

Stefan Dudra*

University of Zielona Góra, Zielona Góra, Poland

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4196-1305>

On the need to recognize the Greeks in Poland as a national minority

Introduction

For several years, members of the Greek community in Poland have been making efforts to obtain national minority status. The issue of the possibility of granting them such status came up in 2015. It was considered by the Committee on National and Ethnic Minorities of the Polish Sejm of the 7th term. During the session on March 18, 2015, the opinion of the Sejm's Bureau of Analyses was presented, which was based on the expert opinion developed by Professor Grzegorz Janusz from the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. In its conclusion, a negative position was expressed on the possibility of granting the Greek community the status of a national minority. The main premise was the failure to meet all the statutory conditions for obtaining such a status. In Janusz's opinion

the contemporary Greek community in Poland fulfils the requirements for citizenship and the conditions set out in Article 2, paragraph 1, points 1-4 and point 6 of the Act. However, in relation to the premise set forth in paragraph 5 of the above mentioned provision of the law, this key condition is not fulfilled, because between the Greek community, which was active and organized into its own parishes as early as the beginning of the 19th century, and the contemporary group of Polish citizens of Greek nationality, there has been a gap of over 150 years in the cultivation of their own identity ¹.

In Polish legal system, the basic acts regulating the issue of national and ethnic minorities are the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of April 2, 1997 (mainly Article 35)² and the Act of January 6, 2005 on national and ethnic minorities and regional

* Correspondence address: Instytut Nauk o Polityce i Administracji, Uniwersytet Zielonogórski, Al. Wojska Polskiego 69, 65-762 Zielona Góra, Polska, e-mail: s.dudra@wh.uz.zgora.pl.

¹ Also in a later expert report of February 2021, Janusz upheld his earlier findings (see: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, 2021).

² Article 35 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland in paragraph 1 ensures Polish citizens belonging to national and ethnic minorities the freedom to preserve and develop their own language, preserve customs and traditions and develop their own culture. In addition, national and ethnic minorities have the right to establish their own educational and cultural institutions for the protection of their religious identity and to participate in the settlement of matters concerning their cultural identity (section 2) (*Constitution of the Republic of Poland, 1997*).

language (Polish Parliament, 2005). In addition, the legal status of national and ethnic minorities is secured under the provisions of international law. These issues are regulated, among others, by the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities drawn up in Strasbourg on February 1, 1995 (Council of Europe, 1995).

Should the Greeks in Poland be given the status of a national minority? Under the current provisions of the 2005 Act in Article 2(1), a community can be recognized as a national minority after fulfilling the following conditions together:

- 1) it is smaller in number than the rest of the population of the Republic of Poland;
- 2) is significantly different from other citizens in terms of language, culture or tradition;
- 3) strives to preserve its language, culture or tradition;
- 4) is aware of its own historical national community and is oriented towards its expression and protection;
- 5) its ancestors have inhabited the present territory of the Republic of Poland for at least 100 years;
- 6) identifies itself with the nation organized in its own state (Polish Parliament, 2005).

From the legislator's point of view, these are the conditions that a social group striving to be recognized as a national minority must meet in order to be recognized as a national minority according to the law in force³. Do the Greeks living in Poland fulfill the criteria for being recognized as a national minority according to the Act of 2005? ⁴ I will try to answer this question by analyzing the presence of the Greeks on the Polish territory.

The Greek community on Polish soil

The first Greeks on Polish soil appeared as early as the time of Bolesław Chrobry. Later, the main reasons for Greek emigration were economic (mainly trade) and political (escape from Turkish terror) (Mikołajczyk, 2014b: 89-90; Malinowski, 2019: 14). They engaged in trade and were also intermediaries in the exchange of goods between East and West. They were animators of the development of Polish culture and science. They settled in Lviv as early as the 14th century, and in the second half of the 16th century they constituted a compact ethnic group there. In addition, they resided in Kalisz, Lublin, Mogilev Podolski, Poznań, Warsaw, and Zamość, among other places (Mikołajczyk, 2015: 35-41; Lylo, 2019: 735-747).

