

## Section 4. European history

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### **Preparation for religious revindication in Holm and Podlasie regions in 1937–38**

Ukrainian-Polish relations between the two world wars — the theme is quite slippery and ambiguous. This period is characterized by a certain confrontation between the two nations and attempts to resolve it in one way or another. Because of this, accumulated a large number of mutual insults and accusations of other parties to the conflict in its launching and fueling. That is why this historical period is actively studied from various sides.

However, despite the large number of researches there are still several areas of not too studied problem. For example, the position of the Ukrainian population, compactly living in the eastern counties of Lublin region — Holm and Southern Podlasie. The said area has not been the scene of active confrontation between the Polish and Ukrainian, so the researchers does not pay much attention to this topic. At first, local scientists are actively engaged in the problem.

In the second half of the thirties, Polish state policy regarding religious national minorities suffered significant deterioration. This was due to faster evolution of Poland towards an authoritarian state. Main ideological topics of the ruling parties of this period were nationalism, Catholicism and authoritarianism. State interest clearly identified with the case of the Polish people. The national policy held the final transition from the concept of state assimilation to national assimilation.

It was believed that the state should monitor the progress of national processes and help to increase the capacity of the Polish people. Point of view according to which the most effective way to ensure social cohesion is a religious unity began to dominate.

Particularly notable was an aggravation of public policy for the Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian population of Holm and Southern Podlasie regions. At the end of January 1935, Lublin province government held a “Congress devoted to the Ukrainian minority in the Lublin province”. Except Lublin governor Jozef Ruzhnetski and officials of General Administration (county mayor, department heads Lublin province government), it was attended by representatives of troops led by Commander II Corps Area General Mieczyslaw Smoravinski.

A troops representatives offered decisive action that would aim the elimination of the Ukrainian question in Holm region. One of the members of the military at the Congress said, “In this area the state should get rid of too much damaging it and unnecessarily tolerance. In the name of its own existence (the state) should completely eliminate the problem of Ukrainian minority in the Holm region, or at least reduce it to as a secondary issue, which is the issue of Czech settlers in Volyn and German colonists in Holm county”. Another speaker spoke clearly: “Our goal is to complete the conquest of the elements of the Polish territory between the Bug and the Wieprz rivers”<sup>1</sup>.

Governor Joseph Ruzhnetski, by the results of the Congress, acknowledged the role of the Orthodox Church as one of the most important aspects that must be considered in the policy of the state. He said, “We are committed polonization of Orthodoxy”<sup>2</sup>. During this period, has not been considered a radical action that would aim to quickly and dramatically restricting the Orthodox Church in Holm and Southern Podlasie regions, attention has focused on providing it Polish character.

As presented at the congress “Guidelines for determining positions on the Ukrainian question” of 35 points was formulated detailed and long-term program elimination “issues of Ukrainian minority” in Holm and Southern Podlasie and inviting it “finally in the fold of Polish culture and the nation”<sup>3</sup>. Among them were also paragraphs that related to Orthodoxy. They mainly said about strong polonization Orthodox Church, opposition to the development of its structures and issue of not recognized by the state priests presence.

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<sup>1</sup> Kuprianowicz G. Projekty “rozwiązania” kwestii ukraińskiej na Chełmszczyźnie i Podlasiu Południowym w drugiej połowie lat trzydziestych XX wieku (statтя) // Волинь і Холмщина 1938–1947 рр. Польсько-українське протистояння та його відлуння. Дослідження, документи, спогади. – Львів: Інститут українознавства НАНУ, – 2003. – С. 103.

<sup>2</sup> Kuprianowicz G. Memorial w sprawie sytuacji ukraińskiej ludności na Chełmszczyźnie/G. Kuprianowicz // Res Historica. – 1997. – Z. 1. – Lublin, – 1997. – S. 332

<sup>3</sup> Kuprianowicz G. Projekty “rozwiązania” kwestii ukraińskiej na Chełmszczyźnie i Podlasiu Południowym w drugiej połowie lat trzydziestych XX wieku (statтя) // Волинь і Холмщина 1938–1947 рр. Польсько-українське протистояння та його відлуння. Дослідження, документи, спогади. – Львів: Інститут українознавства НАНУ, – 2003. – С. 104.

