



Intensification of the cultural Activity of the Lusatian Sorbs in 1820 - 1840

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The paper is devoted to the research of the phenomenon of the Lusatian Sorbs cultural revival. The intensification process of cultural and national movement of the Lusatian Sorbs, that took place under the influence of the Age of Enlightenment at the turn of the 18th -19th centuries, has been considered. Changes that took place in the political and social life of the German states, led to the formation of a new layer - ethnic intelligentsia, who became a leader of the Sorbian revival. Despite the general laws, the Sorbian revival turned to be different from the similar processes of other Slavic peoples. For the Sorbs the main issue of the ethnic revival programme was not politicizing their movement, but preserving their own culture and its renaissance. Consequently, it is argued that the Lusatian ethnic community could not have transformed into a nation because of various objective reasons. However, as the Sorbs developed within the mainstream of the formation of European nations, in particular German, their cultural and ethnic revival was a part of the establishment of new European nations.

Lusatian Sorbs. Ethnos. European nations. Literature. Renaissance. Prussia.

Intensification of the cultural national movement of the Lusatian Sorbs took place at the turn of the XVIII - XIX centuries under the influence of Enlightenment and the 1789 revolution in France. The ideals of the French revolution made a significant influence not only on the great western European nations, but also on the small western Slavonic nation - the Sorbians.

The cultural movement of the Sorbians in late XVIII - early XIX centuries was developing under the conditions of cultural competition and that threatened the existence of the nation. One of the representatives of the ethnical renaissance M. Hornik wrote, „few Sorbians respected their native language, nor did they show respect to their ancestors' traditions. In their manners, customs and even clothing they resembled the Germans“,[1] however, due to the general character of the development of European culture, the ethnic minority together with other Slavonic nations made a step forward from enlightenment to the romantic ideals of ethnic Slavonic renaissance.

Few ethnic public figures cared for the spiritual revival of the Sorbians; they were: J. A. Smolar, D. Glovan, J. Lubus, P. Bol. They led the enlightenment movement of the XIX century on the territory of western Slavs. In 1809 D. Glovan published a collection of his poems in quite a big circulation for those times - 5000 copies. The collection was very popular and was republished.[2] In 1809 - 1812 J. Dyck started to publish a small Sorbian monthly *Serbski powědar a kurěr*. He was the adherent of the ideology of Enlightenment and was actively working on modernizing the people's culture.[3] In his newspaper he published political, publicistic, and cultural descriptive articles. The small number of Sorbian readers was the cause of its closing. In April 1812 Jan Dyck, overcome by the obvious unprofitability of the paper, wrote to his acquaintance, „as far as the readers are very few, I have to work almost free of charge: this year I plan to close this journal“.[4]

Of special significance for the Sorbian national movement were student organizations. The actions of these civil organizations were not political, or if they were, then they were political to the extent they wanted to inspire their own people with the feeling of national pride.[5] In XIX. Century Sorbian students studying in Leipzig restarted publishing their handwritten newspaper Sorbian news. The first copy was issued on 25. November 1826. However, in Łužyca itself this publication was practically unknown, thus had little support of the Slavonic population in Germany. For instance, J. Smoler described the state of ethnic Lusatian literature in 1840s in the newspaper *Serbski Nowinkar*. Besides Matei and Zeiler's grammar and Svitlyk's dictionaries we have nothing but religious books.[6]

In 1838 J. Smoler together with the future professor of Gottingen University Resler founded a Lusatian student society in Breslau with a Sorbian department *Wendische Zweig or Academic society of studying the Sorbian history and language*. [7] Intensification of the Sorbian national movement was accompanied by slogans of national and cultural renaissance, especially of language revival as the main ethnic feature. That is why J. Smoler together with the secretary of Herlitz scientific society L. Haupt published one of the first collections of songs in the Lusatian language. [8] The authors pursued two aims: to show the scientific world that Slavonic ethnic minority does exist on the territory of Saxony and Prussia; the second aim dealt with the philosophy of the publication that "was closely related to the spread of Slavonic self-awareness". [9]

