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National minorities in the Polish- -Czechoslovak relations (1948–1989)

Słowa kluczowe: Stosunki polsko-czechosłowackie po II wojnie światowej, Zaolzie, Spisz, Orawa, Kłodzko, mniejszość polska w Czechosłowacji, Czesi i Słowacy w Polsce

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Abstract: The article describes the role of the problem of national minorities (Poles in Zaolzie, Czechs mainly in Kłodzko, and Slovaks in Polish parts of Spiš and Orava) in Polish-Czechoslovakian relations during the communist era. In the light of the author's research, the nationalist heritage of border disputes from the first half of the 20th century influenced relations between the two countries also in later years, although the minority problem in their mutual relations was marginal and officially did not exist for both sides.

Introduction

There is no doubt that national minorities, and especially the issue of Cieszyn (Teschen, Těšín) Silesia, have always been an important albeit complicated issue in the history of the Polish-Czechoslovak relations. Apart from the rivalry between Warsaw and Prague over leadership in Central European politics, the Polish authorities and most Poles had an emotional attitude to the defeat in the border dispute with Prague in 1918–1920. Most Poles believed that the decision made on 28 VII 1920 by the Council of Ambassadors about the division of Cieszyn Silesia did not solve

the fate of 100,000 of their compatriots in Czechoslovakia, mostly natives, living in the western part of the region referred to Poland as Zaolzie (the land beyond the river Olza¹) while their return to homeland was only a matter of time. On the other hand, the Czechoslovak authorities tried to change the ethnic relations in the borderland to their advantage as was the case in most European countries. Thus, regardless of the plans, illusions and mistakes of the Polish diplomacy headed by Minister Józef Beck, the incorporation of Zaolzie to Poland in October 1938 was perceived by most Poles as an act of historical justice. The importance of Zaolzie to Poles was also confirmed by the (unsuccessful) negotiations between the Polish and Czechoslovak authorities in exile during World War II of Poland keeping the area. It also seems that, regardless of the political calculations and propaganda, the negotiations with Czechoslovakia conducted by the leaders of the Polish Workers' Party in 1945–1947 proved that they were also certain of Poland's rights to Zaolzie for ethnographic and moral reasons. Notably, in many European countries, as a result of negative experiences, after 1945 the notion of building nation states without minorities gained in popularity, hence the demands to keep Zaolzie within the Polish borders were considered justified in Warsaw².

In contrast to Zaolzie, the issue of the Polish-Slovak ethnic border in the parts of Spiš and Orava, incorporated into Poland in 1920, was less important in the Polish-Czechoslovak relations. Unlike the Poles in Zaolzie, the Polish-speaking population, caught in the Slovak state allied with the Third Reich in WWII, was mostly bereft of Polish national awareness and opposed the return to Poland after 1945. The problem was emotionally more important for Slovaks than for Poles but Prague used it as a tactical instrument of pressure and blackmail with respect to the Polish

¹ The name "Zaolzie" (about 700 km²), which appeared only after 1920, covers only the area of the western part of Cieszyn Silesia, granted to Czechoslovakia by the Council of Ambassadors on 28 VII 1920, inhabited by Poles (according to the last Austrian census of 1910, they represented more than 70% of the population). After 1920, it occupied approximately the area of Czeski Cieszyn and Frysztat counties without Frydek county.

² More on the subject (and broadly the Polish-Czechoslovak relations after WWII) in M.K. Kamiński, *Polsko-czechosłowackie stosunki polityczne 1945–1948*, Warszawa 1990; J. Friedl, *Vztahy mezi Československem a Polskem v letech 1945–1949*, [in:] Z. Jirásek, J. Friedl, *Rozpačité spojení. Československo-polské vztahy v letech 1945–1949*, Prague 2008, pp. 11–339; idem, *Češi a Poláci na Těšínsku 1945–1949*, Prague–Brno 2012; K. Nowak, *Mniejszość polska w Czechosłowacji 1945–1989. Między nacjonalizmem a ideą internacjonalizmu*, ed. II, Cieszyn 2012, pp. 70–191. After the mass displacement of Germans and other national minorities, the percentage of them fell in Czechoslovakia to 5.8% (against 32% in 1930), and in Poland to about 3% (31% in 1931).

minority in Zaolzie. Nevertheless, after 1945, contrary to the opinion of many Slovaks, Prague did not agree on the northern Slovak border from 1939–1945 because Warsaw could suggest an exchange of the Polish parts of Spiš and Orava for Zaolzie³.

After 1945, a new border conflict arose between Poland and Czechoslovakia, revolving around the historical German-Czech borderland incorporated into Poland, especially the areas of Kłodzko (Glatz, Kladsko), Głubczyce (Leobschütz, Hlubčice) and Racibórz (Ratibor, Ratiboř)⁴. The Czech propaganda coined slogans of incorporating the areas to Czechoslovakia as inhabited by Czechs in the vicinity of Kłodzko and “Moravians” (Moravci) in the vicinity of Głubczyce and Racibórz. Despite the fact that a majority of this population was strongly Germanized, the Polish authorities suggested an exchange of these areas for a small part of Zaolzie but Prague refused to follow suit⁵.

In the second half of 1946, the Polish-Czechoslovak border conflict was settled by Moscow, completing construction of its external empire in Central Europe and no longer tolerating disputes in the Eastern Bloc. From then on, the talks between Warsaw and Prague focused only on the minority rights. Ultimately, in a special Protocol-Annex to the Polish-Czechoslovak agreement signed on 10 III 1947, the Polish government undertook to assert its rights to the Czechs and Slovaks in Poland and the Czechoslovak government to the rights of Poles in Czechoslovakia, but mainly in culture⁶. At the same time, Moscow solved other “traditional” border conflicts and “territorial appetites” of other countries for influence. In this light, the

³ After the decision of the Council of Ambassadors of 28 VII 1920 and after small corrections till 1924 Poland covered 543 km² in Spiš and Orava (with about 23 000 inhabitants). In the Czechoslovak side remained about 45 000 polish speaking highlanders. In 1938 Poland joined a further 220 km² (with the part of Čadca region). During the WW II the Slovak-German (*Generalgouvernement* and *Provinz Oberschlesien*) border returned to the state of 1918 and after WW II to the state of 1924.

⁴ In the region of Kłodzko, the Czechs (about 6,000 before the WWII) were descendants of the religious refugees from the 17th century. Before WWII, in the Racibórz and Głubczyce regions, a population of about 21,000 called themselves “Moravians” (*Moravci*) as they belonged to the Catholic diocese of Olomouc although they lived in Upper Silesia.

