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ADAM CHĘTNIK AND THE QUESTION OF KURPIAN- MASURIAN BORDERLAND'S POLISH IDENTITY

ADAM CHĘTNIK I KWESTIA POLSKOŚCI POGRANICZA KURPIOWSKO-MAZURSKIEGO

Adam Chętnik, a peasant and a scientist, a Kurpian and a Pole. A man with a unique literary output. He left behind over 900¹ different kinds of articles and publications related to the Kurpie region. This quantity may seem unbelievable, but preliminary studies confirm this. This geographical and ethnographic region was fortunate to have used his talent to perpetuate its past in so many publications. Thanks to his work, modern generations have the opportunity to cultivate the ethnographic and cultural traditions of their ancestors. He was a promoter of the original culture of the Kurpian community and he became an ambassador of Kurpie in the world of science and culture. He also fought for the Kurpian-Masurian borderland's Polish identity, for the inhabitants of East Prussia, speaking and feeling Polish, not to lose their identity with Motherland and for Poland not to forget about them.

Born on 20 December 1885 in Nowogród by the Narew river, as a second and the oldest living child in a numerous family of Wincenty and Stanisława Filiszowska², a demon for positivist work and a great patriot, is worth keeping in human and historical memory. He would often say: "Whatever I'm doing, I'm thinking if it'll be good for Poland". After many years, we can confirm that what he did was right and brought about the revival of the Kurpian culture and young Kurpian generation's interest in the past of their region. The Polish identity of East Prussia, which he so intensely sought, was also restored.

Adam Chętnik was an advocate of the cooperation between the inhabitants of Kurpian-Masurian borderland. He repeatedly emphasized that Masurians from Prussia and Kurpians are the same people who have a common culture, language and customs. He considered that the state border dividing the inhabitants of Kurpie

¹ Based on a bibliographic list compiled by the author.

² The Archives of Muzeum Północno-Mazowieckie in Łomża MOŁ/H 1581, Abridged copy of marriage certificate between Adam Chętnik and Jadwiga Nowicka issued by Urząd Stanu Cywilnego (Registry Office) in Wrasaw – Warszawa Praga-Południe, No. 1050/X/55 of 1 October 1959; A. Chętnik, *Moi rodzice i ich dzieci*. Typescript, Arch. rodziny Chętników, p. 1; M. Pokropek, *Adam Chętnik i jego zasługi dla regionu kurpiowskiego*. Rocznik Białostocki 1966, Vol. VI, p. 11.

and Masuria was an artificial division which came into existence as a result of the unfavorable history. It was a line separating the ethnic language and cultural community of borderland people. From the earliest years he dealt with border divisions. In Chętnik's family, "his grandmother's on the distaff side Salomea Brzostowska's sister married a Masurian from near Rastembork (Kętrzyn – M.N.'s note) a certain Węgorzewski, to go abroad with her husband immediately after the wedding"³. It was the Germanization campaign including schools, undertaken only in the nineteenth century, supported by the German hierarchy of the Evangelical-Augsburg Church that fostered allegiance to homeland and the ruling dynasty. It was also reinforced by compulsory military service leading to the destruction of the Polish intelligentsia⁴. He explained that these processes, in particular the change of religion from the Catholic to Evangelical-Augsburg, did not mean that Masurians could not be good Poles⁵. Zofia Dudzińska wrote: "He liked talking to visitors from Olsztyn that when he was a child he listened to the sound of ligawka (Polish folk wind instrument) before Christmas. Ligawkas in Kurpian villages sounded and ligawkas on the other side of the border replied to them, the same were the traditions and customs of the people living then on the territories annexed by Russia and Prussian Masuria because both here and there lived one and the same Polish people. Already as a teenage boy he listened to bargees chatting while floating logs down the Pisa river and using the same dialect as bargees from Nowogród, in father's conversations with comers from near Szczytno, Nibork (Nidzica – M.N.'s note) and Pisz"⁶.

Germany, not waiting for the final decisions of the great world powers at the Paris Conference, as early as in March 1919 launched a plebiscite agitational campaign. In Olsztyn, under the leadership of Superintendent of the Evangelical-Augsburg Church Paul Hensel from Pisz, an organization was founded whose aim was to prepare the population for the plebiscite. Hensel appealed to the Masurian population: "The Entente Powers have to know that we, Masurians without a difference in language, religion, social status, political party affiliation, that all Masurians without exception do not want to belong to Poland because they are not

³ H. Syska, *Adam Chętnik. Działacz, pisarz, badacz Kurpiowszczyzny*. Warszawa 1969, p. 117.

⁴ It was also noted by J. Kurnatowski, *Zagadnienie Prus Wschodnich*. Warszawa 1925, p. 14; "A Masurian is an evangelical but pious; however, while during German religious services churches are empty or not very full, during Polish services they are overcrowded" emphasizes A. Chętnik, *Mazurzy pruscy na płaszczynie mazowieckiej. Studium etnograficzno-obyczajowe*. Instytut Mazurski in Olsztyn, Komunikat Działu Informacji Naukowej, Seria Sztuki i Kultury No. 2, April 1948, p. 72.

