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POLISH COMMUNITY IN ESTONIA

The first Poles appeared on the Estonian territory in the 16th century. In 1561, part of Livonia was annexed to the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. However, prolonged wars between Sweden and Poland eventually led to the loss of Livonia. Almost all of Estonia came under the Swedish rule.

Although the Polish domination in the lands of the Estonians did not last long, it clearly left its mark in the history of the Republic. This is mainly related to the University of Tartu.

The history of the university dates back to the end of the 16th century, when, in accordance with the decision of the Polish King Stefan Batory, a Jesuit centre was founded, later transformed into a college. A seminary and a grammar school were also established at it. When the lands of the Polish Kingdom in Estonia passed into the hands of the Swedes, these institutions were transformed into a university by King Gustav II Adolf. From the very beginning of the university's existence, Poles played quite a significant role. Indeed, many Poles studied at this university. The famous term "Dorpatczyk" [Dorpat was the old Polish and Swedish name of the city] not only refers to the university graduate, but above all it is associated with a professionally qualified, comprehensively educated person with a high personal culture. In Poland "Dorpatczyk" enjoyed great respect and esteem.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Polish students formed many organisations and associations. The best known and also the longest-lived one was "Polonia". It was the world's first student organisation founded by Polish students. Approved by the university authorities in 1828, the organisation was founded by 17 students from Vilnius. Dissolved many times and changing its name, it nevertheless survived for a century. Other Polish organisations

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(“Koło Młodzieży Polskiej” [Circle of Polish Youth], “Towarzystwo Studentów Polskich” [Society of Polish Students] or “Towarzystwo Teologów Polskich” [Society of Polish Theologians] never matched the importance of “Polonia”.

The activities of different societies and “Polonia” were mainly designed to promote Polish culture and tradition and to foster mutual help in the community – both material (as evidenced by the Polish Student Self-Help Fund, which existed between 1907 and 1918) and academic.

Cooperation between Poland and Estonia was developing quite rapidly, as evidenced by the establishment of the Estonian-Polish Union, which included the Estonian-Polish Academic Society at the University of Tartu.

The cultural capital of Estonia brought together the most prominent figures of the scientific scene. In 1933, the first Polish language course was opened by Jerzy Kapliński (professor at the University of Warsaw).

After the war, however, Polish philology lost its prominence. It was not until the 1990s (in 1993) that the first Polish Studies group was established.

Currently, there are about 2,500 Poles living in Estonia, mainly in Tallinn, Tartu, Kohtla-Järve, Narva, Valga, Ahtme and Pärnu. In 1989, the Polish Cultural Association “Polonia” was established, which in 1995 was transformed into the Association of Poles in Estonia (APE), presided by Halina Kisłacz since 2004. It is a non-profit organisation whose aim is to create and maintain links among Poles through national and cultural activities, e.g. through the cultivation of Polish customs and traditions. Poles have the status of a national minority in Estonia. There is a Polish library at the organisation’s headquarters, and Polish language courses are conducted for children and adults.

The statute clearly stipulates the aims and tasks of the APE “Polonia”. In the first place, it is the preservation and deepening of the Polish national identity, the promotion of historical traditions and the study of Polish culture. In addition, this extends to maintaining close relations with its historical land, Poland.

Throughout the years, the APE “Polonia” has been active for Poland, above all in the cultural, social and informational spheres. Our association has enjoyed many successes in the cultural field. The folk ensemble “Lajkonik”, which has been active since 2007, offers a repertoire of folk songs and folk dances. It takes part in competitions, festivals and is often invited to give performances and concerts both in Estonia and abroad, including in Poland. It has won first places at reviews of national minority ensem-

bles, and on a number of occasions it has been awarded many distinctions and diplomas.

In Estonia, there are so-called “Polish places” that we remember and care about. However, there are not many such traces of Polish presence. Although the Polish domination on Estonian soil did not last long, it clearly left its mark on the history of the Republic. As already mentioned above, this has to do with the University of Tartu. The history of the university dates back to the end of the 16th century, when, by the decision of Stefan Batory, a Jesuit centre was established, later transformed into a college. Between 1802 and 1918, more than 1,500 Poles were educated at the university. Many prominent people graduated from the University of Tartu.