³ On the basis of the 2005 Act, which unambiguously defines and conditions the constituent elements influencing the recognition of a given group as a national minority, there are nine minorities in Poland with the status of national minority: Belarusian, Czech, Lithuanian, German, Armenian, Russian, Slovak, Ukrainian and Jewish. Additionally, the law also lists groups with the status of ethnic minority. These include the Karaite, Lemko, Roma and Tatar minorities (see: Article 2, Section 2 and 4, Polish Parliament, 2005).

⁴ Today, according to the results of the 2011 Population and Housing Census, 3600 people made a declaration of Greek nationality, of which a declaration of Greek nationality occurring with a simultaneous declaration of Polish nationality was made by 2,858 people. The declaration of using the Greek language at home was made by 2,858 people, including as the only one for 56 people (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2012).

The activity of the Greeks on the Polish lands became visible, among others, in scientific and educational activities (they were engaged in teaching, they were co-founders of libraries and bookstores) (Mikołajczyk, 2018: 81-82; Kempa, 2010: 185-204; Różycki, 1991: 171-175; Lylo, 2012: 49-58). Their activity was also one of the strongest factors influencing the cultural development of Lviv. Among the most well-known and respected Greeks in Polish society was the bookseller and publisher Jan Konstanty Żupański of Poznań. He was also an active social activist, took part in the work of the Society for Scientific Aid and was one of the initiators of the Poznań Society of the Friends of Sciences (in 1867-1868 he served as chairman of the Department of Historical Sciences) and the Society of People's Readers. He also acted as a patron, e.g., he donated considerable sums to poor Polish emigrants and intelligentsia (Foć, Romanowska, 1996: 24-27; Chadzinikolau, 2000: 73-111; Jazdon, 2003: 381-382).

The Greeks were also the owners of rich book collections. Among others, Konstantyn Ukuta Chartofilax from Poznań (died in 1799) or Atanazy Sawicz, who firstly served as a priest in Poznań and then in Kalisz (died in 1827). They were also engaged in selling books (among others the owner of the largest book collection among the Lviv Greeks, Konstanty Madzapeta, was involved in book trade). Generally, Greeks left their mark on the development of Polish bookselling. One of the biggest Greek bookshops functioned in Kalisz (founded in 1856 by Rajko Grabowski family). Rich libraries were also possessed by Greeks living in other cities, e.g., Dymitr Mawros from Vilnius at the end of the 19th century had a library of 5,060 titles in 9,000 volumes (Mikołajczyk, 2017: 8-13; Różycki, 1991: 181). The publishing activities of the Greeks, the possession of huge book collections for the time, which were often lent out, contributed to the integration of Polish society and the Polish lands during the period of partitions.

In addition to their scientific and educational activities, they also engaged in trade. The activity of Greek merchants was one of the strongest factors influencing the economic development of Polish cities. In Lviv, they had their permanent trading posts. Apart from wine trade, which was dominated by them in Lviv, they also imported Eastern goods (such as carpets, horse blankets, jewelry, spices and sweets) and weapons (mainly Turkish sabers and Persian sabers and shields). For the then inhabitants of the Polish lands owning Eastern goods was a specific sign of social status. The Greeks offered goods "for every taste and every pocket" (Lylo, 2012: 52; Mikołajczyk, 2014b: 92-93).

They invested the money they earned in the Polish lands. They opened craft workshops that produced fabrics modeled on oriental fashion (e.g., popular men's belts and Turkish shirts). This activity was patronized, among others, by King John III Sobieski, for whom they made custom-made horse pompons (saddle pads) and high-quality quivers. In their workshops, they produced sought-after goods (e.g., products of goldsmiths, weavers, embroiderers). A strong weaving center was established in the mid-17th century in Brody, under the patronage of Hetman Stanisław Koniecpolski (Lylo, 2016: 198' 204-206). They also bought or built tenements, acquired properties, and erected

exquisite palaces (e.g., Konstanty Korniak of Lviv). Rich Greeks became patrons of culture and founders of residences (e.g., Korniak was one of the founders of the Jesuit fathers' residence in Lviv). In Puławy, in the palace of Duke Adam Czartoryski, a cafe run by a Greek named Anastazy was very popular (Reychman, 1965: 99; Lylo, 2010: 212).