⁵ A. Chętnik, *Mazurskim szlakiem*. Łomża 1939, p. 9; W. Chojnacki, *Mazury i Warmia 1800–1870. Wybór źródeł*. Wrocław 1959, p. XII. In 1890, the official German censuses still used the term "Pole" and "Polish language" for residents of East Prussia and the language they used.

⁶ Z. Dudzińska, *Jeden ród mazowiecki...* Głos Olsztyński from 18 June 1967, No. 143, p. 4.

Poles but Masurians". On 30 March 1919, the "Ostdeutschen Heimatdienst" – "East German Homeland Service" was established in Królewiec, which was superior to other organizations dedicated to keeping the plebiscite areas in East Prussia. This organization received large financial resources, created a big network of trustees. Numerous rallies and demonstrations were organized during which the population resolved to remain in East Prussia with Germany⁷. Meetings, rallies and demonstrations were held on the German side on a regular basis, each time protesting against the appearance and movement of Polish troops from the group of General Józef Heller in the borderland, which were to violate the border areas. In fact, these were the units guarding the border areas against the Bolshevik penetration⁸.

The plebiscite was held on 11 July 1920 and was supervised by the Allied Plebiscite Commission which, being quite biased, did not react to aggression against Poles. The used propaganda heated up the already tense atmosphere. Animosity between the neighbors were reborn, and militia organized by the Germans terrorized the supporters of joining the plebiscite areas to Poland. There were even ethnic homicides. The implemented procedures also promoted the German side, allowing to vote not only the people living in the plebiscite areas but also those who were born there. Thus, the people living permanently in Germany massively took part in the plebiscite as German authorities encouraged them to vote and facilitated transport to the territory of Prussia.

The events of the 1920 war that took place in the eastern areas of Poland, which were being rebuilt, had a negative impact on the results of the plebiscite in Warmia and Masuria for the Polish side. Defensive activities did not allow to use similar measures for the plebiscite action as Germany did. The Polish state had neither financial measures nor possibilities to transport voters to the plebiscite areas. It took place during the most inconvenient for Poland moment of history. Bolshevik forces were just marching towards Warsaw. Europe was convinced of the inevitable defeat of the newly created state. A similar thesis was spread by Germany in the plebiscite areas, claiming that the fall of the "seasonal state" was only a matter of time.

By the decision of the Allied Plebiscite Committee, the voters received two ballots. One with the inscription "Polen – Poland", the other "Ostpreussen – East Prussia". German regional organizations appealed to regional identity, to the slogans of "Little Homeland". Polish-speaking Masurians and Warmians, after centuries of Germanization, did not have a strong sense of national community with the Poles. That is why, when voting, they gave their vote to the small homeland of East Prussia, not to the unknown Poland. In addition, German

⁷ S. Achremczyk, *Historia Warmii i Mazur*. Olsztyn 1997, p. 242.

⁸ Z. Kudrzycki, *Wyniki plebiscytu na Warmii, Mazurach i Powiślu 11 lipca 1920 roku w powiatach szczecińskim i nidzickim*. Rocznik Mazurski 2010, Vol. 14, pp. 66–67.

propaganda emphasized showing the separateness and backwardness of Poland and developing feelings for the Prussian homeland rather than Germany. Until the arrival of the Allied Commission in February 1920, the German side brought about quite serious intimidation of the plebiscite activists and the breakdown of the Polish national movement in Masuria⁹.

In 1919, during the preparations for the plebiscite action in Warmia and Masuria, Adam Chętnik was actively involved in fighting for returning those areas to Poland. He started an awareness campaign among the cross-border society whose aim was to support the Polish plebiscite case in Masuria. He wrote that “Kurpians, Prussian Masurians together with Warmians are not just ordinary neighbours across the border, they are like a family, like the closest relatives, like sisters and brothers, fathers and mothers, brothers-in-law and sons-in-law in one big cottage divided with walls”¹⁰. From June 1919, he cooperated with the Masurian Committee in Warsaw which commissioned him to conduct a widespread plebiscite campaign on the Kurpian-Masurian borderland. He assisted the emissaries sent from the headquarters to distribute press and proclamations and to smuggle plebiscite propaganda and awareness materials to East Prussia. In the same month, he founded and headed a department of the Masurian Committee in Nowogród¹¹, whose task was to prepare for and make the inhabitants of the Kurpie region aware of the plebiscite which was to take place, and to explain who the inhabitants of Masuria were because the mutual image of both Poles and Masurians was destroyed during the occupation. Most of the German army soldiers that stayed in the Kurpie region were of Masurian origin. They carried out the occupational, robbery orders of the German command. Therefore, an image of a German soldier arose - an occupier speaking Polish and robbing the economy of the Green Forest¹².