⁵ M.K. Kamiński, *Polsko-czechosłowackie stosunki*, pp. 184–198.

⁶ Ibidem, pp. 247–316. The Protocol ensured: “Poles in Czechoslovakia and Slovaks in Poland, as part of the rule of law and on the principle of reciprocity, opportunities for national, political, cultural and economic development (schools, associations, cooperatives based on the principle of the unity of cooperatives in Poland or in Czechoslovakia)”. *Dokumenty i materiały do historii stosunków polsko-czechosłowackich*, ed. W. Balcerak, Vol. I: 1944–1960, part 1: 1944–1948, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź 1985 [further referred to as *DiM*], pp. 170–172.

conflict between Warsaw and Prague was no exception, but has been a part of the post-war history of the beginning of communism in Central Europe.

After the border conflict between Warsaw and Prague, the issue of national minorities mainly concerned Poles in Zaolzie in Czechoslovakia (59,000 in 1950), Czechs in the vicinity of Kłodzko and Slovaks in the Polish parts of Spiš and Orava. The remains of the Czech Calvinist colonies from the 19th century near Łódź (Zelów, Kuców, about 1,000 people) were not a political issue for the Polish authorities, and the Germanized “Moravians” near Głubczyce and Racibórz after 1947 did not get involved in politics or culture⁷.

After March 1947, in Zaolzie, many Czechs feared that a situation from before 1938 would repeat itself when Poles represented a strong and influential group. Consequently, most Czechs were against the implementation of the Protocol-Annex⁸. On the other hand, the Protocol was a priority in Warsaw, regardless of the fact that some Poles in Zaolzie and Slovaks in the Polish parts of Spiš and Orava still hoped for a shift of the border. According to the Czechoslovak authorities, the Protocol complicated the situation on the border with Poland as Prague’s priority was to build a national state of Czechs and Slovaks. It was clear that the issue of national minorities would also be used by the Czechoslovak parties in their struggle for political influence. This was especially true of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (Komunistická strana Československa, KSČ) headed by Klement Gottwald. It supported many cultural postulates of Poles as a result of which in 1945–1947 Poles it regained some property and reactivated some schools. In return, Gottwald could count on Poles voting in the parliamentary elections in 1946 and the resulting victory of the KSČ in Zaolzie. It was also important to support the KSČ for the establishment of the Polish Cultural and Educational Association in Czechoslovakia (Polski Związek Kulturalno-Oświatowy w Czechosłowacji, PZKO) in the summer of 1947, and the Polish Youth Association (Stowarzyszenie Młodzieży Polskiej, SMP), as non-political organizations, in accor-

⁷ More in: Z. Tobjański, *Czesi w Polsce*, Krakow 1994; P. Palys, *Skupiska czeskie w Kłodzkiem, Raciborskiem, Głubczyckiem i Żytawskim wobec planów zmiany granicy państwowej po II wojnie światowej*, Torun 2009; K. Nowak, *Czesi w Polsce w polsko-czechosłowackich stosunkach politycznych po 1945 roku*, [in:] *Czesi – historia i kultura*, ed. M. Jarnecki, Szreniawa 2012, pp. 83–92.

⁸ *Státní politika vůči polské menšine na Těšinsku v letech 1945–1949. Vyběrova edice dokumentů*, ed. J. Friedl, Bibliotheca Tessinensis V, series Bohemica 3, Praha–Česky Těšin 2011 [next as *Státní politika*], pp. 323–350; J. Friedl, *Češi*, pp. 197–245.

dance with the principles of the Protocol-Annex⁹. In the autumn of 1947, the Polish consulate in Ostrava was reactivated; again, it operated as a typical “minority” institution, focusing (like before 1938) mainly on helping the compatriots, Czechoslovak citizens. The Protocol-Annex was also behind these activities. The Czechoslovak consulate in Katowice, opened at the same time, was involved in parallel activities in the Polish areas of Spiš and Orava and in the Kłodzko region, motivated by the “bilateral” nature of the Protocol. The first confirmation in the Protocol-Annex by the Polish authorities of the existence of a Slovak minority in Poland (whose members spoke a Polish dialect on a daily basis) sparked euphoria in Slovakia. It was another defeat of Warsaw, as it agreed to equate the problems of the Czechs and Slovaks in Poland and the oftentimes disproportionate problems of Poles in Zaolzie. The Czechoslovak authorities did not investigate the nature of the national relations in the Polish-Slovak borderland because it was only important to declare Slovak nationality by the Polish-speaking highlanders¹⁰. The activity of the Czechoslovak consulate in the Polish parts of Spiš and Orava created an impression that Prague tactically tried to tie Poland’s cultural concessions in Zaolzie with the concessions of Warsaw to the Slovaks in Poland, even though both issues were in many aspects incomparable. Thus the Polish authorities were forced to build a network of Slovak schools. According to consul Matej Andráš’s plans, a school was to be established in every commune in Spiš and Orava but the teachers could only come from Slovakia. In his opinion, the local teachers had little knowledge of the Slovak language or were anti-Slovak¹¹. A Czech school was also established in Kudowa (Chudoba) in the Kłodzko region. That time marked the beginning of the Polish-Czech commission for the verification of the Czech population in the Kłodzko region, which, contrary to Prague’s earlier hopes, stated that only 1,094 Czechs lived there¹².

⁹ Ibidem; K. Nowak, *Mniejszość*, pp. 171–190. See also: Z. Jirásek, *K problematice vzniku polských spolků na Těšínsku v roce 1947*, *Slezský sborník* 3 (2003), pp. 339–343.

¹⁰ K. Nowak, *Władze czechosłowackie a mniejszość słowacka w Polsce (1947–1956)*, *Wiek Stare i Nowe* (2013), pp. 188–191.

¹¹ Ibidem, pp. 190–192.

¹² In 1954, the Czech school in Kudowa was changed into German, but in 1960 disappeared due to lack of children. In 1948–1962, there was also a Czech school in Gościęcice (Mehltheuer) near Strzelin (Strehlen) in Lower Silesia. Most of the Czechs from these areas emigrated to Germany or Czechoslovakia. Z. Tobjański, *Czesi w Polsce*, p. 203; P. Pałys, *Skupiska czeskie*, pp. 79–97. More see: K. Nowak, *Stefan Wengierow i Matej Andráš. Konsulowie „mniejszościowi” początków komunizmu*, [in:] *Polska między Wschodem a Zachodem*, t. II: *W kręgu polityki zagranicznej*, eds. A. Szczepańska, H. Walczak, A. Wątor, Toruń 2008, pp. 195–210.