From the 18th century Poznań was an important center of social, economic, and religious life for Greek merchants (the first mention of Greeks in the city dates back to the 16th century). Just like in other regions of Poland, they dealt mainly with trade, creating its modern foundations. Among others, Żupański belonged to the Polish Casino in Bazar, was a member of the Polish Industrial Society and the National Guard in Poznań. Michał Rajko Grabowski from Kalisz was the founder of the Kantor of Orders and Information (1862) and managed the agency of the Cracow Society of the Friends of Fine Arts (selling paintings and furniture). Dymitr Simo Szymanowski (died 1889), who also lived in Kalisz, was the Elder of the Merchant Assembly in that city (Mikołajczyk, 2014a: 92; Maciejewski, 1981: 888).

The settlement of the Greeks on Polish lands, their economic activities, and their involvement in local culture and science also encouraged them to take action to satisfy their own religious needs. Multicultural and multinational Orthodoxy helped the Greeks to maintain their national and religious identity. Greek monks became members of monastic communities. They influenced the theological formation of Orthodox monasteries. In the Orthodox churches they could cultivate and develop their religious tradition. Greek merchants in Zamość were granted the privilege of building the first church as early as in 1589. The fact of its existence was clear evidence of the high social position of the Greek community in Zamość. At the end of the 16th century, there were about 100 Greek merchants and craftsmen in Zamość. They became, together with the Armenians, the second largest national group outside the borders of the Republic (Lylo, 2019: 738-739). Later, thanks to their initiative and funds, temples were built in Mohylów Podolski (1754), Lublin (1786), and Warsaw (1796), among others. The Greeks also had their own house of prayer in Cracow (Sakowicz, 1939: 3-4; Sokół, Sosna, 2003: 9-11).

From the 18th century, an important center of Greek religious life was Poznań. In the middle of the century, the first Greek religious community was established there. An important figure among the Greek clergy in Poznań was Konstantyn Ukuta Chartofilax. He participated, among others, in the deliberations of the Pinsk congregation in 1791 (he was the only clergyman representing the provinces of Greater Poland and probably all the Orthodox communities founded by Greeks). The goal of the congregation was to work out the status and organization of the Orthodox Church in Poland. The project was submitted to the Great Sejm and approved as a constitution on May 21, 1792 (in fact, the Pinsk congregation established the Autocephalous Orthodox Church in the Republic of Poland, independent from external authorities). However, the outbreak of the war in defense of the Constitution of 3 May and the subsequent partitions of Poland meant that this act did not come into force (Mironowicz, 1999: 107-108).

Apart from the Orthodox community in Poznań, Greeks initiated the development of Orthodoxy in other regions of Greater Poland. They were the founders of churches in Piotrków Trybunalski (1788), Kalisz (1835), and Opatów (1837) (Sławiński, 2006; Sokół, Sosna, 2003: 9-11).

Another page of the Greek presence on Polish soil was written by the soldiers who were settled in Zgorzelec (then Görlitz) in 1916. In September 1916, 6,100 soldiers and 430 officers arrived. They also brought their wives and children with them (about 500 people). Their arrival was related to the warfare during World War I, when in August 1916 German and Bulgarian troops encircled the IV Corps of the Hellenic Army in northern Greece as a result of operational activities. Its commander, Colonel Ioannis Chatzopoulos, approached the German authorities with a proposal to transport the corps to Germany. After reaching an agreement with Major Wolfgang von Schweinitz and at the invitation of the German Army Command (Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff), the Greek soldiers were loaded onto trains and transported by rail to Germany as “guests of the Reich Government”. It was decided to place them in a prison of war camp in Görlitz (on the eastern side of the city – today’s Zgorzelec). The Greeks were even enthusiastically welcomed by the townspeople (they were greeted with a military band and flowers, and the Greek anthem was played) (Alexatos, 2018: 31-38). The Germans treated them as a bargaining chip in their negotiations with the government in Athens to maintain neutrality during the war. In the initial period, they were treated very well (they were not even disarmed, the officers lived outside the camp in rented apartments or hotels with free movement), they published their newspaper (*Nea Tou Görlitz*). They were provided with good living conditions. The German government allocated more than 10 million marks from the so-called Greek Fund to support the Greeks (Weltkrieg, 2017). Some Greeks had the opportunity to work in agriculture and in industrial plants. They learned the professions of shoemaker and tailor. Marriages to German women also occurred (Seewald, 2016).

