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Betrayed twice. The German community in the Kingdom of Poland during the Great War

Abstract: The article discusses the impact of the Great War on the German community that inhabited the Kingdom of Poland. The author analyses the true reasons and the actual course of “evacuation” of the German-origin civilians from the Kingdom of Poland as well as the consequences of this operation.

Shortly before the outbreak of World War I, the Kingdom of Poland was inhabited by about 500 thousand Germans, who accounted for approximately 5% of the total population. Three-quarters of this population lived in the countryside, with the largest concentrations in the governorates of Piotrków, Kalisz, Warsaw and Płock¹. The cities with the largest number of Germans were Łódź and Warsaw,

1 Around 1910, the percentage of German population in the total population of the Kingdom of Poland fluctuated, according to various estimates, from 3.6% to 5.6% (compare: Chrapowicki, Włodzimierz: *Krótki opis topograficzny i statystyczny Królestwa Polskiego*. Zakłady Graficzne Braci Wierzbickich: Warszawa 1912; Krzyżanowski, Adam/ Kumaniecki, Kazimierz: *Statystyka Polska*. Polskie Towarzystwo Statystyczne: Kraków 1915; Romer, Eugeniusz/ Weinfeld Ignacy: *Rocznik polski. Tablice statystyczne*. Nakładem Księgarni G. Gebethnera: Kraków 1917; Wakar, Włodzimierz: *Rozwój terytorialny narodowości polskiej*. St. Święcicki: Kielce 1917; Strasburger, Edward (ed.): *Rocznik statystyczny Królestwa Polskiego z uwzględnieniem innych ziem polskich. Rok 1915*. Gebethner i Wolff: Warszawa 1916. In 1913 it was assumed that the Kingdom was inhabited by 719 thousand Germans, who made up 5.5% of the total population (Pruss, Witold: *Spółeczeństwo Królestwa Polskiego w XIX i początkach XX wieku. Cz. I: Narodowości, wyznania, sekty, organizacje kościelne*, “Przegląd Historyczny”, t. 68, 1977, z. 2, p. 276). In January 1915, the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs referred to the data from 1908, showing the number of 552,895 Germans, with a note that this figure “increased significantly” in the period 1908 to 1914 (Российский государственный исторический архив, Санкт Петербург (subsequently referred to as RGIA), Департамент духовных дел иностранных исповеданий, opis 10, 1169, sheet 68). The overwhelming majority of Germans lived in the countryside, making up,

as well as the industrial centers of Łódź and Częstochowa, so-called Sosnowiec districts. In many cases, after living together with the Polish population for over a century, the German national consciousness was limited to a sense of community regarding language and religion. Gradually the process of acculturation deepened, which was visible mainly in the cities, especially in Warsaw². The state of national consciousness was also heavily influenced by Russian public institutions, especially education. For the youngest generation of Germans in the Kingdom, that is the people born in the last decades of the 19th and in the early 20th Century, it was natural that the country where they lived was of a Russian character. Similar to their Polish and Jewish neighbors, the Germans felt subjects of the country, in which Russian was the official language, the privileged denomination was the Orthodox religion and military service under Russian command an undisputed duty of young men. Not without reason, the German geographer and historian Eugen Oskar Kossmann from Rudy Bugaj near Aleksandrów Łódzki wrote about “the late national awakening”³ of his compatriots⁴. In many cases, this happened only under the influence of wartime events⁵.

For more than 400 thousand German peasants, often running their farms in the territory of the Kingdom of Poland for several generations, the outbreak of

according to various estimates, from 62% to 75% of the total German population in the Kingdom of Poland.

- 2 Cf. Stegner, Tadeusz: *Ewangelicy warszawscy 1815–1918*. Semper: Warszawa 1993. Even the traditionally German environment of the congregation of the Lutheran Church in Warsaw was very diverse. In 1906 it consisted of 9257 Germans and 9145 Poles (Merczyng, Henryk: “Ilu jest ewangelików Polaków?”. *Zwiastun Ewangeliczny*: 1906, nr 5, p. 17).
- 3 All quotations in the text have been prepared by the translator.
- 4 Kossmann, Oskar: *Es begann in Polen. Erinnerungen eines Diplomaten und Ostforschers*. Verlag J. A. Koch, Marburg 1995, pp. 19–20. Compare: Krebs, Bernd: *Nationale Identität und kirchliche Selbstbehauptung. Julius Bursche und die Auseinandersetzung um Auftrag und Weg des Protestantismus in Polen 1917–1939*. Neukirchener Verlagsgesellschaft: Neukirchen-Vluyn 1993, pp. 15–18; Wegener, Tadeusz: *Juliusz Bursche – biskup w dobie przełomów*. Augustana: Bielsko-Biała 2003, p. 60.
- 5 This process is well documented in the memories of Paul Althaus, a military chaplain from Łódź in the years 1915–1917 (Althaus, Paul: *Lodzer Kriegsbüchlein. Deutsch-ewangelische Betrachtungen*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 1916; idem: *Um Glauben und Vaterland. Neues Lodzer Kriegsbüchlein*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 1917). See also: Kucner, Monika: *I wojna światowa w świetle badań literaturoznawczych: kazania pastora Paula Althausa z lat 1915–1917*. In: Radziszewska, Krystyna/ Zawilski, Piotr: *Między wielką historią a codziennością. Łódź i region łódzki w okresie I wojny światowej*. Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi: Łódź 2011, pp. 111–127.

