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THE POLISH STATISTICAL ASSOCIATION (PTS) – RE-ESTABLISHING

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For the hundred-year history of existence and activity of the Polish Statistical Association the year 1981 was an exceptional one since the Association for the first time in its history became part of the process of creating the basis of official statistics for a democratic society. We were set up both by the public demand and how painful need to cleanse science and statistical practice of the previous 25-35 years of availability, dependency, dependencies, bureaucracy, but also of conformism and opportunism to authorities.

Using the privilege of "an eye-witness" I wish to recall how the Association was established for the third time in its history².

Before re-establishing

Polish statistics started its official activity immediately after the Second World War, as the statisticians from Warsaw began to operate two days after the liberation of the city (19 January 1945), and CSO started its activity on March 12, 1945, when the front was still in the country, and there were two months left to the end of the war. The Association took action two years later, and on March 5, 1947 the Polish Statistical Association was re-entered into the register of associations and unions. Stefan Szulc, the President of the CSO, was elected the Chairman, and Dr. Kazimierz Romaniuk his deputy³. Short was the joy of the activity of both CSO and independent PTS. Already in 1949, Prof. S. Szulc retired, and Dr. K. Romaniuk moved to the Planning Committee, Central Statistical Office withdrew its grant and resigned its position of a supporting member. PTS lost its reasons to exist. Polish statistics were dominated by

¹ Vice-President of the Main Council of PTS. Chairman of the Council of Warsaw Department of PTS.

² See "Polish Statistical Association 1912-2012". Joint publication edited by Kazimierz Kruszką, Warsaw 2012. Polish Statistical Association General Council.; especially Part I, Chapters 4,5,6 and 7.

³ See Lucjan Adamczuk and Kazimierz Latuch, "Reaktywowanie Polskiego Towarzystwa Statystycznego" In: Wiadomości Statystyczne, 1981, No.8.

economists and planners. The final blows for PTS were inflicted by I Congress of Polish Science (1951), and I Scientific Conference of Statistics Departments of Higher School of Economics (1952). The specialists in political economics of socialism and planners put then the finishing touch and consented to the creation of the Section of Statistics in the Warsaw Department of PTS. The final blow was the formal liquidation of PTS on April 4, 1955. And this is how PTS ceased to exist for 26 years.

In retrospect, it is difficult for me to find a good term for what actions we took in 1981. Was it an "establishing of the new PTS", "reanimation" or finally "re-establishing"? For me, it will always be a re-establishing, as in the minds and activity of Polish statisticians an extremely strong survival gene was always present, the gene of the public and science service. This was in the period of the Partitions of Poland, before and after World War I, before, during and after World War II, as well as in the years 1955-1981. Statisticians are reluctant to talk about this, because statistics is essentially the science of the country and it is intended to serve the state in accordance with the principles of science, truth and ethics of the profession. The year 1981 again set before us the questions of where we are in this country and in this science, what this statistics should look like and how we are to serve their country. The next decade showed that these questions were repeatedly returning and are still valid.

First stage of re-establishing

The period 1980-1981 in the Central Statistical Office, and consequently in the whole Polish statistics was very lively in political and union sense. The NSZZ "Solidarność", the most powerful trade union of all central government institutions (more than 1500 members) was active in the CSO. But before the association "Solidarność" was established, we had tried to set up an Independent Self-Governing Trade Union of Polish Statisticians, and only the great emphasis of the crew caused the creation of the circle "Solidarność". Later the idea of reactivating the PTS developed. Many members of the founding group of the "Solidarność" was also among the founders of the PTS. But while the people of "Solidarność" were a group of very radical views and even more radical actions, the group of founding members of the PTS was more moderate in general and represented a full cross-section of socio-professional personnel of statistics, that is official posts, views, political options, interest groups, academic intentions and perhaps also ideological ones.

Founding members - who were they?

The list of founding members who completed the Founding Declaration of Polish Statistical Association included 42 persons, but not all were present at this meeting. Currently, only some of them are living, although the author, despite strenuous efforts, was not able to contact all living founding members. Two groups prevailed: researchers and statisticians practitioners. Among the first ones were men of great stature such as professors Leszek Zienkowski, Wiesław Sadowski, Jerzy Holzer, Zdzisław Hellwig, Mikołaj Latuch, Zbigniew Pawłowski, Stanisław Wierzchosławski and Jan Kordos. Among the founding members were men who worked in the CSO in the thirties (Stanisław Róg, Maria Czarnowska, Józef Wojtyniak)¹. The majority were heads of departments of statistical organizational units, lecturers from universities and middle-ranking management staff of statistical offices. To date, the following persons are actively participating in the activities of PTS authorities: W. Łagodziński as Vice President of the General Council, K. Kruszka, J. Berger and T. Jurek as members of the Main Council of PTS.

The founding meeting

On 16.04.1981, at the headquarters of one of the museums in Warsaw the founding meeting was held. The above mentioned founding members signed the following declaration:

"After reviewing the Programme Declaration and the Statute of the Polish Statistical Association presented at the Founding Meeting held on 16 April 1981 in Warsaw I confirm participation in the re-establishing of activity of the Polish Statistical Association. At the same time I apply for membership in the Polish Statistical Association as an ordinary member. I agree to comply with provisions of the Statute and the Rules, the Resolutions of General Meetings of Members (Deputies), to make regular payments of membership fees and to implement the goals and tasks of the Polish Statistical Association". Each declaration was confirmed by a signature. The declaration was a careful compromise for those times. What is important is that we did not obtain then any declaration of support from the CSO. This significantly influenced the next 10 years.

The Assembly passed the statute, elected provisional government, adopted a programme declaration, approved the establishment fund and adopted a resolution on the activity and the organizational rules of the Association. We also decided that we are a heir to the traditions and achievements of the Association. The description of the history of the Association and photocopies of original documents can be found in the mentioned publication, edited by Kazimierz Kruszka.

¹ Full list of founding members in "PTS 1912-2012, Op. Cit.

What is worth remembering today when referring to the 1981 convention?

When deciding on the re-establishment of the PTS, we knew that:

- 1) most academic and professional circles in the years 1950-1980 lost the ability to determine directions of its development and articulation of interests. This led to the superficial actions, loss of prestige and public confidence,
- 2) statistics deprived of broader social support and subjected to increasing pressure from the authorities lost systematically the status of social service transforming itself in a government agency,
- 3) statistical information became more and more widely the subject of manipulation. There were attempts at the central level to use it to bolster the ideology of success and prosperity of the Poles by using censorship and selection of statistical data far more than was reasonable, by running psychological mechanisms of self-censorship, blurring of personal responsibility for the content and quality of information and studies (one was also deprived of merit and job satisfaction for the accuracy of research and development, as well as high quality of publications W. Ł.),
- 4) due to negative phenomena causing statistical information to fail to meet the reality, a crisis of public confidence in statistics started to grow.

All this meant a dramatic crisis in the social situation and the position of statistics, thus "...overcoming this crisis, restoring confidence in the statistics, re-establishing its status of a nationwide social service, raising its renown and prestige as a science..." were the most urgent goals of the PTS in 1981.

After 21 years, while reporting the events from the history of the PTS RE-ESTABLISHING in 1981, I cannot resist the impression that many of the observations and findings made back then retained its validity and its relevance to the present day.