

EMIGRATION FROM POLAND IN THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Agnieszka Weinar

Poland has been an emigration country for few centuries now. People would leave Poland for two main reasons – political engagement in the struggle for independence and economic needs. The first type of emigration was prominent since 1795 to 1918 and since 1939 to 1989 and it involved upper strata of the society. The second type has been present throughout the centuries until today. Emigration from Poland used to be predominantly of long-term or permanent character. In the last 20 years it has gained characteristics of a shuttle or circular migration. It is estimated that Polish community abroad amounts to 10-16 million, with the largest group in the US.

Permanent emigration has led to creation of a wide Polish community abroad. It is important here to differentiate between Polonia and Polish emigrants. Polonia is the name given to descendants of Polish emigrants or refugees. Polish emigrants are Polish citizens, who left the country. In the presently given sense Polonia are Polish emigrants, and their descendants, who create Polish organizations abroad, who reside abroad, who have a legal status (usually citizenship of the country of residence), who are aware of their origins, and who want to cultivate their Polish identity.

II REPUBLIC OF POLAND (1918- 1939)

In 1918, when Polish independent state was created, the government had to elaborate two approaches to the emigration policy. The management of outflows was strictly connected to the internal policies, and the relations with Polonia were a part of foreign policy. II Republic was a multiethnic state and it pursued the policy of Polonization and assimilation of minorities throughout the 1930s. This influenced the outward migrations, especially emigration of ethnic Germans.

Also the ethnic Poles were leaving the country. The economic crisis and unemployment in Poland influenced the new policy towards the economic migrants. In 1919, the first official convention between Polish Republic and the French Republic concerning the contract workers was signed. It gave basis for legal employment and settlement of almost 700 000 Polish miners and workers (600 000 from Poland and 100 000 second-time migrants from Westphalia) between 1919 – 1938. This was the first contract on such a scale in the history of Poland. Also individual emigration was more intensive, especially to Western Europe (after the US had introduced stricter immigration regulations). The government did not support the individual emigration officially, but no barriers were put to stop it. Both types of emigration were half-officially perceived as the means of solving internal economic pressure. In some cases this emigration was even desired, as in the case of Polish nationals settling in South America. In the mid-1930s Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs elaborated a plan of establishing a Polish colony in the triangle between Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina. Therefore the settlement emigration to this area was officially supported, the government even bought some terrains in the region and initiated two Polish settlement outposts. These ideas collapsed with independence of Brazil and the IIWW.

POLISH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC (1945 - 1989)

In Polish People's Republic the emigration flows were formed by anti-minority policy and passport policy. The emigration policy of the Polish People's Republic was twofold: on one hand emigration was banned and free movement of citizens was not allowed. On the other hand the authorities supported "silent emigration", with purpose of getting rid of unwanted individuals.

EXPULSION OF ETHNIC GROUPS

The ethnic deportation was a tool primarily meant to create a homogenous nation within the new borders after 1945. Masses of people were forced to move: ethnic Germans from newly acquired western regions to Germany; ethnic Ukrainians from eastern region to the USSR.

The most important emigration flows were related to the *Aussiedlung* policy of Western German state. After 1945, relations between Polish government and the inhabitants of the Western Territories were regulated by Article 13 of the Potsdam Treaty. It provided for expulsion of 3,5 million of German citizens and their deportation to Russian, British and American occupational zones. In fact, the treaty legitimized the ongoing deportations. The deportation of individuals considered German citizens stopped in 1950 (in 1945-1950 almost 3,2 million Germans emigrated), but it was not complete. From that time on the authorities officially stated that there were at most few thousand Germans (holders of German citizenship) living in Poland. These numbers included the ethnic Germans among the Mazurians, Silesians and Kashubs.

Thus, in the next decades, emigration of German citizens continued under the family reunification process. In 1949-1959 almost 354,000 people left Poland for East Germany (the only German state Poland had diplomatic relations with), of which only around 17% were German citizens, the rest being ethnic Germans, therefore people claiming the descent. The consent was given by the central authorities. In order to prevent any minority organizational structures, the active individuals were persuaded to emigrate. Between 1960 and 1970 almost 18,000 inhabitants of Mazuria left the country and in the years 1956 – 1969 almost 400,000 Polish citizens of German origin (including inhabitants of Mazuria, Silesia and Kashubia) emigrated to West Germany. The most striking characteristic of the emigration of this stage was automatic loss of Polish citizenship and granting of German citizenship at the border, if the emigrant or deportee was not German citizen.

The breakthrough came in December 1970, when the Warsaw Treaty was signed. It became the basis for further negotiations concerning ethnic Germans still living in Poland. The agreement was not signed until 1975, when Polish government forced by difficult financial situation agreed upon family reunification action in exchange for financial aid. On October 9, 1975 Polish government signed agreements with the West Germany on family reunification. Almost 250,000 people left Poland in the years 1975 – 1980. However it is important to notice that the emigration of ethnic Germans had also another aspect. In the situation of very restricted possibilities of leaving the country, the family reunification agreement constituted the only way out. People willing to emigrate for economic and political reasons would claim German roots only to get the pass to the West. This involved particularly the inhabitants of Upper Silesia. The process of German identity building was thus spontaneous and in many cases profit-oriented.

In the 1980s this type of emigration changed into mass migration. Between 1980-1989 ca. 630,000 people considered to be ethnic Germans left Poland.

