second half of the 19th century Siberia is being rapidly populated, and the government treats it as one of the most important colonised areas⁵. The region had about 3 million inhabitants in 1858 and the number multiplied to over 9 million in 53 years. At the turn of the century (1897) out of 5 million 760 thousand inhabitants of Siberia only over 870 thousand were indigenous, and nearly 4 million 890 thousand were immigrants. In 1911 the number of indigenous people reached 973 thousand, and there were 8 million 394 thousands new settlers⁶.

Probably in the 1870s there were nearly 10,000 Poles living in Siberia, and it was only in 1881 that nearly 5,000 arrived from the Kingdom of Poland alone. Every year the migration increased to reach 10,000 new settlers on 1889⁷. Peasants from Lithuanian and Latvian lands also began to migrate to Siberia, and they would mainly settle in the Tomsk gubernya. The majority of these people came to Siberia with the help of agents that convinced them to move to this region. In the Kingdom of Poland the action was being organised until the end of the 19th century. Entire families were included in special lists, and these were not only peasants. There were also, among others, weavers from the vicinity of Łódź, Zgierz, Pabianice, or Sieradz who, as a result of the economic stagnation of the beginning of the 1880s were out of work, which led to their mass migrations. They were typically of peasant ancestry⁸. As a result of stagnation in coal mining and the consequent redundancies in Zagłębie Dąbrowskie in 1909 900 families (5,000 people) found themselves on the "migration lists". Procedures were developed to provide as much information as possible about the opportunities to live in the new places of settlement. "Scouts" (also called "hodoks" – from the Russian term for emissary) selected from among the future settlers received previously collected money and were sent ahead to Siberia to learn of the conditions in which people would live in the future. Some of them returned convinced that the poverty, pervasive crime, moral decadence, negative attitudes of the Buryat tribesmen, and, last but not least, severe climate would make survival impossible. Out of the group of 5 thousand only 200 people made the decision to resettle⁹. However, according to the population census

⁵ Previously the penal colonies delayed or made impossible the process of regular colonisation: *Zestanie i katorga na Syberii...*, op. cit., p. 36.

⁶ Zvieriev, V. A. – Zujev, A. S. – Kuzniecova, F. S. (1999) *Istorija Sibiri*. Nowosybirsk, p. 365.

⁷ According to Zygmunt Librowicz, citing a Russian newspaper "Sibir", 4,955 settlers arrived from the Kingdom of Poland in 1881, and 5,708 in 1882: Librowicz, Z. (1884). *Polacy w Syberii*, Kraków, p. 265; *Ateneum* (1889) Issue 1 (IV).

⁸ *Wychoźstwo włościan z Królestwa* (1886). *Przegląd Społeczny*, Issue 1.

⁹ *Zestanie i katorga na Syberii...*, op. cit., pp. 34–35.

carried out in Russia in 1897 peasants constituted over 60% of the Polish diaspora in Siberia, although before the start of the First World War 30–39% percent of them would regularly return, which was a significantly high rate¹⁰.

The highest number of peasants from the Kingdom of Poland would settle in Western Siberia, mainly in the Tomsk gubernya¹¹. They received land there and started their villages called “posiołki”. The settlements with the highest number of Polish families stood the greatest chances of survival. In a settlement of people of the same culture the bonds of language and religion were strong. Roman Catholic parishes played a significant role. These were established at the turn of the 19th and the 20th century in the bigger cities of the gubernya. The priests were typically Polish or Lithuanian. They tried to reach even the remotest of villages at least once a year, which helped to integrate the community.

The number of Roman Catholics in the Tomsk gubernya increased 4 times in the years 1897–1911 (that of Lutherans increased 10 times, and members of the Orthodox Church – twice). In 1897 there were 8,973 of them, and after 14 years – 39,000¹². Roman Catholics preferred to settle in cities and constituted 3.11% of their entire population, and 0.87% of the rural population. However, the majority of Catholics in Siberia lived in villages, particularly in the Tomsk district and the city of Tomsk. Most of them were of Polish ancestry¹³.

