

KASHUBIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT. AN ATTEMPT AT THE HISTORY OVERVIEW

Kashubian national movement emerged in the mid-nineteenth century out of the need to protest against the political consolidation and cultural assimilation enforced by the Prussian state, within the borders of which were the Kashubians. Its purpose was the protection and development of their own identity, of which the language was the foundation, and struggle for the legal status on the German-Polish border.

The development of Kashubian statehood was interrupted early, which stopped the natural formation of the Kashubian (Pomeranian) nation. Although the West State ruled by the royal Griffin dynasty survived from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century, its population had been Germanized a lot sooner. In the Middle Ages Gdańsk Pomerania enjoyed independence for a little more than a century. After that it fell into the hands of the Teutonic Knights for almost 150 years. Further 300 years it was under the rule of Royal Prussia administered by Polish Kingdom, and finally, during the first partition of Poland it became a part of the Prussian State. Nevertheless, traditionally it is *the whole of Pomerania from the Baltic Sea to the Noteć river* – defines Józef Borzyszkowski¹ – *by the lower Oder and Vistula, this is the original Kashubia, the spiritual homeland of contemporary Kashubians*. It is this tradition that the representatives of native intelligence called for in the mid-nineteenth century, through which *the remnant Slavs of the southern Baltic Sea coast* – as it was already said about Kashubians – over the next several decades were awoken from their lethargy and started their own path to national revival.

Kashubians in the nineteenth century were a community of which vast majority was nationally unconscious. *It is remarkable that most of the evidence regarding the national consciousness of Kashubians originating in the second half of the nineteenth century* – as written by Gerard Labuda² – *accuses them either of a far-reaching dependence on German culture, or a total coldness and indifference in national matters*. The stimulus for the revival came from the European Revolutions of 1848. The Prussian state was stifling aspirations of the national minorities for any sort of autonomy. In the minds of Poles from the Congress Poland or Galicia, Kashubia and Kashubians almost did not exist. Under these conditions Dr. Florian Ceynowa from Sławoszyno near Puck, participant of a failed uprising in 1846, formulated program of the *Kashubian-Slavic Nation*, giving rise to the Kashubian national movement. It was year 1850, when Ceynowa published his political credo entitled *Kashubians to Poles*, in which he crystallized his view – the choice of independent road to Kashubian ethnic revival. Initiator of the "Kashubian case", he emphasized the Kashubian

identity and saw its ennoblement and development in the realization of the idea of rebirth of all Slav nations. He introduced Kashubia to a large European research platform and gave the foundations to the Kashubian literature.

Although Ceynowa's actions initiated a period of national revival, the fruits of his labour became apparent only in the twentieth century. His ideals partially appealed to "Young Kashubians", a generation of activists gathered around the "Griffin", a magazine formed in 1908. The Young Kashubians acknowledged as their main objective to work "*on rising Kashubians-Pomeranians culturally, politically and economically*"³. They have adapted Ceynowa's slogans to their times and reality, abandoning the idea of Pan-Slavism. They came up with the slogan *what is Kashubian, is also Polish* and decided to *insert Kashubian roots into the Polish culture*⁴. However, shortly afterwards the views of some of them have changed in the direction of Ceynowa's thought. Aleksander Majkowski, the leader of the camp, started slowly to move away from his pro-Polish views of his adolescence years as early as during the Great War. He wrote in his diary: *In scientific, linguistic and ethnographic terms it is beyond any doubt that the language of today's (...) Kashubians is a distinct language, and therefore they are not Poles, but form a separate nation*⁵. The policy of the Polish state, newly independent from 1918, within which found itself part of the land inhabited by the Kashubian people, led to the final crystallization of his views. Majkowski evaluated this policy as follows: *Germany needed a 800-900 years to conquer Baltic coast. You can stick to the Prussian model and hold Kashubians in dependence, you can even force them to take part in the major state events, but they are not naive enough to give their hearts and souls in return for pretences or promises. To break them and to regard as ethnographic rejects is an illusion. Due to the enslavement, they are very resilient and close to one another just as the Jewish race is. And to annihilate them, in my opinion, is not in the interest of the Polish state, because in them it has the best guardians of the Baltic stronghold*⁶. As a kind of addition to these observations should be the words that the "Griffin's" creator directed at the end of his life to the Slavonic scholar, Czech Antonín Frinta: *Due to the prevailing relations, which after the war radically changed Kashubian opinion, there is a deep antagonism among Polish and Kashubian people. It is so great that it is not in the interest of the Slavs and could only benefit "King of the Prussia" (...) As a result of persecuting Kashubians the national Kashubian movement has arisen, which manifests itself through "Zrzesz", a magazine as much persecuted by the Poles as the Germans persecuted us during the worst hakatism time (...) In*