Chętnik organized rallies for the borderland population, motivated teachers to join the plebiscite campaign. At the meeting of the Masurian Committee Department on 7 June 1919, it was decided that Chętnik would set up a weekly magazine in the Kurpie region “to dispel distrust between the people on both sides of the border. The monthly subsidy grants 4,500 marks for the current five

⁹ R. Waleszczak, *Chorzele. Zarys dziejów*. Chorzele 1992, pp. 197–198.

¹⁰ A. Chętnik, *Scalone pogranicze*. Łomża 1939, p. 9.

¹¹ S. Pajka, *O życiu i twórczości Adama Chętnika – kilka przypomnień i refleksji*. Zeszyty Naukowe OTN 1990, Vol. IV, p. 204. Explaining the establishment of the Committee, he wrote: “The task of this institution was to regulate the whole of economic, cultural and political relations across the whole borderland of Prussia, and above all in the Kurpie region, where the population, most closely related to Masurians, was with them in constant neighbourly relations, and which relations, artificially disturbed in recent years by the Germans, had to be fixed” [In:] A. Chętnik, *Mazurskim szlakiem*. Łomża 1939, p. 221.

¹² A. Chętnik, *Warunki gospodarczo-kulturalne na pograniczu kurpiowsko-mazurskim*. Łomża 1927, p. 118.

months”¹³. Adam Chętnik’s task appointed to him at this meeting was to find trustees in border villages and make a list of border posts¹⁴. The issue of the publication of several prints was also discussed, as well as the preparation of a list of towns in Mazovia and a dictionary of the Masurian dialect. The necessity of issuing a guide to Prussian Mazovia was also raised¹⁵. At the next meeting of the Committee on 13 June, the matter of issuing the magazine¹⁶ by Chętnik was discussed again.

Fulfilling the commitments made to the Plebiscite Committee, he founded and edited, together with his wife Zofia, a biweekly “Goniec Pograniczny” (“The borderland messenger”), published in the years 1920–1923. Initially, the paper was the voice of the Plebiscite Committee and after its dissolution he edited it himself. The editorial office was located in the Chętniks’ house in Nowogród, and the paper was printed in Warsaw. The message of “Goniec Pograniczny”, distributed not only in the area of the Kurpian borderland but also outside Działdowo and the area of Suwałki region, was to promote the unity of the borderland. The paper included proclamations, programs, announcements of organized meetings, demonstrations and readings or fundraisings for plebiscite purposes. It was in “Goniec Pograniczny” where, under the pseudonym T. Kurp, he published a poem well known in the Second Polish Republic, beginning with the words:

Kurp i Mazur to dwa braty,
Choć się znają, jak przez kraty,
Chociaż dzielą ich granice
Jednej ziemi to dziedzice.
(Kurpian and Masurian are two brothers,
Though they know each other as if through the bars,
Though divided by borders
They are heirs of the same land)¹⁷.

On 2 February 1920, A. Chętnik took part in the meeting of the Executive Board of the Masurian Committee in Warsaw with the participation of, among others, the President of the Committee – Bishop Juliusz Bursche, Adam Uziębło, eng. Kania, Mieczysław Czerwiński, Kazimierz Popiel, Stanisław Zieliński, MP

¹³ The minutes from the meeting of the Masurian Committee Department in Warsaw from 7 June 1919, *Plebiscyty na Warmii, Mazurach i Powiślu w 1920 roku. Wybór źródeł*. Eds. P. Stawiecki and W. Wrześniński. Olsztyn 1986, p. 51.

¹⁴ This task results from the minutes from the meeting of the Masurian Committee Department from 17 June 1919, *Plebiscyty na Warmii...*, p. 41.

¹⁵ It seems that in this case it concerned *Ilustrowany przewodnik po Mazurach* by Mieczysław Orłowicz which was eventually printed only in 1923 in Lviv.

¹⁶ The minutes from the session of Pre-plebiscite Committee from 13 June 1919 which took place in the office of Supreme People’s Council, *Plebiscyty na Warmii...*, p. 53.

¹⁷ A. Chętnik, *Mazurzy pruscy...*, p. 81; T. Kurp (A. Chętnik), *Kurp i Mazur*. Gość Puszczafński 1919, No. 12–13, p. 5.

Władysław Herz, Ewald Lodwich, Fryderyk Leyk and Captain Adam Dobrodzicki. At the meeting, the question of recording an agitational film for the purposes of the plebiscite was discussed. A special committee headed by Stanisława Wysocka was established. In its work, also well-known writers got involved: Stefan Żeromski and Andrzej Strug as well as actors Aleksander Zalwerowicz, Tadeusz Frenkiel, Kazimierz Kamiński, Jerzy Jaszczółt Sulima and many decorators, painters and sculptors. The film was supposed to show the better side of the Republic, its achievements, its economic, social and military power. The screenplay was to be based on the books by Ignacy Maciejowski (*Sewer*) *Dla świętej ziemi* and by Bolesław Prus *Placówka*. However, the film was never made¹⁸.