Typically during the first year after settling the Roman Catholic communities would ask the authorities for permissions and help in building churches or at least small chapels. The communities organised around them would grow into bigger Polish villages that, thanks to their religious and national identity¹⁴, have survived until the Stalinist repressions of the second half of the 1930s. The immigrants, who were brought up in Roman Catholicism, who supported the stability of traditional families, and who did not recognise divorce, would live according to the same values in Siberia, which is why many children were born in marriages and hardly any out of wedlock.

¹⁰ Łukawski, Z. (1978). *Ludność polska w Rosji 1863–1914*, Wrocław, pp. 43–45.

¹¹ Chaniewicz, W. (2004). Polacy wpisani w dzieje Tomaska, *Zestawienie*, Issue 18, pp. 45–50.

¹² With 1,927,932 and 3,673,746 members of other religions – of the Orthodox Church, Old Believers, Lutherans, Jews and Muslims – in 1897 and 1911 respectively.

¹³ Niedzieluk, T. (2008). Polscy katolicy w guberni tomskiej. *Wrocławskie Studia Wschodnie*, Issue 12, pp. 69–75.

¹⁴ Jasiewicz, Z. (1996). *Wymiary kultury i tożsamości etnicznej i narodowej. Polskość i Polacy w Kazachstanie i na innych terenach dawnego ZSRR*. In *Polacy w Kazachstanie. Historia i współczesność*. Wrocław, p. 505.

A typical example of a resettlement action and the setting up of Polish villages in the Western Siberia before 1900 was the village of Bielystok (Белосток).

At the end of the 1890s (in 1896 or 1897) thanks to pro-immigration agitation and free transport, the first “scout” from the Grodno gubernya (vicinity of Szczuczyn) arrived in Tomsk. It was Aleksander Joncz. He received offers of a number of locations for nearly twenty families to settle. Having become familiar with the conditions and having made the final selection he received land for his family and all the others willing to come. In the spring of 1899 13 families who had decided to emigrate set out on a railway journey to Siberia, with 5,000 kilometres in front of them. Each of them travelled in one freight train carriage with all their belongings and farm equipment: farm animals with their feed, tools, seeds, basic furniture, food for the road. Discounts on tickets for people and equipment were an incentive¹⁵. At the same time, every family was guaranteed 30 morgens of land and 100 roubles of interest-free credit to set up their farms. However, it would later turn out that they only received 35 to 50 roubles, and some received no funds at all. In the case of the land it all depended on how large an area a family could clear for farming.

After arrival in Tomsk by railway the settlers had to board a ship that would take them to a village of Mołczanowo. From this point they went on foot and on rented carriages through the taiga to their place of settlement, which did not yet have a name.

The construction of the village was started in the Novo-Aleksandrovskoy district in the North of the Tomsk gubernya, which was at that time named Novo-Rybalovsk. After the immigrants settled they changed the name to Bielystok, which was to remind them of their native country and the nearby city of Bielystok¹⁶. The settlers were exempted from taxes for 3 years, and in the 3 following years they were to pay only 50%. Also for three years adult men did not have to do military service. Roads, bridges, and churches were built, wells were dug. The local authorities were obliged to organise warehouses and shops with food and farming tools near the new settlements. However, the corrupt and bureaucratic administration and resettlement offices could not keep up with the ever growing number of immigrants and their problems. It turned

¹⁵ Children under the age of 10 could travel free of charge, adults paid 25% of the ticket price. The fare for luggage, horses, and cattle depended on their size and the length of the journey, but it was nevertheless a fair offer.

¹⁶ Chaniewicz, V. (1993). *Bielostockaja tragiedija. Iz istorii ghenocida Poljakow w Sibiri*, Tomsk, pp. 129–136.

out that despite tax exemptions they had to pay high district taxes. They were also forced to work building roads and bridges.