*our situation I do not consider an open fight with Polishness to be beneficial because of the Germans. However, this fight will be necessary until a compromise is reached.*⁷”

At the turn of 1920s a group "Zrzeszińcy" formed around the leader of Young Kashubians. These young Kashubian activists took up Ceynowa's ideas. The creator of the Kashubian national movement was for them the man who *put a stop to both, Germanization and Polonization of Kashubians*⁸. The leaders of this generation were young teachers – Aleksander Labuda and Jan Trepczyk. The beginnings of their activity coincided with the period of repressive measures against the Kashubians by the Polish administration: removing Pomeranians out of the offices and schools, lack of plan directed at the Pomeranian natives, and finally treating them as a second-class citizens, and barring from the economic benefits accompanying the construction of Gdynia. For "Zrzeszińcy" Kashubians formed a separate nation, because, as they wrote, *we are united by a common past, connected by present identical interests and we strive to achieve the same goals – therefore we are a nation*⁹. Their program "Zrzeszińcy" finally formulated in the journal "Zrzesz Kaszëbskô", published since 1933, *demanding material and spiritual equality for Kashubians and residents of other regions of Poland*¹⁰.

An extremely difficult time in the history of Kashubians was the World War II. The overwhelming majority of Kashubian social elites were killed at the turn of 1939 in Piaśnica, Szpęgawsk and dozens of other places, or thrown into the Stutthof concentration camp, which was operating as early as September 1939. Since March 1942 in the area under German occupation, including Pomerania, enrolling on the German Nationality List (DVL) was compulsory. As the result of which thousands of young Kashubians were drafted into the German army. Despite this, an attempt was made to resist the Nazi terror by creating secret military organization, the "Kashubian Griffin" later renamed the TOW "Pomeranian Griffin." Although this organization had different ideological values to those proclaimed by "Zrzeszińcy", when facing a common enemy they too (father Franciszek Grucza, Jan Rompski) had found themselves in its ranks. In this way they were fulfilling their pre-war program expressed in these words: *Kashubian revival for the Great Pomerania, Great Pomerania (the historical one) for the powerful Poland*¹¹.

In the post-war years soldiers of the TOW "Pomeranian Griffin" had undergone persecution by the communist security apparatus, and the attitude of the authorities to the Kashubians was *a mixture of distrust and an attempt to draw their representatives into the authority structures* – as described by Cezary Obracht-Prondzyński¹². Hope and new solutions

were supposed to come out of the First Kashubian Congress, which was convened by the pre-war "Zrzesińcy" in 1946 in Wejherowo. The key objective of the Congress was to give Kashubians the freedom of association.

It was not in the interest of the authorities at the time, but they allowed Kashubians for some time (1945-1947) to resume publishing of the pre-war newspaper "Zrzesz Kaszëbskô". The People's Poland had an ambitious programme: to turn the name "Kashubians" into a historical term. *In order to combat separatist tendencies, one ought to avoid such words as "Kashubian", "Kashubia", and to use in their place the term of "local population"*¹³ – as recommended in July 1949 by the Provincial Communist Party Committee in Gdańsk.

