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Polish immigrant organisations after 2004

Introduction

The present article is intended to order, select types and systematise knowledge of Polish immigrant organisations founded and active in Ireland after 2004. The author does not analyse typical businesses, Polish immigrant schools, trade unions, Polish branches of international organisations in Ireland or purely commercial and service organisations but associations, societies, and organisations of immigrant, cultural, non-profit or business, socio-political or self-help nature united in their goals of promoting Poland and Polish immigrants, integration into Irish society and other aims as provided for by charters or names. The period of 2004-2011 is discussed, though certain facts in the life of Polish immigrants and their organisations from before the EU membership are mentioned for the sake of continuity. The information on the longest-running organisations will provide the background for discussing Polish immigrants in the 21st century.

Admission of Poland into European structures stimulated the migration and, as a consequence, various forms of social, cultural or business activities in the receiving countries, including Ireland. After nearly five years of negotiations, from 31 March 1998 to the Copenhagen summit in December 2002, Poland became a full member of the European Union as of 1 May 2004. The catalogue of rights due to member state citizens lists the right to free movement and stay in the member state territories as fundamental freedoms. This meant that citizens of the member states and their families could freely travel, earn their living, settle and enjoy the same welfare rights regardless of their state allegiances.¹ Poland's joining of the European Union did not automatically introduce all EU regulations, however. Some required gradual implementation due to disparities across the member states, which was of particular importance to the new members eager to defend against competition from stronger and more wealthy Western states and, on the other hand, of the latter eager to protect their job markets from cheap labour from the former Eastern bloc. Not all of the 43 transition periods negotiated before the Copenhagen arrangements were applied. According

¹ K. Kołodziejczyk-Konarska, 'Economic Integration of the European Union States' [in:] *Society and Politics. Fundamentals of Political Sciences*, ed. by K.A. Wojtaszczyk, W. Jakubowski, Warsaw 2003, p. 685.

to expectations, Poland preserved the longest transition periods in respect of agriculture (till 2014) and foreigners purchasing real estate (till 2016), whereas the 'old' EU countries took advantage of restrictions against freedom of job-seeking movement. Germany and Austria maintained the longest transition periods (by 2011) while Ireland and the UK preserved such restrictions against citizens of Romania and Bulgaria (currently till 2012). The fact that Ireland (following the suit of the United Kingdom) abandoned the transition periods regarding workers from the 'new' European Union countries was of crucial significance for the increased influx of Polish migrants, of course. Poles began coming to Ireland in May 2004, which over time resulted in emergence of new Polish immigrant organisations and growing membership of the existing associations. Prior to 2004, non-EU individuals in receipt of the so-called work permits – issued to specified people for definite workplaces – ranged around 30 000 a year and coincided with the number of Irish people leaving to work in the United States, UK or Australia, thus the migration balanced. May 2004 was not a turning point as crowds of young Poles (chiefly students) began to appear in Dublin and then other major cities only in June and July, that is, during summer holidays. Characteristic figures in summer clothes with small tourist rucksacks and briefcase-loads of CVs came to dominate main streets for months. The new arrivals were usually quick to find work, first due to the seasonal demand of the service sector, that is, principally hotels and catering outlets, and second, due to continuing demand for workers in the building sector, the chief force driving Ireland's rapid economic growth at the time. A quantum leap in the numbers of newly registered PPS (Personal Public Service Number) numbers happened in summer. Holidays passed in no time and it was already in October that inn and hotel keepers began to note many young Poles packing and returning home. The situation recurred over the following years though some people decided to stay longer, delay their studies for a year or two, earn some money and come back to Poland later already at that initial stage. Those returning left behind active PPS numbers, which largely contributed to the myth of hundreds of thousands of Poles in Ireland. Official estimates of the Polish nationals remaining in Ireland in the period 2004 – 2007 are greatly exaggerated as they include significant percentages of inactive PPS numbers of those who had left long ago. The overinflated figure of 250 000 Poles in Ireland is untrue though it correctly reflects the trend in arrivals, clearly increasing to peak in 2006. The dynamics slowed down only in 2007 and reversed in 2008 and the subsequent years. The Irish census in 2002 indicated 2091 Poles were present in Ireland while the 2006 census established the number of our countrymen there at 63 276. M. Lisak computed about 172 000 Poles stayed

