

# Antoni MIRONOWICZ

## National Minorities in Poland Today

Poland has always been a multinational country. However, the percentage of non-Poles has varied over time. In the Poland of the sixteenth until the eighteenth century, Poles were estimated at only 50% of the country's total population. In the Poland created after the First World War, non-Polish citizens made up approximately one-third of the population. Only four percent of those living on the territory of contemporary Poland are today regarded as belonging to a national minority. This substantial reduction of the percentage of non-Poles resulted from the modification of Poland's borders after the Yalta Agreement, which shifted numerous Byelorussians and Ukrainians to the USSR and removed ethnic Germans from Poland. The present Polish population is one of the most ethnically homogeneous societies in Europe. However, there remain around 1.2 to 1.5 million people who belong to national minorities: about 500,000 Germans, 250,000 Ukrainians, 180,000 Byelorussians, 60,000 Lemkos, 25,000 Gypsies, 25,000 Lithuanians, 25,000 Slovaks, 15,000 Jews, 10,000 Russians, 8,000 Armenians, 4,000 Tartars, and 3,000 Czechs.

### Germans

The German minority resides throughout Poland. Its major centres are in: Upper Silesia (Katowice, Częstochowa and Opole provinces), Lower Silesia (Wrocław province), Western Pomerania (Ślupsk, Koszalin and Szczecin provinces) and Eastern Pomerania together with Mazury and Warmia (Gdańsk, Toruń and Olsztyn provinces). This minority is internally divided

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and is organised in 49 associations. The number and division of these is rooted in the way they emerged, independent of one another. Hence their scope and significance are limited to very small regions. The Union of German Social and Cultural Associations in the Republic of Poland is the umbrella organisation for a large proportion of German associations.

The Union, which encompasses German associations in Northwest Poland, is the Union of German Minority Associations in the Olsztyn-Gdańsk-Toruń Regions. The youth association of an all-Polish nature is the Union of Youth of the German Minority in the Republic of Poland. Other organisations are of a regional scope. This minority attaches much importance to its presence in local governments, particularly in Opole province. The German minority has its representatives in 60 communes.

The German minority practices cultural activity in many levels, in events encompassing a whole region and those of strictly local impact. Local cultural activity is based on club work, various German-language meetings and courses, organising libraries as well as choirs and orchestras. The largest part of the German minority belongs to the Roman Catholic Church and there are numerous Catholic masses celebrated in the German language. The remaining part of the German minority, mostly in Northeast Poland, belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession.

### **Ukrainians**

The Ukrainians can presently be found in many provinces. This dispersal is the outcome of the 1947 "Vistula" campaign (Akcja Wisła) during which the Ukrainian population was expelled from the territory in Southeast Poland to the lands in the North and West. The largest groups of Ukrainians can be found in the following provinces: Olsztyn, Koszalin, Słupsk, Suwałki, Szczecin, Gorzów, Zielona Góra, Legnica, Nowy Sącz and Przemyśl.

The largest among the various Ukrainian organisations is the Union of Ukrainians in Poland. It was formed in 1990 on the basis of the structure of the Ukrainian Social and Cultural Society which had existed since 1956. The Union has a membership of 10,000 in 182 local groups. Several organisations of a professional character operate within this organisation's framework to mention but a few: the Union of Ukrainian Physicians, the Union of Ukrainian Teachers, the Union of Ukrainian Businessmen etc. There is also a Union of Ukrainian Women and the "Plast", a scout organisation.

There are also several independent Ukrainian organisations linked with separate regional groups: the Union of Podlachia Ukrainians and the Union of Lemkos. The Union of Ukrainian Independent Youth has a different character. This Union's activists have set up the "Kontakt", an experimental the-

atre who achieved its big break when it appeared on the Polish national TV. Apart from the aforementioned kinds of organisations, the Ukrainians have also established two foundations whose purpose is to support Ukrainian culture in Poland: the Ukrainian Culture Foundation and the Foundation of St. Vladimir the Baptist of Kievan Rus.

In terms of religious affiliation, the Ukrainians in Poland belong to the Roman Catholic Church (Byzantine rite – appr. 80%) and to the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church. The Roman Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite has 95 parishes throughout Poland.

### **Gypsies**

The Gypsy community in Poland is composed, principally, of two groups: the Polish Roma and the Bergitkas. The largest Gypsy communities in Poland are in the Nowy Sącz province as well as in Zgierz, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Mława, Żyrardów, Olsztyn and Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki. One Gypsy periodical, the “Rom-po-Drom” edited in Polish and in Gypsy dialects, is published in Poland. Publications of the Library of Roma Studies also appear.