1948–1956

In late February 1948, the communists seized ultimate power in Czechoslovakia. A question arises about the status of the (previously important) issue of the national minorities in the Polish-Czechoslovak relations when the sovereignty of the Eastern Bloc countries was limited by the Kremlin.

Bearing in mind the situation in Zaolzie, it is not difficult to identify the attitude of the Polish minority and Warsaw toward the seizure of power by Klement Gottwald's party. Most Poles approved of the fact because previously, the KSČ was the only political force not tainted by anti-Polish chauvinism. This was of importance because in the Interwar period, Poles represented 80% of the communist party members in Zaolzie.

Therefore, after February 1948, Warsaw and the Poles in Zaolzie expected the new Czechoslovak authorities to reciprocate for their support against the Czech "bourgeois" parties. As it turned out, they were severely disappointed although at first they might have had reasons for hope. Irrespective of the formally unresolved border issue, in the school year of 1948/1949 there had already been 93 schools in Zaolzie teaching in Polish and 20 Polish kindergartens. In an act of reciprocity, permission was also given to alleviate the staff shortages by bringing teachers from Poland¹³. However, the issue of linguistic equality and the pre-war property of Polish organizations was not resolved¹⁴. As for the status of the national minorities in Czechoslovakia, everything became clear when the new constitution of 9 V 1948 made no mention of them. Similarly, the Polish constitution of 1952 failed to mention any minorities in Poland. Civil rights were to be granted individually¹⁵.

¹³ *Zaolzie w świetle szyfrogramów polskiej placówki dyplomatycznej w Pradze oraz Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych w Warszawie (1945–1949)*, ed. J. Friedl, Bibliotheca Tessinensis III, series Bohemica 2, Český Těšín 2007 [further referred to as *Zaolzie*], pp. 244, 257; T. Siwek, S. Zahradnik, J. Szymeczek, *Polská národní menšina na Těšínsku 1945–1954*, Praha 2001, pp. 56–58, 81–83; K. Nowak, *Mniejszość*, pp. 194–203, 209, 216; J. Szymeczek, *Augsburski Kościół ewangelicki w czechosłowackiej części Śląska Cieszyńskiego w latach 1945–1950*, Cieszyn 2008, pp. 65–102.

¹⁴ *Zaolzie*, pp. 245–246, 249, 253–254; *Státní politika*, pp. 524, 532.

¹⁵ See: *Nowe konstytucje państw europejskich*, ed. L. Gelberg, Warszawa 1949. National minorities were mentioned in the constitutions of communist Germany of 1949, Romania of 1948 (the right to cultural development and use of one's own language in offices) and Hungary of 1949 (the right to cultural development).

Czechoslovakia and Poland, two countries which in the Interwar period had large minorities, after 1948 wiped out these groups as legal entities from public life. However, the Polish diplomacy continued to insist on implementing the Protocol-Annex on language issues and on the property of pre-war Polish organizations.

In the second half of 1948, the Polish consulate in Ostrava reported that the relations between Poles and Czechs in Zaolzie had deteriorated. The courts resumed prosecuting Poles for their anti-Slavic actions in 1938. In October 1948, during a football match in the town of Karvina, riots broke out and led to closing down Polish sports clubs. The Czechoslovak authorities took steps to include Polish athletes in the rearranged Czech "Sokol" (Falcon) organisation, much to the Polish diplomats' chagrin. The Czechs attributed the actions to the new political situation that required ideological supervision and integration of social and cultural life. In Prague and Ostrava, there were also opinions against the excessive activity of the Polish consul Stefan Wengierow in Zaolzie, while in Poland the activities of consul Matej András in Spiš and Orava were also criticized¹⁶.

On the other hand, with both countries taking a swift course of Stalinization, the national narrative was no longer needed in the political propaganda. The problems with Zaolzie started to worry the leaders of communist Poland who wanted to give up on the role of the only defender of their compatriots in Czechoslovakia. On 30 X 1948, at a conference in Prague, Józef Olszewski, the Polish ambassador, suggested a re-interpretation of the Protocol-Annex with the intention of handing over to the KSČ the unsatisfied demands of his compatriots and thus limiting Warsaw's interference with Zaolzie. The prerequisite was reactivation of the remaining Polish schools, suspension of court proceedings in relation to 1938 and annulment of previous sentences, suspension of the resettlement of Polish citizens, introduction of bilingualism in local offices, transfer of pre-war real estate to Poles (except for schools since a stop was put on private education in communist countries), and reactivation of Polish cooperatives. The Czechs partially accepted it but did not agree to giving the Poles the real estate of cooperatives. Ultimately, Olszewski agreed to creating mixed Polish-Czech cooperatives and agreed on Polish sports clubs, operating under the SMP, being affiliated with the Czech "Sokol" but subordinated to the Polish "Sokol" Council. The Polish Physical Education Council was to be estab-

¹⁶ *Zaolzie*, pp. 245–249, 251–252, 255; M.K. Kamiński, *Polsko-czechosłowackie stosunki*, p. 369; J. Friedl, *Češi*, pp. 259–268. It is worth mentioning that after WW II there were 30 000 Poles left in Zaolzie, of whom 20 000 officially changed their nationality to Czech, mainly due to fears of harassment and displacement.

lished at the SMP, but the SMP was to become a section of the Czechoslovak Youth Union (Československý svaz mládeže), as the SMP-ČSM, following the pattern of the youth organizations of Hungarians and Ukrainians in Slovakia. Regardless of Warsaw's intentions, the Czechoslovak authorities started to supervise the Polish minority. However, Warsaw as well as Prague, had other priorities at that time. According to Olszewski, "looking at the entirety of the Polish-Czechoslovak relations through the issue of Zaolzie, would be a serious political mistake"¹⁷. Following assessment of the successes of Poles in Zaolzie in 1945–1948 and bearing in mind the diplomatic documents, a conclusion can be drawn that regardless of the activity of the Polish minority, everything that it obtained from the Czechoslovak authorities, it owed not to itself but to Poland's diplomatic efforts¹⁸.