After Greece’s accession to the Entente, the situation of Greek soldiers became complicated. From internees, they became prisoners of war, were disarmed and confined to a camp. Many of them died as a result of the Spanish flu. In January 1919, talks began about liquidating the camp. Due to the lack of transport facilities, most of the soldiers left Zgorzelec only on February 21, 1919. About 200 Greeks and the graves of 133 soldiers remained in the city, including Colonel Chatzopoulos, who died in 1918 (Seewald, 2016). In 1921, Greeks living in Zgorzelec founded the association Griechische Vereinigung in Görlitz. Its purpose was to support their own activities, to cultivate “Greek religion and patriotism, and to support their poor and sick compatriots”. In 1930, the association received financial support from the Greek government to maintain the graves in the local cemetery. With Hitler’s rise to power, the activities of the association almost died down. The Greeks of Görlitz were subjected to harassment by the security appara-

tus until the end of World War II. As Gerassimos Alexatos, states it was one of the oldest Greek associations in Germany (Alexatos, 2018: 130).

Most of the Greeks who remained in Zgorzelec started families and their own businesses. They owned stores, shoemaker and hairdresser workshops. In 1923, the Greeks had 15 companies registered (two shoemaker's workshops, a tailor's store, a hairdresser's, a dentist, an engine repair workshop, stores), including one factory. As trade with Greece expanded, exotic products were imported, including the particularly popular Greek snuff (Alexatos, 2018: 130).

Over the centuries Greeks played an important role in the development of the economic, cultural and scientific life of Polish cities. Undoubtedly, they also existed as a national group during the Second Polish Republic. It is difficult to clearly indicate their contribution to the development of various areas of social life, since many of them adopted Polish surnames, among others resisting Germanization and Russification during the partitions and, thus, becoming solidary with the Polish society. This issue would require in-depth genealogical research⁵.

They did not undertake major organizational activities during this period, among other reasons due to their small size (in fact, the lack of temporary creation of organizational forms is not a prerequisite for recognizing a group as a national minority). In addition, the reluctant and sometimes hostile attitude of the state towards the Orthodox Church was an obstacle to their development (e.g., religious life), which manifested itself in the closing and demolition of Orthodox churches, which for the Greeks constituted an important element of identity. Nevertheless, the Orthodox Church and local parishes were places of grouping for the Greek community. The temples, in addition to the worship space, were also meeting places for the Greeks, and were centers of culture or information exchange. In the interwar period, there existed an organized Greek colony in Warsaw (organizational life took place around St. Mary Magdalene Orthodox Church) and in Łódź (activity was centered around St. Alexander Nevsky Parish)⁶. Grouping around Orthodox churches is a phenomenon characteristic for the life of minorities and is also present today (e.g., religious buildings abroad are an important element of identity and culture for Poles, and the same is true for churches in Poland for immigrants from Ukraine or Belarus).

The Greek community also participated in the economic and socio-political life of the Second Polish Republic. They were also visible during political events. Their representatives participated, among others, in a meeting at the seat of the Greek Embassy in Warsaw with the Prime Minister of Greece, Eleftherios Venizelos, who came on an of-

⁵ Often it was not until funeral information and posthumous reminiscences that a reminder of the ethnicity of the deceased was provided. Krzysztof Walczak, a researcher of the Kalisz Greeks, draws attention to this issue (Walczak, 2007: 298).

