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The Kashubs: Past and Present

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Introduction

The reason for publishing the present book seems quite obvious: since 1935 (i.e. since the publication of *The Cassubian Civilisation* by Adam Fischer, Professor of Ethnography at Jan Kazimierz University in Lwów/Lemberg,¹ Tadeusz Lehr-Spławiński, Professor at the Jagiellonian University of Cracow and eminent expert in Slavonic languages, and the German linguist and ethnographer Friedrich Lorentz, with a preface by Bronisław Malinowski) no substantial, compact publication in English has appeared in print presenting the Kashubs as an ethnic community. Clearly, that book was far from complete, as it focused mainly on ethnography and language, in principle passing over social life, political issues and even historical questions, which were discussed only superficially. Since then a few English-language publications have been brought out (mainly articles or papers edited in Poland); most of them, however, have had quite a limited range of publicity and may hardly have reached readers interested in the ethnic scene of East Central Europe, Poland and Pomerania. It even seems that, except for an inner circle of specialists, in particular linguists, the very fact of the existence of the community of several hundred thousand Kashubs is almost unknown.

Meanwhile, interest in ethnic and regional processes is evidently growing, not only in academic circles (among sociologists, linguists, historians and anthropologists), but also among journalists, educationalists and cultural activists. There are various reasons for this, among them the changes which occurred in Poland and East Central Europe after 1989 related to the so-called 'disclosed multiculturalism' i.e. the renaissance of ethnic communities and national minorities, the restoration of local and regional self-government and various integration processes. These changes stirred up frequent

1 Nowadays Lviv in Ukraine.

disputes and arguments, from the time of the emergence of Euroregions² at the beginning of the 1990s until May 2004, when Poland, together with other countries in that part of Europe, entered the European Union and became subject to the all-European regional policy. The renaissance of interest in regional and ethnic issues can be viewed from a wider perspective – namely, as a sequence of phenomena of global dimension, where on the one hand we have to do with an amalgamation of cultures (the unification of behavioural models and values with a free flow of ideas, finances, and to some extent also people), and on the other hand we deal with the revival of local identity, the verification of ‘rootedness’ and duration, as well as a growing attachment and devotion to the native land and/or home region.

Understandably, this revival of interest in regional and ethnic issues has not passed by the circles interested in Kashubian matters, hence the unambiguous calls addressed to Kashubian scholarship. There is an unquestionable need for a new English-language publication which presents the current state of the art in Kashubian studies, and discusses the present situation of the Kashubian community, taking into consideration its historical context.

An additional incentive for the authors of this book has been a growing interest in their own roots among Kashubian immigrants in Canada and the USA – in 2008, Canada formally celebrated the 150th anniversary of the arrival of its first Kashubian settlers.

The present book is addressed to several groups of potential readers, one of them being academic circles interested in ethnic, sociolinguistic and ethno-historical processes in Central Europe and the Baltic Sea region, including linguists, ethno-linguists, sociologists, social anthropologists, historians and cultural experts.

The second potential circle of readers includes members of the Kashubian community dispersed around the world, whose greatest concentration is in the USA and Canada, with smaller numbers also in Australia and New Zealand. We would like to present them with a thorough, accessible and above all reliable source of information on the community which their forebears came from.

2 Transnational co-operation structures between two or more contiguous regions located in different European countries.

Last but not least, the book is addressed to institutions and organisations dealing with minority issues and ethnic studies in Europe. We are convinced that the Kashubian example can have a universal character – exposing the dangers that small ethnic communities encounter when facing the transformations of contemporary civilisation, but also presenting the challenges which these groups envisage and the modern instruments they are provided with, not only to effectively and successfully protect and maintain their heritage, but also to develop and promote it.

The reason for publishing the book within Peter Lang's series *Nationalisms Across the Globe* seems more than justified – especially in light of appeals made by the international expert in Slavonic linguistics, Professor Gerald Stone: 'The question has been frequently asked whether Cassubian is not really a separate Slavonic language rather than just a dialect of Polish. If the answer to this is yes, it implies a further question as to existence of a separate Cassubian nationality. There are no known linguistic criteria for the resolution of such questions, but it is, in any case, clear that the question is not purely linguistic' (Stone 1993 and 2002: 739). As the contributors to the present book attempt to demonstrate, the case of the Kashubs and their language is in this respect quite unique – as the question mentioned by Professor Stone has been answered by developments during the last two decades. In that and many other respects, the Kashubs do constitute a distinctive group in the European ethno-linguistic landscape.

The question of the Kashubs' origin, their ethnic identity, the origins and history of the Kashubian movement, its reasonably successful ideology and the practice of regional development, and the Kashubs' successful struggle to upgrade their linguistic status (from the imminent extinction of their dialect, predicted more than a century ago, to its official recognition as Poland's only regional language) – all these, together with the enduring efforts of the Kashubian elites to maintain but also to modernise the basic Kashubian values, make the group an extremely interesting subject of study.

This book should contribute to further debate on the 'Kashubian issue', or rather on the 'Kashubian model', closely observed by other European groups of a similar kind.