Chętnik began cooperation with “Mazur”, issued in Szczytno and edited by Kazimierz Jaroszyk, which during the time of the plebiscite played an important role in winning the support of the Masurian population for Poland. In 1920, he published there several articles advocating voting for Poland. Another magazine with which he collaborated was “Gazeta Mazurska”, issued in Działdowo and edited by Pastor Feliks Gloeh, and then by Emilia Sukertowa-Biedrawina. It was founded by the Plebiscite Association of Polish Evangelicals. Both magazines cooperated with the Masurian Committee, promoting the unity of Masurians with Poles¹⁹.

For the plebiscite actions Chętnik incorporated “Związek Puszczański” (“Green Forest Union”) founded in 1919 with the participation of prominent Kurpian activists: Józef Sobiech and Fr. Józef Michnikowski from Kadzidło, Aleksander Stefens from Łączki, Fr. Andrzej Krysiak from Chorzele and Fr. Błażej Pszczółkowski from Myszyniec. It was an organization emphasizing its apolitical character, aiming at solving socio-economic and cultural issues of the Kurpie region and the borderland. In the spring and summer of 1920, the entire activity of the Union conducted in the Kurpie region was wholly dedicated to the plebiscite issues²⁰.

At the convention run by Fr. J. Michnikowski, held on 28 March, A. Chętnik reported on the plebiscite issues. On his initiative, a resolution protesting against German violence was adopted and demanded removing from the

¹⁸ Report from the meeting of the Executive Board of the Masurian Committee in Warsaw from 4 February 1920, discussing organizational issues and making a film for the purpose of the plebiscite lands, *Plebiscyty na Warmii...*, p. 135.

¹⁹ H. Syska, op. cit., pp. 119–120; J. Judziński, *Wystawa o plebiscycie na Warmii i Mazurach*. Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie 1970, No. 4, p. 667; E. Sukertowa-Biedrawina, *Kulisy wydawnicze „Gazety Mazurskiej” i „Kalendarza dla Mazurów”*. Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie 1965, No. 3, p. 383. The first issue of „Gazeta Mazurska” was dated 3 December 1922 and was issued at the opening ceremony of Mazurski Dom Ludowy (Masurian Community House) in Działdowo.

²⁰ J. Kijowski, *Działalność Adama Chętnika na pograniczu mazursko-kurpiowskim*, [In:] *Migracja ludności pogranicza mazursko-kurpiowskiego w XIX i XX wieku*. Ed. J. Gołota. Ostrołęka–Olsztyn 2008, p. 151.

plebiscite areas violent towards Masurians military and police troops as well as German officials. A preventive use of the army to help the persecuted compatriots was suggested.²¹ Another rally, led by Międzybłocki, the editor of “Gazeta Łomżyńska”, took place on 11 April in Łomża. Chętnik was introduced there as a trustee of the Masurian Committee²². A few days later, on 15 April, another rally was held – in the village of Zbójna, run by a local teacher²³. On the same day, in Łomża, an organizational meeting was held in the chamber of the County Council, which established the Łomża Plebiscite Committee, where Chętnik was elected for the Executive Committee²⁴. At the turn of June and July, with the help of local social activists, Chętnik organized another round of rallies. With the cooperation of Fr. Andrzej Krysiak, the parish priest from Chorzele, on 6 June “a dance took place in the forest in Chorzele (Przątalina), [...] all the proceeds from this dance went for the purpose of the plebiscite in Masuria. Masurians were also invited to the dance. Approximately 30 people came to Poland. On the border, Germans searched us in dirty corners up to our shirts, but on the Polish land the police and army welcomed us warmly and politely [...]. Polish senior representatives spoke to us, expressing hope that Masuria would be Polish”. Czesław Wycech, a teacher from Cyk (future Speaker of the Sejm in the People’s Republic of Poland) and Władysław Horoch, a teacher from Dąbrowy, also spoke. In other villages (Czarnia, Wolkowe, Zbójna), other invited representatives took the floor: Władysław Konopański, Henryk Tułodziecki and Jan Zwarycz. At the rallies and through the press corps, people were encouraged to donate money for the purpose of the plebiscite²⁵.

About 15,000 people from the Kurpie region came for the rally in Łyse, organized on 20 June 1920 by “Związek Puszczański” (“Kurpian Forest Union”). The attendees decided to present to the public a resolution on the improprieties in the plebiscite in Masuria. They appealed to the representatives of the United Kingdom, whose troops kept order in the plebiscite areas, for objectivity, rather than pursuing pro-German biased policies, allowing German militia to beat Masurian activists engaged in the plebiscite work on the Polish side²⁶.

²¹ *Uchwała Kurpiów w sprawie plebiscytu mazurskiego*. *Goniec Pograniczny* from 16 April 1920, No. 9–10, pp. 3–4.