However, the final shape of the border remained a problem as March 1949 marked the end of the two-year transition period. However, the Polish authorities knew that any concessions on the part of Prague were not possible. However, due to the still raw emotions, in late 1948 the leaders of the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR) still feared their compatriots' negative response to Poland's official withdrawal from Zaolzie. Therefore, Warsaw asked Prague for further delay, promising not to raise the issue of the border revision in the future. It meant tacit acceptance of the status quo which Prague accepted¹⁹.

In 1949–1950, the interest of the Polish communist diplomacy in Zaolzie started to wane (together with the interest in the affairs of the compatriots in other countries of the Eastern Bloc). The Polish authorities began to stretch barbed wire along their southern border and plowed a border road. Natural persons found it increasingly difficult to cross the border, even as part of "local border traffic". On the other hand, Prague was interested in recruiting workforce in Poland, offering better wages. The Polish authorities tried to put a stop to it but were generally powerless. In fact, working in Czechoslovakia, like before WWII, reduced unemployment in the southern Polish borderlands²⁰.

¹⁷ Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych w Warszawie (next as AMSZ), Departament Polityczny, sign. 6/15/207: Raport J. Olszewskiego dla MSZ, 3 XI 1948; M.K. Kamiński, *Polsko-czechosłowackie stosunki*, pp. 366–367.

¹⁸ As said in 1951 highly placed in KSČ Marie Švermová, the Poles in Czechoslovakia "will get as many rights as the Polish authorities will pull out from us". Národní archiv Praha, Ustřední výbor KSČ [next as NAP], sign. 100/24/98/1138: Polsko 3, p. 119.

¹⁹ M.K. Kamiński, *Polsko-czechosłowackie stosunki*, pp. 367–368.

²⁰ *Státní politika*, pp. 496–498; K. Nowak, *Mniejszość*, pp. 227–229.

At that time, the authorities of Poland and Czechoslovakia lost their interest in their compatriots from socialist countries. Following a conflict between Tito and Stalin (June 1948), the Kremlin satellite countries launched an engine to combat “bourgeois nationalism” (in Poland it was referred to as the “right-wing deviation”). The national propaganda was replaced by slogans of “class conflict”. In line with this Stalinist ideological direction, the introduction of the socialist system, nationality problems were resolved and reference to them was considered manifestation of nationalist tendencies. In this new reality, in the autumn of 1950, consuls Wengierow and Andráš were accused of nationalism and dismissed from their jobs. These events marked the end of a certain stage in the Polish-Czechoslovak relations, related to the activities of typical “minority consulates”, dealing mainly with open and secret assistance to compatriots who were citizens of the country in which these consulates operated²¹.

In the following years, the issue of minorities in both countries was hushed and became a taboo in public life, concealed by the propaganda of internationalism. In the Eastern Bloc, the problem of national minorities was only an internal affair of each state, and there was no question of intervening to defend compatriots in a neighboring country. National minorities could only establish cultural organizations, financed by the state in which they lived, and their representative to the authorities of that state could only be the ruling communist party, without national sections. The minority rights in Poland and Czechoslovakia were regulated only by resolutions of the communist parties because after 1950, the diplomacy of both states did not refer to the provisions of the Protocol-Annex. In Zaolzie, the party resolutions introduced Polish inscriptions mainly in commercial establishments. Theoretically, it was also possible to communicate in Polish in the offices but it was not respected everywhere. In the Polish parts of Spiš and Orava, bilingualism was a fact (apart from schools) only in inscriptions on commercial establishments. From 1949, the Slovak Union was active in these areas as a cultural organization and ethnically mixed cooperatives, the way it was in Zaolzie. The cultural organizations of the Czech minority established in Poland, and the few Czech schools, disappeared after a few years because the population was more related to German culture and interested in migrating to Germany²². Of course, the official Polish-Czechoslovak friendship flourished²³.

²¹ K. Nowak, *Stefan Wengierow*, pp. 208–209.

²² Idem, *Władze czechosłowackie*, pp. 196–197. About 500 people returned from Slovakia, so only 10% of refugees from 1945–1947.

²³ See: D. Janák, *Oficjalne formy przygranicznych kontaktów czesko-polskich w latach 1945–1989*, [in:] *Między przymusową przyjaźnią a prawdziwą solidarnością. Czesi – Polacy –*

In 1951–1952, the Czechoslovak authorities fought against “bourgeois nationalism”, and the so-called “Platform” of Paweł Cieślár from Zaolzie. He argued that the centralization activities of the KSČ, carried out under the slogan of internationalism, in practice led to assimilation of Poles and were inconsistent with the ideas of Marxism and Leninism. So he suggested administrative re-Polonisation of this issue because most Czechs born in Zaolzie before 1920 had Polish ethnic roots²⁴. Regardless of the unrealistic nature of these concepts, Cieślár’s “Platform” became a pretext for the Czechoslovak authorities to further limit the independence of the Polish minority, officially as part of fighting against Polish nationalism. Cieślár was removed from the KSČ, the SMP organization was incorporated into ČSM and the Polish “Sokol” Council was dissolved²⁵. Poles in Zaolzie were no longer able to oppose it, the more so that they could no longer count on the Polish diplomacy which frustrated them. They tended to perceive the Ostrava consulate as their natural ally. In the Polish-Czechoslovak relations, the issue of national minorities ceased to exist. Since then, the PZKO remained the only organization for Poles in Czechoslovakia (and in the communist countries in general). During that period, Poles in Zaolzie had about 90 schools, 50 kindergartens with Polish as the language of instruction, the Polish Stage at the theater in Český Těšín, Polish-language broadcasts on Radio Ostrava, and several Polish press titles²⁶. Of course, it was only a fraction of the Polish infrastructure built in that part of Cieszyn Silesia since the mid-19th century.

The attitude of the Polish diplomacy towards Zaolzie changed slightly after the first “thaw” in Czechoslovakia, after the deaths of Stalin and Gottwald in March 1953. This, however, resulted not from the decisions made in Warsaw but from a change in the opinion of the Czechoslovak authorities according to which Zaolzie displayed also Czech nationalism. However, this change in the attitudes towards Poles also had a practical reason as continued repressions could have threatened the region’s economic interests because Polish workers were also responsible for the implementation of production plans. In addition, the KSČ was concerned about the turnout in the elections to the national councils and the parliament in 1954. For this reason, the Czechoslovak authorities temporarily stopped taking over the assets of

Słowacy 1938/39–1945–1989, cz. II, eds. P. Błażek, P. Jaworski, Ł. Kamiński, Warszawa 2009, pp. 111–115.