New trends in national and religious policy of the Polish state became more and more clearly manifested after the death of Marshal Jozef Pilsudski. In December 1935, government officially established the Committee on the issue of national minorities, which included prime minister and heads of key agencies. Landmark was that in their first meeting, the Committee discussed the state policy about Orthodoxy. It was agreed that the Orthodox Church should be used for the distribution of Polish culture and therefore the state must go to her polonization.

Principles of the state policy were drawn by the premiere Marian Zyndarm-Koshtsyanski in February 1936, when he said that, “the goal (of policy) is the internal consolidation of the Republic”. During 1935–1936 role of religious forces in the formulation of policies that dealt with national minorities has grown<sup>1</sup>. Representatives of troops usually made more radical proposals than representatives of civil administration.

In the late thirties, more and more attention was devoted to religious issues. It was decided that on the way to assimilation must be polonization religious life of individual faiths. A special role was defined to the Catholic Church, because it was believed that the most certain way of polonization and the integration of society is the acceptance of Catholicism in the Latin rite.

This sharpening of religious and national policy had the most dramatic effect in Holm and Southern Podlasie regions. As renowned Polish scholar Jan Kęsik noted, “Holm and Volyn were training ground for a new national policy, in these areas it has the most acute forms”<sup>2</sup>.

Preparation for polonization-revindication program was launched in the Lublin province in late 1936. On December 11, 1936, the Coordination Committee by the Regions Corps Command number II (Lublin) was created. It covered with its activities five southeastern counties of Lublin and Volyn provinces. Formally, the aim of the Committee was to strengthen, organize and coordinate, and thus make effective efforts of society towards the rise of military force and military readiness in the state.

The Committee included representatives of troops and more than twenty Polish community organizations of Lublin and Volyn provinces. Mieczyslaw Smoravinski (commander of the Regions Corps Command) was the head of the Committee. The executive body of the Committee was the headquarters of the independent Department of the Regions Corps Command, headed by Major General Stanislaw Krogulski.

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<sup>1</sup> Kuprianowicz G. Projekty “rozwiązania” kwestii ukraińskiej na Chełmszczyźnie i Podlasiu Południowym w drugiej połowie lat trzydziestych XX wieku (стаття) // Волинь і Холмщина 1938–1947 рр. Польсько-українське протистояння та його відлуння. Дослідження, документи, спогади. – Львів: Інститут українознавства НАНУ, – 2003. – С. 105

<sup>2</sup> Jan Kęsik *Naród pod bronią: społeczeństwo w programie polskiej polityki wojskowej 1918–1939.* – Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, – 1998 – 199 s.

On June 4, 1937 in Lublin held plenary meetings of the Coordination Committee, which, in addition to military commanders, was also attended by representatives of civil administrative authorities, Professors of Catholic University of Lublin, representatives of Polish NGOs. At the meeting, principles of the Committee were established. Indicated the need to consolidate all Polish organizations and society to “strengthen Polishness” in the areas covered by the activities of the Committee. One of the activities of the Committee was preparation for the revindication<sup>1</sup>.

Civil administration was collaborating with an army in implementation of this program. Radicalization of policy regarding to national minorities has caused doubts about the leadership of the province. Previous governor of Lublin province Jozef Ruzhetskyy unofficially protested against exacerbation of national and religious policies. It was probably the reason for withdrawal from the post of governor in September 1937. On the wave of Lublin authority changes, duties of Lublin province governor fell on George Albin de Tramenkurt, which by this time was acting Polesie governor. He fully supported the action “of strengthening Polishness” in the eastern provinces of the state.

General Olbryht, the commander of the 3rd Infantry Division, directly controlled actions in Holm region. He was the “Head of the Coordination action in Holm region”. The main center of activity was Zamosch, which was the headquarters of the division. On October 26, 1937, General Olbryht issued an order, which defined the objectives of the polonization action and instructions for preparation of an action and later announced the development of a plan for the whole Holm region<sup>2</sup>.

