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Polish Organisations in Germany
Their Present Status and Needs

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Chapter I
The origin and development of the organisations in Germany

1. Polish migration to Germany

Polish migration to Germany has been almost continuous for two hundred years. The first waves of this emigration occurred at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Many of Polish insurgents either chose or were forced to migrate following the partitions of Poland between Russia, Austria, and Prussia at the end of the eighteenth century, and again after the series of unsuccessful uprisings that followed (in 1794, 1830, 1848, and 1863). For geographic reasons, the German states were chiefly transfer territories, but some Polish political immigrants settled there. On account of historic ties, Saxony was particularly popular. As Panikos Panayi observes, some German communities were glad to receive Polish immigrants, as they saw certain similarities between the Polish struggle for freedom and self-determination and German attempts at unification.

The partitions also meant that Poles residing in the Prussian partition unwittingly became the Polish minority in Prussia. From 1772–1795, the Kingdom of Prussia expanded both its territory and population considerably. Of the approximately eight million inhabitants of the Kingdom of Prussia, three million were Poles. Following the Napoleonic Wars and the Congress of Vienna, the Polish population in Prussia decreased to one and a half million. In 1871, the population of Poles was concentrated mainly in the eastern provinces, and was estimated to be two and a half million people. In most cases, these were autochthonic Poles living in the countryside, villages, and small towns.

32 Ibidem, p. 54.
33 Ibidem.
Although the economic migration of Poles to Germany started as early as the first half of the nineteenth century,\textsuperscript{36} it was not until the unification of Germany and the creation of the German Empire in 1871 that the process of rapid industrial and economic development of Germany began, leading to a greater need for labour in both industry and agriculture.\textsuperscript{37} Poles were one of the main sources of the labour force needed to meet the increased demand. This was due most of all to the fact that the social and economic processes emerging in the Polish community, such as the abolition of serfdom, rapid population growth, and overpopulation, combined with the lack of industrial development in the partitioned areas, led to poverty among the population, and created a large migratory potential in the Polish population.\textsuperscript{38} Initially Polish migration was above all internal: Poles living in the Prussian partition moved deeper into the German Empire to developing industrial centres. In time, the ever-greater need for labour also led to a flow of Polish population into the German Empire from the Russian and Austrian partitions.\textsuperscript{39} It should however be noted that in many cases Poles from the east settled mainly in Prussia and were a labour supply for German agriculture.

Polish migration to the industrial areas of the German Empire mostly took a network form. Frequently, people from the same regions, or even from the same local communities, settled in the same areas of Germany. The Polish communities were resilient enough to create Polish districts in which there was not only the option of communicating openly in the Polish language, but also the possibility of making use of Polish services and workshops.\textsuperscript{40} This severely slowed the process of integration with the German population, because the migrants reconstructed the social networks necessary to meet their basic social, religious, and economic needs.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{36} See A. Pilch, \textit{Emigracja z ziem zaboru austriackiego (od połowy XIX w. do 1918 r.)}, in: A Pilch, \textit{Emigracja z ziem polskich w czasach nowożytnych i najnowszych (XVIII–XX w.)}, Warsaw 1984.
\textsuperscript{37} W. Lesiuk, op. cit., p. 11.
\textsuperscript{40} See, for example, the description of Polish communities in the Ruhrgebiet: V. M. Stefanski, op. cit., in particular p. 30–72.
\textsuperscript{41} Paradoxically the chain nature of migration might have had a negative effect on the development of Polish organizations, due to the fact that the ties linking migrants often were local and selective, relations between them were rather those of a community, related to similarities and their common experiences. This meant that the first
Between 1870 and 1914, an estimated 3.5 million Poles emigrated to Germany. Approximately 1.2 million people moved from the Prussia partition further into the German Empire, a further 1.2 million Poles emigrated from the Russian partition, while less than 1.1 million Polish immigrants in Germany originated from the Austrian partition.\textsuperscript{42} The most popular area for settlement by Polish immigrants was the territory of the modern North Rhine-Westphalia, which at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was inhabited by between 300,000\textsuperscript{43} and 500,000\textsuperscript{44} Poles. The towns of the Ruhrgebiet in which Polish labourers most frequently settled were Bochum, Bottrop, Dortmund, Recklinghausen, and Düsseldorf. In addition, the Polish population settled in other industrial centres, for example in Saxony (e.g. Dresden, Magdeburg, the Mansfeld Copper Region, and others—approximately 45,000–90,000 people\textsuperscript{45}), in the Hanover region, and in Hamburg. The rapidly growing capital of the Empire, Berlin, also attracted large numbers of Poles, of which there were more than 100,000\textsuperscript{46} at the start of the twentieth century.

