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THE SLOVAK MINORITY WITHIN POLISH CARPATHIAN BORDERLAND

The Slovaks inhabit an area of southern Poland within two historical and territorial units - Orawa and Spisz, separated by Polish-speaking Podhale. A small groups of these minority living in few big cities: Cracow, Katowice and Warsaw. In view of an absence of the confirmed data it is difficult to determine even a rough number of Slovaks living in Poland (such information has not been included in the National Census since 1950).

Considering only the active members of the Cultural Association of Czechs and Slovaks in Poland (Kulturno-Socialna Spoločnosť Čechov a Slovákov v Poľsku), their number is evaluated to 2700 in Spisz and to 1000 in Orawa (Kłosińska, 1992, *Mniejszości narodowe...*, 1994). Unofficially, the Association's representatives estimate a share of Slovak minority in total number of Spisz and Orawa population to 60%. This results from a general assumption that all people born on this area in the families living here for a long time are the Slovaks. Non-Slovak population, according to this theory, constitute mainly representatives of state, economic and church administration and their families, being the influx element. On the other hand, the local Poles evaluate a number of the Slovaks to 3% of the region's inhabitants (Sobczyński, Zawadzka, 1988). That means that the Slovaks evaluate their population in Poland to approx. 22 000 persons while, according to local Polish estimating, Spisz and Orawa are inhabited by slightly more than 1200 Slovaks, which is even less than the number of the Association's members.

Until 1989, the problems of national minorities have been subordinated to Polish Ministry of Home Affairs, thus the data provided by this ministry were rather reliable. The number of Slovaks was determined then to 12 000. On 8th December, 1989 the Association's president, W. Molitoris defined in his TV interview the number of Slovaks and Czechs in Poland to 30 thousand that nearly corresponds with my previous calculations. A good discernment was showed by the author of Soviet guide-book "*Naselenie mira*" - S.J. Bruk (1986), who determined the number of Slovaks in Poland to 22 thousand. Unquestionably, this is at

present a fourth national minority in Poland (in respect of numbers), after the Germans, Ukrainians and Belorussians (Sobczyński, Strzelecki, Michalski, 1994).

The area inhabited by the Slovaks forms, from physiographic point of view, an evident depression in the curve of Carpathians. Orawa forms a relative depression in comparison to the Babia Góra Range situated to the west, and Tatry and Podhale Mountain Range, situated to the east. The last physiographic formations are situated to the west of Polish Spisz, which from the north and east is limited by Pieniny. Such location facilitated the movements of human groups to both directions through the difficult Carpathians massives. In this way for ages, the valleys of the Skawa and Raba to the valley of Orawa throughout Sieniawa and Spytkowice passes and by Dunajec and Poprad valleys up to Hungarian Lowland, were creating the roads for trade.

Within these roads the settlement streams were fluctuating towards Upper Hungary (former name of Slovakia), crossing the Slovak and later on, the German streams flowing from the west and south.

Until 10th century a border between Polish and Slovak tribes was created by the Baltic Sea and Black Sea water division on the main ridge of the Carpathians. When the Vistula tribes were infused by the Polish State and the Slovaks - by Hungary in the middle of 10th century, this border achieved for the first time the status of political boundary.

Weakly settled Trans-Carpathian wildernesses became slowly an object of Slovak expansion. From 13th century the Orawian castles, donated by Hungarian king Bela IV to the Donch's tribe constituted the focal point of alien expansion in Orawa (Gotkiewicz, 1939). North of that borderline the wilderness area was inhabited by Polish population from Oświęcim Duchy flowing here until 14th century. Groups of this population have been preserved on Slovak Orawa until today (Małacki, 1938; Semkowicz, 1932-39). Polish-Hungarian boundary in Orawa on the slopes of Beskid mountains endured almost until the first partition of Poland on 5th July, 1772.

Problem of Spisz boundary was slightly different. Although the Hungarian historical sources refer to the fact of assuming the rule over the Spisz region by legendary Hungarian king - Arpad, but later on Spisz with the entire Slovakia has been included into Poland. In spite of this, Hungarian settlement came here earlier, in 11th-12th century. Poland lost Spisz on Poprad in the indefinite circumstances - probably in 1145. The Hungarians were colonizing Spisz by German element, brought by king Geza II. Colonists have advanced so far that in 1271 king Stephen established for Spisz Saxons (called *Zipsers*) a separate province of 24