in Ireland in 2008.² At the time, Irish press cited alarming statistics of 200-250 000 Poles in Ireland. According to figures of the Irish National Office for Statistics, compiled by M. Lisak, an average Polish migrant to Ireland in the first years after the EU's enlargement was 27.5 years old, predominantly male (64%), unmarried (62%), while as many as 59% married men declared they had come to Ireland alone. Approximately 18% of the married women did not live with their husbands. The employment distribution figures are interesting as well. The same author says: 'more than a half of the men worked in the building sector and industry, half of the women in shops, hotels and restaurants. Thus, the most popular sectors of employment are: construction (22%) and industry (22%), retail and wholesale (17%), hotels and restaurants (16%). In respect of the professional status, a mere 9% belonged to the three highest socio-economic classes: employers and managers; higher and lower-level professionals. Only a handful of Poles were self-employed – 503 people'.³

These statistics have not only information value but also provide some insights into inclination towards social activity and mature forms of self-organisation. Most of these individuals are young males, lonely or living in Ireland without their spouses. It is difficult to decide, on the basis of empirical data, whether this emigration is short-term or permanent as the median migration time varies between 2 and 4 years in the period under examination, i.e. 2008 and 2010. The economic crisis does not predetermine the question of returning to Poland but tends to delay it as hard times are endured in better living and welfare conditions. An analysis of migration plans, therefore, points to a temporary nature of staying in Ireland, the clear motif being profits to be invested in Poland, presumably soon after returning. Only 23% respondents motivated their coming to Ireland with the difficult circumstances in Poland and appreciably better living conditions in Ireland for themselves and their families, and it is presumably this latter group that will form the core of permanent or long-term immigrants. The comprehensive sociological analysis undertaken by M. Lisak seems consistent in this respect as well since more than 70% of those surveyed said they were determined to come back (provided they find well-paid jobs) while about 10% remained undecided.⁴ It is therefore to be expected that, out of the total of 172-180 000 Poles living in Ireland,

² The author quotes information concerning numbers of the Polish diaspora in Ireland on the basis of up-to-date statistics collected during the national censuses in 2002 and 2006; cf. M. Lisak, 'Numbers of the Polish Diaspora in Ireland' [in:] *Polish Migrants in Ireland: Around Catholic Ministry to Polish Immigrants*, ed. by Grubka. M., Lisak M., Kraków-Dublin 2010, pp. 96 and 102.

³ Ibidem. p. 97; cf. J. Pinkowski, *Challenges and Promise for Immigrant Entrepreneurship In Dublin*, Dublin City Economic Development Unit, vol. 27 V 2009, p. 58.

⁴ Ibidem. pp. 113, 115 and 116.

between 25–33% will, intentionally or otherwise, become rooted in Ireland, buy homes, bring or start their families there. A rough estimate suggests more than 50 000 Poles will lay the foundations for the first migrant generation who will remember their roots but will remain consciously connected with and integrated into Ireland. They will soon form the elite and massed ranks of social organisations, trade unions and, perhaps over time, an essential element of the political and social system of the Irish state.

1. Development of Polish immigrant groups before 2004

The first migrants to arrive after 2004 were naturally interested in participating in the life of the Polish immigrant community, eager to make contact with, obtain useful information from and be among people speaking the same language. Many found their way to the Polish House at 20 Fitzwilliam Place, to the Polish Social and Cultural Association Limited (POSK) or the Irish Polish Society as the Polish immigrant organisations with the longest records of activity in Ireland, oldest and most experienced. The latter was founded in 1979 following on Archbishop Dermot Ryan's invitation of all Poles living in Ireland to a solemn mass on 21 October 1978, soon after the election of the Polish pope, and the historic visit of John Paul II to Ireland in September 1979. First meetings, initiated by Rev. Klaus Cieszyński, were quite sporadic, but that changed after the building at 20 Fitzwilliam Place in Dublin was purchased in 1986 and opened a year later. The same time saw the emergence of POSK (Polish Social and Cultural Association Limited), a 7–person strong group in the Irish Polish Society (IPS) which was to administer the estate that Ms. Brown – a Polish woman who settled in Ireland after the First World War – left in her last will and testament '... for the purpose of promoting and encouraging the Arts of Music, Painting and Literature in Ireland'. The Irish Polish House, as Krystyna Dobrzyńska-Contwell called it in her memoirs, was soon to 'become the centre of Polish life in Ireland'.⁵

Mutual relations between the two oldest Polish immigrant associations in Ireland were described in 1993 by a co-founder and long-time president of IPS Henryk Lebioda, who defined POSK as an '... umbrella organisation which enables and finances activities of the Irish Polish Society and fulfils its statutory purposes as outlined in the memorandum of association.' In November 1997, Polish Social and Cultural Association Limited was reorganised and registered as the Ognisko Polskie Limited, which acquired the title in the Polish House at 20 Fitzwilliam Place. POSK was reinstated as

⁵ After: K. Dobrzyńska-Contwell, *An Unusual Diplomat: Dobrzyński Biography*, London 1998, p. 144; cf. W. Konarski, *A Forgotten Community*, *Razem* weekly, Oct. 1991 issue.

