

## About the national culture of the Kashubians

Usually by the term of "culture" we understand the material and spiritual achievements of a society. "Culture is the first and the fundamental evidence of national identity" – as noted many years ago by the Pope John Paul II<sup>1</sup>. And as described by prof. Gerard Labuda, the culture forms "as the result of our physical, social and mental work"<sup>2</sup>. These products are the everyday objects, institutions of social life and all the works of an intellectual life: artistic creations, knowledge, norms, principles and religion.

National culture as the product of ethnic community is, of course, the subject of constant change, just as are the economic, political, or legal processes. Essential for its development are any innovations. Disseminated and assimilated into the group over a period of time, they provide basis for cultural change during the next stage of the community development<sup>3</sup>. Not irrelevant to this process are the conditions under which it happens. Among the conditions favouring the development undoubtedly are: national consciousness of this particular community, social and economic prosperity, existence of indigenous cultural institutions, as well as the existence of their own ideological and educational institutions.

Kashubian nation, as a non-political community (stateless) grew up on the foundation of culture and language. Further discussion of the language topic, which has already been discussed in many publications is unnecessary. I will only highlight here the words of Bronisław Malinowski, who said that Kashubian language "does not fulfil some ancillary or supplementary function, but plays its own, unique and irreplaceable role"<sup>4</sup>. With regard to Kashubian culture, as the "proof of identity of the nation", it has to be said that the culture has found itself at a point in development where it is no longer proper to wonder whether it is a folk culture, local culture or "something more"<sup>5</sup>. It has matured to be treated just like other national cultures.

The canon of Kashubian culture, agreed upon by the community, should combine its own tradition, modernity and global trends which result from the civilization undergoing change. We need to define priorities and agree upon the principles for the national cultural policy. In the future this could happen under the roof of "The Kashubian Academy". It is most likely that for many years it will be difficult for the Kashubs to determine their internal status, which is not without significance for the development of culture. Therefore, this type of cultural institution could gather scholars, artists, writers and generally speaking, people of the creative professions, regardless of their self-identification.

This is not an imaginary concept and perhaps the best for Kashubs. Examples of such cooperation despite the diverse look at their own ethnicity exist in Europe. The Northern Frisians living in the German state of Schleswig-Holstein could be one example. For many years the two ethnic organizations: Verein für Nordfriesischer Heimatkunde und Heimatliebe (North Frisian Association) and Foriining for National Friiske (Association for National Frisians) were looking for ways to reach agreement. The solution proved to be the jointly appointed Nordfriisk Instituut (North Frisian Institute). Language, history and geography are the three main areas in which the Institute is active.

The Joint Government and National and Ethnic Minorities Committee is working on developing a legal framework for the functioning of such institutions in Poland for several years running. The representatives of the minority within the Committee believe that the best guarantee for the cultural policy of the minorities to be fulfilled would be to equip them with an important tool such as the Minority Cultural Institutions. This concept had been brought to attention repeatedly. Secretary General of the Association of Slovaks in Poland, Ludomir Militoris describes it as follows: "The current provisions of the law contained in the article 18, paragraph 4 of the Act of 6 January 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language leave in this area a complete freedom for

the local government units, because these government units "may" provide funds for carrying out tasks under the aforementioned law, instead of being "obligated" to support these tasks. In practice the situation is that the local government units acting in the sphere of culture transfer funds only to Polish cultural institutions, and refuse to transfer these funds to the associations and institutions of national and ethnic minorities"<sup>6</sup>. I believe that sooner or later all kinds of barriers will be broken and that the green light will shine for the establishment of minority cultural institution – also in Kashubia.

Unfortunately within the Kashubian movement are those who fear cooperation with the national movement in the area of Kashubian language development, culture, history and geography, believing that "the key to Kashubian hearts" is in their possession, and only they know what is best, and how to protect or develop it. For example, when few years ago I proposed convening of the Third Kashubian Congress, after which I expected to have worked out some kind of "Kashubian Charter", seen as declaration of rights, privileges and responsibilities, joint program of activities for the members of our community, as well as the single standardisation of symbols, historical truths, language, culture, environment, to which some have reacted quite hysterically. We need to get rid of such attitudes.

It is already more than 20 years that we live in democratic Poland. As Kashubians we have used this time effectively. We have achieved the goals set by the past generations. We protect and develop Kashubian language: we learn it at school, we pray in it in the Church, we use it to communicate in the media and we gained for it the status of regional language - the only other official language in Poland. It's time to devote more energy to our national culture, which is part of the European culture. The strength of Europe is, after all, its multiculturalism, which best describe the words of Gerard Labuda: "Each of the communities entering the EU, as well as the communities already in it, will decide what out of their self-awareness continue to preserve and cherish and what should be reviewed and rebuilt on a new basis. This is particularly true for the language as the major component of identity, and further, of culture as the domain of individual and collective creative output, and also for the reception of cultural creations coming from other creative environments. Therefore, the future of national and cultural identity will be decided upon internally by the communities and under the influence of their own tradition"<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Paweł II, Przemówienie do Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, Częstochowa 5 czerwca 1979 r.

<sup>2</sup> Gerard Labuda, Rozważaniach nad teorią i historią kultury i cywilizacji, Poznań 2008, s.393.

<sup>3</sup> Gerard Labuda, Rozważaniach nad teorią i historią kultury i cywilizacji, Poznań 2008, s.425-427.

<sup>4</sup> J. Szymura, Bronisława Malinowskiego „etnograficzna teoria języka”, [w:] Antropologia społeczna Bronisława Malinowskiego, Warszawa 1985, s.204.

<sup>5</sup> Cezary Obracht-Prondzyński, Kaszubi dzisiaj. Kultura – język – tożsamość, Gdańsk 2007, s.22.

<sup>6</sup> Pismo z dnia 22 lipca 2011 do posła Marka Asta, przewodniczącego Sejmowej Komisji MNiE.

<sup>7</sup> Gerard Labuda, Rozważaniach nad teorią i historią kultury i cywilizacji, Poznań 2008.