Furthermore, nine Poles received honorary doctorates (Ignacy Mościcki was awarded an honorary doctorate in law in 1930).

A plaque on the wall of the University of Tartu main building dedicated to King Stefan Batory and Polish students was unveiled on 9 May 2005.

An obelisk with a plaque dedicated to Stefan Batory has been unveiled in Valga. Stefan Batory was not only a Polish king, but also the Prince of Transylvania. The plaque on the central street proclaims: “In tribute to Stefan Batory – King of Poland, Grand Duke of Lithuania and Prince of Transylvania, who granted Valga municipal rights in 1584.”

A monument has been unveiled on the castle hill in Rakvere, on the pedestal of which, among inscriptions in several languages, we can read: “Between 1602 and 1605 the castle town belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.”

In Haapsalu there is a poster from the inter-war years announcing guest performances by the famous tenor Jan Kiepura.

The municipality of Viimsi is home to the “Estonian Sulejówek”. In 1918, General Johan Laldoner married a Polish woman, Maria Kruszevska. They lived in the Viimsi manor house, where the State Museum of the Estonian Army named after General Johan Laldoner is now located. One of the halls is dedicated to Polish-Estonian relations.

At the old Sea Gate in Tallinn, there is a plaque commemorating the daring escape of the Polish submarine ORP “Orzeł” [Eagle], interned here in September 1939.

In Rakvere there is a monument with a plaque dedicated to the memory of the eminent Polish historian Stanislaw Herbst (1907 – 1973), a recognised authority on military history and the history of Livonia, author of ca. 300 scientific works. He was born and spent his early childhood in Rakvere.

Preserving and strengthening national identity is the most important task for the generations of Poles living here. We cooperate with non-governmental organisations and with local authorities. However, the most important matter for us is the contact with Polish non-governmental organisations carrying out tasks resulting from the Government Programme for Cooperation with Poles and Polish Communities Abroad. The most important and closest organisations to the APE “Polonia” are the “Polish Community” Association and the “Aid to Poles in the East” Foundation. Thanks to our regular contacts with Poland, we are able to maintain this little island of Polishness on the Estonian soil. Thanks to the “Polish Community” Association, we are able to hold joint meetings with Poles from other countries, which brings tangible integration effects, and in the case of children and young people, it particularly strengthens the bonds of mutual contact and improves knowledge of the mother tongue. It is very important for us, although not very often practised in recent years, to be able to send children to summer camps and Polish language schools in Poland. The young people returning from such visits have a completely different perception of the country of their ancestors and are proud of the achievements and level of development of their Homeland.

We particularly celebrate holidays such as the Polish Day, Independence Day, Christmas and Christmas wafer meetings, for which crowds of Poles from all over Estonia come to Tallinn. Children and young people present drama plays, their artwork, recite Polish poetry and perform Polish songs. At such gatherings, friendships are formed and there is an additional stimulus to deepen the knowledge of the ancestors’ language.

A huge role in preserving Polish culture is played by all kinds of competitions, sport events and camps held in Poland. They provide an opportunity not only to learn the Polish language and familiarise oneself with Polish culture, but also to meet young compatriots scattered across various countries and to strengthen the sense of bond and national identity that unites them all. Particularly popular among young people are the Adam Mickiewicz Recitation Contest “KRESY”, organised by the Podlasie Branch in Białystok, the Maria Konopnicka Recitation Contest in Przedbórz, “ORLE GNIAZDO” in Poznań, and the “Poland in my Heart” Contest organised by Stowarzyszenie Pomocy Polakom na Wschodzie “Kresy”. Also of great importance are the annual meetings of Polish young people in Szumsk and trips to Kraków, Częstochowa and Warsaw.

Our Polonia also organises charity events and help for the poor, sick and lonely.

Today's Polish community is visible on the international arena as well. We have hosted in Estonia the President of the Republic of Poland Aleksander Kwaśniewski, the spouse of the President of the Republic of Poland Mrs Maria Kaczyńska, the Minister of Defence Bogdan Klich, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Anna Fotyga, the President of the Republic of Poland and Nobel Prize laureate Lech Wałęsa, as well as the Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz.