Polish Social and Cultural Association Limited as early as January 1998. The issue of three sister Polish immigrant committees operating in the Polish House has been raised several times by the then president of IPS, Helena Johnston, for instance, in January 2000 and February 2001.⁶ Nowadays, those longest-standing Polish immigrant organisations in Ireland, though they spring from the same root - the Irish Polish Society established already in 1979 - have different competences yet similar functions. They often provide premises and support to more recent associations, their doors are open to those willing to present their skills and talents. According to an unwritten rule, Saturday is the POSK day while the Irish Polish Society usually meets on Sunday. Polish is the working language of POSK and the Ognisko while the Irish Polish Society, as a sign of respect for the Irish in its structures, most often uses English. Despite this parallel operation, combining memberships of POSK, the Ognisko and the Irish Polish Society is not practised but for a narrow group of the most senior members. The organisations base on voluntary work of their members. Polish Social and Cultural Association Limited runs a library and Polish language classes, arranges meetings with interesting people, lectures, theme and anniversary events.⁷ The Ognisko Polskie administers and manages financing of the Polish House, in which it assumes the original roles and competences of the Polish Social and Cultural Association Limited.⁸ The objective of the Irish Polish Society is to promote contacts and cultural exchange between Poles and the Irish. According to the Society's website, 'the Administrative Board of the Society consists of Poles and the Irish who work together for the promotion of what is best in both the countries'.⁹ The organisations have long become fixtures of the Polish presence in Ireland, upholding and nurturing the national heritage, Polish language, culture and respect for Irish tradition. The Polish House at 20 Fitzwilliam Place in Dublin has indeed become the cultural centre for Poles in Ireland, a place to turn up at, meet interesting people, watch a Polish film or listen to a concert together. The House provides a venue for book promotions, meetings with Polish and Irish artists, sharing of information, a focus of Polish and English learning, and presentation of many a skill. Let it continue so that future generations of Poles, already with Irish passports, could verify deeds of the old and, remembering their background, learn to respect the voluntary efforts of those who sacrifice their own spare time without a view to profits or acclaim.

⁶ Cf. "Minutes of Meeting of Irish-Polish Society" of 23 February 2001.

⁷ More on activities and structure of POSK can be found at: www.poskdublin.org.

⁸ There is no website on everyday tasks and activities of the Ognisko.

⁹ More on activities and structure of IPS can be found at: www.irishpolishsociety.ie.

2. General characteristics and typologies of Polish immigrant organisations founded after the EU's enlargement after 2004

Arrival of such a mass of Poles was bound to give rise to interest in social activity, participation or will to establish new organisations. Many were introduced to Ireland by the three oldest immigrant associations, POSK, Ognisko Polskie or IPS, as ordinary members or even governors. Regardless of motivations for founding Polish immigrant groups and associations of active Poles, their (declared) objectives were very similar. On websites of many new organisations one could read, therefore, about the drive towards integration, promotion of Polish culture, business, assistance, and self-help, professional mobilisation, English language learning, psychologist consulting, etc. Despite this stated disparity of goals, there are certain characteristics common to all the new organisations. These include the weight attached to integration into Irish society, the wish to involve new arrivals from Poland in structures or at least groupings around an organisation even if, formally, many such individuals remained their customers. Self-help nature of these associations, coupled with opportunities for self-presentation, meeting new people and potential customers or employers and, first and foremost, conversations and contacts in the native tongue offered unique opportunities for those who had never been in touch with the Anglo-Saxon culture and whose standard of English excluded them from active and full-fledged involvement in public life of Ireland. In this respect, Polish immigrant organisations did and continue to play a vital role of a link with the recipient country, a buffer against difficulties with integration of both the communities. The new emigration has thus presented an image of a well-organised and pro-European Poland, even if it often grapples with language or culture barrier issues. The genuine reasons for establishing new committees are another story. Without going into value-judgements, the broad range of official goals and objectives must be associated with a similarly far-flung gamut of motivations, starting with realisation of the need for community work and ending with the will to further their own careers or create own jobs. These attitudes should not be reproved as the current social model promotes activity, creativity and enterprise. Barnaba F. Dorda and Wojciech Białek, authors of the report 'Development of the Polish Immigration to Ireland in the Last Five Years', delivered at a conference in Malmö and published in October 2010: 'Poles settled down in the new reality quickly, taking entrepreneurial opportunities and building an immigrant infrastructure in a nearly virgin land. A range of magazines and web portals addressed to Poles, most of them still active, were quick to emerge. Polish entrepreneurs took advantage of the market niche and shops offering Polish products can be found in almost every town while the largest supermarket chains include

