

Summary

The Polish Minority in the South-Eastern Ukraine

The Ukraine shares borders with seven countries: Russia, Belorussia, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Moldova and Romania. The Ukraine, against a European backdrop, is characterised by un-even terrain and un-even distribution of its population. The country's borders changed frequently over the course of history which in turn inspired efforts to achieve independence. The administrative and territorial divisions of the Zaporozhian and Donetsk oblasts as well as how they have changed over time are described in chapter 1.1. Originally these areas were just a wilderness populated by nomadic peoples. Later, these lands formally became part of Poland and the Ottoman Empire. In the 19th century these lands formed part of the Jekaterynoslaw and Tauride provinces under the Russian Empire. In the period 1917–1920 the Ukrainian People's Republic was formed. In the interwar period this was the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (the republic was divided into districts).

The Donetsk oblast is deemed to be the most industrialised part of the Ukraine. Donetsk, also known as the “City of Roses,” was founded in 1869 thanks to a Welsh entrepreneur. He built metallurgical plants and coal mines in several settlements founded in the 17th century. The other most important industrial towns, apart from Donetsk, are: Artiomowsk, Gorlowka, Jenakijewo, Kramatorsk, Makiejewka, Mariupol and Torez. Poles lived in these towns thereby contributing to their growth. There were (and are) Roman Catholic churches, where Poles played an important role especially after 1991. The Zaporizhia Oblast was founded in 1939 and its capital is Zaporizhia. The other big towns are Berdyansk, Melitopol and Tokmak, which are also inhabited by Poles.

The national-ethnic make-up of the oblast analysed by me, where the largest ethnic group are Ukrainians, is presented in chapter 1.4. The second largest group are Russians. Several groups contributed to the development of this area, including: Bulgarians, Germans, Greeks, Jews, Czechs, Tatars, Poles, Armenians and others.

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Representatives of these ethnic groups and nations live in the area to this day. The area was characterised by the penetration of different cultures. Industrialisation and Stalinisation was to lead to the development of a single state organism and titular nation, i.e. Russian. From a language perspective this policy was a success. Once the Ukraine became independent, associations for each of the aforementioned ethnic groups were founded which led to the teaching of minority languages. Multiculturalism and tolerance were discouraged.

Poles in the south-eastern Ukraine first lived as migrant workers, were refugees and were later sent to work in the mines. They were repressed and treated like a “fifth column” due to their catholic faith and Polish origin. They experienced humiliation and were to disappear from the Ukrainian national map as a result of the seventy years of Soviet policy. Chapter 1.5 deals with the subject of Poles in this region.

As is commonly known, Poles were good specialists in various fields. They were respected by Russians and representatives of other nations as hard-working,

cultural and honest people. It is worthwhile considering how difficult the conditions in which Poles lived, learned and worked were. And despite these conditions, they earned a reputation as worthy citizens in this corner of central-eastern Europe.

As an independent country following “perestroika” the Ukraine started to set its own laws. It adopted and ratified a constitution as a guarantee of rights which was complemented by acts and laws; legal regulations regarding selected aspects of problems with ethnic minorities are described in chapter 2. It seems that the most important aspect is that Ukrainian authorities appreciated the role and importance of the ethnic and national minorities living in the country as well as the richness of their cultures, languages and religions etc.

The aim of this chapter was to present the basic principles of law relating to national minorities. I have presented several acts and decrees as well as citations from the Ukrainian constitution. They describe which societies are legally deemed to be minorities, what the state guarantees these groups, the principles regarding the formation of associations and minority organizations. I have mainly focused on the Polish minority living in the Donetsk and Zaporozhian oblasts. Afterwards I describe the current situation of Polish organisations in the examined area.

There are very few Polish organisations given the size of the area and there are over two thousand members of Polish organisations in the Donetsk and Zaporozhian oblasts. There are ten independent organisations with eleven regional branches. As usual, any attempt to form such organisations is met with difficulties and organisers can wait a long time for a decision. The length of time that organisers must wait depends upon the official dealing with the case.

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The issue of education for national minorities from the perspective of prevailing Ukrainian laws is described in chapter 2.2. All minorities have the right to organise classes, provide courses and to teach their own languages. Similarly, Poles living in the Ukraine have the possibility to learn Polish in various ways. Based upon the information provided by teachers, it is known that the number of individuals learning Polish increases annually. It can only be hoped that with time, Ukrainian law will match the demands of users of the language / languages.

