



SENAT RP

## NOTES ON THE SENATE

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# Involvement of the Senate of the Third Republic of Poland in the life of Poles abroad

During the inter-war period, the Senate of the Republic of Poland paid a great deal of attention to the issue of emigration and matters involving Polish expatriate and émigré communities. Various activities were undertaken to integrate Poles living abroad. In 1929, the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of Poles from Abroad took place and an Organization Council was appointed to coordinate initiatives dealing with Polish expatriates and émigrés. Senate Marshal Juliusz Szymański became the Council's chairman. Participants in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress (1934) established the World Association of Poles Living Abroad (*Światpol*), which grouped most Polish émigré communities. Senate Marshal Władysław Raczkiewicz became its first president.

*Światpol* aimed at reinforcing ties between Poles living abroad and their homeland, collaborated with Polish émigré educational and cultural organizations, raised funds and subsidized Polish émigré publishing houses.

Following the tradition of the inter-war period, after the Senate was reinstated in the Third Polish Republic in 1989, it once again assumed the patronage over Poles living outside Poland as a result of an agreement between various political factions. Today, significant funds are earmarked in the Senate Chancellery budget for care extended to Polish expatriate and émigré communities.

The establishment in 1990 of the association *Wspólnota Polska* (Polish Commonwealth), in which Andrzej Stelmachowski, Marshal of the 1<sup>st</sup> Term Senate, was joined by numerous public figures including senators and Catholic Church dignitaries, reinforced the hopes of Polish expatriates and émigrés for a change in State policy with respect to the Polish Diaspora and promoted their trust in re-established democratic Polish State institutions.

An important task of the Polish Senate and non-governmental organizations that deal on its behalf with problems experienced by Poles living abroad (such as the association *Wspólnota Polska*, foundation *Pomoc Polakom na Wschodzie* /Assistance to Poles in the FSU/) lies in the dissemination inside Poland of the knowledge about our countrymen around the world, their achievements throughout history and their often outstanding present accomplishments.

The Senate accomplishes its policy with respect to Polish communities abroad via personal activities of the Senate Marshal and work of the Senate Presidium and Emigration Affairs and Contact with Poles Abroad Committee. In many initiatives, the Marshal, Presidium and Committee assist and complement one another.

As the main representative of the Senate, the Marshal is at the same time the principle honorary sponsor of numerous initiatives on behalf of Polish expatriate and émigré communities, as well as important events held in Poland with the participation of Poles living abroad.

The Senate Presidium examines financial assistance applications which have already received the approval of the Emigration Affairs and Contact with Poles Abroad Committee and the Senate Chancellery. Until 1993, the bulk of this assistance was earmarked for tasks performed on behalf of the State by *Wspólnota Polska* Association, whereas since 1994, the Senate Presidium entrusts such tasks also to entities not financed by the public sector, such as grassroots associations and foundations.

Initially, almost the entirety of these funds was earmarked for assistance to Poles living in the former Soviet Union. The Polish Senate has greatly contributed to the historic process of the rebirth of Polish identity in countries established as a result of the break-up of the USSR. It is largely thanks to the Senate that Polish education and culture are developing there at a brisk pace, albeit not without problems, that direct contacts between Poles (particularly children and youth) living in the FSU and their Homeland have increased, that many new Polish periodicals have been founded and that there are now numerous Polish radio and TV programmes. Today there are grounds to affirm that the fundamental needs of the Polish communities in the FSU are being satisfied.

Presently, financial resources granted by the Senate Presidium serve mainly the purpose of stimulating and supporting local initiatives of the Polish communities in the FSU, traditionally in the area of education and culture, but also in the field of small-enterprise development, improvement of professional qualifications, agriculture, self-governance, and dissemination of the knowledge of international laws concerning the standards of protection of the rights of national and ethnic minorities.

A considerable portion of resources coming from the Senate Chancellery is earmarked for the construction and repair of Polish schools located abroad, Polish cultural centres and headquarters of Polish organizations, mainly in the FSU and Central and Eastern Europe.

Senate cooperation with Polish expatriate and émigré communities in the West is of a different nature than in the case of Poles living in the FSU. Polish communities in the West have been in existence for decades in countries with a long-standing democratic tradition and, consequently, have been free to organize and acquire experience in conducting political, social, and cultural activities. Poles living in the West expect before all else that Poland will support their activities and initiatives directed toward the authorities of the countries of their residence, and assist in their further integration into local societies. This applies particularly to Europe and Latin America. They are also excellent in organizing lobbies on behalf of the most important objectives of Polish foreign policy. Polish communities abroad also expect assistance in documenting intellectual accomplishments and protecting the material heritage of émigré generations. Since the situation of many such communities is becoming increasingly difficult, the Senate Chancellery has been receiving a growing number of applications for assistance, e.g. in covering the cost of maintaining or repairing Polish cultural and educational institutions abroad.

