

FIRST CONGRESS OF FOREIGN RESEARCHERS INTO POLAND'S HISTORY

The First Congress of Foreign Researchers into Poland's History was held in Cracow from June 28 to 30, 2007. It had been convened by historians from the Cracow branch of the Polish Historians' Society (*PTH*). The co-organisers were: the Museum of Poland's History in Warsaw, the International Centre of Culture, the Association "Polish Community", the Jagiellonian University, the Municipality of Cracow and the Little Poland Voivodship Office.

In September 2004, a symposium of foreign researchers, held during the 17th Congress of Polish Historians, discussed various aspects of Poland's history. It was proposed during the symposium to organise an enterprise which would make possible a fuller presentation of Polish history as it is seen outside Poland. Preparatory work started soon afterwards conducted by of Andrzej Chwałba and Krzysztof Zamojski and with an active participation of the Scientific Circle of History Students at the Jagiellonian University.

The main aim of the Congress was to integrate Polish and foreign scholars, to get acquainted with mutual achievements and establish cooperation between individual persons and research centres. The organisers want to be acquainted with foreign research on Poland's history in order to back it up, and to create a catalogue that would systematise the publications of foreign authors. About a thousand researchers representing various fields of the humanities — mainly history but also history of art, political science and sociology — had been invited to Cracow.

The Congress was attended by over 400 scholars from 35 countries. More than 120 papers were read. The programme included symposia and workshops held in the mornings and afternoons during the three days of the Congress. Conferences dealing with the presentation of different periods of Poland's history in European and world historiography constituted the core of the programme. A cycle of symposia entitled *Aspects of History — A Historian's Methodology* as well as a number of meetings devoted to specific subjects were also held. The debates were accompanied by cultural events and sight-seeing tours of Cracow and its neighbourhood.

During the opening ceremony the "Pro Historia Polonorum" prize for the best book on Poland's history published in a foreign language in 2002–2006 was presented to Timothy Snyder, author of the monograph *Sketches from a Secret War. A Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate the Soviet Union* (Yale, 2005), devoted to Henryk Józefowski. Norman Davies was awarded a prize for the whole of his output and for propagating Poland's history in Poland and the world.

The real part of the Congress opened with a debate entitled *Historical Policy — Importance and Prospects*. In an introductory lecture Władysław Bartoś presented his reflections on the concept of historical policy, on the consequences of the use of historical themes in Polish political debates, and

on the possibilities of a dialogue to solve historical and political problems. Karin Steffen, Robert Traba, Jan Raczynski, Adam Zamoyski and Igal Avidan took part in the discussion which was monitored by Jan Rydel. The most active speakers in the first stage were Steffen and Traba. The discussion focused on the directions of historical policy in Germany and on the symbols and slogans which define the Polish and the German debate on remembrance of the past. Jan Raczynski, a traveller and member of the "Memorial" Association, was asked about the aims and methods of historical policy in Russia, about the Russian historical myth and its use for political purposes. Igal Avidan from Israel showed a film about young Jews' opinions on excursions to places commemorating the Holocaust. His comments referred to the role played by memory of the Holocaust and to the changes which had taken place in the image and symbols of historical policy in Israel. They can be seen above all in education and in the fact that Poland is spoken about not only in the context of the Holocaust but also as a place of Jewish life, a place where Jewish history and culture were born. The Holocaust theme also appeared in the part devoted to Anglo-Saxon countries. Adam Zamoyski pointed out that public opinion, academic debates and the shaping of national consciousness could play an important role in discussions on historical policy. It was stressed in the summing up that memory of the past and historical policy referred to many subjects and were highly differentiated in Europe.

The symposia dealing with specific periods discussed the state of foreign research on Poland's history, the main interests and the difficulties encountered in the course of studies. The medieval section, chaired by Zenon Piech, focused on the level of knowledge about Poland in the neighbouring countries and in Hungary. The participants tried to find the reasons for the inadequate state of research and the possibilities of improving the situation. The language barrier and the fact that foreign libraries did not have a sufficient number of books by Polish authors were regarded as the main reasons. There was also a lack of publications in West European languages. All speakers raised the question of Polish subjects in foreign historiographies, comparing the present situation with the period before the transformation, before the disintegration of the eastern bloc. Most speakers drew attention to marginal areas in research and put forward proposals concerning sources and methodology. They stressed the need for comparative research on a regional level and for syntheses of medieval histories from a Central European perspective and of Poland's histories of that period, especially those written in national languages. The panel devoted to early modern history, which focused on the presentation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in individual historiographies, raised, on the whole, the same fundamental questions. The participants discussed the achievements of Polish historiography, the possibilities of popularising them abroad and the extent to which Polish archives were being used. Both the authors of the papers and the persons who took part in the discussion agreed that the dialogue between historians was far from being satisfactory. The panel dealing with 19th century history attracted speakers from various parts of Europe and also from Japan. Its aim was to learn about those distant centres and circles dealing with Poland's 19th century history and about the questions researched there. Analyses of Poland's relations with other European nations and presentations of the achievements of national historiographies predominated in that section. The participants also drew attention to the themes from Poland's 19th century history which attracted young researchers. The panel on recent history, entitled *Pride and Prejudice*, discussed different problems and its debates were extremely stormy. The papers showed how the most important events from Po-