### **Lithuanians**

The Lithuanian minority resides mainly in the Northeast part of the Suwałki province - in the communes of Puńsk, Sejny and Szypliszki. However, the Lithuanians can be found throughout Poland. They have either migrated from the Suwałki district or were repatriated from Lithuania after World War II. The latter mainly live in Silesia and Pomerania.

The Lithuanian minority's largest organisation is the Association of the Lithuanians in Poland, first set up in 1957 (up to 1992 it was called the Lithuanian Social and Cultural Society). It is based in the town of Sejny. The society has an approximate membership of 2000 in 47 local groups. There are two other associations of the Lithuanian minority in Poland: the St. Casimir Lithuanian Society and the Community of the Lithuanians in Poland.

As far as the cultural activities of the Lithuanians in Poland are concerned, they comprise such diverse events as the “Saskrydis” Review of Folklore Ensembles, the Festival of Barn Theatres and an outdoor painting sessions for folk artists to mention but a few. A fortnightly “Ausra” is published. The Lithuanians at present have their own radio programme: one hour per week in the Białystok broadcasting station of the Polish Radio.

Education in the Lithuanian language is available in the Suwałki province. There are five primary schools and one secondary grammar school in which



the language of instruction is Lithuanian, while there are six other schools that offer Lithuanian as an optional subject. Lithuanian is the largest national minority language of instruction in schools. As regards university studies, there is a Department of the Lithuanian Language at the University of Poznań, while a Department of Baltic Philology operates in Warsaw.

Most Lithuanians belong to the Roman Catholic Church. Catholic masses are presently celebrated in Lithuanian in four parishes in the Suwałki region as well as in Wrocław and Warsaw.

### **Slovaks and Czechs**

The Slovak minority in Poland is mainly resident in the Nowy Sącz province, as well as in the territory of Spisz and Orawa. Slovaks can also be found in Warsaw, Kraków and Katowice. These are all small communities, though important, as they are the intellectual back-up for the Slovak society resident in Poland. Those living in Spisz and Orawa are mainly farmers.

The Czechs living in Poland are mainly the descendants of the Czech Brethren who settled in Poland after fleeing from religious persecution in their homeland. They presently reside in Żelów and its surroundings (Piotrków province) as well as in Lublin. Another group comprises the Czechs living in the region of Cieszyn and Dolina Kłodzka along the border with the Czech Republic.

The Czechs and Slovaks have jointly established the Social and Cultural Society of the Czechs and Slovaks in Poland. The Society was founded in 1957 when a number of smaller organisations merged. The Society boasts 36 districts and publishes its own monthly „Zivot” in the Slovak and Czech languages and partially in Polish (one page). Schools with Slovak as the language of instruction are situated in the Spisz and Orawa region (Nowy Sącz province). There are seventeen schools in which Slovak is an optional subject, attended by 498 pupils. Two primary schools are classified as schools with Slovak as the language of instruction. There is one secondary grammar school in which Slovak is optionally taught, the number of pupils there being thirty-one. The Czech system of education is at an organisational stage. The Czech language is being taught as of this year in two schools in the town of Rybnik.

### **Jews**

The Jewish minority community comprises people living mainly in Polish urban centres like Warszawa, Wrocław, Kraków, Bielsko-Biała, Częstochowa, Gdańsk and Legnica. The Jewish community is relatively small today.

The largest Jewish organisation is the Social and Cultural Society of the Jews in Poland, with fifteen local branches. One of the most important cultural institutions of the Jews in Poland is the professional Jewish Theatre in Warszawa. The remaining social organisations are the Association of Jewish Veterans and Victims of the Second World War, the Forum of Jewish Intellectuals and the Union of Jewish Students and Youth. The Jewish Historical Institute acting as a social research unit has a different character.

Two Jewish newspapers include the “Jewish World” which is bilingual

(Yiddish and Polish), and sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and Arts. A youth periodical is also published "Jidele" which is entirely in Polish. A number of Polish Jews are members of the Religious Union of the Judaic Faith. The remainder is without religious affiliation. There are no schools in Poland presently in which Hebrew is taught.

### **Minority Legislation**

After the General Election of June 1989, the post-Communist Polish authorities raised the subject of national minorities. It was a new idea since the communist Polish government from Edward GIEREK onwards maintained that Polish society was completely homogeneous and that the problem of national minorities did not exist.

In recognizing this issue, the new Polish authorities appointed two councils. The Committee for Ethnic and National Minorities was appointed by the Parliament in August 1989 and the Committee for National Minorities was appointed by the Polish government on 7 September, 1990. Unfortunately in reality the activity of the former Committee proved to be insignificant and the latter one did not function in practice.

