Krzysztof Kawęcki, *Polacy na Wileńszczyźnie 1990–2012*, Warsaw: Europejskie Centrum Analiz Geopolitycznych, 2013. 256 p. ISBN 978-8393-291-54-0

The issue of the Polish minority settled in Vilnius and in the Vilnius district is a recurring theme in the Polish as well as the Lithuanian media. Unfortunately, they fail to create a full and, at the same time, authentic picture of it, and that is why I reached with sheer interest for the book by Dr Krzysztof Kawęcki, published by the European Centre of Geopolitical Analysis,¹ believing that it contributes significantly to building an honest and scientific image of the Poles in the district of Vilnius.

The book is divided into five chapters with annexes, in which one can find, among others, ‘A message from the 1st Convention of the Union of Poles in Lithuania to the Lithuanian Nation’, or ‘Resolution of the 8th Convention of the EAPL (Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania) of 28 April 2012’.

The first chapter, entitled ‘Shadows of history’, is a summary of the history of the Polish minority in Lithuania since the rise of the independent state of Lithuania in 1918 until the last election to the Supreme Council of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Lithuania in 1990. The author treats it rather as an introduction to the issue, and does not formulate any original theses, apart from stating that the Russian Soviets hindered the development of the Polish-speaking educational system. It is common knowledge that in Russian Soviet times the Polish education system in the Vilnius district was quite broad as opposed to other republics, and in the school year 1954/1955 it reached a record-breaking number of 312 schools with lessons conducted in Polish.²

The second chapter’s title ‘Game of appearances’ is supposed to reflect the Polish government’s attitude towards the Polish minority in Lithuania. However, even after not too careful a reading, one can see that, surely, the author is dealing with the issue of autonomy for Poles in the Vilnius district, the treaty between Poland and Lithuania, the question of returning land, or the problem of spelling names, etc, but only on the surface. As a matter of fact, his focus is on highlighting the political conflict not only between Lithuania and its Polish citizens, but also on the state level, between Lithuania and Poland. The very description of this conflict is a

¹ European Centre of Geopolitical Analysis – an association created in 2007 in Warsaw.

² A. Srebrakowski, *Polacy w Litewskiej SRR 1944–1989* (Toruń, 2002), p. 155.

critique of Poland's policies towards the Republic of Lithuania and the Polish minority living there. Maybe not directly, but still, Krzysztof Kawęcki states that consecutive governments of the Republic of Poland gave the Lithuanian authorities permission to pursue a policy of discrimination. And so, instead of focusing on a description of the Poles in the Vilnius district, he engages in a critique of the Polish policy towards Lithuania not from the point of view of an expert on political science, but from the point of view of a far right-wing politician, which he is.

In the next chapter entitled 'Stuck with each other', the author continues criticising the Polish government, and its representative of the time in Vilnius personally, the ambassador Jan Widacki. This time he bases his discussion on the issue of 'lithuanisation of the Vilnius district', the struggle of the Polish minority for Polish-speaking education,³ and also on an unsuccessful attempt to create the Polish University. He builds up a rather negative image of Lithuanians, accusing them of extreme ethno-nationalism as a tendency dominating in society.⁴ He brings up a series of often very unjust activities to the Poles of Lithuania by the Lithuanian national administration and groups of people connected with the Vilnija society. In his description of Polish-Lithuanian issues in the Vilnius district, the author seems very selective: he mentions, for example, the lack of agreement by the Diocese of Vilnius to place on one of their buildings a sign commemorating the fact that before the Second World War it had been the editorial office of the newspaper *Ślowo*. There is no mention, however, of putting up bilingual (Lithuanian-Polish) signs dedicated to Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Władysław Syrokomla or Józef Ignacy Kraszewski in the heart of Vilnius' Old Town.

In the fourth chapter, as the title suggests, Kawęcki means to describe Polish organisations. Unfortunately, besides the Association of Poles in Lithuania, he characterises only the Macierz Szkolna Association of Polish School Teachers in Lithuania. The remaining socio-cultural organisations, a selection of them, are only mentioned briefly. Kawęcki does not even refer to the most important organisations for Poles in Lithuania, such as the Polish Lawyers Association in Lithuania, the Association of Polish Scientists in Lithuania, or the Józef Montwiłł Foundation of Polish Culture in Lithuania, and many more. While presenting theatrical activities, he describes the Polish Theatre in Vilnius, but he does not even mention the Polish Theatre Studio, which was created five years earlier, that is, in 1960. On the other hand, quite a detailed description in this chapter is

³ Krzysztof Kawęcki writes about 'the Polish schools'. It is worth mentioning that in Lithuania, Polish schools do not function as such; there are, however, Lithuanian schools with lessons in Polish. This is an oversimplification often used by journalists, although one would expect an explanation of such nuances in a scientific publication like this.

⁴ K. Kawęcki, *Polacy na Wileńszczyźnie 1990–2012* (Warsaw, 2013), p. 120.

given a political party called the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania. The author treats it as representative of the whole Polish minority in Lithuania, without even a mention of the Polish Peoples Party, which is strongly detached from the aforementioned party's activities.

The last chapter, entitled 'Restoring the memory', is definitely the least concerned with a description of Poles in the Vilnius district. The author depicts here the activities of organisations set up in Poland, such as the Association of Friends of Grodno and Wilno, and the Association of the Supporters of Vilnius and the Vilnius District. He presents the activities concerned with saving the Rasos cemetery, the Polish pilgrimage to the Gates of Dawn (Ostra Brama), motorcycle rallies, horse-riding expeditions to Lithuania (where the horsemen wear the pre-war uniforms of Polish lancers), etc. There is, however, not much to learn about the Poles of the Vilnius district, which is the topic of this book.

In conclusion, it is necessary to acknowledge that this book is a poor reading reference, as it gives the impression of being written in Warsaw, where, in fact, the author conducted a fair amount of press research in the National Library. But the quality of this research testifies to the message that is presented, with the result that one can learn no more from this book than can be learnt from the newspapers. What we can find in this publication is lots of simplifications and misrepresentations. The author also reflects a sort of sloppiness in his spelling of the names of the people described. And so, on one of the pages we encounter 'Garšva', and on the same page we see 'Garszva', professor Alvydas Nikžentaitis becomes 'a young historian Nikzentaitis', and prelate Józef Obrębski is called Józef Obremski.

This book does seem to have some advantages. One of them is surely its broad bibliography of press items dealing with the issue of the Polish minority in Lithuania. Another is the language the author uses, thanks to which the book is readable and interesting; however, taking into account its content, it can also be dangerous.

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