²² *Wiec w Łomży*. *Goniec Pograniczny* from 28 April 1920, No. 11–12, p. 2.

²³ *Wiec w Zbójnie, gm. Gawrychy, pow. Kolno*. *Goniec Pograniczny* from 28 April 1920, No. 11–12, p. 2.

²⁴ *Łomżyński Komitet Plebiscytowy*. *Goniec Pograniczny* from 28 April 1920, No. 11–12, pp. 2–3.

²⁵ “Send donations for the plebiscite fund – for the purpose of the Masurian Committee. Read and disseminate «Goniec Pograniczny». Remember that East Prussia has been our Polish land since time immemorial”. Such a text was published by A. Chętnik in the press he edited himself. Among others vide: *Goniec Pograniczny* from 25 March 1920, No. 8, p. 2; H. Syska, *Scalone pogranicze*. Warszawa 1975, p. 151; R. Waleszczak, *Chorzele. Zarys dziejów*. Chorzele 1992, p. 197.

²⁶ A. Chętnik, *Rezolucja Kurpiów*. *Goniec Pograniczny* 1920, No. 19–20, p. 4.

Eventually, the plebiscite ended with the loss of the Polish cause. In the district of Olsztyn, only 7,980 people voted for being part of Poland and more than 363,000 people voted in favor of being part of Germany. In the district of Kwidzyn it was respectively 7,948 and almost 98,000 votes. The Polish option received a total of 3.4% of eligible votes. Only three Masurian villages of Ostróda County: Groszki, Napromek and Lubszynek and four villages in Powiśle: Burszych, Janowo, Małe Pólko, Nowe Lignawy and Kramrowo, were joined to Poland. Such a result was quite painful for A. Chętnik but he still worked to maintain the Polish identity of those lands and their return to Motherland.

The loss resulted in German repression of active Polish plebiscite activists. Many of them had to flee to Poland to save their lives. Chętnik helped the editor of "Mazur" from Szczytno – Kazimierz Jaroszyk, a pharmacist from Wielbark – Michał Becker, and others, to cross the border illegally. In Nowogród, he assisted in the settlement of 46 Masurian Catholics, at risk of arrest, and helped a well-known activist from the vicinity of Szczytno – Karol Pentowski to get a job at the Reconstruction Office in Kolno. Then he worked in various institutions in the country to get a job as a warehouseman in Warsaw shortly before the war²⁷.

On the initiative of Chętnik, in the Kurpie region took place a widespread protest action against German repression towards those involved in the Polish option and against plebiscite forgery. He had no doubt that the Masurian brothers, separated by an artificial border, must be remembered. Following the suspension of issuing "Goniec Pograniczny," on 8 September 1922, the first issue of a new paper "Dzwon znad Narwi" was published. There, he again raised the issue of anti-Polish politics in Prussia, ending the article with the following statement: "It is our duty as the borderland inhabitants [...] to oppose German actions, to create a protective embankment against the Prussians and not to allow the Germanization of Prussian Masurians"²⁸. In the book *Kurpie*, published in 1924, he wrote: "Masurians cannot be doomed to destruction, it cannot be allowed that the sons of the former Mazovian land were raised to be its enemies"²⁹. He constantly stressed the need for comprehensive economic and cultural-educational work on the Kurpian-Masurian borderland, assisting Masurians in developing their education and readership, and thereby strengthening the Polish identity by the Baltic Sea³⁰.

Many mistakes that had a negative impact on the vote were also made by the Polish administration and its representatives in the plebiscite areas. A well-known plebiscite activist, a member of the Masurian Plebiscite Committee – Adam Uziębło noted bitterly in his diary "after smashing the Bolsheviks [...] I found myself again in Warsaw and came across the case of the plebiscite action

²⁷ E. Sukertowa-Biedrawina, *Dawno i niedawno*. Olsztyn 1965, p. 93.

²⁸ A. Chętnik, *Wielka zdrada na Pograniczu Prus Wschodnich*. Dzwon znad Narwi from 8 September 1922, No. 1, p. 1.

²⁹ A. Chętnik, *Kurpie*. Kraków 1924, p. 133.

³⁰ A. Chętnik, *Kurpie...*, p. 133.

liquidation. [...] It was carried out mechanically, ruthlessly, destroying everything that could serve as the basis of our future work in Masuria. The efforts of Father Bursche were in vain, the efforts of Paweł Gettel, Jerzy Kurnatowski and many others were in vain. The bureaucracy did its job. It eradicated everything it could and destroyed even the seeds for the future”³¹.