The First World War and the creation of an independent Polish state in 1918 changed this situation. The foundation of the Republic of Poland meant that some of the lands of the former German Empire that were inhabited by Poles were now incorporated into the new Polish territory. This was true above all of Wielkopolska, West Prussia, Upper Silesia, South and East Prussia, and part of Pomerania. This led to a substantial decrease in the population of Poles living in the Weimar Republic, although levels continued to be considerable at around 1.5 million.\textsuperscript{47} The largest population clusters were Upper Silesia (600,000–800,000), East Prussia (400,000–550,000), Central Germany (120,000–150,000), and Western Germany (95,000–120,000).\textsuperscript{48}

Organisational forms could help to support and maintain ties with the homeland, with a local, rather than with a general and often abstract ideological idea of their native land of Poland. This might have stalled the development of the Polish movement using national rhetoric, see M. Kostrzewa, op. cit., p. 16.

\textsuperscript{43} G. Janusz, \textit{Polonia w Niemczech...}, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{44} W. Lesiuk, op. cit., p. 15–16.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibidem.
This was not only the shift of borders that affected the number of Poles in Germany. Another major factor was return migration⁴⁹ and further migration to other industrial countries—primarily France and Belgium.⁵⁰ Krystian Heffner estimates that approximately 250,000 Poles left Westphalia alone, of which 100,000 emigrated to Poland and France apiece, and 50,000 to other countries (Belgium, the USA, Canada, and Argentina).⁵¹ A good example of the complex situation of transformation of the Polish migratory communities in the Weimar Republic is Bottrop, from which as much as 23% of the Polish population departed between 1919 and 1933. Some returned to Poland, some emigrated to Holland, and some moved to other German towns⁵².

From the social point of view, there was very little diversity in the Polish minority in Germany. The core of the minority consisted of workers, among which were agricultural workers. There were a much smaller number of farmers, and those were mainly located in the indigenous areas. Intelligentsia were relatively few.⁵³ This make-up of the Polish community was reflected in its Polishness and Polish traditions. The dominant group were individuals who indeed maintained their Polish identity and knowledge of the Polish language, but this was mostly done privately. They did not make a show of their nationality, and they remained relatively passive both organisationally and politically. There were significantly less of those who were fiercely committed to demonstrating their membership of the Polish minority, and who were active in preserving their national identity. A final group was rapidly assimilated into German society, and renounced all connections whatsoever with Poland, Polish culture, and the language.⁵⁴

In the interwar period, there was a change in the nature of Polish migration to Germany. Permanent migration was inhibited, and seasonal migration was restricted. As Edward Marek observes, in Poland in the interwar years there was continuously great potential for migration, due mainly to economic

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⁴⁹ It is worth noting, however, that some of these reverse migrations were only temporary, as a certain number of migrants decided to return to Germany after a certain period of time. See P. Panayi, op. cit., p. 150.
⁵² P. Panayi, op. cit., p. 150.
⁵⁴ Ibidem, p. 9.
hardship and unemployment. At the same time, Germany—particularly in the initial years after the First World War—due to a high level of unemployment attempted to limit economic migration, including from Poland. For a number of years negotiations were held between the authorities of the Republic of Poland and the Weimar Republic regarding a treaty to regulate seasonal migration. Prior to an understanding being reached in 1926, and the signing of the convention concerning Polish agricultural labourers on 24 November, 1927, Polish agricultural labourers were nonetheless migrating illegally to Germany. It is estimated that in the years 1920–1926, between 70,000 and 75,000 agricultural workers took this route, mainly to farms in the east of Germany. It was not until the Convention was signed that it was possible for Polish seasonal immigrants to be covered by basic legal protection. In addition to the provisions regarding the rights of Polish labourers and the regulation of recruitment and the size of quotas, the convention also contained rules for the repatriation of the approximately 60,000 Polish labour migrants present in Germany. On the basis of the agreements contained in the convention, approximately 360,000 people departed for Germany in the years 1926–1930. Once the flow of Polish labour had stopped as a result of economic crisis, the borders were opened again in 1937. Until 1939, more than 80,000 people were leaving Poland each year. Legal migration was accompanied at the same time by steady illegal migration, in particular from border regions.