land's 20th century were presented in the historiographies of France, Germany, Russia, Ukraine, the Czech Republic and Lithuania: Antony Polonsky spoke about the presentation of Polish–Jewish relations in historiography, the debate on this subject in Poland and the US. reaction to this debate. Timothy Snyder presented American studies on Polish questions, pointing out that the twenty year inter-war period was rarely discussed in them. The discussion centred on two problems: the knowledge of Polish history and the possibilities which Polish historiography offers to foreign researchers to popularise this knowledge. Many speakers criticised the lack of synthesizing studies.

The other four symposia were jointly entitled *Aspects of History – An Historian's Methodology*. The first, entitled *Cities – Places of Common Memory*, was organized together with the International Centre of Culture. The papers dealt with the identity of cities in East–Central Europe and with the frequently difficult and complex relations between the inhabitants of these cities and their cultural and historical heritage. The symposium *Peculiarities in the Development of Selected Political Institutions in Europe and Poland* analysed the Polish political system, its transformations and the activities of foreign centres engaged in its formation. Great interest was aroused by the panel *Voluntary and Forced Migrations in Polish History*, which examined wider problems as well as individual cases. The last symposium of the cycle was *Polish Studies Abroad – Participation in Research on Polish History* which discussed the education on Poland's history provided by French, German, Russian and Japanese universities. Workshops and meetings were an important part of the Congress. Very interesting was the cycle of discussions *History in Dialogue, Dialogue in History*. Participants of the meetings discussed with invited guests — Michael G. Müller, James Bjork and Joanna Michlic — problems and methodology: the writing and creation of national histories in a broader identity context, the interpretation of joint actions and controversial problems in the Polish–German borderland as well as ethical questions in historical research. Meetings devoted to film as a source for reconstructing Polish reality in the 20th century were another interesting initiative. Much attention was also paid to Poland's image. The students' panel *History and Culture in the Eyes of Young Europeans* concentrated on national stereotypes in the European Union. A similar question was discussed by the *Media and History* panel which examined the image of Poland and the Poles in the foreign press. The other meetings were of an informative character; they provided data on the resources of Polish and foreign archives and on the possibilities of obtaining a grant or a scholarship.

There is not a shadow of a doubt that the Congress was very useful. It surveyed the research of a large gamut of subjects connected with Poland's history. This is understandable for this was the first venture of its kind but in the future the programme should be more lucid and concrete. The level of the papers differed; most papers were interesting and well prepared but some were weak and did not contribute much to what is already known. Unfortunately the Cracow Congress was not attended by Daniel Beauvois and Jan Tomasz Gross, researchers whose works are very important for the historiography of Poland's history. Much was said during the debates about the lack of knowledge about Poland and lack of interest in Polish history in foreign countries. Polish researchers, on their side, could learn much about the situation of research centres and trends in neighbouring countries, especially in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. The most important achievement of the Congress was that it launched an intellectual exchange and made an attempt to integrate different milieus. The effects will be seen in the years to come, not only in planned conferences and publications but also in individual cooperation. One of the first initiatives

was the setting up of a global network website in Polish and English, polishhistory.pl, administered by the Museum of Poland's History.

Most sessions as well as the opening and closing ceremonies were held in the Auditorium Maximum of the Jagiellonian University. Only two sessions took place outside that building: *Information on Archives and Scientific Libraries Collections*. *Meeting with Heads of Institutions*, which was held in the Jagiellonian Library, and *Cities — Places of Common Memory*, which was organized in the International Centre of Culture in Cracow's Rynek Główny (Main Square). The fact that most meetings took place in the Auditorium Maximum made the organization of the event easier and was conducive to informal meetings. The next Congress of Foreign Researchers into Poland's History will be held in 2012.

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