Polish food sections. Polish clinics, lawyers, bank and service company staff are fixtures in Ireland. ... Poles rapidly set to developing the infrastructure for Polish immigrant organisations. Some initiatives have naturally failed the test of time but most organisations are still operating and enjoying considerable experience and reputations. Their activities vary from promoting culture and integration through help to those in need to enterprise promotion'.¹⁰ Indeed, the authors are right in saying that enterprise has become a core feature of contemporary Polish immigrant organisations and time will best verify volunteer attitudes.

Attempts at systematising the Polish immigrant organisations set and active in Ireland after 2004 must assume certain criteria of division. Taking the **criterion of time**, namely the moment of establishment, seems inappropriate as all of them have merely several years' worth of experience. This classification would only be reasonable if the time perspective of this article were extended before 2004. Then our simplified model would comprise both the above-mentioned 'old' POSK, Ognisko Polskie, IPS and the 'new' organisations founded after 2004. This obvious division is used in everyday speech of mostly youth, who talk of the 'old' and 'new' Polish immigrants – before and after Poland joined the EU. The **size of organisation**, measured by its membership, may be another criterion. A proper definition of the membership can be problematic, however, as the organisations, particularly those of a virtual nature, provide the registered number of visitors or even individual 'entries' to their websites as a measure of popularity and thus the size of their associations. It would be therefore simpler to compute the absolute number of members according to paid contributions though separating membership from payment for e.g. participation in a training course or conference might prove confusing. The customer - seller relation applies here even if the transaction automatically implies acquisition of membership rights. These appear to be rather academic distinctions, though, not reasonable or applicable to the present-day dynamic and virtual world. The actual size of an organisation should therefore be measured with the number of governors and active members the organisation can rely on, for instance, on the occasion of an annual meeting. If the number of administrators is equal to those present at an annual meeting, this organisation is marginal. An association headed by one or even two people should be described as a private club and only clearly larger organisations can be classified as small, medium-size or large. The so-called umbrella organisations with several active governors, tasked with influencing and representing as many other organisations as possible and covering them with a kind of 'umbrella' are interesting **with regard to**

¹⁰ After B.F. Dorda, W. Białek: 'Development of the Polish Immigration to Ireland in the Last Five Years', 'Monitor of Job-Seeking Emigration 2010, Return or Emigrate?', Malmö 2010, p. 8.

their operation and worthy of notice. If a project succeeds, it is led by a congress, which is already very close to a representative voice of an organised national minority heard by governments of recipient countries, such as Polish American or Canadian Congresses. Poles in Ireland may come to see such a representation too. For purposes of this article, its author proposes to **classify Polish organisations established in Ireland after 2004 according to their stated objectives**, usually associated with an appropriate name and programme (statutes) to be verified by actual actions for Polish immigrants in Ireland.¹¹ On the basis of these criteria, therefore, one can distinguish:

- a) charity and self-help (Support and Integration Centre 'Together - Razem', 2006, Help for the Jobseeker Forum, 2010),
- b) business and public relations organisations (Polish Business Club, 2009, Polish Community in Ireland, 2010)
- c) local organisations (My Cork Association, 2005, MultiCity Kilkenny, 2010, local organisations, 2007),
- d) socio-political organisations (Forum Polonia, 2008),
- e) educational organisations (Polish Teachers Association SEN, 2010 and Polish Educational Association PSE, 2009),
- f) youth and cultural organisations (Polish Scout Group, 2007 and Polish Folk Dance Group-Shamrock, 2009),
- g) women's organisations (Woman's Point of View, 2010).

re. a) charity and self-help:

- **Support and Integration Centre 'Together -Razem'** emerged from My Cork Association in 2006. Together-Razem has the official status of a charity organisation and was founded with Poles in difficult personal, professional or family circumstances in mind. It is involved in welfare and job agency work, psychological, pedagogic and language consulting, advise to alcohol addicts and co-addicts, family and care consultancy. It employs volunteers though its statutes (§3, p. 5) do not rule out hiring staff. The organisation is based in Cork. The Centre is governed by: the Deciding Council of all members, Managing Coordinator (currently Wojciech Białek), staff, and volunteers.¹²
- **The Help for the Jobseeker Forum** was started by Jacek Łacina in 2012. As a self-help group based initially on an Internet forum, it commenced by organising interactive workshops involving speakers and representatives of business and professional groups. It offers professional job and legal advice, assistance with producing your

¹¹ Names and years of establishment of the organisations are provided in the brackets [JP].

¹² See more at: www.together-razem.org.

own CV and letter of application, and psychologist support with jobseeking. The workshops are free and arranged on POSK premises¹³.

re. b) business and public relations (PR) organisations:

- **Polish Business Club** was established in 2009 by Wojciech Wrona – a graduate of the Business School with Dublin City University. The organisation is seated at Woodbrook Lodge in Partarlington, Co. Laois. The Club intends to help register and link small and medium-size immigrant enterprises in Ireland and the world over. Polish Business Club is funded with member contributions and such commercial operations as publicity, sponsoring and promotions. Other goals include boosting internal demand of Polish immigrants, highlighting of Polish products and services, providing access to innovative technological solutions and financing systems. The Club also runs the Polish Business School that offers paid training and business consultancy as well as access to an independent Internet portal¹⁴.
- **Polish Community in Ireland** was started by Bogdan Węgrzynek in 2010 and based, like the foregoing organisation, at the Woodbrook Lodge in Partarlington, Co. Laois. The association, chaired by Agata Szczyrbowska, was intended to promote a positive image of Poland, its culture and national heritage via such public relations efforts as concerts, fêtes, entertainment or cultural events. The organisation staged a march in memory of the victims of the Presidential air-crash in April 2010, helped to open an exhibition called 'Communist Poland – So Far and So Near...' in December 2010, to stage the Irish Miss Polonia contest during the Great Gala at the Liberty Hall in Dublin in March 2011, and to judge the competition 'Pole of the Year'. The association was formally registered only in early 2011 yet it suspended its operations after a brief but feverish spell of activities in June of the same year¹⁵.

re. c) local organisations:

- **MyCork Association** is a local organisation covering the town and county of Cork established in 2005. It focuses on integration of the

¹³ See more at: www.pomocbezrobotnym.com

¹⁴ See more at: www.polonia.ie

¹⁵ The official website, www.polishcommunityinireland.org, has been closed. See more about the association in: *Kurier Polski*, 23 April 2010, *Magazyn Kurier Polski*, vol. II 2011, *Gazeta Polska*, 31 Jan. 2010, 21 April 2010, 14 March 2011, *Nasz Głos*, 23-30 April 2010, 11-17 Dec. 2010, 15-21 Jan. 2011, *The Star*, 19 April 2011.

Polish community in Cork, promotion of Polish culture and tradition as well as information activities on various aspects of everyday life in Ireland. An Internet portal remains a communication and PR platform for the organisation. Most projects within the scope of the organisation are implemented in the field, though. Key cyclical events organised by My Cork include: Polish Culture Festival, participation in the Finale of the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity and St. Patrick parade in Cork, Days of Christian Culture, as well as meetings with arts and culture figures. Izabela Krygiel-Kozłowska is the president of My Cork Association.¹⁶

- **MultiCity Polish Association in Kilkenny** is another initiative for the local community, set up in 2010. Its website states it is oriented towards Poles living in Kilkenny and its objectives are defined as: cultural, educational and information activities. The association wants to represent 'the Polish viewpoint', act on behalf of Poles, be noticed and actively involved in the life of Kilkenny. The grouping declares it is open to a variety of world-views and multicultural. In November 2010, Anna Michalska represented the several-people-strong board in organisation of the Forum Polonia Congress. Besides, the association organises: Polish Film Festival, Football Tournament, information evenings on self-employment or parenthood, and meetings for single mothers.¹⁷
- **Galway Irish – Polish Association (GIPA)** emerged in 2007. The catalogue of its objectives comprises integration of Polish and Irish communities in the county of Galway, sharing and promotion of culture and traditions of both the nations, as well as provision of legal and practical information. Its members from Galway organised an integration march, a series of cultural evenings 'Polish Cultural Nights', and celebrated, at the initiative of its President Robert Borkowski, the Chopin Year in 2010. Further plans envisage creation of a Polish Information Point in collaboration with the Galway City Partnership and Polish Business Network. GIPA was a party to the 'Wherever You Are, Vote' campaign inspired by Forum Polonia and aimed at mobilising and encouraging Poles to register for and participate in the Polish presidential elections in 2010 in the area of Ireland.¹⁸