⁶ Archive of the Parish of the Orthodox Church in Łódź, Civil Status Records of the Parish of St. Alexander Nevsky. List of confessors of the parish of St. A. Nevsky (material obtained from Dr. Małgorzata Łapa of the History Institute of the University of Łódź).

ficial visit to Warsaw on December 30, 1930 (National Digital Archives, sign. 1-D-720-5, 1-D-720-8).

In the interwar period, Greeks were also in the sphere of interest of the Polish governmental administration. This phenomenon is reflected in the materials collected at the Archive of Modern Records in Warsaw, among others in the collections of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Internal Affairs⁷.

After World War II, a large group of the Greek community reached Poland in three stages: 1948-1949 (about 3,200 children), 1949-1950 (9,282 people – the main mass of refugees) and 1950-1956 (as part of a family reunification action about 829 people). Most were refugees associated with the left-wing Greek guerrilla, the Democratic Army of Greece, which was the largest armed organization associated with the Communist Party of Greece. In total up to 15 thousand people (both Greeks and Macedonians) came to Poland⁸. They were settled where there were housing resources and job opportunities. Mainly in Lower Silesia, Lubusz Land, Western Pomerania, the Bieszczady Mountains and cities such as: Gdynia, Warsaw, Poznań, Łódź, Cracow, Bielsko-Biała (Biernacka, 1973: 83-93; Słabig, 2008: 311-333; Romański, 2008: 141; Knopek, 2001: 63; Kurpiel, 2012: 157-169). A characteristic phenomenon was the reappearance of Greeks in 1949 in Zgorzelec, which became the center of socio-cultural life of this community. Already at the end of 1949, a decision was made to establish in Zgorzelec a central center for refugees from Greece under the name of Center of the Workers' Holiday Fund – Special Action (it dealt with all matters related to the life of refugees, including housing, work, food, medical assistance) (Wojecki, 1989: 45). In total, there were about 9,000 people (including about 5,500 children) in Zgorzelec.

After 1956, partial returns of the Macedonian population to the People's Federal Republic of Macedonia began (more than 5,200 people returned by 1968), and after 1975 of the Greeks (more than 5,000 people were included by the early 1990s). Individual departures of both Greeks and Macedonians also occurred in the later period (Pudło, 1992:187; Nowicka, 2008).

The Greeks who stayed in Poland started a lively cultural and educational activity. They were the creators of music bands which gave concerts both in Poland and abroad. A characteristic feature of the Greek emigration was the drive for knowledge and education. They were educated at all levels. The result was an extremely rapid advancement

⁷ Archiwum Akt Nowych [Archives of Modern Records; later AAN], Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych [Ministry of Internal Affairs; later MSZ], sign. 11862, *Extraction of documents relating to Greek citizens. Notes, correspondence*, 1939; sign. 11825, *Requisitions concerning court cases of Greek citizens. Notes, correspondence*, 1938; sign. 11826, *Requisitions concerning court cases of Greek citizens. Notes, correspondence*, 1939; sign. I/2094, *Expulsions [of Greek citizens]*, 1932-1939; sign. I/2031, *Settlement [of Greek citizens]*, 1929-1931; sign. I/2153, *Acquisition of real estate [by Greek citizens]*, 1925-1937; sign. I/1937, *Movement of foreigners temporary residence of individual [Greek citizens]*, 1930-1939 (materials indicated by Dr. Małgorzata Łapa of the Institute of History, University of Łódź).

⁸ Kazimierz Pudło estimates the number of refugees from Greece in the years 1948-1956 at 14,795 people, while Mieczysław Wojecki at 13,384 people (Pudło, 1992: 187; Wojecki, 1989: 24).