The chance to realize the postulate of the First Kashubian Congress came with the political thaw in the autumn of 1956. The chance was utilized as best as it was possible. The Kashubian Association was founded. One wonders whether it was just an exclusive initiative of the group of regional activists, or maybe it was a well thought out and planned action of the authorities wanting to channel in this way the aspirations of regional community and ambitions of its leaders. As noted by Henryk Galus¹⁴ – *the regional associations formed in 1956 have been licensed by the authorities. (...) [The associations] were accepting their controlling role in matters regarding the programme.* Nevertheless, one thing is beyond any doubt. If not for the courage, determination and hope of co-founders of the Kashubian Association, coming from different backgrounds – including from among "Zrzesińcy" – the Kashubian movement probably would not have developed in such a significant way and Kashubians would have not reached the status, which they currently have.

The meetings preceding the establishment of the Association held in Kartuzy and Gdynia saw people arriving with quite different life stories and backgrounds: from former Stalag prisoners to former Wehrmacht soldiers; non-party and party members; passionate Catholics and non-believers; advocates of the national Kashubian option and those wishing to work closely with the people's government. These were people with extremely different visions of Kashubiness, divided by generational differences and temperaments.

The Association quickly took possession of the idea of the whole united Pomerania, as described in 1944 by Lech Bądkowski, who gathered around him young journalists and writers, and who was growing quickly to become the Association's leader: *„Pomerania is one, indivisible – preached Bądkowski – stretches from Stralsund to Elbląg, from the Baltic Sea to the rivers Drwęca, Vistula, Noteć, Warta, Odra and Western Pomerania – and constitutes ethnic, historical, economic and administrative entirety"*¹⁵. This inspired Association's

decision-makers to expand its activities to other sub-regions of Pomerania – Kociewie, Tuchola Forest, Krajna region, which led in 1964 to amendment of the Statutes of the Kashubian Association and change of name to the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association.

The 60's of the 20th century was a time when the Kashubian-minded activists of the national option working in the Association were hamstrung by the communist authorities of Poland. They were mainly pre-war "Zrzeszińcy": Jan Rompski, Stefan Bieszk, Aleksander Labuda, father Franciszek Grucza and Jan Trepczyk. The then leaders of the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association, acting under the dictation of the authorities, issued rulings and some of them were expelled from the organization or their member rights had been suspended for years.

The collapse of communism in 1989 exposed, again, the complexity of Kashubian reality. Gained freedom – also fought for by Kashubians accounting for at least 40% of the crew in the shipyards of Gdańsk and Gdynia – restored the fundamental human right to express one's views. One of the tools used to express those views in this period of transformation was the magazine "Tatczężna", whose authors and publishers were inspired to action by father Franciszek Grucza, the last living member of "Zrzeszińcy". It is they who, for the first time in years, raised the topic of Kashubian nation and emphasized the fundamental role of Kashubian language in development of the Kashubian identity. They also participated in organizing of the Second Kashubian Congress, which took place in Gdańsk in 1992. Being responsible for editing "Lecedło", the congressional newsletter, enabled them to openly call for Kashubians to be entitled to Kashubian symbols, language or political representation. Some of them joined the ranks of the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association, which received the chance to become pluralist organization, representing also the national option. However, this has not happened. This fact drew attention of a group of activists associated with the "Òdroda" magazine and the Kashubian-Pomeranian Resources web portal (later renamed naszekaszuby.pl). This group did not limit itself to publishing ideological manifestos in Òdroda. They have made an effective efforts campaigning for selection of the national option in the census of 2002, which resulted in more than five thousand people declaring Kashubian nationality. The same group of people, in which there was no shortage of the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association activists, made an attempt to establish Kashubian National Party, but this has failed.