²⁴ More in G. Gąsior, *Platforma Cieślara – kwestia narodowościowa na Zaolziu w okresie stalinowskim*, *Studia z dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* XL (2005), pp. 143–166.

²⁵ T. Siwek, S. Zahradnik, J. Szymeczek, *Polská národní menšina*, pp. 70–76.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 81–85.

Polish organizations from before 1938. Wiktor Grosz, another Polish ambassador to Prague and a typical Stalinist who had recently accused the Polish elite in Zaolzie of nationalism, now changed tack and in his reports for Warsaw, he praised the Czechoslovak authorities for changing their attitude towards Poles. Reports of the consulate in Ostrava then headed by Jerzy Fidler reflected the recurring concerns about the assimilation policy of the Czech authorities. In the following months, Polish diplomats discouraged the Czech authorities, albeit only unofficially, from liquidating the PZKO and the Polish newspaper "Głos Ludu" (People's Voice). On the other hand, Grosz and Fidler reported about "the reaction force" among Poles in Zaolzie, and its main representative Paweł Kubisz. He was a poet and, since 1949, editor-in-chief of the Polish cultural monthly "Zwrot" (Turning). The minority leaders from Zaolzie started to meet the cultural activists in Poland. The consulate in Ostrava, once again regaining authority among its compatriots, also tried to help them to organize group trips to Poland. In 1955, Warsaw and Prague resumed negotiations on the signing of the final border agreement. On the other hand, the "Polonia" Society for Liaison with the Emigration (Towarzystwo Łączności z Wychodźstwem "Polonia") established in Warsaw in 1955 (the "Polonia" Society for Liaison with the Emigration since 1959) could officially deal only with compatriots in capitalist countries²⁷. Hence, the problem of national minorities in the Polish-Czechoslovak relations did not exist on a formal level.

1956–1967

The Khrushchev Thaw in the Soviet Union in 1956 involved more profound changes aimed at increasing Warsaw's interest in the compatriots in Czechoslovakia. They were associated with the general de-Stalinization in communist Poland after Władysław Gomułka took over power. The plans to activate the Polish foreign policy included renewal of contacts with Poles abroad, also in the socialist countries²⁸. Addressing this topic in the new political conditions proved that the Polish authorities regarded their earlier policy towards Poles abroad as wrong.

²⁷ *Zaolzie w opiniach konsulów polskich (1948–1960). Raporty dyplomatyczne* [next as *Zwokp*], ed. K. Nowak, *Acta Historica Silesiae Superioris* XIII (2003), pp. 12–42; M. Plačková: *Předvolební taktizování v česko-polských vztazích na Těšínsku v roce 1954*, *Vlastivědné listy* 2 (1998), pp. 12–15; K. Nowak, *Mniejszość*, pp. 264–265, 291–297.

²⁸ *Polskie dokumenty dyplomatyczne: 1957*, eds. K. Ruchniewicz, T. Szumowski, P. Długolecki, Warsaw 2006 [further referred to as the *PDD*], pp. 3–4, 14–15.

In February 1957, in his report from Ostrava, consul Fidler clearly stated that the national policy of Czechoslovakia aims at the assimilation of Poles and that nothing had changed in this respect since WWII. He provided examples of attempts to break up the PZKO, repressions for using the Polish language in offices, pressure on people with Polish passports to change citizenship, closing down Polish schools, and seizing the property of Polish organizations. According to Fidler, the approval of many compatriots from Zaolzie of the changes in Poland after October 1956, which Prague did not accept, were among the reasons for such actions on the part of the Czechs²⁹.

In March 1957, the Polish diplomacy began to consider the possibility of exploring the topic of the Polish minority during Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz's visit to Czechoslovakia planned for 2–7 May. Some diplomats were skeptical about this idea because in fact it was a problem of the Czechoslovak citizens. Others argued that the consulate in Ostrava should not avoid minority issues and were outraged that even a small group of children could not be allowed to come to Poland for a holiday. There were also suggestions that the Polish delegation leaving for Czechoslovakia should raise the issue unofficially. There was also an opinion that avoiding the subject of minorities would disappoint the compatriots. Ultimately, however, the Polish delegation did not take up the subject of Poles in Zaolzie during its stay in Czechoslovakia. Fears about the reaction of the Czechs prevailed³⁰. It was also the case after the 5th PZKO Congress in July 1957 when the Polish delegation indicated in a report to Warsaw their compatriots' bitterness over the passivity of the consulate and the Polish authorities towards the Czech pro-assimilation activities. Poles from Zaolzie claimed that the homeland had forgotten about them. The report also contained proposals for discussion at the highest level with Prague about Zaolzie, plans to invite children and teachers from Zaolzie on holidays to Poland, sending materials necessary for cultural work in Zaolzie, and inviting artists from Poland to Zaolzie³¹. In this situation, during official talks on another bilateral cultural agreement between the two countries, the Polish diplomats tried to talk about the possibility of sending teachers from Zaolzie to Poland and reciprocating by sending Slovak teachers from Poland to Czechoslovakia, coupled with cooperation between schools

²⁹ *Polska a Zaolzie (1957–1967). Po „Polskim Październiku” a przed „Praską Wiosną”. Wybór dokumentów*, ed. K. Nowak, Acta Historia Silesiae Superioris XIX (2006) [further referred to as *PaZ*], p. 14; PDD: 1957, pp. 99–101.

³⁰ *PaZ*, pp. 14–19.

³¹ PDD: 1957, pp. 627–629; *PaZ*, pp. 19–22.

from both countries. Ultimately, after the first exchange of teachers from minority schools in 1957–1958, the Czechoslovak authorities suspended similar projects³².

On the other hand, while planning to start talks with Prague on the minority issue, Warsaw was unable to take advantage of the principle of reciprocity and to propose discussing the problems of about 16,000 Slovaks in Poland. Contrary to the first post-war years, Prague was no longer interested in the subject, considering the existence of schools with Slovak as the language of instruction (in 33 schools) and the establishment of the Social and Cultural Society of Czechs and Slovaks in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Czechów i Słowaków) in 1957 as sufficient. On the other hand, Prague did not want to discuss the Slovak postulates regarding the introduction of the Slovak language to church liturgy in the Polish parts of Spiš and Orava for ideological reasons³³. Unwilling to raise the Slovak issue, Prague expected the same from Warsaw in Zaolzie. On 13 VI 1958, a Polish-Czechoslovak agreement was signed on the final course of the border, which, apart from minor deviations (369 hectares of surplus for Czechoslovakia, which has not been compensated to this day), only confirmed the status quo³⁴. Until the end of communism, the Polish authorities did not dare to start an official dialogue with their Czechoslovak partners on the national policy in Zaolzie.