The plan was called “Main guidelines for the polonization of Holm region”. The leading idea of the program was the principle: “All Orthodox people of Holm are converted Poles”. Based on this idea, three categories of Orthodox population were determined: “indifferent to the Orthodox Church”, which you can convince to switch to Catholicism; “tied to orthodoxy”, which, however, were not conscious Ukrainian; and “nationally conscious Ukrainians”<sup>3</sup>.

A separate policy for each of these groups was created — from cautious campaign in relation to the first category to limiting the impact of the third category because of “splitting large clusters of this population and separating them from other by creating Polish settlements nearby”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Kuprianowicz G. Projekty “rozwiązania” kwestii ukraińskiej na Chełmszczyźnie i Podlasiu Południowym w drugiej połowie lat trzydziestych XX wieku (statтя) // Волинь і Холмщина 1938–1947 рр. Польсько-українське протистояння та його відлуння. Дослідження, документи, спогади. – Львів: Інститут українознавства НАНУ, – 2003. – С. 110.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. – S. 111.

<sup>3</sup> Kuprianowicz G. Memorial w sprawie sytuacji ukraińskiej ludności na Chełmszczyźnie/G. Kuprianowicz// Res Historica. – 1997. – Z. 1. – Lublin, – 1997. – S. 334.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. – S. 335.

As for people from the first group, was supposed to be implemented its transition to Catholicism, of the second group — polonization of Orthodoxy, on the third — its isolation. Achieving these goals was planned for many years to come. Their implementation was to be used by the army, the Catholic Church, schools, administrative authorities, as well as Polish society on the ground.

The “Guidelines” recommended, following idea: “It is necessary to promote that Poles in the Holm region have a special mission of polonization and that is why they should unite around this idea”<sup>1</sup>. Other administrative actions was to reorganize the structure of communes so that the Polish population had an advantage over Ukrainians. The emigration of the population Ukrainian from this region was supported and the emigration of the Polish population was banned. Only Catholics could own the land.

According to the list, approved by General Olbrycht on April 4, 1938, 56 churches were subjected to dismantle and 61 — were to be handed over to the Lublin Catholic episcopate. It is difficult to understand how the Church wanted to use them if the Ministry of National Education objected the creation of new parishes paid government positions priests<sup>2</sup>.

To resolve this issue and eliminate Ukrainian owners of wealth — the Uniate church, on June 20, 1938, Poland signed with Vatican the Memorial about repurchase of former Greek Catholic church building, for which was paid 2.5 million zloty. Sejm (parliament) ratified this agreement on July 6, 1938, when there was the most massive destruction of Orthodox and Uniate Church. The new stage of destruction of former Ukrainian Orthodox and Greek Catholic Church began in April 1938<sup>3</sup>.

Finally, the action of destruction of Orthodox churches in Holm region was ended on July 16, 1938. After it left only 51 church buildings for approximately 230 thousand Orthodox believers.

To summarize, we can say that in the second half of the thirties Polish state policy regarding religion and national minorities experienced a marked aggravation — in national politics held the final transition from the concept of state assimilation to national assimilation. At that time, it was decided to hold the final polonization of Ukrainians in Holm and southern Podlasie regions. The main goal was considered as religious revindication. This was one of the reasons for significant strengthening of nationalist sentiments among the population and activation far-right-wing political forces such as the UNO.

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<sup>1</sup> Kuprianowicz G. Projekty “rozwiązania” kwestii ukraińskiej na Chełmszczyźnie i Podlasiu Południowym w drugiej połowie lat trzydziestych XX wieku (statтя) // Волинь і Хоамщина 1938–1947 рр. Польсько-українське протистояння та його відлуння. Дослідження, документи, спогади. – Львів: Інститут українознавства НАНУ, – 2003. – С. 113.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. – S. 838.

<sup>3</sup> Пастернак Є. Нарис історії Хоамщини і Підляшшя : Новіші часи/Є. Пастернак. – Вінніпег; Торонто, – 1989., – С. 229.