In a similar way, the activity of the committees appointed by the Parliament between 1991 and 1993 did not produce any substantial results. The activity of the Polish Government's Office for National Minorities, in the Ministry of Culture, was limited to the distribution of very modest resources for cultural events. The subject of minorities was taken up by the Parliament again when new laws regarding the national educational system, the electoral regulations, and radio and TV broadcasting were passed. As a result of these new laws, national minorities were granted the right to learn their languages and history in school and to receive access to radio and television.

Although the local elections of 1990 were carried out without any attention paid to the national minorities, national minority candidates managed to gain a number of positions proportionate to their percentage of the population. For example, in Grodek, of 24 seats, the Byelorussian candidates gained 22. In the Parliament elected in 1991, seven deputies represented the German minority and one represented the Byelorussians. In the parliamentary election of 1993, the minorities obtained four seats.

### **Byelorussians**

After World War II, the Byelorussian population, estimated at 300,000, lived mostly in the Bialystok region. Polish nationalists forced some Byelorussians to leave Poland and move to the Byelorussian Soviet

Socialist Republic. Only in 1956 were the Byelorussians permitted to organise their own cultural organisation. The Byelorussian Cultural Society was the only legal Byelorussian organisation. This society was financed and supervised by the Polish Interior Ministry. The Society published calendars and books of poetry, organised folk music festivals and literary competitions for young people and children. It also established the Byelorussian Museum in Białowieża, which was abolished in 1976 as “unnecessary”.

Today, Byelorussians can be found in Białystok and a part of the Suwałki province. Apart from these regions groups mainly of Byelorussian intellectuals reside in most major Polish cities like Warsaw, Gdańsk or Lublin.

After 1989, new Byelorussian organisations were activated. The Byelorussian Democratic Union was created in 1990 as the only political party of a national minority in Poland. Members of this party were elected to some provincial and municipal councils. The Byelorussian Federation, established in 1990, unites seven organisations and works without any financial support from the Polish government. Some Byelorussian periodicals are available in Poland today: the weekly “Niwa,” the monthly “Czasopis”. A student paper - “Sustreczy” - also appears, though irregularly. Byelorussians have their own daily programme broadcast by the Polish Radio station in Białystok.

The Byelorussian Museum in Hajnówka is now under construction, financed solely by the Byelorussian community. The Festival of Orthodox Church Music in Hajnówka has achieved international recognition. The literary group “Białowieża,” linking Byelorussian writers, has significant achievements to its credit.

The Byelorussian youth movement can boast of a multitude of successes. The movement is composed of two organisations: the Byelorussian Student Union and the Union of Byelorussian Youth. There are two other organisations of a social and creative nature: the Byelorussian Literary Association “Białowieża” and the Association of Byelorussian Journalists.

The Byelorussian language is taught in 43 primary schools in the Białystok province. Optional teaching of Byelorussian is pursued in two secondary grammar schools. The rate of quantitative changes in the teaching of the Byelorussian language differs from the rate typical of some other minorities. The network of schools remains unchanged while the number of pupils attending Byelorussian language classes is systematically dropping. Today the Department of Byelorussian Philology operates at the University in Białystok. Most Byelorussians in Poland are members of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church, only a small number being Roman Catholic.

However, the diminishing number of young Byelorussians learning their native language threatens this flourishing community life. Assimilation and the abandoning of one's own culture is common as the whole of Poland is taking over the culture of the West. This is the case especially in larger municipal communities. In smaller ones, where the culture is still preserved, antagonisms between the Byelorussian and Polish nationalists arise at times, e.g. in villages where Byelorussians are identified with the Orthodox faith. In Narew, the Orthodox church was burned down and difficulties emerged in returning the property of the Orthodox Church. Sometimes certain local Białystok newspapers argue that Byelorussians contributed to the introduction of communism into Poland. The individuals spreading these views do not consider the Byelorussians to be the original inhabitants of Poland and see them as a foreign group. This treatment of the Byelorussian minority in Poland has had repercussions in Polish-Byelorussian relations.

Northeast Poland, where most Byelorussians live, is one of the least developed regions of Poland regarding industry, commerce, and services. Agriculture is also underdeveloped because of the poor, sandy soil.

Byelorussians in Poland have no separatist tendencies. It is their claim to be treated as equals, to be able to develop their own culture and customs and to participate actively in the governing of the region where they live. The Byelorussians hope that the integration of Poland into the European Union brings about the adoption of European standards in the field of minority rights and thus safeguards the future development of the Byelorussians' national identity.