towns with capital in Lewocza, subordinated directly to the Hungarian crown. The area given to Saxons surpassed Hungarian boundaries to the right, Polish bank of Poprad. The voivode of Cracow - Teodor, colonizing these lands since 13th century was using German settlers, too. Only from the middle of 13th century, the Cistercian monastery founded in Szczyrzyc, began colonization of these lands by Polish element. Polish settlement entered the south throughout Dunajec and Poprad valley, reaching Podoliniec, Gniazda and Lubowla (Semkowicz 1938). In 14th century Hungarians moved boundary, up to the left bank of Dunajec (Uj-Bela - Nowa Biała village) carried out this colonization using Polish element, too (*Lud polski..*, 1910). The Hungarian ruling over the Polish Spisz lasted for 100 years. In 1412 Hungarian king Sigismund of Luxembourg, in return for lending him a considerable amount of money by Polish king Władystaw Jagiełło, pawned the Spisz region with 16 towns to Poland. It was an area consisting of 5 enclaves, the biggest of which Podoliniec region - adjoined territory of Poland. Entire area of a deposit comprised 1100 km₂ (*Spisz, Orawa i ziemia..*, 1939).

The Hungarian attempts to regain Spisz by paying off the debts or, on the diplomatic way failed and only just before the partitions in 1769, it was taken by force of arms. Political situation of the region shaped after the partitions of Poland maintained until the end of I World War. The boundary on Orawa and Spisz, having the intra-state character between Austrian Galicia and Hungarian Slovakia (Upper Hungary) left two areas inhabited by the Slovaks at the Hungarian side.

After loosing Orawa and Spisz for the benefit of Hungary, the Poles engaged in their tragical events (the partitions, national insurrections) were slowly forgetting Polish inhabitants of the lost lands. Yet, the population of these lands consisted mainly of the peasants, unconscious of their descent (Goetel, 1930). Alternately magyarized or slovakized, working hard on their infertile soil, they completely lost the ties with the ancestry country (Mileski, 1930). Activation of Polish element in Orawa and Spisz occurred only at the beginning of 20th century and intensified after the break-up of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, when the political blank followed (Machay, 1923). Similar activity was shown by Slovaks inhabiting this region that had to involve conflicts. A conflict became of interstate character after the revival of Czechoslovak and Polish statehood in 1918. At the conference in Paris on 29th September, 1919, a plebiscitary area in the parts of Orawa and Spisz has been settled (Machay, 1919; *Spisz, Orawa i Okręg..*, 1919). As plebiscitary regions have been inhabited mostly by Polish population, Czechoslovakia for fear of loosing the plebiscite, aimed at avoiding it by different diplomatic actions. Benefiting from the fact that Poland was surviving

the hardest moment of war with the Soviet Russia, Czechoslovakia forced Poland to sign in Spa, on 16th July, 1920, a withdrawal of plebiscite, using the blackmail of stopping the ammunition supplies and closing the transit supplies of gun from the west. A boundary was delimited by the Ambassadors Conference on 27th July, 1920. The massive of Babia Góra and the commune Lipnica Wielka was divided in such way that Poland received 2/3 of a village's population but only 1/3 of arable lands. The boundary was traversing the cottages, roads and fields across the village. All villagers had their grounds beyond the state boundary. They succeeded only on 5th June, 1924, during the delimitation of a boundary. It was agreed that instead of a part of Lipnica Wielka with 800 inhabitants, Poland will give Czechoslovakia two Orawian villages: Głodówka and Sucha Góra, of a similar area but with 1250 inhabitants. The fragment of Orawa incorporated to Poland by decision of the Ambassadors Conference (called Polish Orawa) was inhabited at that time by 23 thousand people, 98% of which declared themselves to be Poles.

Undoubtedly, Poland has suffered the largest losses in result of the Ambassadors Conference in Spisz, inhabited by the Poles, Jews and Germans but there were no Slovaks. A verdict from 1920, assigned Poland 1/4 of Spisz area i.e. 14 villages with 9 thousand inhabitants. 22 thousand Poles were left on Slovak side. The boundary was delimited as irrationally as in Orawa. In Jurgów all houses were on Polish side but the fields, meadows and forests belonging to its inhabitants were left on Slovak side in, so called, Jaworzyna. In the first winter after the boundary's delimitation, inhabitants were using the hoardings as a fuel, because their forests remained on the other side of boundary.

Poland made the correction of the boundary by force, benefiting from a weakening of Czechoslovakia in October, 1938, when together with occupation of Trans-Olza area there were revindicated also two villages given away before: Głodówka and Sucha Góra in Orawa as well as Jaworzyna, Zdziar and a part of Pieniny near Lechnica in Spisz (Mileski, 1939). However, on 1st September, 1939, together with Hitler's army, Polish Orawa and Spisz were attacked by the forces of Slovak Republic created under the protection of Germany. According to the German-Slovak agreement of 21st November, 1939, Orawa and Spisz region was subordinated to Slovak authorities within the border-lines from 1914 (Hungarian boundary settled already before ages), who ruled over there until the end of the II World War (*Podhale w czasie okupacji..*, 1972).

