

*From perestroika to the Card of the Pole.  
The Environment and Polish scouting organizations  
in the Soviet Union and after its collapse*

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The author discusses the structures of the Polish scouting movement revived (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia) or established (Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Moldova) in the Polish society in the former Soviet republics. It must be emphasized that some of them were founded as early as in 1989 under Gorbachev's perestroika ("restructuring") program of civic freedoms and functioned as long as until 1990 in the still existing Soviet republics (Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus). The importance of scouting and guiding as a form of resistance against communism must not be underestimated. It was a way of education completely different from the one promoted by communists and thus opposing this system. The issue may also constitute a part of research on the history of Eastern Borderlands of the 2nd Polish Republic after 1939 through the study of Polish minority who have been living in these lands until this day.

Individual chapters of the book present major events in the history of the Polish scouting in the East from 1990 until the first half of 2007 drawing attention to its distinctive periods. Additionally, each chapter is preceded by a short introduction on both the history and current situation as well as organized Polish minority in the discussed territories. The book is arranged in chronological order. The substantive part of the book is accompanied by the collection of source documents included in Appendices.

In the second half of 2007, the structures and scout societies in the East consist of more than 2.6 thousand girl guides, boy scouts and instructors. The most numerous scout organization exists in Belarus [RSZ

„Harcerstwo”] and includes more than 1 thousand people. The smallest ones are the two troops in Estonia (Tallin, Tartu) which consist of not more than 15 members. The earliest reactivated structure was the Polish scout movement in Latvia (March 1989) which emerged as a part of LSGCO Latvian scout organization (in the same way as before World War II). The youngest are scout troops in Estonia whose beginning reach back to 2002 (Tallin) and 2003 (Tartu). December 1989 saw the beginning of the Polish Scout Association in Lithuania [Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego na Litwie] which was the first independent scout organization established beyond Poland's eastern border. It is worth mentioning that the three troops in Kazakhstan are geographically furthestmost scout structure in the East (5 thousand kilometres away from Warsaw).

The organizations described in the book are independent of the Polish Scouting Association (abroad) [Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego poza granicami Kraju – ZHPpgK] – (with the authorities having a seat in London) and scout organizations in Poland. Only the Polish scout troops being a part of the Latvian scout organization since 1993 are members of the world scout structures: World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM) and World Association of Girl Guides and Girls Scouts (WAGGGS). All the organizations and societies mentioned in the book are unified by the bonds of brotherhood with the world-wide scout organizations. On 22 February 2008 the President of Poland Lech Kaczyński took all scouting organizations in Poland and abroad (including those in the East) to their honorary patronage.

As early as in 1989 the significant role in revival and establishment of some of the scout organizations and societies in the East was played by the instructors of the “East” Division [Referat „Wschód”] of The Scouting Association of the Republic of Poland [Związek Harcerstwa Rzeczypospolitej – ZHR] and later also the instructors of the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association [Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego – ZHP] in the territory of Poland. Both financial aid and assistance in substantive matters for individual organizations was also provided by the Polish Scouting Association (abroad). At present, the biggest donor of working activity is Association “Polish Commune” [Stowarzyszenie „Wspólnota Polska”] with an office in Warsaw which supports, among other initiatives, organizations providing care and scout organizations in Poland acting for the benefit of the Polish scouting in the East.

The book presents Polish scouting in the East as a typical example of non-governmental organization. As compared to the studies of other organizations this subject is not widely known and neglected in the research even though scouting in the first phase of its development often took pioneering initiatives and was the first to take action in order to rebuild civil society in these countries in the post-communist era.

The monograph compiled is a continuation of the author's study undertaken earlier in one of the chapters of his doctoral thesis entitled *Niepokorni i niezależni. Walka o kształt harcerstwa w Polsce (1980–1990)* ["The rebellious and independent. Fight for the shape of scouting in Poland, 1980–1990", The Catholic University of Lublin]. This book is the first attempt of the comprehensive study of this issue. It includes not only the perspective of the organization's authorities but also distinctive societies and their instructors.