On 25 June 1922, Chętnik organized a big patriotic rally in the Jednaczewski forest, on the occasion of the unveiling of the statue of Stach Konwa – a Kurpian hero, to which about 10,000 people came from the counties of: Ostrołęka, Łomża, Kolno and Przasnysz. A delegation of Masurians, who illegally crossed the green border, also participated in the ceremony. Hugely moved, they manifested their allegiance to Poland. A well-known Masurian activist, the former chairman of the Masurian People's Union – Fryderyk Mirosław Leyk came to the meeting and recalled how he and Chętnik had run from the German militia in Olsztyn and how the leaflets printed and distributed behind the Prussian cordon had bolstered up Masurians' Polish identity³².

In 1923, at the request of the Masurian Committee, Chętnik was decorated by the President of the Republic of Poland, Stanisław Wojciechowski, with the Gold Cross of Merit³³ (Złoty Krzyż Zasługi) – the highest civilian award established in June 1923, for his work for the purpose of the plebiscite in Warmia and Masuria and the activity on the Kurpian-Masurian borderland. During President S. Wojciechowski's visit in Łomża he was also decorated with the Knight's Cross of the Order of “Polonia Restituta”³⁴.

In 1926, the work of the first term of office of the Sejm finished as well as Adam Chętnik's work as a member of parliament. The work undertaken by him as an MP was mainly aimed at solving urgent problems of the Kurpie region. He submitted requests for favorable loan and material conditions allowing for the rapid reconstruction of the buildings destroyed during the occupation, for classifying and merging the land, for resettling Kurpians to areas with better soil. These actions

³¹ A. Uziębło, *Walka o Mazury*. Niepodległość 1939, No. 2(52), p. 288.

³² H. Czernekowa, „*Nie byłbym tym – kim jestem*”, [In:] *Adam Chętnik a współczesne badania kultury wsi polskiej*. Materiały z sesji kurpiowskiej Polskiego Towarzystwa Ludoznawczego, Łomża–Marianowo–Nowogród, 21–23.09.1984. Ed. M. Drozd-Piasecka. Warszawa 1988, pp. 279–280.

³³ Letter from the director of the Museum in Łomża from 26 May 1964 to the director of the Regional Museum in Białystok – personal data of Adam Chętnik, typescript, archives of the Chętnik family, without pagination.

³⁴ Letter from the director of the Museum in Łomża from 26 May 1964 to the director of the Regional Museum in Białystok – personal data of Adam Chętnik, typescript, archives of the Chętnik family, without pagination; *Prezydent Rzeczypospolitej Stanisław Wojciechowski w Łomży i Zambrowie*. Gazeta Łomżyńska from 11 October 1923, p. 1.

were supposed to improve economic conditions and bridge the differences which existed between one and the other side of the border³⁵.

In 1927, he was asked by the Chancellery of the Sejm and the Senate whether he could consider further propaganda work on the Masurian borderland. After a moment's hesitation, he decided to continue the work and received for this purpose a portion of the remaining funds from the Plebiscite Committee. On 7 November 1927, he presented Wojciech Trąmpczyński, the Marshal of the Senate of the first term, a work plan on East Prussia borderland, whose implementation was based on the activists from the Kurpian Division of Polish Tourist Society (Polskie Towarzystwo Krajoznawcze), Scientific Research Station of Płock Scientific Association (Stacja Naukowo-Badawcza Towarzystwa Naukowego Płockiego), Kurpian Culture Museum (Muzeum Kurpiowskie) in Nowogród, and socially engaged people (Romuald Bielecki, the director of Building Society in Łomża or a well-known attorney from Łomża – Stanisław Kurcysz). The work was to consist in, among others, renewing contacts with former collaborators and friends of the Polish cause in Prussia, publishing press, flyers, postcards and deciding on the ways of their distribution, registering refugees from Prussia and helping with their settlement, organizing summer camps and trips around Poland for Masurians, organizing festivities along the border with the participation of Masurians, giving readings and awareness talks for Poles³⁶.

Just before the outbreak of the war in 1939, he published in Łomża, as volume VI of the Biblioteka Dobrych Książek series (Good Book Library), a work entitled *Mazurskim szlakiem*, in which he noted that the book “is written not only with a pen and ordinary ink, but also with a touch of cordial blood, that ours from the borderland”³⁷. As Henryk Syska accurately pointed out, it is a summary of Chętnik's lifelong efforts to unite the borderland. Most of this book's edition, as anti-German, was destroyed by Germans during the Second World War, and Chętnik himself was put on the list of enemies of the German occupant authorities. To avoid arrest, he left Nowogród, and lived in the towns near Warsaw and Warsaw under the assumed name – Antoni Chojnowski³⁸.

During the occupation, *Ziemia Zabrana* (ZZ) (the Taken Lands) by the Third Reich and the area of *Ziemia Postulowana* (ZP) (the Postulated Lands), which were to be joined to the Polish state after the war, were subdivided by Polish Underground administrative authorities into territorial departments headed by department clerks. The area of the Postulated Lands was planned to be divided into

³⁵ A. Chętnik, *Praca oświatowo-kulturalna i plany polityczno-gospodarcze na pograniczu VI^a* [typescript]. Archives of the Chętnik family, p. 2.