30.000 Jews were allowed to emigrate to Israel first in the years 1949-1950. The next wave took place in 1956, after Stalin's death. Among thousands of Polish citizens claiming various ethnic origins and applying for permanent emigration were over 47,000 ethnic Jews going to Israel. When the emigration was curbed in the 1960's, the numbers declined, but still, it was relatively easier to emigrate to Israel than to any other non-communist country. As Dariusz Stola quotes, in 1966, 67% applicants willing to emigrate to Israel were granted permission to leave (78% in 1965). To compare, only 19% out of those willing to emigrate to Germany were allowed to do so, and 38% applicants set for the US and France were granted the permission. Jewish emigration reached its peak after March 1968, when the communist party organized anti-Semitic campaign among its members. In the years 1968-1971, the number of emigrants headed for Israel reached 12,927.

PASSPORT POLICY

In the first period (1945- 1955) the emigration of Germans and Jews were the only accepted outward movements. The new communist Poland closed its borders in the first years of its existence. The official policy of the government was to ban the citizens from leaving the country. The passports were issued by the appropriate authorities, closely related to the Security Service. The passport did not belong to the citizen, thus the State could block the departure by disagreeing to give out the document. This regulation was practiced in the course of the communist rule. The policy was also the response to the political emigration – the family members of the most active individuals were kept hostages, with no chance for family reunification.

Since the passport policy depended on political and economic factors, it underwent periodical fluctuations. In the periods of lessened political restrictions, the outflows were obviously higher. Family reunification and ethnic migration were not the only way out. Together with growing engagement of Polish contract workers in the Western Europe, and tourism, the phenomenon of overstay occurred. This was the main source of emigration flows in the 1970's and 1980's.

In 1975, Poland signed the Final Act of CSCE in Helsinki. Family reunifications scheme included not only minorities, but also these Poles, who wanted to join the families living abroad. Additionally the agreement with Germany opened up the gates of the West to mass emigration. In the 1980's the real boom took place. Although during the Marshal Law the passport policy went stricter, especially during the total closure of December 1981, the emigration continued: this time it was even offered as an alternative to the imprisonment. Oppositionists were in fact the only Polish citizens for whom leaving the country was not difficult. They would be offered easier access to the passport. The authorities welcomed that particular form of the brain drain as an important element in the pacification of the opposition. This "silent emigration" was again a political move. After the new lessening of the restrictions in the passport policies of the mid- and late-1980s, hundreds of thousands of people emigrated benefiting from quite dense migratory network and easy asylum procedures. Over 1 million people emigrated permanently, legally or else, in that period. Additionally, ca. 2 million people were circular migrants. The last communist government of 1989 officially gave up the passport policy.

EMIGRATION AFTER 1989

After 1989, the permanent emigration from Poland has been decreasing and replaced with various forms of short-term mobility, often described as incomplete migration.

THE MAIN DESTINATION COUNTRIES FOR LONG-TERM EMIGRATION REMAINED THE SAME: GERMANY, US AND CANADA.

As Okólski shows emigration to Germany within Aussiedler scheme reached its peak in 1989 (with 250,340 people) and then sharply declined. After 1994, the numbers were under 2,000 annually. At the same time, the numbers of documented migrant workers increased. As Okólski quotes, they grew from 150,000 in 1989 to 350,000 in 1998, with Germany being the major destination country (40,000 in 1989 and 200,000 in 1998). Before the EU enlargement these flows constituted mainly from seasonal workers employed in agriculture and construction.

Incomplete migration amounted to hundreds of thousands of people. E.g. according to the estimates for 1995, ca 1.5 – 2 million Poles traveled for work abroad. The change was brought forward by the facilitations of the cross-border movements for the Polish citizens introduced by the Western European countries in the early 1990s. Thus the increasing mobility was linked to the increasing short-term labor migration. The

pattern that emerged was of temporary migrations to the secondary labor markets. At the same time, the directions of mobility changed – the short-term migration for the US dropped, while the streams to the EU countries increased, thus diversifying the destinations. It has been impossible to accurately estimate the volume of these flows.

The EU enlargement was the major watershed in the post-1989 migration patterns of Polish workers, mainly for the sake of opening the new labor markets within the EU. Thus, the study is going to answer the questions concerning the possible changes and/or continuities in the international migrations from Poland; the decisive factors while choosing the destination; and the factors facilitating the entry to a given sector of the foreign labor market.

After May 1, 2004, only three EU member states opened their labor markets to Polish citizens – UK, Ireland and Sweden. The majority of Polish workers chose UK and Ireland. The estimates are based on the Workers Registration Scheme for the UK and Personal Public Service Number for Ireland. They show that between May 1, 2004 and December 31, 2005, 209,895 Poles registered in the UK (of which over 70,000 had been already illegally in the US) and 90,320 – in Ireland. The numbers are high, and they do not include merely workers. As it is shown on the following graph, the majority of Poles migrating to the UK are short-term migrants, of which majority is registered as workers. Long-term migration has not increased dramatically, but the short-term migrations can be expected to transform into long-term stays.

For the time being emigration to other EU member states from Poland has not changed in a substantial way: mainly for reasons related to language and pre-existing networks. It can be claimed that post-enlargement migrations are continuation of earlier flows of irregular workers, e.g. to Italy or Greece. Other interesting observation is related to the migration of double citizens (German/Polish) who use their passport to work in Germany and Netherlands.

The scale and the character of the new emigration however is still to be researched and assessed.