In relation to the declaration of Kashubian nationality in the census the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association responded reservedly, admitting that within this organization there *is*

a place for people with different kinds of ethnic identity and that ethnic or national identification cannot be imposed on anyone¹⁶. However, in the matter of the Kashubian National Party the response was categorical. The General Council of the Association in a special resolution cut itself off from these activities. Witold Bobrowski, the vice-president of the Board, as one of the initiators of the establishment of the party was forced to resign.

The present-day Kashubian national movement requires consolidation. Choosing the national option is the best formula for protection and development of the Kashubian cultural potential. As a result of law enactment regarding the National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language by the Polish parliament, Kashubians obtained in 2005 status of the *community using regional language*, which means that in Poland they enjoy the same rights as national and ethnic minorities (apart from having representatives in parliament). Further, ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by Poland, which took place in 2008, caused Kashubians to be covered by international regulations. However, this is not enough. Only planned and long-term actions for the benefit of the Kashubian national option can make our nation capable of independent continuance.

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¹ J. Borzyszkowski, *Pomorze mała ojczyzna Kaszubów*, Gdańsk 2000, s. 33.

² G. Labuda, „Sprawa kaszubska” w perspektywie historii, „Pomorze Gdańskie”, nr 18 „Kaszuby”, Wrocław 1988, s. 240.

³ Statut Towarzystwa Młodokaszubów. Cyt. za: J. Borzyszkowski, *Aleksander Majkowski (1876–1938). Biografia historyczna*, Gdańsk – Wejherowo 2002, s. 359.

⁴ [A. Majkowski], *Ruch młodokaszubski*, „Gryf”, R. 1909, z. 7, s. 192.

⁵ A. Majkowski, *Pamiętnik z wojny europejskiej roku 1914*, oprac. T. Linkner, Wejherowo – Pelplin 2000, s. 75.

⁶ J. Kutta, *Nieznaný list Aleksandra Majkowskiego*, „Pomerania”, R. 1991, nr 1–2, s. 14.

⁷ *Z dziejów stosunków kaszubsko-czeskich. Korespondencja Aleksandra Majkowskiego z Antonínem Frintą*, oprac. D. Szymikowski, Gdynia, s. 43–45.

⁸ *Pogląd na epokę odrodzenia narodowego Kaszubów*, „Zrzesz Kaszëbskô” [dalej: „ZK”], R. 2 (1934), nr 18, s. 135.

⁹ *Zagadnienie odrębności narodu Kaszubskiego* [sic!], „ZK”, R. 1 (1933), nr 30, [s. 1].

¹⁰ W. Pepliński, „Zrzesz Kaszëbskô”. *Geneza i kształtowanie się oblicza społeczno-politycznego (1933–1939)*, „Pomerania”, R. 1992, nr 4, s. 31.

¹¹ Rębok [J. Rompski], *Jakô musi bęc najô skarnjô?*, „ZK”, R. 6 (1938), nr 5, s. 29.

¹² C. Obracht-Prondzyński, *Kaszubi dzisiaj. Kultura – język – tożsamość*, Gdańsk 2007, s. 5.

¹³ Zob.: A. Jabłoński, *Wstęp*, [w:] *Kaszubi w PRL*, red. M. Adamkiewicz, I. Joć, Gdańsk 2007, s. 7.

¹⁴ H. Galus, *Struktura ruchu regionalnego na Pomorzu*, [w:] *Ślązacy, Kaszubi, Mazurzy i Warmiacy – między polskością a niemieckością*, red. A. Sakson, Poznań 2008, s. 260.

¹⁵ L. Bądkowski, *Pomorska myśl polityczna*, Gdynia 1990, s. 45

¹⁶ Cyt. za: C. Obracht-Prondzyński, *Zjednoczeni w idei. Pięćdziesiąt lat działalności Zrzeszenia Kaszubsko-Pomorskiego (1956–2006)*, Gdańsk 2006, s. 443