³⁶ A. Chętnik, *Akcja działalności i propagandy polskiej po nieudanym plebiscycie na Mazurach Pruskich* [typescript]. Archives of the Chętnik family, pp. 1–2.

³⁷ A. Chętnik, *Mazurskim szlakiem*. Łomża 1939, p. 11.

³⁸ M. Pokropek, *Adam Chętnik – życie i praca (1885–1967)*, [In:] *Adam Chętnik a współczesne...*, p. 134.

six territorial departments which received the symbols from VI A to VI F. According to the researchers of this subject, not all of them were created, and it is not fully known which territories they covered. The preserved archival materials allow to determine the territorial affiliation for the department VI A – Lower Silesia and VI D – Warmia and Masuria³⁹. The territorial department of the Postulated Lands (dep. VI) was organized in early 1943. It was impossible to determine who its manager was. According to A. Chętnik, the department was divided into three divisions: organizational, scientific research and information. He employed a dozen or more people, some of whom were paid partial or full salaries, receiving for this purpose from 3 to 5 thousand zlotys per month. The couriers, coming to Warsaw once every two months, were reimbursed for travel expenses and a weekly stay in the city⁴⁰. The tasks of the VI department included establishing permanent contact with the area, conducting explanatory work and raising awareness among the local population that those areas would belong to Poland in the future. The department prepared and distributed printed materials and the press to the borderland. An important task was to create reports presenting the socio-political and economic conditions in East Prussia from September 1939 to March 1943⁴¹.

According to the report of Wydział Informacyjny Sekcji Zachodniej Departamentu Informacji i Prasy Delegatury Rządu RP (the Information Department of Western Section of Information and Press Department of the Government Delegation of the Republic of Poland) from 10 March 1943, it was already then when “a contact was made with the area through [...] a regional – social group. The information network is being established”⁴². In June 1943, Adam Chętnik, a. k. a. “Kurpik”, is appointed as an information clerk of the VI D Warmia and Masuria department. His fieldwork was based on the activists of Masurian-Kurpian Union founded in 1941 (among others Emilia Sukertowa-Biedrawina and Bohdan Wilamowski – a member of the secret Masurian Union), which was a continuation of the Green Forest Union⁴³. According to Chętnik’s personal notes,

³⁹ *Raporty z ziem wcielonych do III Rzeszy (1942–1944)*. Eds. Z. Mazur, A. Pietrowicz, M. Rutkowska. Poznań 2004, p. XXIV.

⁴⁰ A. Chętnik, *Praca oświatowo-kulturalna...*, p. 6. According to the authors of *Raporty z ziem...*, Warmia and Masuria received the symbol VID; according to Chętnik, however, it was VIA.

⁴¹ A. Chętnik, *Praca oświatowo-kulturalna...*, pp. 6–7; *Raporty z ziem...*, p. XXX; The authors of the publication did not find the materials including a full list of names of people working for the departments.

⁴² New Files Archives (AAN), Government Delegation for Poland (Delegatura Rządu RP na Kraj; from therein: DRK), sign. 202/III-148, Report of the Information Department for the period until 10 August 1943, k. 308.

⁴³ A. Chętnik, *Praca oświatowo-kulturalna...*, p. 10; According to the budget control of the Western Section for January – February and April – May 1944, Masurian-Kurpian Union is listed as an organization receiving a subsidy for its activities. Vide: A. Pietrowicz, *Sekcja*

he made several trips to the Prussian borderland where he contacted Masurian representatives and forced laborers. He sought to set up Kurpian-Masurian Border Guard Corps whose aim would be to protect the borderland from robberies, public appearances of “insane people” and chaos. He claimed that in the future, “both land and property will belong to us, we will get them, so they must be protected from destruction. Forced laborers in Prussia [...] we should try to keep at least some of them in the area, to join our troops”⁴⁴. The central office received the first situation report presented by Chętnik in early August 1943⁴⁵.

The end of World War II fulfilled Adam Chętnik’s dream of joining the Kurpie region with Masuria, Poland with East Prussia. When the historical situation of the Kurpian-Masurian borderland changed, he devoted a lot of space in his post-war publications to Masuria. Cooperating with the Masurian Institute in Olsztyn and the Ministry for the Recovered Territories, he sought to bring closer and discuss the specific nature of those lands and the people who had inhabited them for centuries. In 1948, a work entitled *Mazurzy pruscy na płaszczyźnie mazowieckiej* was published in Olsztyn, in which we wrote those significant words: “For centuries the Masurian-Prussian land has soaked up the sweat and toil of our first colonists – farmers as well as the blood of our knights, defending this land and our culture from violence and looting. [...] the words «Prussian border» – on its both sides – should sink into eternal oblivion!”⁴⁶.