¹⁶ See more at: www.mycork.org; cf. *Munster Wizjer*, 15 April 2010, *Polonia Extra*, 2 April 2010, 5 July 2010, *Nasz Głos*, 3 June 2011, *Evening Echo*, 24 Jan. 2011.

¹⁷ www.news.kierunekirlandia.eu/v/708/organizacja-mulicity-z-kilkenny, www.nk.pl/#profile/2555433, cf. the programme document of the Forum Polonia Congress of 27 Nov. 2011, *passim*.

¹⁸ See more at: www.gipa.pl/view/55/53/ and the programme document of the Forum Polonia Congress of 27 Nov. 2011, p. 5.

re. d) socio-political organisations:

- **Forum Polonia**, active since March 2008 and formerly known as Forum of Active Poles, is a coalition of representatives from Polish organisations, media and individuals committed to projects concerning the Polish minority and Irish society.¹⁹ The association is run by several-members-strong steering and executive group which includes: Anna Paś, Anna Marchelewska, Barnaba Dorda, and Anna Michalska. The board decides on admissions into the coalition and day-to-day business of the Forum. The organisation acts as a 'network for information sharing, mutual support, social integration and defence of Polish minority interests in the Republic of Ireland'.²⁰ The socio-political nature of FP stems from several sources, therefore. First, from the stated objective of providing a broad platform for communication of representatives of Polish immigrant organisations (coalitions); second, from undertaking the defence (and thus representation) of Polish minority interests (a feature of pressure groups); and third, from attempts at joining the political system of Ireland and institutional commitment to the Irish local elections in 2009. The latter included mobilising Polish citizens and residents of Ireland as voters (FP's Civic Project 'I Vote in Ireland') as well as organisation assistance to Polish candidates to town and community councils in Ireland.²¹ There were eight Poles among the forty-four foreign-nationality candidates in the 2009 local elections.²² None gained the required number of votes and only four emigrants were elected, namely, a Nigerian, Dutchman, Lithuanian and Russian women. A survey by Bryan Fanning and Neil O'Boyle indicated seven of the Polish candidates in the 2009 local elections declared their membership of Forum Polonia.²³ Forum Polonia seems the only organisation capable of forming a broad coalition and an 'umbrella' to represent the interested Polish

¹⁹ After: S. Norberczak, 'Forum Polonia is 2 Years Old!', *Kurier Polski*, 19 March 2010.

²⁰ After: the programme document of the Forum Polonia Congress of 27 Nov. 2011, p. 7.

²¹ More about the campaign in 'Join the Strong Voice of Polish Immigrants', *Kurier Polski*, 20 Sep. 2008, and 'Forum Polonia's Campaign Gathers Pace', cf. *Kurier Polski*, 22 Jan. 2009.

²² The Polish candidates are presented by Tomasz Wybranowski in his article 'Our Countrymen on the Election Rosters! - Let's Vote for the 'Ours''. These included: Anna Bańko, Anna Michalska, Katarzyna Gaborem and Wojciech Wiśniewski from Fianna Fáil, Agnieszka Faltyn, Tomasz Askuntowicz from Fine Gael, Anna Kuligowska from the Labour Party and an independent candidate Leszek Szczeciński; cf. *Kurier Polski*, 04 April 2009.

²³ Despite the massive influx of immigrants, especially from Central Europe, their impact on the Irish political system has been very limited; cf. B. Fanning, N. O'Boyle, 'Immigrants In Irish Politics: African and East European Candidates In the 2009 Local Government Elections' [in:] "Irish Political Studies", vol. 25, No. 3, September 2010, p. 429; cf. also "The Irish Times", 27 April 2009.

immigrants and their associations. This is corroborated by activities of the association, particularly the regular congresses where participants agree on joint positions and strategies. If the Forum activists persuaded more organisations and individuals to their goals and methods, a group might emerge that would speak for the entire Polish community and could even propose its candidates to stand for the Irish Dáil and Senate.