The severe climate, with its short and hot summers and long winters with extreme freezing temperatures, the taiga, with its wild animals, and the very hard work with clearing new land for farming did not discourage the settlers. They quickly turned their small and primitive dug-outs into real houses with pantries, granaries, and barns for the animals¹⁷. In the first years after their arrival they would attend religious services in Tomsk, 200 km away from Biełystok, or they invited the vicar Paweł Kaziunas to visit them. That was, however, hardly convenient, so it was decided that a local church needed to be built. A collection of funds commenced, with a high tax of 5 roubles "for every soul" established. The place that was selected for the church was on a hill and visible from all around. The construction was started in 1902. The works were conducted by a group of local carpenters, who were supervised by the settlers themselves. A house and a farm for a priest were built nearby. On June 13, 1908 the construction was concluded by the consecration of the Church of Saint Anthony of Padua. On request of the settlers the Roman Catholic Province in Sankt Petersburg sent priest Hieronim Cerpento to the church in Biełystok. He would remain there until 1913. After him Mikołaj Mikasionek became the rector of the parish. He, in turn, was driven out of Biełystok in 1923 by Bolsheviks and Polish communists¹⁸.

The wooden church was designed in the shape of a Roman Catholic cross and the local pines, cedars, and larches were used to build it. Above the entrance there was a large bell tower with two bells, with a cross on its roof. The interior, with high walls, narrow windows, and stairs leading to a choir, was richly decorated with 15 large paintings of St. Anthony (today nobody can remember how many smaller paintings were there). Under the ceiling there was a large chandelier of imitation crystal, and below there were simple benches.

The church attracted more and more Catholic settlers to Biełystok. In 1916 there were 95 individual farms in the village, with 561 inhabitants, which made its population one of the largest in the area. The last of the settlers to arrive there came from Biała Podlaska. They came in 1914. At

¹⁷ Masiarz, W., op. cit. pp. 233–234.

¹⁸ Mikołaj Michasionek was arrested in Novosibirsk and sentenced to 3 years in a labour camp on the Solovetsky Islands. He died in exile: Chaniewicz, W. (1997). *Z historii kościoła katolickiego na Syberii Zachodniej Zestaniec*, Issue 2, pp. 96–103; Chaniewicz, W. (2002). *Wiejska świątynia. Z historii budowy, zniszczenia i odbudowy kościoła we wsi Białystok na Syberii*. In *Kościół katolicki na Syberii. Historia. Współczesność. Przyszłość* Wrocław, pp. 357–358.

that time the village was inhabited by Poles from many western Russian gubernyas, such as those of Wilno, Grodno, Warszawa, Siedlce¹⁹. A Catholic church allowed them to preserve their national and religious identity in the distant land of Siberia.

The church and its priests helped to preserve the national identity, religiousness, and morality of the local Polish population. The priests not only used to teach religion, but also Polish language, correct pronunciation and general culture, because a school was only built in 1917²⁰.

A new, difficult period began with the victory of Bolsheviks in 1920. With the help of the newly arrived Polish communists they started a strong anti-religion agitation and an atheist campaign²¹. The priest was driven out of Biełystok, and in 1931 the church was closed and the presbytery was confiscated and made into a school. The Poles who protested were taken to a prison in Tomsk. For some time masses were occasionally held by pr. Julian Groński, the administrator of the Roman Catholic Church for Siberia. However, he was arrested, as well, along with a group of the faithful. Among them was a representative of the parish council of Biełystok, who was accused of helping "the Polish spy and anti-soviet" Julian Groński²².

With the forced collectivisation and establishment of a kolkhoz that all the peasants were required to join a number of people were arrested and sentenced to 3 to 7 years in prison. The local communists used the atmosphere of terror to remove the cross from the bell tower and break it, and they used horses to transport the church bells away to have them melted. Even then the local population did not allow them to completely vandalize their church²³.

The inhabitants of Biełystok faced a true tragedy in the years 1937–38, when the NKVD in Tomsk arrested all Polish men aged 16 to 75 (about

¹⁹ Chaniewicz, W. *Wiejska świątynia* ..., op. cit. pp. 355–357.

²⁰ Masiarz, W. op. cit., p. 234.