the Great War carried a threat much more serious than for Polish peasants, and reached much further than a fear for one's own life and the entire family fortune. The first months of the conflict between Russia and Germany brought an end to speculations that had appeared in the press in the Kingdom and Empire since the end of the Russian-Japanese war, raising the question of who the Germans living within the borders of Russia really were. They suddenly became a threat to the most vital interests of the state. It was with trepidation that some suggested the weakness of the Romanov monarchy, disclosed during fights with Japan, contributed to the development of a pan-Germanic idea among the German-speaking subjects of the Tsar. The Russian press also reported that the number of Germans in the Kingdom of Poland was increasing and the area of land they owned was growing⁶.

The propaganda campaign directed against the colonists begun in the first decade of the 20th Century raised two sets of allegations: the Polish press first sounded the alarm concerning Germans purchasing land, and colonists were later accused of spying for the German army in the years just before the outbreak of the war and in its first months. In light of the sources known today, it can be stated with full confidence that the allegation of espionage was invented in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and was taken up and maintained by some of the press in the Kingdom.

Tracing the main themes present in the journalistic narrative shows the creation of a specific topos of a colonist: that of spy and traitor⁷. The repeated display of often identical motifs proves that the action was directed, but also reveals the limited ingenuity in creating this vision of danger⁸. Even before the war, during

6 *Утро России*. 11.01.1915, p. 3 (correspondence from Warsaw). According to Russian estimates, in 1908 German colonists in the Kingdom of Poland owned 11 716 diesiatin (12,770 hectares) of land (RGIA, *ibid.*, 1169, sheet 68). In the light of the available random data, this figure seems to be underestimated State Archive in Kielce (Archiwum Państwowe w Kielcach subsequently referred to as APK, Kancelaria Gubernatora Kieleckiego, 98, pp. 41, 47).

7 Hensel, Jürgen: "Ewakuacja kolonistów niemieckiego pochodzenia z Królestwa Polskiego" w głąb Rosji w latach 1914–1915". In: Borodziej, Włodzimierz/ Wieczorkiewicz, Paweł (ed.): *Polska między Niemcami a Rosją. Studia ofiarowane Marianowi Wojciechowskiemu w 70 rocznicę urodzin*. Wydawnictwo Instytutu Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk: Warszawa 1997, p. 47 footnote 33.

8 RGIA, *ibid.*, 1169, sheets 66, 78; Niemirowicz-Danczenko, Wasilij: "По крестам боев. Под Лодзью". *Русское Слово*. 21.11.1914.; *Rys historyczny Kościoła Ewangelickiego w Radomiu*, vol. 1: 1826–1926, sheets 43–45 (a copy in the German Historical Institute in Warsaw).

the maneuvers of Russian troops at the Narew River near Modlin, elements of a bridge “of a strategic importance” were allegedly discovered in a mill belonging to a German colonist⁹. In November 1914, already during the course of the war, Vasily Nemirovich-Danchenko reported on a similar mill near Sochaczew¹⁰. This extremely unreliable correspondent of the “Русское Слово” left many descriptions of the treacherous attitude of the colonists. His reports, and the ones repeated later, were swarming with exposed spies, agents enlisting in the German army and following the Russian command at the front. “When we were passing through the colonies, especially at night, piles of grain, haystacks, barns and stables were burning. Bells were ringing on weekdays” and colonists supposedly transmitted signals using mirrors. It was also believed that German farmers used carrier pigeons to communicate with Wilhelm’s troops¹¹. German colonists were perceived as “an intelligence office collecting information about the movements of Russian troops”¹². It was they who led Germans to the resting units of Russian troops, lured Russians into ambushes, served as guides, hid German prisoners who escaped and provided them with food and forage, while refusing it to Russians¹³. Soon, it turned out that creating and maintaining such a psychosis of threat allegedly posed by colonists served a specific purpose. At the turn of 1914 and 1915, neither colonists nor the administrative authorities, especially military, could have expected that the fate of German farmers in the Kingdom of Poland was already sealed.

On 19 December 1914, the commander-in-chief, the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich gave an order with a clause “to carry out promptly”, demanding rapid evacuation of all male German farmers above 15 years of age, living less than 15 versts away from railways and resettling them deeper into the Empire¹⁴. The term “evacuation” itself was not understood as sinister because while the difficult

9 “Kronika miesięczna”. *Biblioteka Warszawska* 1908, t. 2, p. 424.

10 Niemirowicz-Danczenko, Wasilij: op. cit., p. 7.

11 RGIA, *ibid.*, 534, sheet 6.

12 *Ibidem*; Compare: Septimus: “Szpiegostwo niemieckie w byłym zaborze rosyjskim w czasie wojny światowej”. In: *Kurier Warszawski*. 29.12.1925, p. 2.