re. e) educational organisations:

- **Polish Teachers Association** (SEN) was founded in 2010 by teachers of an immigrant weekend school that had operated by the Polish ministry Church in Dublin since 2006. This is a non-profit association based on voluntary work of its members and created to administer the school. SEN is headed by a president (Rafał Gruszczyński). In 2011, the association had a full-time staff of 33, including a headmaster, project manager, 28 teachers and the remaining school personnel. Lessons in the association's school supplement the compulsory Irish education and are provided as part of a weekend system according to Polish basic curricula, beginning with kindergarten, through integrated instruction, primary and middle schools. 267 pupils aged 2 to 17 attended the SEN Polish School in the school year 2010/2011.²⁴
- **Polish Educational Association** (PSE) is another educational organisation of Polish immigrants, created in July 2009 at the initiative of the Parents' Council and management of the School Consultation Point at the School Complex for Children of Polish Citizens Temporarily Abroad with the Polish Embassy in Dublin.²⁵ Its statutory objective is to 'develop and promote initiatives and actions fostering development of local communities, an atmosphere of respect for patriotic attitudes, propagation of education, Polish culture and traditions as well as contributing to growth of national awareness, organisational and material support for individuals and organisations which undertake such actions'.²⁶ The association provides assistance to the School and its Parents' Council. Halina

²⁴ T. Bastkowski, *Polish School of the Polish Teachers Association in Dublin: organisational, educational and cultural model of the weekend Polish immigrant school* [in:] Grubka M., Lisak M., op.cit., pp. 173-180.

²⁵ The school was started in October 2005 owing to efforts of Mariola and Witold Izycycki. It supplements pupils' education in the field of Polish language and literature, history, geography and civic education within the curricula of primary, junior and upper secondary schools; based on www.polskaszkoła.org.pl/o-szkole/statut; cf. also <http://polonia.h2.pl/index.php?id=gr01018>.

²⁶ After: Statutes of the Polish Educational Association, Chapter I 'General provisions'.

Sochacka was the president in 2009-2011, to be succeeded in July 2011 by Joanna Wawrzyńska. The association is registered with the Irish Revenue and incorporated. Its principal functions comprise organisation of classes for pre-school children, additional maths classes for grades 2-3 of the primary school grade 1 of the middle school and grade 1 of the secondary comprehensive. The association also organises sports activities, the school choir, and a range of fêtes and contests.²⁷

re. f) youth and cultural organisations:

- **87th Polish Scout Group** was founded in October 2007 as part of Scouting Ireland at the initiative of Scoutmaster Anita Regucka-Kwaśnik and Sub-Scoutmaster Mirosław Karczmarczyk. First meetings took place on the premises of St. Audoen Church and Dominican monastery in Dublin. Today the group, led by Sub-Scoutmaster Mirosław Karczmarczyk, consists of two troops including children aged 8–11 (cubs) and youth aged 11–15 (scouts).²⁸ The organisation follows rules of Irish scouting (a blue uniform and methods of work) while preserving certain Polish traditions and symbols (the scouting cross and Polish language). They hold meetings in the field and Scout dens, arrange trips and talks. In the framework of Irish Scouting, troops stage campaigns against intolerance, leaders tell the young about Scouting history and ideas and run outdoor activities. Scouts win badges and proficiencies.²⁹ Individuals without criminal records and after compulsory first-aid and the so-called Fundamentals training can be appointed as instructors. Units are headed by three leaders in Ireland. A single instructor can lead only six cubs or eight scouts.³⁰ Instructors of the Polish scout group are volunteers.³¹
- **Polish Folk Dance Group-Shamrock** consists of about 20 dancers and operates by the Dominican parish in Dublin, specialising in Polish folklore, songs, national and regional dances.³² The ensemble was established by a choreographer and Polish folk dance instructor Małgorzata Dulna in October 2009. The Group comprises volunteers and aims to develop and present the culture and traditions of Polish folklore in Ireland and to instil these values in the young

²⁷ Cf. www.polskaszkoła.org.pl/rodzice/stowarzyszenie.

²⁸ P. Wróblewska 'O What A Lovely Scouting Team!', *Gazeta Polska*, 2007.

²⁹ K. Kasprzyk, *Polski Herald*, 21 Jan. 2007.

³⁰ After: M. Hundt, *Polski Express*, 6 July 2007.

³¹ See more about the 87th Polish Scout Group at www.87dpg.plscout.com/o-szczepie.html.