Moreover, the intensification of the Sorbian ethnic movement was enhanced by the specific circumstances of development and the influence of the German surrounding. The latter, besides the positive consequences of integration into the European cultural community had some negative moments as well: forced assimilation and disrespect towards the culture of ethnic minority. Before Germany's union the official German science in its study of the Slavonic world substantiated some theoretical researches with the idea of inferiority of the Slavonic culture and hopelessness of their history. For example, O. Kohl in his notes after his travel around the Slavonic districts of Łužyca, wrote, „*The spiritual superiority and significant morality ... of the Germans forces Germany to rule over the powerless Latin west and the uncultivated Slavonic east*“.[10] Another German scientist G. Caruss called his political and philosophical treatise *On the unequal abilities of different human tribes for spiritual development*[11] where he substantiated the spiritual superiority of the German nation over other nations. Under the conditions of obvious disrespect on the part of some scientific circles in Germany towards the Slavs some works were published where the Sorbians were viewed as a disappearing and non-perspective nation, „*The Wends are lost for the Slavs just like they formerly lost the Lusatian district*“.[12] Under the conditions of intensification of the all-German movement for union some German theoreticians reviewed the conception of Lusatian Slavs' early history. An example of such a scientific theoretical approach is F. Schelze's book under the title *Were the German or the Slavonic nations autochthone tribes in Łužyca?* The book was published in 1842 in Herlitz. The author questioned the Slavs right to live on the territory of Germany for he thought they had come there. P.J. Šafárik was against such a scientific claim. He said some German researchers subjectively evaluated the Slavonic past, though in general the XIX century German researchers were mainly adherents of enlightenment, they not only „*got acquainted with the spiritual heritage of their Slavonic neighbours, but also exercised influence on their spiritual development*“.[13]

The first stage of intensification of the Sorbian national movement according to I. I. Sreznevsky was the 1812 events. At that time one of the founders of the Sorbian renaissance was Pastor G. Lubensky (1790 - 1840) that maintained active scientific relations with J. Dombrovsky, V. Hanka, F. Čelakovský, P. J. Šafárik, L. Štúr. Evaluating G. Lubensky, I. I. Sreznevsky claimed that the new „*Serbian literature is the continuation of the pastor's personal activity*“.[14] G. Lubensky published 25 books and brochures of different content in the Lusatian language.[15] His works were popular not only among the scientists-slavists, but also among the clerical and secular intellectuals. I. I. Sreznevsky witnessed those events and wrote that since that time „*young Serbs gathered together, read their own works, published journals, tried to renew the Sorbian literature, and, what is even more important, did not forget their own people, studied them*“.[16] At that time a Warsaw slavist P. Dubrowsky noted a significant increase of patriotically minded Lusatian youth. He wrote, „*There are four Serbian literature societies: Budyshyn, Wrocław, Lipsk, and the Sorbian ... In early 1842 a new Serbian scientific society was opened in Lipsk*“.[17] Thus, the Sorbian societies were an influential factor in the ethnical and cultural self-awareness of the Lusatian Serbians.

Among the most famous representatives of the Lusatian renaissance in 1830 - 1840s is J. P. Jordan (1818 - 1891 pp.).[18] The philosophy of his patriotic views was formed under the influence of the Czech slavist V. Hanka while he had been studying in Prague. In history he is known as the promoter of „*Slavonic mutuality*“. On the eve of the 1848 - 1849 revolution J. P. Jordan characterized the task of the ethnic

Sorbian movement as „*Our time calls for the consolidation of forces and the expectation of our Slavonic fellow brothers*“.[19] Therefore, the perspective of the modern national movement was, in his opinion, in the cultural field, revival of their own ethnic culture that „*reached a higher level than that of the Germans at that time (the Middle Ages (author's note))*“.[20] The active position of the ethnic Lusatian public figure could not but evoke dissatisfaction on the part of the official authorities that tried to suppress the process of further consolidation of the Sorbian movement and prevent the spread of the idea of Slavonic mutuality that could turn against the Germans. In the same years J. A. Smoler started his social, public and national patriotic activity. He is considered to be the leader of the national Lusatian movement in XIX century. He was a conservative in spirit and a patriot in soul. His works were rather careful in criticizing the German national policy but he sympathized with the Slavonic population.[21] He saw the main way out of the spiritual crisis in the spread of education that was to help to deprive the Slavonic population of Germany „*of spiritual misery*“.[22]