Bearing in mind the general political situation in the Eastern Bloc, the answer to the question about the source of Prague's stubbornness in prohibiting wider cultural contacts between Poles from Zaolzie and Poland after 1956 seems to be a simple one. In 1956, the de-Stalinization in Czechoslovakia was not as intense as in Poland, neither was the atmosphere of the "Thaw", anti-Soviet moods, or a departure from socialist realism in culture. Prague was afraid of contracting the "Gomułka revolution". In October 1956, the Czechoslovak authorities banned tourist traffic with Poland, introduced protection of public buildings and reinforced military garrisons on the border. After the outbreak of the anti-communist uprising in Hungary and the

³² PaZ, pp. 31–32; K. Nowak, *Czesi*, p. 95.

³³ L. Olejnik, *Polityka narodowościowa Polski w latach 1944–1960*, Łódź 2003, pp. 489–496; T. Kopyś, *Trzy listy, które wstrząsnęły Spiszem i Orawą*, [in:] *Między przymusową*, pp. 55–62; J. Kwiek, *Sytuacja ludności słowackiej na Spiszu i Orawie po październiku 1956 r.*, [in:] *Państwo, prawo, społeczeństwo w dziejach Europy Środkowej. Księga Jubileuszowa dedykowana Profesorowi Józefowi Ciągwie w siedemdziesięciolecie urodzin*, ed. L. Molitoris, Kraków 2009, pp. 389–401; K. Nowak, *Mniejszość*, p. 311. In 1967, the TSKCiS changed its name to the Cultural Society of Czechs and Slovaks.

³⁴ See: *DiM*, Vol. I, part 2: 1948–1960, pp. 428–429.

support of some Slovak Hungarians for the changes in this country, Czechoslovakia was increasingly concerned³⁵. In this situation, there was no question of facilitating contacts between the Polish minority and Poland. Besides, Prague realized that the Slovak minority in Poland also lived in a new political reality and avoided contacts. The policy of the authorities in Prague towards Poland suggests that they were primarily interested in economic matters, in particular imports of the necessary natural resources and labour. In other matters, Poland, considered by many Czechs a less affluent country, was not an attractive partner for Prague³⁶.

In this atmosphere, the Czechoslovak authorities began to fight the so-called “theory of two homelands”, recognizing that Czechoslovakia should be not only the physical (as many Poles thought) but also the spiritual homeland of the Polish minority³⁷. The KSČ supervision of the PZKO was tightened (some thought that the organization should be disbanded) together with the isolation of the Polish minority from the cultural life in Poland. Paweł Kubisz from “Zwrot” and poet Henryk Jasiczek from “Głos Ludu” were dismissed. On the Czech side, there were also opinions that Poland was back to minister “Beck’s policy” on Zaolzie³⁸. The consulate in Ostrava informed Warsaw about the repressions³⁹.

The repression of the Czechoslovak authorities against Poles in Zaolzie resulted more from concerns about the impact of the political changes in Poland on Czechoslovakia than any new policy towards the minorities. Therefore, when the political “thaw” intensified in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, every year Poles from Zaolzie had more and more opportunities for cultural contacts with Poland. In the new Czechoslovak constitution adopted in July 1960, Article 25 provided citizens of Polish, Ukrainian and Hungarian nationalities with “all opportunities and means of

³⁵ K. Sieber, *Pies, który nie szczekał. Czechosłowacja a wydarzenia w Polsce w 1956 roku*, [in:] *Polski Październik 1956 w polityce światowej*, ed. J. Rowiński, Warszawa 2006, pp. 150–165; NAP, UV KSČ, inscription 100/24/42/123: Schůze Sekretariatu, 29 VI 1956; Z. Jirásek, *K průběhu roku 1956 v ostravském kraji*, Časopis Slezského zemského muzea B 1 (1997), pp. 85–95.

³⁶ K. Nowak, *Mniejszość*, p. 374.

³⁷ See: M. Plačková, *Tzv. teorie dvou vlasti Polaků na Těšinsku v 50. letech*, *Vlastivědné listy* 2 (1997), pp. 10–14.

³⁸ *Zaolzie*, pp. 44–49; *PaZ*, p. 28–30, 32; R. Skobelski, *Położenie mniejszości polskiej na Zaolziu w drugiej połowie lat pięćdziesiątych XX wieku*, [in:] *Między prawdziwą przyjaźnią*, p. 87; K. Nowak, *Mniejszość*, pp. 317–326.

³⁹ See: *Zaolzie*, pp. 44–51; *PaZ*, pp. 18–30.

education in their mother tongue and cultural development”⁴⁰. Undoubtedly, from a legal point of view it was a step forward. Yet in the following years, none of the minorities referred to this constitutional provision in their postulates. The issues of national minorities were still mainly determined by the resolutions of the KSČ.

Generally, after 1956, the Polish diplomacy was still limited to observing the situation in Zaolzie, commenting on the Czech nationality policy, and devising the strategy of helping the compatriots. On the other hand, during the preparations for the signing of the new Polish-Czechoslovak treaty (which took place on 1 March 1967), neither side mentioned the national minorities. It was an indication that they were completely marginal in the bilateral relations and officially did not exist at all.

During the “Prague Spring” of 1968

The democratization process initiated in January 1968 by Alexander Dubček, the new first secretary of the KSČ Central Committee, was welcome in Czechoslovakia with hope for a better future. It held true for national minorities, especially that the documents issued by the new authorities mentioned the need to create a statute regulating national rights⁴¹. Most Poles in Zaolzie supported the political revival known as the “Prague Spring” and counted on compensation for the harm suffered after WWII, especially in terms of property, the assimilation pressure, limitations to bilingualism and administrative changes unfavourable for Poles. However, these postulates were negatively perceived by the Czech population, fearing the consequences of their application that would pose a threat of return to the status quo from before 1938. The abolition of censorship was conducive to press polemics on the subject⁴².