13 Revelations published by the Russian correspondent were in contradiction with the reports of the Russian military authorities from areas of hostilities and their direct supply areas (APK, *ibid.*, 2987, sheet not numbered. See also: Stegner, Tadeusz: “Protestanci na terenie guberni radomskiej i kieleckiej w XIX i na początku XX wieku”. In: *Studia Kieleckie. Seria Historyczna* 1, 1995, p. 19).

14 Archiwum Państwowe w Warszawie Oddział w Twierdzy Modlin, 20, sheets 142–143; APK, *ibid.*

situation of Russian troops at the front developed, state institutions together with the employed staff were transferred from the Kingdom of Poland to Russia. Equipment was also taken away from industrial plants.

With regard to German peasants, “evacuation” meant in practice displacement and deportation, which spared only the sick who would not have survived the journey. The evacuation also included family members, because, as it was justified: “military authorities complain of female espionage.”¹⁵ The Warsaw Governor-General repeatedly admonished the subjects to consider these deportations a “national necessity” (государственная необходимость) and carry them out without severity, but persistently¹⁶. In practice, families were separated, women and children were not taken to the same places to which their husbands and fathers were deported¹⁷. Local administrative authorities were supposed to protect abandoned households. Still, “terrible things happened” in the evacuated villages: All the belongings of the colonists were sold to Polish peasants and Jews for next to nothing; in front of the colonists’ very eyes, peasants looted and stole anything they could and anywhere they could. Only few showed some compassion and mercy. After the colonists disappeared, everything they left behind was plundered: fences, barns, whole houses.¹⁸ By alleging that the colonists posed a threat, the Russian authorities succeeded in instilling a belief that Germans were being punished for treason. The words of a pastor from Lublin, Adolf Tochtermann, are important evidence of how strong this belief was: “Many otherwise noble and good people did not see the great injustice done to these people. This was only seen as revenge for the wrongs done in Poznań and considered as a historical nemesis”¹⁹. In the course of the deportations, the Russian authorities used a stereotype equating Germans with Evangelicals, which meant that Polish evangelical peasants in areas like the Suwałki and Lublin provinces were also displaced. “They demanded a list of parishioners from the pastor and are sending all of them orders to leave. Many people with German names live in fear,” noted Reverend Józef Rokoszny in a diary entry dated 28 February 1915²⁰. “Russian Protestant subjects, must leave.

15 APK, *ibid.* – cyrkularz gubernatora kieleckiego do naczelników powiatów z 12.02.1915 r.

16 *Ibid.* telegram dated 12.02.1915.

17 APK, *ibid.*, 2769, sheets 17–18.

18 *Kronika Zboru Ewangelickiego Lubelskiego*, t. 1 (1888–1932), sheets 183, 185, 186 (a copy in the German Historical Institute in Warsaw).

19 *Rys historyczny Kościoła Ewangelickiego w Radomiu*, sheet 47.

20 Caban, Wiesław/ Przeniosło, Marek (ed.): Rokoszny, Józef ks.: *Diariusz Wielkiej Wojny 1914–1918*. Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna im. Jana Kochanowskiego: Kielce 1998, vol. 1, p. 224.

There are also such situations: the husband went to the war as a Russian soldier and his wife, a Protestant, is now being sent to Russia [...]”²¹. This unplanned institutionalization of the deportees made it easier to later estimate the losses that Germany suffered in the Kingdom of Poland during the Great War²².

The term “evacuation” used with regard to German colonists was a euphemism concealing the real purpose of the operation. Its true meaning was revealed in a telegram of the Warsaw Governor-General dated 20 February 1915: “Dislocation concerns only German colonists, i.e. farmers of German descent, owning land, wherever they may be, but not all persons bearing German names”²³. The legal basis for this decision was included in the decrees of liquidation issued five days earlier. They were published in the form of highest ukases: extraordinary ordinances confirmed by the Tsar without the Duma. They introduced the purchase of land owned by the colonists, which in fact meant expropriation²⁴. Upon entering the war, Russia did not take into account that it might take an unfavorable course for this very country. The expropriation of German farmers, to be carried out in 26 provinces and the Grand Duchy of Finland, was performed to protect the great Russian land property against expropriation and parceling, as well as to ensure the gratitude of the Russian and Polish peasantry, who was offered the opportunity to buy the expropriated land. The course of war prevented the implementation of these plans²⁵.

21 Ibid.

22 According to the balance drawn up by the Consistory of the Lutheran Church at the end of 1916, the Church as an institution suffered such enormous material losses that “a million rubles would probably not be enough to restore 5 destroyed and 18 damaged churches, 15 presbyteries, 7 parish houses, 79 houses of worship and 78 schools” (Holtz, Edmund: *Der Krieg und die Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Polen. Erweiterter Konferenzbericht verfaßt auf Grund von amtlichem Material im Auftrage des Warschauer Evangelisch-Ausburgischen Konsistoriums*. Deutsche Staatsdruckerei: Łódź 1916, p. 11). This estimate did not take into account further losses resulting from requisitions of the church property taking place until the last months of the war. In October 1917, the German authorities took away bells and tin and lead organ pipes from St. John’s Lutheran Church in Łódź.