Religious factor exercised great influence in the development of cultural and national movement of the Sorbians in 1820 - 1840s. For the Sorbians it was not only of cultural and educational significance, it also served to maintain the nation. It should be, however, mentioned that the Slavonic historiography of the XIX century denied the positive effect of catholicizing the Lusatians. V. Hanka, for example, in his letter to A. Y. Storozhenko wrote that orthodox „*rays did not reach the Slavonic tribes; together with the German bishops came slave baptism, thus, in those countries the Slavonic language disappeared altogether and only faint reminiscences of customs and traditions remained*“.[23]

From early XIX century the selection system to the clerical educational establishments became more democratic. In 1820s the Sorbian clergy was mainly from the families of clergymen. After 25 years the number of clergy by origin was reduced, but the number of clergy that were peasants by birth was almost eight times larger.[24] If we consider the clergy the main ideologist, a means of mass propaganda, then petty bourgeois Sorbian priesthood added conservatism and moderation to the Slavonic ethnic minority's self-awareness.

The Sorbian intellectuals consisted mainly of the clergy. For instance, J. Smoler started his university studies in 1836 at the faculty of theology in Breslau.[25] The intelligentsia of Prussian Łużyca was very few in number and patriotically indifferent. They came from lower level officials and clergy, so it is no wonder this part of the Sorbian intellectuals was mainly conservative and moderate. Moreover, the ethnic self-awareness of the Sorbians in Lower Łużyca had always been moderate for Prussia maintained an unwavering policy towards the Slavonic minority. The Germans were mainly appointed in schools and parishes and they pursued the interests of the German majority and not of the remainder relict Slavs.[26]

Advanced ideas reached the Lusatian population thanks to the ethnic youth that was studying in various educational establishments of Europe. For instance, the future activists of the Sorbian renaissance H. Zejler and G. A. Krykar studied in Leipzig and made friends with the Serbian poet S. Milutinovych and a Czech historian F. Palacký. Friendly relations with the Polish patriotically minded youth were upheld by J. P. Jordan and K. A. Mosak-Kolosopolsky. Of some influence on the Lusatian patriots was *Towarzystwo Literacko-Słowiańskie* that functioned in Prague under the guidance of J. E. Purkyně and F. Čelakovsky. One of the greatest contributors to the Sorbian renaissance, especially its spirituality was the neighbouring Czech Republic that was the centre of maintaining Slavonic national traditions and culture. Thus, the *Lusatian seminary* in Prague played a great role in educating a great number of Lusatian public figures of the ethnic renaissance. Later, on the eve of the 1848 revolution students of the *Lusatian seminary* founded the society *Serbovka* headed by a well-known activist of the Czech renaissance, P. J. Šafárik's associate, a Czech V. Hanka.[27] P. Kulish wrote on V. Hanka's merit in the Slavonic and Lusatian movements in his letter to the Czech.[28]

The society's sittings dealt with different aspects of Lusatian culture, manners and customs. V. Hanka described the perspectives of the development of the Sorbian national movement in his letter from Prague to the Kyiv slavist O. J. Storozhenko on 4 July 1847, „*I am sure that if the weak rays from the neighbouring Czech Republic to Łużyca were stronger, then, correspondingly ... on the rivers Sale and Lower Laba there would be no German faith left*“.[29]

Under the pressure of the Slavonic movement for the recognition of their national and cultural rights as well as to settle the Slavonic issue the leading German dynasties were forced in 1841 to establish language, literature and Slavonic history departments in Berlin University, in Wrocław University in Prussia. German Slavonic and Sorbian studies obtained the status of an official scientific discipline. As a result of further organization of the Sorbian ethnic movement in 1830s and at the request of Lusatian patriotic public figures the authorities of Saxony kingdom were forced to make concessions and allow in

1835 to study the Lusatian language in primary schools as an optional subject.