Meanwhile, Warsaw watched the changes in Czechoslovakia with growing anxiety. The PZPR propaganda against the “Prague Spring” revolved around the demonstrations in Czechoslovakia in defence of students persecuted in Poland after the Polish 1968 political crisis. In the following weeks, Polish diplomats officially protested against actions which damaged Poland’s reputation⁴³. In order to improve

⁴⁰ See: *Konstytucja Czechosłowackiej Republiki Socjalistycznej z dnia 11 lipca 1960*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk 1973.

⁴¹ See: *Občanská společnost 1967–1970. Sociální organismy a hnutí Pražského jara. Prameny k dějinám Československé krize 1967–1970*, díl 2, sv. 2, eds. J. Pecka, J. Belda, J. Hoppe, Prague–Brno 1998, p. 256.

⁴² See especially “Głos Ludu”, March–July 1968.

⁴³ Archiwum Akt Nowych [further referred to as the AAN], KC PZPR, inscription XI/379:

the atmosphere in the bilateral relations, Edward Gierek, the regional leader of the PZPR in Katowice, persuaded the KSČ authorities in Ostrava to organize a joint demonstration on the anniversary of the end of WWII on 9 May in Český Těšín. Much to the surprise of the Polish authorities, the demonstration was joined mainly by participants transported from Poland and jettisoned the propaganda goals⁴⁴.

Understandably, the Polish press in Zaolzie and the PZKO were in an awkward position in the face of these events. On the one hand, the Polish minority supported the democratic changes but it did not want to openly criticize its Polish homeland. Meanwhile, taking advantage of the conflict, the consulate in Ostrava instructed the Polish press in Zaolzie to condemn the criticism of Poland in Czechoslovakia, referring to the national unity and patriotism. Hence the Polish authorities actively referred to the problems of their compatriots in Zaolzie. In these efforts, consul Jan Korczyński was assisted by Edward Gierek from Katowice, who maintained secret contacts with regional KSČ leaders afraid of the consequences of the system reforms (they even considered political asylum in Poland)⁴⁵. Most of the leaders of the Polish minority treated Korczyński's plans with reserve, disagreeing with the thesis adopted by the Polish authorities that the reforms in Czechoslovakia would lead to Polish-Czech conflicts on the border⁴⁶. In the Polish parts of Spiš and Orava, the Ministry of Public Security (Służba Bezpieczeństwa – SB) noted Slovaks' increased interest in the situation in Czechoslovakia and new demands for the development of the Slovak education. In connection with the growing tension around Czechoslovakia, there were also rumors that Poland would annex Zaolzie and even a part of Slovakia, or would exchange the Polish parts of Spiš and Orava for Zaolzie⁴⁷. Despite the aforementioned signals pointing to an increase in interest in the problems of minorities in

The party Central Committee's and the government's letter to the UV KSČ and the Czechoslovak government, 6 V 1968, k. 11–14.

⁴⁴ AMSZ, D I, inscription 3/9/74: Note on the latest political situation in Northern Moravia, 14 V 1968; "Podhale" na Zaolziu. Służba bezpieczeństwa wobec zaolziańskiej „Praskiej Wiosny”. *Wybór dokumentów z lat 1968–1969*, ed. K. Nowak, Acta Historica Silesiae Superioris XVII (2005) [further referred to as "Podhale"], p. 18.

⁴⁵ AMSZ, D I, inscription 3/9/74: Note on the latest issues of the Polish diaspora in Czechoslovakia in the light of the operations of the Polish Association of Culture and Education, 23 VII 1968; AAN, KC PZPR, inscription XIA/33: A note on talks with comrade Kolder, pp. 658–662.

⁴⁶ "Podhale", pp. 13–20.

⁴⁷ J. Kwiek, *Ludność słowacka w Polsce w latach 1957–1968*, [in:] *Góry i góralszczyzna w dziejach i kulturze polskiej pogranicza polsko-słowackiego (Podhale, Spisz, Orawa, Gorce, Pieniny)*, ed. M. Gotkiewicz, Nowy Targ 2005, pp. 122–124.

Poland and Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1968, the diplomacy of both countries did not decide to engage in a dialogue because at that time, these issues did not seem the most important. Apart from that, both the supporters and the opponents of the reforms could use the propaganda as an attempt to interfere with the internal affairs of either state.

In 1968, the Polish authorities were rather confused by the attitude of their compatriots in Zaolzie. On the one hand, Warsaw welcomed the changes in the minority legislation planned by the Czechoslovak government. On the other hand, the Polish authorities were afraid of the political changes in Czechoslovakia. In general, the consulate in Ostrava created an image of the compatriots in Zaolzie as victims of the counter-revolution and Czech nationalism. This confusion, coupled with errors in the consulate's assessment of the situation, came to light when the Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia (20/21 VIII 1968) when most Poles from Zaolzie condemned the aggression⁴⁸. On the other hand, Władysław Gomułka was aware of the complicated history of the Polish-Czech relations, therefore the Polish army did not enter Czechoslovakia through Zaolzie⁴⁹. Nevertheless, like Hungarians in Slovakia, Poles in Zaolzie found themselves in a difficult position. Although they were against the Warsaw Pact's intervention, they were harassed by the Czechs and Slovaks as members of the "occupying" nation. The situation was handled when several leaders of the Polish minority (especially by Henryk Jasiczek) openly condemned the Polish authorities⁵⁰.

During the Czechoslovak "normalization" of 1969–1989

The Polish authorities also participated in the suppression of the "Prague Spring" after August 1968. The Ministry of Public Security conducted a secret propaganda operation codenamed "Podhale". Warsaw also wanted to punish the Polish "counter-revolutionaries" from Zaolzie. The Polish authorities prevented about 10 people, mainly journalists, described by the consulate in Ostrava as "anti-Polish", from entering Poland and publishing there. The Czech authorities dismissed them and made changes to the PZKO. Polish organizations, re-established during the "Prague

⁴⁸ „Podhale”, pp. 13–24; 19–28; K. Nowak, *Mniejszość*, pp. 432–435.

⁴⁹ L. Pajórek, *Polska a Praska Wiosna. Udział Wojska Polskiego w interwencji zbrojnej w Czechosłowacji w 1968 r.*, Warszawa 1998, p. 77, 80.

⁵⁰ „Podhale”, pp. 27–28, 40–41.

Spring": the SMP and the Polish Scouts Movement (Harcerstwo Polskie), were dissolved⁵¹. In late March 1970, Ladyslaw Krumniklowa – a journalist from “Głos Ludu” – was arrested for contacts with Poles illegally transporting Jerzy Giedroyc’s publications from the Literary Institute in Paris across the Tatra Mountains⁵².