23 APK, *ibid.*, 2987, sheet not numbered.

24 “Gesetze über die Ländereien der deutschen Kolonisten. Landbesitz feindlicher Ausländer und der Kolonisten”. In: Hummel, Theodor: *100 Jahre Erbhofrecht der deutschen Kolonisten in Rußland*. Reichsnährstand Verlags-Gesellschaft m b. H.: Berlin 1936; Anhang 2. Teil: Enteignungs- und Liquidationsgesetze, pp. 223–253.

25 The deportations were accompanied by various guesses as to their consequences: “Newspapers write that colonists form Russia, who have so far been deported to Siberia,

The scale of the displacement of German inhabitants from the Kingdom of Poland was huge. Some idea of the loss of population may be gained by the information provided by Eduard Kneifel, which is, however, by no means exhaustive²⁶. In the area of the Diocese of Warsaw, almost all the faithful from the parishes in Przasnysz, Paproc Duża and Pilica were deported to Russia. The same happened with the Lutherans belonging to the parish branch of Stara Iwiczna in Błędów. In all, 3,600 of the four thousand Lutherans from the parish in Radzymin were deported. In the Diocese of Płock, 2,806 Evangelicals from the parish in Płock were deported to Russia in the period of 15 to 17 January 1915. Only 40 people out of 1,200 parishioners of the parish branch in Płońsk stayed in their homes. All people were deported from the cantorate in Boryszew, and the house of prayer and many farms were razed to the ground²⁷.

More German farmers were displaced from the eastern regions of the Kingdom of Poland during the course of the war. Of the 17 thousand faithful of the parish in Chełm, 15 thousand were deported to the area near Samara, Orenburg and even further east. Out of 8.8 thousand evangelicals from Lublin, only 519 people avoided deportation. Parishes in Kielce, Kamień and Radom lost almost all their faithful. The parish branch in Kozienice, a part of the Radom parish, lost 600 people, only 80 of whom returned after the war. Only the dioceses of Kalisz and Piotrków did not suffer such severe population losses due to the rapid seizure of the western parts of the Kingdom by the German army. However, the Russian authorities managed to start the "evacuation" there as well²⁸. They deported, among others, about 30 families from the parish in Kleszczów. In the diocese of Łódź, the Russian authorities displaced the majority of evangelical inhabitants from

will be brought in place of German colonists" (Caban, Wiesław/ Przeniosło, Marek: op. cit., p. 226). Centrally managed and administratively regulated resettlement of peasants in Russia had a tradition dating back to at least the third quarter of the 18th Century. In 1894 an ukase of 1889 permitting resettlement of peasants settled on government land was extended to the territory of the Kingdom of Poland. It was assumed that at least a part of about 850 thousand landless peasants in the Kingdom would move to Russia. An ukase of 1904 facilitated the resettlement of farmers and farming townspeople to the other side of the Urals (APK, *ibid.*, 1554, *passim*). War time allowed the real purpose of evictions of German peasants from the Kingdom, expropriation, to be hidden.

26 Kneifel, Eduard: *Die evangelisch-augsburgischen Gemeinden in Polen 1555–1939*. Selbstverlag des Verfassers: Vierkirchen 1971, pp. 30–172.

27 Lackner, Franz: *Chronik der Gemeinde und Volksschule Tiefenbach (Nowe Boryszewo, kr. Plock, Polen)*. Ostdeutsche Forschungsstelle im Lande Nordrhein-Westfalen: Dortmund 1959, p. 32.

28 Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Kancelaria Gubernatora Piotrkowskiego, 2863 *passim*. Elbieta Katarzyna Dzikowska, Agata G. Handley and Piotr Zawilski - 9783631806777

the parish of Nowosolna: 150 peasant homesteads in the village of Nowosolna were completely destroyed and another 50 only partially. During the fighting, 18 parishioners were killed, and four others were shot or hanged by the Russian authorities²⁹. It is difficult to find a greater paradox in history: during the November Uprising the residents of Nowosolna ostentatiously showed loyalty to the Russian monarch³⁰. In the nearby Łaznowska Wola, inhabited in 1802 by immigrants from Swabia, a local cantor and teacher, Emil Froelich, was shot by the Russian authorities after being falsely accused of espionage³¹. Estimates prepared by the authorities of the Lutheran Church state that approximately 140 thousand of their faithful, i.e. about 37% of the Evangelicals living in the Kingdom of Poland in 1914, were deported to Russia³².