### **Antoni MIRONOWICZ: Nemzeti kisebbségek és a mai Lengyelország**

Lengyelország mindig is többnemzetiségű ország volt, ám a jaltai egyezmény után a fehéroroszok és az ukránok már a Szovjetunióhoz tartoztak, és a német nemzetiségűek is eltűntek Lengyelországból. A mai Lengyelország egyike a leginkább homogén országoknak Európában, ahol a kisebbségben élő emberek számát mintegy 1,2-1,5 millióra teszik az ország teljes népességében. Ha sorra vesszük a főbb kisebbségeket, megtaláljuk a németeket, ukránokat, románokat, litvánokat, szlovákokat, cseheket, zsidókat és fehéroroszokat egyaránt. Minden kisebbségnek megvan a maga szervezeti rendszere, amely kapcsolatban áll az általuk működtetett – főként oktatási és kulturális – intézményekkel, s ezekben különféle tevékenységek folynak a lengyel jogi keretek között. A lengyel kormányzat az utóbbi években bizonyos új lépésekre szánta el magát: a nemzeti kisebbségeknek engedélyezték, hogy tanulhassák nyelvüket és történelmüket az iskolában, és hogy megjelenhessenek a rádióban és a televízióban. Az esszé különös figyelmet szentel a lengyelországi fehérorosz kisebbség helyzetének.

## Antoni MIRONOWICZ: Mniejszości narodowe we współczesnej Polsce



Polska od zawsze była krajem wielonarodowościowym, ale po porozumieniu w Jaltcie Białorusini i Ukraińcy zostali przemieszczeni do ZSRR. Również etniczni Niemcy zostali usunięci z Polski. Obecnie Polska jest jednym z najbardziej jednorodnych narodowościowo krajów w Europie, w którym mniejszość ocenia się na 1,2-1,5 milionów całej populacji. Głównymi mniejszościami Polski są Niemcy, Ukraińcy, Romowie, Litwini, Słowacy, Czesi, Żydzi oraz Białorusini. Każda z mniejszości posiada system organizacji związanych z instytucjami, które prowadzą (głównie edukacyjnymi i kulturalnymi). Ich różnorodne działania odbywają się w zgodzie z polskimi ramami prawnymi. W ostatnich latach przez polski rząd zostały podjęte sprzyjające temu kroki; ponadto mniejszościom narodowym zagwarantowano prawo do nauki własnego języka i historii w szkole oraz dostęp do radia i telewizji. W eseju znajduje się również szeroki opis sytuacji mniejszości białoruskiej w Polsce.

## Antoni MIRONOWICZ: Národnostní menšiny vdnešním Polsku



Polsko bylo vždy mnohonárodnostní zemí, ale po Jaltské konferenci byla běloruská a ukrajinská menšina odsunuta do SSSR a stejně tak i etničtí Němci museli Polsko opustit. Dnes je tedy Polsko jednou z nejhomogennějších zemí v Evropě, kde národnostní menšiny představují asi jen 1,2–1,5 miliónu osob z celkového počtu populace. Mezi nejvýznamnější můžeme počítat menšinu německou, ukrajinskou, romskou, litevskou, slovenskou, českou, židovskou a běloruskou. V rámci polského právního systému je každé z minorit umožněno vytvoření vlastního organizačního schématu, se kterým souvisí i zajištění vlastních institucí – zvláště vzdělávacích a kulturních – a dalších aktivit. V posledních letech byly polskou vládou v otázce menšin podniknuty některé kroky. Ty jim zajistily právo na výuku svého jazyka a dějin ve škole, právo na přístup do médií a podobně. V článku je věnována zvláštní pozornost běloruské menšině v Polsku.

## Antoni MIRONOWICZ: Nationale Minderheiten im heutigen Polen



Polen war immer schon ein multinationales Land, aber im Zuge der Konferenz von Jalta wurden Weissrussen und Ukrainer in der UdSSR umgesiedelt und ethnische Deutsche aus Polen vertrieben. Heutzutage ist Polen eines der homogensten Länder Europas. Minderheiten werden auf 1,2 bis 1,5 Millionen Menschen geschätzt. Die grössten Minderheiten sind Deutsche, Ukrainer, Roma, Litauer, Slowaken, Tschechen, Juden und Weissrussen. Jede Minderheit ist auf ihre eigene Weise organisiert. Dies geschieht grösstenteils durch ihre eigenen ausbildenden und kulturellen Institutionen, ausserdem findet vieles im Rahmen des polnischen Rechtssystems statt. In den letzten Jahren hat die polnische Regierung in diesem Bereich einige Schritte unternommen. Nationale Minderheiten wurde das Recht zugesprochen ihre Sprache und Geschichte in den Schulen zu lehren und Radio- und Fernsehprogramme auszustrahlen. Zur Situation der weissrussischen Minderheit in Polen gibt es einen eigenen Artikel.