During the Second World War, the Third Reich’s policy of increasing the supply of labour from areas annexed to the Reich and occupied areas resulted in the forced movement of approximately 1.9 million to 2.5 million Poles to the Reich. These were chiefly taken for forced labour and as prisoners in

55 E. Marek, op. cit. p. 90.
56 Ibidem, p. 91–92. Ewa Kępińska also mentions the fears of repolonisation of the eastern frontiers of Germany, which did not, however, hamper migration from Poland directly. See E. Kępińska, op. cit., p. 115.
59 E. Marek, op. cit., p. 96–97
60 Ibidem, p. 104.
61 E. Kępińska, op. cit., p. 119.
63 E. Marek, op. cit., s 191.
64 Z. Landau, Polityka ludnościowa Niemiec hitlerowskich za ziemiami polskich w latach II wojny światowej, Warsaw 1964, p. 198; J. Korczyńska, op. cit., p. 45.
concentration camps, stalags, and oflags. Poles were the biggest group of foreign forced labourers in Germany, making up as much as 60% of the total.\(^6\) It should also be remembered that approximately 200,000 Polish children were displaced for Germanisation purposes.\(^6\) Immediately following the cessation of combat operations, Poles who had been forcibly resettled in the Third Reich found themselves in various occupation zones (700,000 in the Soviet zone, 540,000 in the British zone, 400,000 in the US zone, and 68,000 in the French zone).\(^6\) Most of these received displaced person (“DP”) status. As a result of repatriation measures, many DPs returned to their homeland, while some—mainly for political reasons—decided to emigrate to other western European states. The most efficient repatriation programme was conducted in the Soviet occupation zone: by the end of 1946, almost all of the displaced persons in that zone had returned to Poland.\(^6\) A certain number of DPs decided to stay in West Germany. It is estimated that, in 1950 in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), there were 80,000 or more DPs who were granted stateless foreigner (heimatlose Ausländer) status.\(^7\) The numbers of this group decreased further in the mid-1950s to approximately 50,000.\(^7\)

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the number and location of the prewar Polish minority living in Germany also changed. This was due mainly to shifts in the borders, the result of which was that the indigenous Polish population living in Lower Silesia, East Prussia, and Pomerania found itself in Polish territory. Only Poles living in the central and western parts of Germany found themselves within Germany’s postwar borders. There were estimated to be approximately 100,000 to 200,000 such people,\(^7\) most of whom lived in the Ruhrgebiet (approximately 100,000), Berlin (approximately 20,000), Hamburg (10,000), Hanover, Dresden, and Leipzig.\(^7\) Another factor resulting in a decrease in the Polish population holding German citizenship

\(^{67}\) E. Marek, op. cit. p. 192.
\(^{68}\) G. Janusz, *Polonia w Niemczech...*, p. 27.
\(^{72}\) K. Heffner, op. cit., p. 50.
\(^{73}\) G. Janusz, *Polonia w Niemczech...*, s 27.
was remigration. The Polish authorities tried to persuade representatives of minorities to return to Poland. Repatriation was successful mainly in the Soviet occupation zone, from which a little over 20,000 Poles returned to Poland. The number of people that returned from the western occupied zones was considerably less. In the years 1948–49 this number was estimated to be approximately 6,500 people. In total, as a result of the repatriation programme in the years 1946–48, almost 34,000 German citizens of Polish origin returned to Poland from all occupation zones. Ultimately in 1949, approximately 80,000 representatives of the prewar minority were living in the FRG, while 25,000 were living in the German Democratic Republic (DDR). The location of the prewar minority also changed due to the policies of the occupying powers. They did not acknowledge the Polish community to be a national minority, but rather considered them “Germans of Polish origin”.

It should be stressed that both in view of the legal status (German citizens vs. heimatlose Ausländer) and their different experiences, Poles in Germany after the Second World War did not form a single homogenous group. Quite the opposite was true: there was a distinct difference between the DPs’ community and so-called old Polonia—those who remained of the prewar Polish minority in Germany.

Although migration was greatly hindered by the closure of the borders of the People’s Republic of Poland (PRL), this did not completely halt population shifts between Poland and Germany. Above all, resettlers (Aussiedler) and the so-called late resettlers (Spätaussiedler) from Poland started to enter the FRG. These migrations commenced in the 1950s as a part of the so-called reuniting of families, which was carried out on the basis of an agreement between the Polish and the German Red Crosses. The size of this wave of migration is estimated to have been approximately 250,000 people. Consequent to the signing in 1970 of a Polish-German Treaty, a further 130,000 people emigrated during the 1970s. The largest wave of resettlers from Poland to Germany arrived in the 1980s, when more than 800,000 people claim-