The fate of those deported throughout the western provinces of the European part of Russia was extremely tough, especially for women who in most cases did not speak Russian. "They unloaded these poor people in any town and left them there in the hands of God's mercy"³³. In larger cities that they passed on the way, e.g. in Kharkiv, they could count on help from local Evangelical parishes. The situation in Kharkiv was particularly difficult because six thousand Evangelicals from the Kingdom of Poland were transported there until July 1915. Most of them had no money and needed material help. Poor conditions during the long journey caused the health of many deportees to fail, and the mortality rate was growing, especially among children. There were cases of death from infectious diseases³⁴. The scope of the necessary help for the needy exceeded the capabilities of the Kharkiv Evangelical parish. It is worth noting that Evangelical clergymen were not subject to deportation, being quite rightly regarded as spiritual leaders of the local communities of colonists³⁵. The Russian administration launched vigorous steps against those whose statements or manifested attitude were recognized as contrary to the Russian state. Such allegations were made against Juliusz Bursche, the superintendent of the Warsaw Lutheran Consistory, accusing him of "close relationships with persons

29 Kneifel, Eduard: op. cit., p. 171.

30 Woźniak, Krzysztof Paweł: *Niemieckie osadnictwo wiejskie między Prosną a Pilicą i Wisłą od lat 70. XVIII w. do 1866 r. Proces i jego interpretacje*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego: Łódź 2013, p. 232.

31 Kneifel, Eduard: op. cit., p. 150.

32 Holtz, Edmund: op. cit., p. 2.

33 Archiwum Państwowe w Poznaniu, Spuścizna Alberta Breyera, 30, sheet 2.

34 RGIA, *ibid.*, opis 133, 1068, sheet 31–31v.

35 APK, *ibid.*, 2987, sheet not numbered.

accused of collaborating with the enemy³⁶. This absolutely unfounded accusation was a reaction to the efforts undertaken by the superintendent to organize help for the displaced people, which were supported by the Lutheran clergy in the Kingdom of Poland. On 13 March 1915, the College of The Church of the Warsaw Lutheran parish wrote to the Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich a memorial protesting against equating Evangelicals with Germans and against their deportations. The memorial did not bring any positive effects, and Bursche was later removed from all his duties by a highest order dated 8 July 1915³⁷. The Russian interior ministry prepared draft regulations that allowed the removal of pastors from their offices by way of administrative proceedings³⁸. Julius Bursche spent the German occupation outside the Kingdom, returning in February 1918. In turn, pastor Rudolf Buse from Grodziec in the province of Kalisz was accused of informing the German authorities about the location of Russian troops and organizing resistance among the colonists in his parish. The charges against him were supported by an argument that the Polish authorities were also convinced that Buse was a German spy. He was exiled to Ufa and died in 1917³⁹.

The German inhabitants of the Kingdom of Poland treated deportations, expropriation, requisition, and finally, the persecution and repressions of the Russian authorities as providences caused by the war, but also as an expression of undeserved injustice that they suffered only because they came from a different culture and went to different temples than their non-Evangelical neighbors. This forced them to look differently at the German occupant, to seek brotherhood, awaken memories and sentiment with the homeland of their ancestors. The disappointment with the people thinking like this was equal to the feelings of rejection and stigmatization by the Russian authorities. The rapid offensive of the German army in August 1914 prevented the deportation of the colonists from the provinces of Kalisz and Piotrków, where many examples of the lack of cooperation between colonists and the German army can be seen, together with numerous prosecutions of German farmers for active cooperation with Russians. A common origin, language and religion did not mitigate suspicions of the German military and the occupying authorities. In return, the German command only rarely treated the indigenous compatriots as potential allies, ready to welcome Wilhelm's troops with joy, freely offering help and providing intelligence.

36 Krebs, Bernd: *op. cit.*, p. 17.

37 Wegener, Tadeusz: *op. cit.*, pp. 32–33.

38 RGIA, *ibid.*, 1114, sheet 35v.

39 *Ibidem*, sheet 17.

It has to be taken for granted that the occupying German authorities perceived Germans in the Kingdom of Poland as subjects of the Tsar, as other (meaning “worse”) Germans who had to be treated with reserve. They were often suspected of special servility to Russians. Gustav Friedenberg, a pastor in Prażuchy in the Diocese of Kalisz, had been arrested in 1914, charged with exhorting reservists from the pulpit to do their duties as Russian subjects. During the hearing before a court-martial, Friedenberg said that he had said only what he was required to say as a pastor, “dass sie ihrem Lande zu unwandelbarer Treue verpflichtet sind” (you owe unwavering loyalty to your country)⁴⁰. Saying that he was convinced that any possible sign of disloyalty of German reservists would represent an excuse to blame them for desertion. The court did not believe these explanations and sentenced the pastor to 10 years imprisonment. However, Friedenberg directed a request for clemency to the emperor, which was supported by opinions of pastors Eduard Wende from Kalisz and Sigismund Michelis from Lipno. This resulted in the sentence being commuted to 10 years in a fortress. For almost two years, Friedenberg was imprisoned in Berlin and in Strzelce Wielkie near Opole. In April 1917, through the intercession of the General-Superintendent, pastor Rudolf Gundlach, and with the support of the consistory, he was released⁴¹. He was, however, prohibited from returning to his parish in Prażuchy and instead entrusted with the duties of a parish administrator in Kleszczów. It was not until the end of 1917, after obtaining permission from the Governor-General, Hans von Beseler, that he returned to Prażuchy. The allegations of cooperation with the enemy, i.e. the Russians, were raised also against pastor Ryszard Paschke from Koło, who was consequently removed from the parish, and against Aleksander Paschke from Chodecz, who was interned for nine months⁴².