National and ethnic minorities grow mainly due to the preservation and presentation of their national cultures or ethnic origins, as discussed in Section 2.3. There are acts which state that each national minority has the right to express and promote their own cultural heritage.

Poles living in the south-eastern Ukraine are quite well organized and fully exercise their rights. The list of folk, vocal and amateur-dramatic groups is significant.

With the approval of local authorities, high-standing Polish art exhibitions or presentations of regional Polish cultures are organized. Polish newspapers are printed, outdoor painting, recitals and concerts are organised. Poles are characterised by a high level of culture in this melting pot of different groups.

The activities of the Roman Catholic Church in this region are described in chapter 2.4. The Ukrainian government has also issued several legal acts in this field which provide for the freedom of religious expression. A list of churches,

chapels and parishes in the Donetsk and Zaporozhian oblasts is provided following the discussion of these acts.

The contemporary standing of the Polish language among Poles in the south-eastern Ukraine demonstrates the complexity of the problems, which is reflected above all in the social stratification of the Polish language. My sources in the older and middle generations living in the Donetsk and Zaporozhian oblasts use a form of Polish used in the south-eastern and north-eastern regions of Poland as well as general Polish (for those born in the hear of Poland) which stretches to the Khmelnytsky, Volyn and Zhitomir areas. The native language for these people was Polish. Over the course of their lives, they began to learn and use Ukrainian as well as Russian. Some of those questioned also use written and spoken Polish to this day. Others gladly make the most of the opportunity to speak Polish where they reminisce and remember various stories. For some, the only Polish they remember are often-used phrases or prayers learned during childhood. The middle-aged and younger generations born in the Donetsk and Zaporozhian oblasts are only just learning Polish due to their awareness of their roots. They learn Polish from Russian or Ukrainian.

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The Polish of those surveyed in the south-eastern Ukraine was and is always in contact with Ukrainian and Russian. My sources constantly roamed before finally settling in the Donetsk and Zaporozhian oblasts. The migratory movements were as a result of, among others, the political situation (deportation), forced labour in the industrial towns of Donetsk and Zaporizhia as well as later voluntary migration (in search of work). The social status of the survey's participants undoubtedly had an effect on their linguistic abilities. Some participants went to Polish school, some were self-taught. The sources were from various professions, however, the majority represent the higher classes.

The fact that the sources were bilingual or trilingual wasn't surprising because the social and economic situation required them to learn new languages. Using two or three closely tied languages, the participants easily switch between them. Sometimes, they do this consciously, however, often not. To a significant extent, it depends on the situation. Often, the change in linguistic-code occurred when the partner in the discussion changed. The subject of the discussion also played an important role as did the place and general situation: official or un-official. The quantitative criteria suggest it is possible to identify single switches (when the change in code is not repeated) and multiple switches (dependent upon a variety of factors). Sources are able to comfortably switch to another code to a better or worse effect.

With such closely related linguistic codes, it is not surprising that interference occurs among Poles. These interferences occur in the phonetic, inflectional, syntactic systems as well as in vocabulary. The most frequently occurring interferences have been described. The Polish of my sources was in a Russian and Ukrainian setting far away from the current Polish border. Up to 1990, these people were completely isolated from the Polish media and culture. Literature was very rare.

The striking Surzhyk phenomenon is also reflected in the spoken language of

the survey's participants. This phenomenon partly applies to the Polish language as well as to the code which is intertwined with Ukrainian and Russian. For this reason and due to its uniqueness and originality, I have discussed this subject more extensively. Surzhyk is used by older and middle-aged people who are often either family or neighbours. These people are well aware of the fact that they are using a "mixed language": Ukrainian and Russian. The results of my study show that those most often speaking Surzhyk were born in villages.

As a result of language policy which favours Russian, changes were observed in families and neighbourhoods. Only a small part of the Polish minority in the Donetsk (4.1%) and Zaporozhian (4.0%) Oblasts treat Polish as their native language. Officially, 19.3% of Poles in Donetsk treat Ukrainian as their native language,

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whilst 75.7% treat Russian in the same way. In the Zaporozhian Oblast, however, the proportions are 38% Ukrainian and 56.8% Russian. During the course of my studies which I started in 2007, I did not hear about any Poles using Polish on a daily basis. It is probably the case that those who treated Polish as their native tongue were born in pre-war Poland and the language they used at home was Polish. The Russian language in the surveyed area played an important role in recent times and continues to be the most common language used. It is still used in high-culture such as in the theatre, cinema, schools and libraries.