On the initiative of the Board of Directors of Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Ziemi Łomżyńskiej (Łomża Land Friends’ Society), the State Council passed a resolution of 3 April 1986 to decorate Adam Chętnik with “Medal Rodła” (the Rodlo Medal), which was awarded for working actively on preserving Polish national and cultural identity and fighting for the rights of Poles inhabiting the territories which belonged to the Third Reich before World War II. On 13 June 1986, at the 19th General Convention of Delegates of Łomża Land Friends’ Society, Adam Chętnik’s wife – Jadwiga received the medal from the hands of a member of the State Council prof. Kazimierz Secomski⁴⁷.

Zachodnia Departamentu Informacji i Prasy Delegatury Rządu RP – zarys struktury organizacyjnej i działalności (wrzesień 1942 – lipiec 1944 r.). Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość 2005, No. 2(8), p. 281.

⁴⁴ A. Chętnik, *Praca oświatowo-kulturalna...*, pp. 10–11. Chętnik believed that after the war, German population would be compulsorily displaced from East Prussia and “we mercilessly hammer all the German militia, snoopers, etc. [...] we transfer to penal settlements or gradually displace all the German intelligentsia, teachers, attorneys, etc. and finally merchants, industrialists, craftsmen”. He believed that in the first place 40 – 50% of Kurpians should be resettled to the areas left by Germans. According to Chętnik, Masurians should keep their jobs and be left in the households they lived in.

⁴⁵ AAN, DRK, sign. 202/III-148, Report from June 1943 of the Information Department, p. 252; A. Chętnik, *Praca oświatowo-kulturalna...*, p. 10; *Raporty...*, p. XXXI.

⁴⁶ A. Chętnik, *Mazurzy pruscy na płaszczyźnie mazowieckiej...*, p. 81.

⁴⁷ The medal was approved by decree act of 18 April 1985 on instituting “Rodlo Medal” (Dz.U. nr 21, poz. 89) (Journal of Laws No. 21, item 89) conferred by the State Council

Summarizing, it can be stated that the actions undertaken by Adam Chętnik to reconcile Kurpians and Masurians during the interwar period did not bring about the desired effect. However, his involvement and work in various institutions and organizations during the plebiscite period gave rise to further undertakings aimed at preserving the Polish language in the area of East Prussia and understanding Masurians in the Kurpie region. During the occupation, as a representative of the Underground State, he conducted research which was to assist the Polish authorities taking over East Prussia from the Germans with their rapid redevelopment and consolidation with the Polish state.

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SUMMARY

Following the decision of the Treaty of Versailles of 1919, in Warmia and Masuria a plebiscite determining the affiliation of the disputed areas with Poland or Germany was to be held. It took place on 11 July 1920, during the least desirable time for Poland as the Bolshevik forces were already approaching Warsaw. Germany based its plebiscite propaganda on emphasizing the temporality of the Polish state, building awareness of the "small homeland" of Prussia and threatening with Polish Catholicism. The plebiscite ended in a complete loss of the Polish reason of state. Only 3.4% of the population voted for the affiliation with Poland. Adam Chętnik, a prominent Kurpian activist, was involved throughout the whole interwar period in activities aimed at raising awareness of Kurpian-Masurian borderland and showing the historical and cultural-economic connections between the lands on both sides of the border. Later, already after the plebiscite, he explained that a "Masurian-evangelical" is the same Pole as a Pole-Catholic. He predictively claimed that East Prussia would belong to Poland in the future.

STRESZCZENIE

Decyzją traktatu wersalskiego z 1919 r. na Warmii i Mazurach miał zostać przeprowadzony plebiscyt w celu określenia przynależności spornych terenów do Polski lub Niemiec. Odbył się on 11 lipca 1920 r., w najmniej pożądanym dla Polski czasie, bowiem do Warszawy zbliżały się już wojska bolszewickie. Niemcy oparli swoją propagandę plebiscytową na podkreśleniu tymczasowości polskiej państwowości, budowaniu świadomości „małej ojczyzny” pruskiej oraz straszeniu polskim katolicyzmem. Plebiscyt przyniósł całkowitą klęskę polskiej racji stanu. Tylko 3,4% ludności zagłosowało za przynależnością do Polski. Adam Chętnik, znany działacz Kurpiowszczyzny, zaangażowany był przez cały okres międzywojenny w działania zmierzające do uświadomienia pogranicza kurpiowsko-mazurskiego i pokazania historycznych oraz kulturalno-gospodarczych powiązań terenów położonych po jednej i drugiej stronie granicy. W późniejszym czasie, już po plebiscycie, wyjaśniał, że „Mazur-ewangelik” jest takim samym Polakiem jak Polak-katolik. Profetycznie głosił, że w przyszłości Prusy Wschodnie będą należały do Polski.

Key words: Adam Chętnik, Warmia and Masuria, plebiscite, Kurpian-Masurian borderland

Słowa kluczowe: Adam Chętnik, Warmia i Mazury, plebiscyt, pogranicze kurpiowsko-mazurskie