The period of Slovak occupation in Orawa and Spisz was for the local population - paradoxically - the period of relative welfare. A level of life has been improved in comparison

with the pre-war period in Poland, also the neighbouring villages belonging to the General Government. The attempts at solving a problem of overpopulation in villages were undertaken, the inhabitants of these lands were being employed in Slovakia, the Reich and even in Yugoslavia. Men were employed in road-building trade, with quite good salary. An easiness of receiving a job and good salaries have remained until today in the consciousness of Orawians who did not realise that these roads allowed Germans to wage a war. During Slovak occupation, the shops were full of goods: the food, flour, sugar, only supplies of tools and nails were slightly worse. At that time there was a hunger in General Government, that is why the Poles were often crossing the frontier, offering horses and spirit instead of food. The smuggling traditions became deeply rooted in the consciousness of inhabitants. Even today, the inhabitants of Orawian Podwilk who go to Spytkowice say that they '*go to Poland*'. Slovakization was carried on throughout the war with a church who, not without a reason, was recognized as the institution polonizing the population. Polish priests were being exchanged to Slovak ones or, forced to preach in Slovak language that was not difficult in view of similarity of both languages. The Slovak government benefited from the fact that the country's president was priest Tiso who came into occupied area in 1940.

In December 1944, Orawa was entered by German army without any resistance. The front maintained there from January, 1945 for 10 weeks. The Red Army was slowly moving from the northern west, but after Jabłonka occupation, a front became settled between this village and Chyżne until May, 1945. After a passage of Soviet troops the Slovak Militia was created which forced out the Polish Militia. The boundary posts with Russian staff were established firstly in Chyżne but soon they were withdrawn to the pass of Spytkowice and Czarny Dunajec (to the former Hungarian and lately German-Slovak boundary), suggesting with the same the Czechoslovak nationality of Orawa.

In July, 1945, with a passive attitude of Soviet Army, Polish troops and Militia entered Orawa and Spisz pacifying the villages. The Slovaks resisted by force of arms, among others on the tower of a church in Piekielnik (Machejek, 1956). After two-day fights the Poles conquered the whole Orawian area. The Slovaks claim that since Polish offensive, entire population opted for their Czechoslovak nationality. This is very likely, taking into consideration that Poland was the country already governed by the communists, while Czechoslovakia was still a democratic, highly industrialized country. A positive evaluation of the Slovak occupation did not encouraged opting for Poland, either. The local population thinks that the signal for beginning the fights by Poland was the renewed shift of the boundary

posts belonging to the Red Army to Jeleśnia stream in Chyżne at the end of May, 1945. Spisz area was finally taken by Poland only in Autumn, 1945. In spite of animated diplomatic activity of the USSR aiming at a peaceful solution of the Czechoslovak - Polish disputes, it was impossible to sign the boundary treatment by both sides. Such a treatment was formally signed only on 13th June, 1958, and the demarcation was completed in the sixties. In both cases, the boundaries demarcated after the I and II World Wars left the sense of wrong on both sides.

The demarcation of a boundary did not eliminate the conflicts. In 1957, during the flood, a river-bed of the boundary stream Jeleśnia changed its course cutting off 2 ha of Polish grounds. After a time the marks of boundary were shifted to the new bank of a stream and in 1976, the authorities of Dolny Kubin - Slovakia, turned down the Polish rights for these fields. Czechoslovak citizens have in Poland 47 ha of grounds in Orawa and can freely cultivate them while the crops can be entirely taken to their motherland. On the other hand it their sole private property as in Czechoslovakia their grounds were taken away by the co-operative long time ago. Then, 140 Polish farmers and the Forest Community from Lipnica have almost 100 ha of lands in Czechoslovakia. Since 1976, the Slovak side has limited the access to these lands for their owners, in 1970 the forest produce was taken and in 1981 the remaining grounds, without indemnity. The attempts of intervention at the local level failed, also the ones at the government level were ineffective. Czechoslovak government realizing a policy of the villages' communization included the captured lands into the state farms without indemnities for Polish owners.