As a result of the Ukraine reclaiming its independence, the use of the Ukrainian language is becoming more widespread on an annual basis in particular in middle and higher education. In the education system, Polish features only as required or optional subject. In the field of education, we have people of various ages who wish to learn Polish. There are two reasons for this. The first is the willingness to learn the language of the forefathers and the second is the desire to emigrate to Poland.

Russian is also dominant in religion (see chapter 4.3). Even during Polish masses, it is often the case that only the fixed elements of the mass are in Polish whilst the readings, gospels and sermons are in Russian. In the Ukraine, there is no act which stipulates which language should be used in the Catholic Church.

The „Polacy Donbasu” newspaper plays an important role, thanks to which members of the older generation who don't have access to the internet, have the ability to come in to contact with written Polish. The Polish Cultural Society of Donbass publishes the “Polacy Donbasu” newspaper, prepares the “Polska Fala Donbasu” radio show, the “TV Polaków Donbasu” TV show and maintains a website. The editors are the same people. These were all founded by the previous chairman Ryszard Zielinski. Currently, the responsibility for all tasks has fallen to Walentyna Staruszko. It is clear that just one person isn't able to take on all of these tasks which additionally require certain technical skills, such as those required to maintain a website. Moreover, Walentyna Staruszko is a Polish teacher and edits (in Russian) the “Golos Nastojatiela” which is published each Sunday. It contains the reflections of the parish priest and targets Catholics living in Donetsk (see chapter 4.4).

Chairpersons of Polish organisations are faced with a difficult task. The areas

where these organisations function are far away from the Polish border and cooperation as well as the presentation of modern Poland is often not an easy task. In this case the continued development of the Polish language and the other subjective aspects of the Polish identity are in the hands of these chairpersons and associations.

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Currently, in the Donetsk and Zaporozian oblasts the Polish language has a symbolic, cognitive and economic function. The significant symbolic importance of the Polish language is a characteristic of the older generation as the language provides them with a sense of identity. It also occurs that people who are “still in hiding” ask their loved ones to arrange the presence of a catholic priest and prayer in Polish before they pass away.

Problems with group and individual national identity are presented in chapter 5. Descriptions of the following identity criteria, largely based upon the subject literature and the studies I have carried out, have been included:

- › Blood ties, i.e. I am Polish because my parents were Polish;
- › Documents and official annotations, resulting from blood ties;
- › Religion;
- › Language.

The situation of the Polish minority in the south-eastern Ukraine is particularly complicated. The answer to the question “who am I?” is difficult. This is particularly so in the case of the studied region where Poles constitute but an insignificant proportion of the population and are highly dispersed. Interviews and survey results for Polish respondents in south-eastern Ukraine are highlighted by the Polish identity indicators in the specific towns which were surveyed.

This book also contains the opinions of individuals regarding additional factors influencing their identity, e.g. place of birth. The studies show that a new type of Polish culture is forming in the eastern Ukraine, as only certain elements of Polish culture are being nurtured which is a result of the culture’s lack of continuity. A new approach and methodology should be applied to the teaching of the Polish language for the Polish minority of this region. Furthermore, a model for the formation of the future Polish generation should be developed and which should highlight specific aspects of national consciousness.

The subject of biographical memory has been described in chapter 6 and has been split in to two separate study perspectives. The first part contains the spoken biographies of selected individuals and their view of the Polish character and understanding of this concept. The biographies or even the memoirs of the families important for the Polish national culture were prepared based upon the subject literature. Communication memories are important for us, which has been shown in chapters 6.1.1–6.1.4, as are the units which have contributed to the development of Polish culture. The two descriptions which have been presented differ from the perspective of time, space and achievements. I have very briefly summarised the achievements of the Jelski family which is an important component

of Polish culture. The generation now living in Donetsk also played a significant role as well as the older generations active in various periods of time on the borders of the Republic. The family is an important observation point because it is within a family that language patterns and attitudes towards languages as well as ethnic groups are formed.

The Polish character in south-eastern regions of the Ukraine (resurgent of relics, or more accurately, created, transferred from the Poland) is an important part of the regional landscape but also of the knowledge regarding Poles living beyond Polish borders. This book is part of the canon of research regarding the Polish minority in Ukraine and abroad.

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