³² Cf.: 'Together; News of Polish Catholic Communities in the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin, Ireland', issue 9/2011.

generation.³³ During 2011, the Group performed at: the Polish Days at Dundalk Co. Louth, International Days at Carlow, a family picnic and 'I Love You Poland' competition at the Polish School with the Embassy of Poland, and at a farewell ceremony to authorities of the Polish Consulate.³⁴

re. g) women's organisations:

- The only Polish immigrant women's organisation active in Ireland has so far been **Woman's Point of View**, started in 2010 by Anna Witkowska and offering a variety of forms of psychological support, coaching and contact with those facing similar issues. The organisation promotes independent initiatives and joint voluntary efforts and holds (paid or free) seminars, training and workshops on psychology of success, coupled with therapy and group activities for women.³⁵

Conclusion

Polish immigrant organisations established after 2004 engage in dynamic activities and use state of the art PR and marketing tools such as: building of a virtual network of members and supporters, flat organisational structure (often just one or several people directly involved in a group's activities), and frequently a commercial approach to projects. The stated objectives remain the common denominator, particularly those relating to integration and fostering of Polish culture, national heritage and language. What the organisations also have in common are novel methods of operation based on virtual Internet platforms focussing on information and roll-out of the network of people linked to an association and ranked as members, supporters or customers. Undertakings are intended to draw the (Polish and/or Irish) public attention and – beside the declared integration, cultural or other goals – to expand the catalogue of projects which can then help with fund-raising efforts. Private, EU, Polish embassy and/or senate, Polish, Irish or Polish immigrant financing are valuable supplements to budgets of the associations, based mainly on own funds and voluntary work of members. Some Polish organisations in Ireland, particularly the smallest ones, are somewhat closed and access to governors is difficult. This is a significant weakness of the Polish community in Ireland, centred around dispersed groups and organisations in major cities (especially Dublin) and

³³ Cf. www.polishgroup.pl/.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ A. Witkowska, *Women's Whim*, Self Publishing, Ebook, 2011; cf. www.kobiecypunktwidzenia.com.

often avoiding open cooperation with perceived competitors. This is also due to the fact that the community remains relatively small and to a certain conflict of interests between smaller associations. There are of course commendable exceptions, where more or less permanent alliances emerge, normally in connection with joint projects. This conflict of interests is not caused by different programmes, though, but by similar methods of operation and the limited capacity of the immigrant community which has already been mentioned. It has so far proved impossible to gather all groupings and associations in one place and representatives of some major committees, both of the 'old' and 'young' immigrants, have usually been absent at Polish immigrant conferences, seminars or congresses. Perhaps this can be remedied by increased openness of organisations, transparency of criteria, easier access to financing and focussing around a single objective unifying Polish immigrants in Ireland. Unfortunately, neither the Irish local elections in 2009 nor submission of a Polish immigrant candidate to the Polish parliament in 2011 have provided sufficient opportunities.³⁶ A strongest Polish immigrant centre will most likely emerge by way of selection and gradual fading of the weakest and smallest organisations, their mergers with larger organisations, and a subsequent acceptance of the leading role of an association capable of rallying the Polish immigrants to a single cause. Access to funding, interesting programmes, transparency and the ability to reconcile conflicting interests of minor immigrant groupings seem likely to remain the criteria of selection. A leader is still to emerge and, regrettably, either the Polish Social and Cultural Association, the Irish-Polish Society, the Forum Polonia or the Ognisko Polskie (with its own venue) have not managed to take the lead. The assessment voiced by a journalist of the immigrant *Polish Courier* before the 2009 elections cannot but be approved: 'If we want to be treated seriously and our rights to be respected, if we demand attention, we have to leave our mark on the electoral map of this island'.³⁷ The discords and dispersion of the Polish immigrants in Ireland may then be replaced with common interests that will benefit both the Poles living on the island and the entire Irish society.

³⁶ Sebastian Wideł – a Forum Polonia activist and president of the Irish Polish Society in 2008/2009 – has been the only candidate to the Polish parliament living in Ireland and representing the Polish People's Party (PSL); cf. www.kandydacidosejmu.pl/sebastian-widel; he only managed to win 84 valid votes, however: cf. <http://wyboryzagranica.pl/wyniki-wyborow-parlamentarnych-2011-roku/wyniki-wyb...>

³⁷ After: T. Wybranowski, 'The Sunday 'Final Call' Campaign', *Kurier Polski*, 27 Sep. 2008.

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