During Stalin period the communist authorities of Poland were minimalizing a problem of national minorities. The more complex problems were solved by the exterminations and mass displacements (the Germans, Ukrainians and Lemkos). The Slovak problem did not exist at all. Only in result of political changes after 1956, the conditions for a limited activity of national minorities occurred under the control of security service. The Cultural Society of Czechs and Poles in Poland (called in Slovak '*Spolok*') was founded in 1957 with the authorities seat in Cracow. From the beginning, the Slovaks constituted the dominating element (in 1995 - 97%) of this organization (Czechs live in Poland in small centres: Kudowa, Zelów, Gęsiniec) (Barwińska 1995). The Society's branches are active in all these places but their biggest concentration appears in Orawa (14 centres) and Spisz. The Society is publishing its own journal „*Život*” in Czech, Slovak and Polish languages as the main task of this organization is a fight for preserving language and national culture of both minorities. Most of

villages inhabited by the Slovaks have the community centres and libraries, often being the sole cultural centres. The folklorist singing and dancing troupes cultivate the regional traditions often attending the festivals in Slovakia. However, the real influences of the Society upon Slovak environment were not too high.

In 1994, it concentrated not more than 20% of Slovak and Czech population while a share of Czechs was higher. Also the subscribers of "Život" are not numerous while compared to the entire population of these nationalities. The Association activists explain this with little social activity characteristic for rural people and, to some extent with the fear not only for repression but rather for a break of socio-professional carrier. The fact is that Slovaks were not offered with any important administrative, political or economic functions in their communes. They were separated from the commune's social activity. Only in education their share was slightly higher. The roman-catholic church was not engaging Slovaks in the parishes of Orawa and Spisz either, although the masses were being said also in Slovak. In the army too, a declaration of Slovak nationality was causing the worse recruit's classification.

In contradiction, the Slovak's education had its best period after the II World War. Educational system has been functioning since 1947, but now it's strongly criticized. In the beginning, schools with Slovak language were functioning almost in every village. They were subordinated to the Ministry of Education which was preparing the handbooks (also criticized). Teachers were being taught in Warsaw and Cracow at the faculties of Slavonic studies but they had to be replaced by the graduates of Pedagogical School in Bratislava because of a language problem. Cultural and educational organization "Matica Slovenska" was helpful in very limited extent. It founded a scholarship for pupils enabling them an education in schools of Dolny Kubin, Bratislava and Banska Bystrica. From 1980, the number of scholarships considerably diminished and after the martial law in Poland was practically stopped.

At present the Slovak educational system in Poland is in 'a state of agony'. Only few Slovak classes have remained in Spisz schools. In Orawa there-are still 13 schools formally active (beside Polish ones). But a practice is different. A majority of these schools ceased teaching a Slovak language because of lack of pupils. Frequently, only few children from two or three families learn this language. An unique in the country, Slovak secondary school in Jablonka has been acting since 1952. Slovak language is being taught here for 4 years, 3 hours a week. Most of remaining subjects, except Polish language and history, are taught in Slovak simultaneously with Polish terminology. It should be said that for Orawa and Spisz inhabitants

literary Slovak is as foreign as literary Polish as the Orawians speak a distinct Orawian dialect, recognized as transitional form between Polish and Slovak languages. In Spisz one speaks Polish dialect with some Slovak denizens. In Jabłonka secondary school there are also children from Spisz. In 1994, these school have only 29 pupils.

The influx of young people to Slovak schools is very weak. The choice of Polish school is often determined by a distance from home. Only sporadically children have to walk some kilometres to Slovak school that is rather difficult in this region, especially in winter. The Slovaks explain a decline of their national school by the lack of perspectives after graduation and the fear for declaration of the origin. In a situation when almost all inhabitants speak Orawian or Spisz dialect, it is easy to hide a national consciousness, it is only declarative. Most of people act this way, the Slovak nationality is being declared only by the Association activist group. In official talks they underline their nationalistic views but privately they are fanatic chauvinists. A large part of youth of Orawa and Spisz continues their education in the secondary schools in Nowy Targ, Zakopane and in Cracow university. Attending Polish primary school is conditioning the exams passing. This is also the often cause of giving up learning in Slovak school just at the beginning of education.

Generally, although the number of Slovaks in Spisz is evaluated higher than in Orawa, but Slovak population in Orawa is more active. The Slovak cultural activity is being observed there in every village while in Spisz in few villages only (Nowa Biała, Krępachy, Jurgów and Kacwin). While Orawa has preserved the Slovak traditions and heritage, Spisz has been strongly polonized. In the last place it should be pointed out that research works on Slovak population in Poland were being conducted in the conditions of the communist power, when the freedom of declarations and the socio-political activity of local population were strongly restricted. Today there are more numerous social groups declaring again their Slovak origin. Also the Cultural Association of Czechs and Slovaks in Poland has animated its activity and changing name to Socio-cultural Association of Slovak in Poland, so the Czech's part now forms only the branch of Slovak association (Barwińska, 1995).

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