An important event in the life of the Polish community and Poles living in Estonia was the arrival in Estonia of the Speaker of the Polish Sejm, Elżbieta Witek. On the very first day of her visit, Madam Speaker visited Estonian Polonia, where a ceremonial reception was organised for her. In her speech, Madam Speaker highly appreciated the role of the Estonian Polonia in preserving and developing Polish culture and language in Estonia. For their part, Poles living in Estonia presented Madam Speaker with a rich cultural programme. The meeting took place in a warm and homely atmosphere.

The development of the APE "Polonia" would not be possible without the help and support of the "Polish Community" Association, without the "Aid for Poles in the East" Foundation. It is also closely linked to the work of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland. A great help and support in these activities is the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Tallinn, which through its ambassador and consul supports and assists our association, as well as provides an open and welcoming home for us.

In addition, it must be emphasised that our Polonia not only organises cultural events, but also actively participates in establishing economic ties between Poland and Estonia. For example, with the active participation of some members of Polonia (Vice-President Igor Bobrowski), the Polish-Estonian Chamber of Commerce was founded in October 2019 in the presence of the Polish President Andrzej Duda. In this way, another cornerstone was laid in the development of relations between both countries.

It is also worth mentioning that the Estonian Ministry of Culture and the National Minorities Community (with its 120 nationalities) enable the organisation of all kinds of integration events, allowing not only for better mutual acquaintance, but also the opportunity to learn about the achievements of other national minorities. An annual National Minorities Forum is held. Each minority can boast of its achievements. We have the opportunity to present our Polish and Polonia-made products. At our stand there is never a shortage

of traditional Polish dishes, cut-outs, embroidery, drawings, woodwork etc. We also do a photo exhibition and an exhibition of Polish folk costumes. Our stand is the most popular one. Such meetings provide an opportunity to learn about Lithuanian, Latvian, Georgian, Azerbaijani, German, Swedish, Finnish, Ukrainian, Russian and other cultures. These meetings are very fruitful, allowing us to establish many new contacts and solve common problems.

Unfortunately, our Polonia is not only successful, but also struggles with many problems, above all financial ones. Despite very modest conditions in which our association acts, we operate vigorously, and constantly develop new plans and projects. This is why we are always very grateful for any help we receive, but also ask for further help at every opportunity. We try to cope with minor expenses, even though there are no wealthy people among us. We organise meetings to celebrate national, religious and special occasions. We organise competitions, film screenings, handicraft exhibitions, photo exhibitions, concerts, meetings for children and young people. But despite the problems, we are working on new projects and looking to the future with hope.

Today's Polish community is very present in the social life of Estonia, more aware of its origins and proud of its Polish roots. Estonian Poles may have different life experiences, different political views, but they have one thing in common – the willing participation in building the common welfare of Poles and Poland. We strive to work for our homeland. Many Poles here work with the Estonian society while maintaining ties with their historical Homeland – Poland.

POLISH COMMUNITY IN ESTONIA

Summary

This article presents the history of Poles living in Estonia, dating back to the 16th century, when the territory of Livonia (today's Estonia) was incorporated into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. For centuries, Poles were important members of the local community, mainly at the University of Dorpat (Tartu). In the 19th and 20th centuries, they created many organisations; the article briefly describes the activities of some of them. The author also presents the current activity of Estonian Polonia in organising various events, meetings or stimulating economic ties between Poland and Estonia, as well as cooperation with Polish institutions.

Keywords: Polish community in Estonia; Association of Poles in Estonia; Tallinn; University of Tartu.

POLONIA W ESTONII

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia dzieje Polaków zamieszkujących Estonię, rozpoczynające się w XVI wieku, kiedy tereny Inflant (dzisiejsza Estonia) zostały włączone do Rzeczypospolitej. Przez wieki Polacy byli ważnymi członkami tamtejszej społeczności, głównie na Uniwersytecie w Dorpacie (Tartu). W wiekach XIX i XX stworzyli wiele organizacji, w tekście krótko opisano działalność niektórych z nich. Przedstawiono także współczesną działalność estońskiej Polonii polegającą na organizowaniu różnego rodzaju imprez, spotkań czy aktywizowaniu więzi gospodarczych między Polską a Estonią oraz współpracy z polskimi instytucjami.

Słowa kluczowe: Polonia w Estonii; Związek Polaków w Estonii; Tallin; uniwersytet w Tartu.