Military requisitions carried out on a large scale also left no illusions about Berlin's perception of Germans in the Kingdom. German workers in the cities responded to recruiting them to work in the Reich with great reluctance. As a form of pressure, the occupying German administration refused to pay unemployment

40 Kneifel, Eduard: *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Augsburgischen Kirche in Polen. Ein biographisches Pfarrerbuch*. Selbstverlag des Verfassers, Niedermarschacht 1964, pp. 88–89, 189; idem, 1971, p. 83.

41 R. Gundlach also exposed himself to the occupation administration and in 1916 he was tried “for dissidence, hostile attitude and hostile acts” (Kopczyńska-Jaworska, Bronisława/Woźniak, Krzysztof: *Łódzcy luteranie. Społeczność i jej organizacja*. Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze: Łódź 2002, p. 143).

42 Kneifel, Eduard: 1964, p. 189; idem 1971, p. 88.

benefit to persons who did not decide to leave⁴³. All these circumstances resulted in the German inhabitants of the Kingdom of Poland finding themselves in the proverbial position: “caught between a rock and a hard place”⁴⁴.

This atmosphere fostered the awakening of the German national idea. It came to the fore most vividly in the ethnically diverse urban environments of the Łódź area. People were aware of the fact that the situation of the German population in this area was fundamentally different from that of the Germans living in the western and northern reaches of the Kingdom of Poland bordering with the Reich. It was feared that the “German island of Łódź”, surrounded by the “Slavic sea” will be forgotten and no-one could help it. It was decided that as the Germans in central Poland were left to their own resources, they must form a union, thus fostering their language and culture, and giving rise to the special activities of German activists, who from the very beginning, emphasized the need to preserve their national identity to a greater or lesser degree.

In the opinion of Eugen Fröhr, a well-informed editor of the occupation newspaper “Lodzer Deutsche Zeitung”, the German community in the district of Łódź was divided into three groups during the first period of the occupation. The first one consisted of “activists” who felt responsible for all Germans in the Kingdom of Poland. The second group consisted of German workers and representatives of the petty bourgeoisie; they were ready to manifest their Germanness, but put economic interest in the first place and felt aggrieved by the unfulfilled promises of the German management of factories, and perceived requisitions of raw materials and machinery as machinations of their economic competitors from the Reich. The third group consisted of factory owners who achieved prosperity under Russian rule. They did not get engaged in national issues, were quite cosmopolitan and even considered the possibility of transferring their factories to Russia, which was prevented by the outbreak of the revolution⁴⁵. With the benefit of hindsight, Otto Heike, saw this problem a bit differently. In his opinion, after the entrance of German troops to Łódź, its German inhabitants were torn between the loyalty to the Russian state, whose citizens they believed themselves to be, and the national sense of community with the Germans from the Reich and its

43 Hertz, Mieczysław: *Łódź w czasach wielkiej wojny*. Skład Główny: Księgarnia S. Seipelt: Łódź 1933, p. 113.

44 Numerous examples of various attitudes are presented in: *Zwischen den Fronten. Kriegsaufzeichnungen eines Lodzer Deutschen*. Łódź 1918.

45 Eichler, Adolf: *Deutschtum im Schatten des Ostens*. Meinhold Verlag: Dresden 1942, p. 253.

soldiers⁴⁶. Many signs suggest that this feeling was shared by large numbers of the German community in the Kingdom of Poland⁴⁷. War events, especially the lack of German military successes, left no illusions as to the possibility of extending the territory across Poland. In 1917, it became clear that any future plans made by the German residents of the Kingdom of Poland must consider the emergence of an independent Polish state.

As soon as in 1915, the “activists” attempted to organize the German community⁴⁸. In July, they began issuing their own publication, the weekly *Deutsche Post*, which was by definition competitive, also ideologically, to the widely read daily *Neue Lodzer Zeitung*⁴⁹. *Deutsche Post*, edited by Adolf Eichler and appearing from October 1918, set itself the goal of strengthening the social bonds between Germans living in central Poland, by making reference to the community of language, national identity (“von deutscher Art”) and memory of the achievements of their ancestors. It fulfilled its objective by encouraging the formation of associations and reporting on the effects of common achievements, especially in the sphere of organizing national education.

In December of 1915, the circle of “activists” formulated a memorandum which was submitted through official channels via the chief of police in Łódź, Matthias von Oppen, and the Governor-General Hans von Beseler, to the Chancellor of the Reich: Theobald Bethmann-Holweg⁵⁰. The most important part of the document was a fragment, in which the authors postulated an extensive justification for the inclusion into Germany of the following governorates of the Russian occupation: Kalisz, Piotrków and Płock. The memorial was issued under a euphemistic title “Die Deutschen in Russisch-Polen” and sent to influential, nationalist-minded German politicians, who, as the authors of the memorial expected, should support their demands. The anti-Polish character of this document was reflected primarily

46 Heike, Otto: *Deutsche Minderheit in Polen bis 1939. Ihr Leben und Wirken, kulturell, gesellschaftlich, politisch. Eine historisch-dokumentarische Analyse*. Selbstverlag des Verfassers: Leverkusen 1985, pp. 41–42.