The fall of Gomułka’s rule in Poland in December 1970 diminished the consulate in Ostrava’s ideological pressure on Poles in Zaolzie. The situation was back to “normal”. The new minority legislation in Czechoslovakia (Constitutional Law No. 144/68) did not give minorities legal representation and the KSČ continued to decide on the minority policy⁵³. Polish diplomats did not change their minds about the negative ethnic policy in Zaolzie, knowing that Prague still did not want to talk about Zaolzie or the Czechs and Slovaks in Poland. In the following years, the Czechoslovak authorities allowed more intense cultural contacts between Zaolzie and Poland and the PZKO was willing to follow suit. On the other hand, since the 1970s, the assimilation of the national minorities in both countries significantly accelerated. Despite the possibility of speaking Polish in offices, the local authorities in Zaolzie created an atmosphere hostile towards the Polish minority⁵⁴.

The contacts of the national minorities in both countries with their respective homelands were broken off in the 1980s due to another political breakthrough in Poland and the establishment of the “Solidarity” (Solidarność) movement. Prague had only one goal: to contain the influx of the “anti-socialist plague” from Poland into Czechoslovakia. Like Warsaw in 1968, now Prague was in favour of the intervention of the Warsaw Pact because of the Polish “counter-revolution”. The desire for “revenge” for 1968 also played a role⁵⁵. On 7 XII 1981, six days before the introduction of “martial law” in Poland, the Czechoslovak authorities unilaterally suspended – as it turned out for almost ten years – “small border traffic” with Poland. This resulted in severing many cultural and family contacts on either side of the border.

⁵¹ Ibidem, pp. 33–66; K. Nowak, *Mniejszość*, pp. 464–475.

⁵² More in K. Nowak, *Mniejszość*, pp. 475–479. On the Poles illegally transporting books see *Proces tatarników. Informacja z drugiego dnia procesu w sprawie Macieja Kozłowskiego i innych*, *Zeszyty Historyczne* 121 (1997), pp. 89–97.

⁵³ More in R. Petráš, *Menšiny v komunistickém Československu. Právní a faktické postavení národnostních menšin v českých zemích v letech 1948–1970*, Prague 2008, pp. 336–340.

⁵⁴ More in K. Nowak, *Mniejszość*, pp. 482–506, 537–562. The census from 1970 showed 54,000, according to the census from 1980 there were 52,000 Poles in Zaolzie.

⁵⁵ More see: A. Kobus, *Czechosłowacja wobec narodzin, rozwoju i delegalizacji „Solidarności” (1980–1982)*, Toruń 2006.

The supporters of “Solidarity” were persecuted in Zaolzie⁵⁶. According to the KSC, Poland was a political suspect from which the inhabitants of Czechoslovakia should be isolated. In this situation, Warsaw had even less leeway to start a dialogue with Prague on the national minorities, even at the end of communism in 1989. The political opposition of the two countries did not talk about minority issues during their secret meetings because what connected Poles, Czechs and Slovaks was of importance, not the great divides⁵⁷.

Conclusions

After February 1948, the issue of national minorities in the Polish-Czechoslovak relations played an important role only in the next six months. By its suggestion to change the interpretation of the Protocol-Annex, the Polish diplomacy quickly assumed the role of a supplicant, unable to find a formula for the talks with Prague about Zaolzie in the years to come. Regardless of the ideological conditions that complicated the minority issues in the Eastern Bloc, the Czechoslovak diplomacy once again turned out to be more effective in relations with Poland. In the following years, under the heavy rule of the Soviet totalitarianism, the isolation of Zaolzie from Poland was mainly the result of Prague’s reaction to the events in Poland (1956, 1970, 1980). Consequently, the case of Zaolzie was pushed to the sidelines. In general, like in the Interwar period, the official Polish-Czechoslovak relations in 1948–1989 were quite tense. It partly resulted from the negative stereotypes, especially on the side of the Czechoslovak authorities which failed to show any inclinations towards closer relations with Poland. This negative impacted the situation of Poles in Czechoslovakia and Czechs and Slovaks in Poland.

⁵⁶ See materials from the archives of Czechoslovak security services: Archiv bezpečnostních složek in Brno-Kanice and Praha, especially fond Státní bezpečnost Ostrava. See also: J. Rychlík, *Politické změny ve Východní Evropě před 17. listopadem a jejich ohlas v Československu*, Česko-slovenská historická ročenka (2009), pp. 113–125; K. Nowak, *Mniejszość*, pp. 506–537.

⁵⁷ More see: *Obywatele dyplomaci. Solidarność Polsko-Czesko-Słowacka w Cieszynie i Bielsku-Białej*, eds. M. Kaute, J. Okrzesik, Bielsko-Biała 2009; G. Waligóra, *Opozycja przedsierpniowa w Polsce wobec opozycji czechosłowackiej*, [in:] *Między przymusową przyjaźnią*, pp. 246–251.

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Summary

After the communists took over power in Czechoslovakia in February 1948, the formerly important issue of national minorities in the Polish-Czechoslovak relations remained valid. The border disputes came to an end but under the new political conditions, there was an open question of attaching the Protocol-Annex to the bilateral agreement of 10 III 1947 in Zaolzie, Spiš, Orava and Kłodzko. Ultimately, Poland only managed to secure Polish education and cultural life in Zaolzie at the expense of the former assets of Polish organizations. On the other hand, in Czechoslovakia there was a desire to treat the issue of Czechs and Slovaks in Poland as an instrument weakening the power of Poles in Zaolzie and depriving Warsaw of grounds for interfering in the affairs of its minority in Czechoslovakia. Since the autumn of 1948, the Stalinist totalitarianism affected Polish-Czechoslovak relations which resulted in perceiving national issues as “class conflict”. Poland suggested a change in the interpretation of the Protocol-Annex by limiting the role of both countries in arranging the affairs of their compatriots, with Prague’s acceptance. The effects could be seen in the following years because Warsaw lost the courage to raise the problem of Zaolzie in talks with Prague. The region became a taboo in the international arena. On the other hand, the political crises in Poland (1956, 1970, 1980) and Czechoslovakia (1968) prompted Prague to isolate the Polish minority from its homeland thus intensifying the assimilation processes, and isolated Czechs and Slovaks in Poland from Czechoslovakia. The negative balance of the Polish-Czechoslovak relations and the past stereotypes, especially on the Czechoslovak side, also played an important role in the issue under discussion.