It should be mentioned that the official authorities took measures to settle the issue of the disappearing ethnos. For instance, Saxony's state minister D. Muller in October 1834 presented a project to be reviewed by the deputies of the first chamber where he suggested allowing „*the Vendian children to study the Lusatian language*“. Further on it was emphasized that the suggested project «could calm down the Vendian communities. However, the most interesting part of the speech is its ending. As far as it was told by a minister, it can be considered a demonstration of state policy towards the autochthone ethnos. D. Muller claimed, „*each nation's language is its sacred property, and each nation has the legal right to keep it*“.[30]

In 1840 in Prussia after the death of Friedrich-Wilhelm III the royal throne was taken by his son Friedrich-Wilhelm IV. Liberals and democrats expected constitutional measures to be taken that would relieve absolutism and give democratic freedom to all the strata of the population in Prussia. For the Sorbian liberals with their social basis – the peasantry, the main issue of the movement was the land and recognition on the part of the official authorities the Lusatians' right to hold enlightenment measures taking into account the ethnic and cultural specific character. In 1845 all the provincial Landtags, including those in Prussian Lower Łużyca set up claims to adopt the constitution. The content of the constitutional demands was typical for the majority of German states and principedoms – to convene an all-Prussian representative body, to hold a legal reform and to cancel class privileges. But even such an all-German liberalization of the political life had to improve the state of the Sorbian national minority. That is why the liberals' calls found their response in the Sorbian community.

Of special importance for the intensification of the Lusatian patriots' activities during renaissance were the direct contacts of the ethnic leaders or representatives with scientists and public figures of other Slavonic nations. The spiritual contacts of the XIX century were directly connected with the all-Slavonic process of national renaissance. The scientists started to investigate ethnic folklore that was an important factor of self-identification that helped to determine the ethnical roots. Sorbian renaissance was also greatly influenced by L. Štur's visit to Budyšyn in 1839. This famous Slovak public figure gave the theoretical basis for the young Sorbian national movement.

The scientists of the Russian empire also contributed to the intensification of the Sorbians' national activity. M. P. Dragomanov wrote to O. M. Pypin in October 1841 that they „*introduced some Slavophil view and anti-German spirit*“[31] and showed interest in the culture of various Slavonic nations, including the Lusatian Sorbs, treated them with tolerance and respect. It should be mentioned that the intensive activity of the public figures, educational and cultural events needed constant financing. Besides the internal material sources the Lusatians were given help by Slavonic patriots from different countries. For instance, M. P. Pogodin (1800 – 1875) that was personally acquainted with J. A. Smoler since 1839 gave financial help to the Sorbian cultural and national movement, addressed the official authorities several times with the request „*to necessarily help the poor fellow brothers, be their patron, head of the family as if by Gods will*“.[32] The Manuscript Institute of the National Library of Ukraine contains reports on the researcher's trips abroad, his personal letters where he dwells on the possible formation of the Slavonic federation[33] and writes about the necessity to finance the Slavs abroad, to support their aim to revive their own ethnic unique identity.[34] On the eve of the 1848 revolution the following public figures contributed to the intensification of the Sorbians' national movement by means of cultural exchange as well as scientific and cultural cooperation: I. Sreznevsky, O. Bodyansky, M. Pilnyakevych, P. Tutkovsky and others.

Therefore, intensification of the Sorbians' national activity in the first half of the XIX century is a specific process that, despite the general regularities of the Slavonic renaissance somewhat differed from the similar process of other Slavonic nations. This was conditioned by the greater importance of cultural issues in the Sorbian movement. For other Slavs the national program was based on protecting their own culture and building a national state or uniting ethnically close nations. The main issue of the Sorbian revival program was maintaining its own culture and its renaissance. The latter meant not only maintaining ethnical peculiarity, but also getting closer to general cultural values. Despite the many centuries of existence almost in the centre of European civilization, German enlightenment, the Lusatians adopted the cultural heritage of the Old World quite late. For instance, J.A. Smoler wrote, „*the beginning of the Sorbian literature is 1597 when the first Serbian book (translation of Luther's small catechism by the priest Varykhiy) was published*“.[35] Thus, intensification of the Sorbians' ethnical movement is a specific phenomenon which is not synchronic with the similar phenomena of the other Slav nations. First of all, there were social changes in the ethnic Lusatian community that led to the formation of the national bourgeoisie and individual independent peasants. This formed the precondition for the expansion

of the small in number ethnic intellectuals that brought about the consolidation of the whole nation and managed to overcome the political passiveness of the Lusatians. Sorbian publicism and journalism were established, the foundations of the Sorbian studies as a Slavistics discipline were laid. All the enumerated factors formed the basis of the Sorbian renaissance.

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