47 More detail in: Woźniak, Krzysztof Paweł: “Niemcy w Królestwie Polskim wobec odrodzenia państwa polskiego w 1918 r.” *Studia z historii społeczno-gospodarczej XIX i XX w.* 9, 2011, pp. 331–342.

48 Eichler, Adolf: “Die Lodzer deutsche Aktivisten und ihre Gegner”. *Deutsche Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift im Wartheland* 3–4, 1941, pp. 283–327.

49 Kucner, Monika: “Prasa niemiecka w Łodzi 1863–1939”. In: Kuczyński, Krzysztof/Ratecka, Barbara (ed.): *Niemcy w dziejach Łodzi do 1945 r. Zagadnienia wybrane*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego: Łódź 2001, pp. 216–217.

50 Kulak, Zbigniew: “Memoriał Niemców łódzkich w sprawie aneksji ziem polskich do Rzeszy w okresie I wojny światowej”. *Przegląd Zachodni* 6, 1966, pp. 338–353.

in blaming the Poles for deportations of German-Evangelicals to Russia conducted by the Russian authorities. According to the signatories of the memorandum, Russian authorities had no doubts about the loyalty of their German subjects until the war, and the deportations were a result of Polish anti-German propaganda. The postulated annexation of parts of the Kingdom was presented as a kind of punishment for the injustice done to Germans by the Poles. However, the memorandum did not bring the effects that were expected by its authors. The policy of Berlin was evolving in the direction that found its expression in the Act of 5 November 1916. The noisy activities of the “activists” from Łódź were not always accepted by the German civilian administration in Warsaw⁵¹.

In this situation, the “activists” attempted to gather all Germans living in the area of the Russian partition within one organization. At the beginning of 1916, they began to create institutions of the “Bund der Deutschen in Polen”. However, neither the German civil administration, nor the authorities in Berlin agreed to its establishment, fearing it would be seen as a manifestation of a Germanization policy. These fears were not unfounded, because the union leadership secretly remained in contact with a prominent activist of Hakata (Ostmarkenverein), George Cleinow⁵². In March 1916, the local authorities agreed to register the organization under the name of “Deutscher Verein für Łódź und Umgegend”. The organization focused on practical activities: they germanized street names, developed the education system and socio-economic organizations, especially savings and loan funds, influenced the make up of police personnel and rogatory offices. They obtained funds from the Reich to achieve these goals⁵³. In February 1917 the name of the association was changed to “Deutscher Verein”, which should be seen as another, this time successful attempt to create an organization covering the entire area under Russian rule. “Deutscher Verein” quickly became the largest and the most influential German organization in the Kingdom of Poland. In February 1918, it had around 20 thousand members, and in October of the same year already more than 30 thousand, grouped in more than 200 local branches. The Association dissociated itself from political purposes, while it strongly emphasized the need to guarantee the Germans’ right to cultural identity.

Germans in Poland love the country whose industry, commerce and crafts they enliven with their minds and hands. They care about the future of the country with the same seriousness as their Polish compatriots. They want to loyally fulfill all the obligations

51 Ibid., p. 343.

52 Eichler, Adolf: 1942, p. 201.

53 Ibid., pp. 423–424.

which the state requires from its citizens. They want to be self-sacrificing and helpful in everything that enriches their homeland and the welfare of the state. For this unlimited devotion they expect only one thing: a full recognition of their German mother tongue and their individuality (*Eigenart*) and everything that results from this individuality – the freedom to develop the German education system, associations and cultural life. Germans living in the Kingdom associate only in order to protect and develop these things (*Dinge*) that are dearest to them⁵⁴.

The German circles paid special attention to the issue of education. It welcomed provisions issued by the Regency Council at the end of 1917 relating to addressing the school needs of national minorities in the Kingdom of Poland. They were seen as a signal of a guarantee for minority education given by the emerging Polish state⁵⁵. As soon as in June 1917, “*Deutsch-Evangelischer Landesschulverband*” was established, which declared cooperation with the Polish authorities and the society for the good of the entire state⁵⁶. In February 1918, the “*Verband deutscher Lehrkräfte Polens*” was created. Its management included teachers of German elementary schools (*Volksschule*) and secondary schools⁵⁷. Two months later “*Deutscher Lehrerverband in Polen*” began its activity⁵⁸. As the years of war relaxed discipline at school, the German environment began promoting the fast introduction of compulsory education⁵⁹.

In addition to national education, the second most important element of preserving national identity was the Lutheran Church. The occupation authorities in the Warsaw governorate-general sought to impose a new law in place of the one in force since 1849, which would increase the participation of Germans in the authorities of the Church. They made great efforts to push through three demands: 1) to make German the official language of the Church; 2) to make a rule that only those candidates who had studied theology at a German university could become pastors; 3) to move the consistory from Warsaw to Łódź, where the German nationalist environment had a much stronger influence. The meeting of the Synod ended in a fiasco, because 32 out of the total of 44 pastors demonstratively left the meeting to protest against the planned changes⁶⁰. The friction

54 *Ibid.*, p. 242.