The Senate of the Polish Republic, including its Emigration Affairs and Contact with Poles Abroad Committee, cares for Poles and people of Polish decent maintaining links with their homeland and is interested in their legal status. It initiates and coordinates collaboration between Polish communities in the FSU, and cares for the protection of the Polish cultural heritage, traditions and customs abroad.

The Committee is charged by the Senate Presidium with evaluating the plan and execution of tasks commissioned thereby within the framework of caring for Polish émigré and expatriate communities. The specificity of the Committee work requires direct contacts with representatives of such communities and groups in the FSU. Their frequent visits to Poland are an excellent opportunity for becoming familiar with the situation of the communities they represent, their problems and needs. Contacts with the Committee have become an integral element of visits to Poland by émigré and expatriate community representatives.

Legislative initiatives taken by the 4<sup>th</sup> Term Senate were an important breakthrough in Polish policy with respect to Poles living abroad. Two of them – one concerning the possibility of enabling Poles living abroad to participate in the second round of presidential elections and another concerning

repatriation – had been accepted by the Sejm and the President, and became law. The process of legislating the law on Polish citizenship, the law on Pole's Charter, and the law on declaring May 2<sup>nd</sup> as the Day of Polish Émigré and Expatriate Communities, was not completed because of the expiry of the Sejm and Senate term in office.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Term Senate returned to the initiative of declaring May 2<sup>nd</sup> as the Day of Polish Émigré and Expatriate Communities, and forwarded a legislative proposal to this effect to the Sejm (it was adopted on 20.03.2002). In this solemn manner, the unity of all Poles was marked – those in their homeland and those abroad. The Senate initiative was founded on the conviction that Poland must stay in contact with Polish compatriots living abroad, be it only because they make up 1/3 of the Polish nation. It was taken up as an expression of appreciation of the Polish State for the work and outstanding achievements of Polish émigrés and expatriates in their countries of residence. Finally, it was an homage paid to our fellow Poles scattered around the world for their contribution to Poland regaining independence and for help they have always offered when Poland was going through difficult times. The legislation refers to the pre-World War II tradition of celebrating the Day of Care for the Welfare of Polish Compatriots in Foreign Lands and is a realization of the resolution adopted by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of Polish Communities and Poles Abroad. In this manner, the 5<sup>th</sup> Term Senate has completed the work started by its predecessors. A new statute – the Pole's Charter – came into force during the Senate's sixth term. It simplifies procedures and grants privileges to Poles living in the former Soviet republics, including multiple-entry permits, visa fee reimbursements, access to Polish education, etc.

The Polish Senate works hard on giving a new dimension to Poland's ties with Polish communities abroad. Senate plenary sessions fully dedicated to issues affecting Polish émigré and expatriate communities have been among the activities conducted for that purpose:

- The first such session was held on March 4 and 5, 1997. It was the first time that the condition of Polish emigration and the adequacy of measures taken in Poland to the needs of Polish communities abroad was discussed in parliament. The debate was not limited to parliamentarians and officials of the ministries dealing with Polish communities and Poles abroad. Relevant pronouncements were made by guests present at the session: the last Polish émigré president, a representative of the Polish episcopate, parliamentarians of Polish ancestry from several European countries, and representatives of principal non-governmental organizations which on behalf of the Senate deliver services to Polish expatriate and émigré communities.
- The second session took place on April 30, 2002, and included representatives of Polish communities from around the world as well as top Polish government leaders and the President.

*The Senate Marshal  
Bogdan Borusewicz  
appointed The Polish  
Communities' Consultative  
Board – February 2006*

(Fot. K. Wiśniewska)



On that occasion, parliamentarians and guests discussed areas and forms of cooperation between Poland and Polish communities abroad adequate to their current needs and long-term goals of Polish foreign policy.

The idea of holding these debates ensued from the need to reflect jointly on the establishment of priorities in the Senate's work on behalf of Polish expatriate and émigré communities. The Senate also wanted to ensure the implementation of postulates brought forward during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of Polish Communities and Poles Abroad. Both debates were carefully watched by the media, not only in Poland. They echoed in the Polish émigré media around the world and were met with a great deal of interest and favourable comments.

One of the effects of the debate of April 30, 2002, was the appointment of the Consultative Board by the Polish Senate Marshal, composed of representatives of the largest Polish community organizations from all continents. In the on-going process of consolidation of Polish communities in the West and the FSU, expressed by the establishment and activities of Polish community organizations with a continental reach (Polish-American Congress, Union of Polish Associations and Organizations in Latin America, Polish Community Council of Australia and New Zealand, Union of Polish Communities' in Europe) as well as universal (World Council of Polish Communities Abroad), that decision makes it possible to better disseminate the voice of these communities inside Poland.

The Polish Communities' Consultative Board has already held five sessions (the latest on March 2007), at which the most pressing problems of Polish communities around the world were discussed. As a result of these sessions, the needs of Polish communities abroad were determined, which then enabled the Senate Presidium to work out resolutions specifying the directions of the activities and annual priorities of financing State tasks associated with caring for the welfare of Polish expatriate and émigré communities.

*Polish Communities Abroad Office, March 2006  
with later amendments, October 2007*