²¹ What was significant in the anti-religion campaign in the Tomsk gubernya was the participation of the head of the local Education Department, and subsequently National Minorities Department and a Secretary of the Polish Office and the Tomsk Committee of the RCP (b) Kazimierz Bulanda, a future doctor of philosophy of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków in 1929. Bulanda, K. (1967). *Księga uczestników Rewolucji Październikowej*. Warszawa, p. 126.

²² Julian Groński was sentenced to 10 years in labour camps, however, he left the USSR by way of an exchange. Zygmunt Proński, head of the Parish Council of the Siberian Biełystok returned to Tomsk after a year in prison. In 1937 he was shot along with other members of the church council. Haniewicz, W. *Wiejska świątynia*..., op. cit., p. 357.

²³ Chaniewicz, W. *Wiejska świątynia*..., op. cit., p. 358.

100 persons). They were named “enemy of the people”. It was two decades after this event that the families started receiving news about the arrested in the form of documents proving their supposed membership in the Polish Military Organisation (Polska Organizacja Wojskowa) or participation in common crimes. A flood that came in the 1970s and damaged a river bank uncovered human remains, along with the truth. All the men were shot in the spring of 1938 in Kolpashev, the capital city of Narimskiy Kray²⁴. After these events there was no one left to defend the church in Bietystok and in the summer of 1938 it was completely vandalized. Some of the equipment was thrown out into the street, including the paintings, and the furniture was confiscated by the city council and the kolkhoz. In 1940 the church was officially closed as a “place of prayer”. It was to be reborn 50 years later. During the Second World War the building was made into a granary, and later into a club. This led to changes in its construction – it was lowered and the bell tower was removed from the roof. The lack of any renovations led to enormous damage.

Through all these years the Poles did not forget their religion, despite the atmosphere of terror. Older women would gather in homes or at the cemetery to read prayers and sing hymns in Polish, and to baptise “in water” new-born children in the Catholic rite. Occasionally a priest turned up, usually to baptize children. By the end of the 1980s only a few of the villagers could remember the original purpose of the decrepit building. The local administration wanted to have it pulled to the side and burnt. It was only with an article published in a district newspaper about the history of the church, written by Wasyl Haniewicz, a historian, and a descendant of the Polish settlers, that the decision was changed. When the local community learnt that the building which was to be demolished was not an old barn, but a Catholic church, they agreed that it would have been “a deadly sin to do something like that”²⁵.

In 1990 the 36 oldest inhabitants of the village petitioned for the registration of a Catholic community in Bietystok, transferring the possession of the remains of the church to them, and for help with its renovation. During the times of the “restructuring and transparency” (perestroika and glasnost’) it was possible to repossess the building. The old wooden structure was disassembled and moved to a different location, where it was placed on new foundation. It was crowned with a large Catholic cross, and a bell named Maria, cast in Poland, was

²⁴ Jędrychowska, B. (2002). Tomsk, *Gazeta Polska* (Moskwa), September, p. 3.

²⁵ Chaniewicz, W. *Wiejska świątynia...* op. cit., p. 359.

placed under the roof of the bell tower. The consecration of the new church was celebrated together with the 100th anniversary of the establishment of Biełystok. The celebrations took place on June 13, 1998, the day of St Anthony of Padua²⁶.

This Catholic church has always been the centre of the life of the Catholic community, and it is still associated with the Polish nation, even though the nationality of the local population has changed rapidly, especially after the events of 1938. Because of the lack of Polish men the Polish women would marry the Russians or the Cossacks who settled in the area. The descendants of the Polish settlers have slowly undergone the process of forced integration with Russians. In 2002 only one of the villagers could speak Polish, even though the older women could recite certain prayers and sing hymns from a book in Polish. Nevertheless, people are nowadays still aware of the Polish roots of the founders of the Siberian Biełystok.

²⁶ Masiarz, W., op. cit., p. 234; Chaniewicz, W. *Wiejska świątynia...*, op. cit., pp. 360–362.

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