55 *Deutsche Post* Jg 4, 1918, issue 4, p. 1.

56 *Ibid.*, issue 40, p. 1.

57 *Ibid.*, issue 7, p. 2.

58 *Ibid.*, issue 11, p. 2.

59 *Ibid.*, issue 40, p. 1.

60 From extensive literature see: Krebs, Bernd: *op. cit.*; Kneifel, Eduard: *Bischof Dr. Julius Bursche. Sein Leben und seine Tätigkeit (1862–1942)*. Selbstverlag des Verfassers, Elbieta Katarzyna Dzikowska, Agata G. Handley and Piotr Zawilski - 9783631806777

connected with national issues (“Kirchenkampf”) within the Lutheran Church was reflected in the 16 years needed to develop and adopt the Ecclesiastical Law and the Essential Inner Law⁶¹.

The ethnic problem, including the definition of the relationship with the emerging Polish state, did not apply to German Catholics, who represented only a small percentage of all Germans in the Kingdom of Poland. They also demonstrated less organizational resilience than the Evangelical community. It was only at the turn of 1917 and 1918 when “Verein der deutschen Katholiken in Polen” was founded, which was chaired by father Sigismund Brettle from Konstantynów.

It could be supposed that the politically conscious part of the German community in the Kingdom of Poland tended towards conservative, nationalist attitudes. The group was visible thanks to its activity, which resulted in the creation of numerous professional associations and organizations with the very influential “Deutscher Verein” at the helm. “Deutsch-Evangelischer Landesschulverband” gathered approximately 500 schools, in which German was the official language⁶² and “Deutschen Genossenschaftsverband” founded in March 1917 was formed by 150 savings and loan funds⁶³. The “Activists” were also the prime movers behind ethnic rifts in the church. The Germans in the Kingdom of Poland generally accepted a “wait-and-see” attitude regarding the political consequences of the war: The extremely harsh conditions of existence and the effort to survive had exhausted virtually all their energy.

On the eve of Polish independence, a huge part of the Germans who had settled in the Kingdom three or four generations ago did not feel significantly distant from their Polishness. Such attitudes were aptly characterized on 7 March 1919 by Józef Spickermann from Łódź, a Member of the Legislative Sejm and the Sejm of the first term, later a senator, when he said in the Sejm:

We, the citizens of German origin, consider Poland as our homeland, because we were born here, we spent our youth here, we are bound with the local land by all our thoughts; our entire psyche is completely different than the psyche of the Germans abroad, all our

Vierkirchen über München [1980]; Kossert, Andreas: “*Nieprzejednane sprzeczności?*” *Napięcia narodowe w protestantyzmie łódzkim w latach 1918–1939*. In: Milerski, Bogusław ks/ Woźniak, Krzysztof (ed.): *Przeszłość przyszłości. Z dziejów luteranizmu w Łodzi i regionie. Praca zbiorowa*. Wydawnictwo Ewangelickie św. Mateusza: Łódź 1998, pp. 151–174.

61 “Entwurf eines Staatsgesetzes betreffend Evangelisch-Augsburgischen Kirche im Königreich Polen”. *Deutsche Post*, Jg 4, 1918, issue 18, p. 2; Wegener, Tadeusz: op. cit., p. 34.

62 *Deutsche Post*, Jg 4, 1918, issue 40, p. 1.

63 *Ibid.*, issue 20, p. 1; issue 40, p. 1.

moral strength comes from this land, our native land; nowhere but here we can feel at home, nowhere but here we are completely at ease, therefore we gladly make every sacrifice for the good of the state. We are ready to give up our property and life to contribute to the creation of a strong and powerful Poland. We only have one request: we want to be able to use our native language at school, at home and in church. The language which we use from the day we are born, and which we want to keep until we die, because our moral strength is related to the homeland as much as to our mother tongue, which we consider a sacred inheritance from our fathers and grandfathers⁶⁴.

The voice of the same deputy sounded very different on 24 July 1920, when in a discussion on the expose by the Sejm of Prime Minister Wincenty Witos, the head of the Government of National Defence, he said on behalf of the Club of German Unification:

The German Union expresses its confidence in the new government and will support it in all its positions. We hope that the new government will manage to quickly bring us to an honorable peace. As a German national minority we expect that the new government will enter the path of true tolerance and complete equality to concentrate all forces on the work for the reconstruction of the whole country and our common Homeland⁶⁵.

Although this short speech was interrupted with applause three times, it revealed the feelings of the German community in Poland of “incomplete” tolerance, and the lack of “real” equality. In subsequent years, the awkwardness of the Polish policy towards national minorities inhabiting the area of the Second Republic collided with the increasingly stressed nationalistic attitudes in the German circles⁶⁶. No consensus could be reached.

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65 <http://kronika.sejm.gov.pl/kronika.97.3/text/pl/an-6.htm> (access on: 17.10.2014).

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