of the young generation. They also created their own organizational structures. From 1950, the Commune of Democratic Political Refugees from Greece functioned, which was later transformed: first into the Nikos Belojannis Union of Political Refugees from Greece in Poland in 1953, and then into the Society of Greeks in Poland in 1984 (Wojecki, 1980: 93; Terzudis, 1980: 231-251). The number of Greek organizations, blocked by the authorities until 1989 (following the pattern: one minority – one association), increased after the democratic transition in Poland. The following were established: 'Odysseas' Association of Greeks in Poland based in Wrocław (2007), Association of Greeks in Cracow (2007), Union of Greeks in Poland based in Warsaw (2007), 'Hermes' Association of Greek Entrepreneurs in Poland based in Warsaw (2007), 'Hellada' Association of Greeks in Poland based in Gdynia (2007), Ellas Parea Society of Greeks of Western Pomerania based in Szczecin (2007), Stathis Jeropulos Society of Greeks in Łódź (2008), Delta Association of Greeks in Poland based in Zgorzelec (2011). In order to cooperate and coordinate the activities of Greek organizations, the Federation of Associations of Greeks in Poland 'Hellada' was established in 2010. The aims of these organizations are, among others, to preserve national identity, to cultivate and promote the Greek heritage, tradition, and culture, to popularize and teach Greek history and language, to popularize the multicultural and multinational heritage of the Polish state, and to broaden knowledge about the Polish-Greek relations.

Over the centuries, Greeks on Polish lands have made lasting contributions to culture, science, art, and economy. They created religious life outside the traditional centers of Polish Orthodoxy. They developed this activity both in the First Republic and after its partitions. They continued it also in the interwar period in the restored Poland. The activity of the Greek community in the social, cultural, and organizational field became visible again after 1949. Nowadays, the Greek minority is a permanent element of the Polish society.

Conclusions

The Greeks have lived on Polish territory since the Middle Ages. Their stay is well documented both in 18th and 19th century, and in 20th century as well. The stay of the soldiers of the 4th Armed Corps in Zgorzelec between 1916 and 1919, as well as the stay of about 200 Greeks in the interwar period who settled there permanently, is an undeniable historical fact and an element of identity continuity and intergenerational bonding. The refugees from the second half of the 1940s, albeit the largest group to arrive in Poland at one time, continued the earlier Greek presence on Polish soil. Nowadays, Greeks cultivate their own national and religious traditions (mainly within the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church). They express their national separateness and identity through social activity concentrated in numerous socio-cultural organizations that function throughout Poland.

The Greeks fulfil all the conditions set out in the Act of 2005 (Article 2, section 1, points 1-6) for the recognition of a given social group as a national minority. Among other things, they are a group smaller in number than the rest of the population of the Republic of Poland; they are significantly different from other citizens in terms of language, culture or tradition; they strive to preserve their language, culture and traditions; they are aware of their own historical ethnic community and are oriented towards expressing and protecting it, i.a., through the activities of socio-cultural associations; they are aware of their own historical ethnic community and are oriented towards expressing and protecting it, i.a., through the activities of socio-cultural associations. Their ancestors have inhabited the present territory of the Republic of Poland for at least 100 years (the Greeks have been present on Polish territory since the late Middle Ages, their ancestors inhabited Polish territory in all historical periods of the Polish state, preserving identity continuity) and they identify themselves with a nation organized in their own state.

Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that the Greeks are a historical minority whose members have lived on the Polish lands for centuries and identified themselves with the Greek nationality. They have preserved the continuity of their existence until modern times and have made a significant contribution to the cultural development of Polish lands, they have been and still are co-creators of Polish science and socio-economic life. They are political and local government activists. Through the organizational structures they created, they emphasize and cultivate their own national identity. Thus, they should be recognized as a national minority and listed in the Act of 2005.

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Abstract: Members of the Greek community living in Poland are making efforts to obtain the status of a national minority. Their ancestors have been present on Polish lands since the Middle Ages. Over the centuries, Greeks played an important role in the development of economic and scientific life of Polish cities. They were co-creators of Polish culture, art, and animators of the development of Orthodox religious life. Nowadays, the Greek minority is a permanent element of the Polish society, cultivating its own national and religious traditions. Its representatives are political and local government activists. Through the created organizational structures, they emphasize and cultivate their own national identity. The Greeks in Poland meet all the legal requirements for recognition as a national minority.

Keywords: Greeks, national minority, nationality, Orthodoxy

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