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‘Ethnic and Religious Diversity in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: A Comparative Perspective’. A Report on the Conference Held 19–21 June 2017

An international scientific conference entitled ‘Ethnic and Religious Diversity in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: a comparative perspective’, co-organised by the Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences, was held on 19 to 21 June 2017 at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw. The incentive behind the event was the first anniversary of the demise of Professor Janusz Tazbir and the semicentenary of the first edition of his book *Państwo bez stosów. Szkice z dziejów tolerancji w Polsce w XVI i XVII w.* [A State Without Stakes: Religious Toleration in Reformation Poland].

The introductory lecture was delivered by David Frick of the University of California, Berkeley, whose research is centred on aspects of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation in the Commonwealth of the Two Nations. His paper, entitled ‘*Names and Faces: Toward a Comparative Study of Confessionally Mixed Cities of the Early Modern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*’, presented the research assumptions, sources, and methodology behind his 2013 study *Kith, Kin, and Neighbours: Communities and Confessions in Seventeenth-Century Wilno*. With research in the seventeenth-century Wilno (Vilnius) as the point of departure, Frick discussed a new research perspective as he pointed out to the potential comparative studies of the other cities within Poland-Lithuania for which useful extant records are available. Research of this kind may extend to Lublin, Cracow, Poznań, Lwów (L’viv), Toruń (Thorn), and Gdańsk (Danzig). Use of the surviving sources would enable to show the everyday relationships (neighbourhood, family relationships), selection of godparents, choice of witnesses) between the religiously and denominationally diverse communities populating the Commonwealth’s towns. Such a ‘bottom-up’ (urban dwellers’) perspective would answer the question of how the ‘Polish toleration’ presented itself in everyday practice.

The three-day long conference was arranged into five panels, the first of which focused on historiographic considerations. The papers delivered by Tomasz Kempa and Jakub Wysmulek concerned the confessional situation in Wilno and Lwów, respectively. The scholars discussed the present state of research on the multilingual and multireligious communities of the urban hubs in question, and outlined the perspective for further research. The paper presented by Alexander Filiuškina dealt with historiographical concepts of the religious history of Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages and in the modern era. He gave as an example the narratives related to the interpretation

of the pagan period, the relations between religious denomination and cultural background, the emancipation of the Orthodox religion from the domination of Muscovy, the religious pluralism in the nobility-dominated Commonwealth, and the relationship between confession and ethnic identification.

The second panel offered an opportunity to present new theoretical concepts and research methods. Tomasz Wiślicz presented the possibilities of using the category of intersectionality in research into the diversity of the residents of modern-age Poland-Lithuania. Marta Kuc discussed the theoretical assumptions behind the concept of cultural transfer and the options for its practical application, using the example of the German-speaking community in the eighteenth-century Warsaw. Piotr Guzowski and Radosław Poniak discussed the theoretical and methodological assumptions of their underway research project that refers to Max Weber's classical work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, where the association is emphasised between the religious confession and the level of economic development. The project seeks to verify the hypothesis whereby the denominational factor did not play a critical role in the economic activity and in the shaping of the model of family, as far as communities functioning in comparable legal, societal and economic conditions were concerned.

Among the speakers in the subsequent panel, entitled 'Concepts', Andrzej Janeczek delivered a paper on Red Ruthenia (Rus') – the region once populated by ethnically and religiously diverse people, including East-Slavic Ruthenians as well as non-native groups such as Poles, Germans, Jews, Valachians, Karaites, and Tatars. The diversity resulted from political actions undertaken by the rulers of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, combined with migration processes. The proposed analysis concerned the conditions under which the nobility was formed as a supra-ethnic and supra-religious class ('estate'), which foreshadowed the emergence in the Commonwealth of a 'noble (that is, nobility-based) political nation'. Anat Vaturi discussed the legal position of the Jewish people and the rights or privileges granted thereto as an argument in the religious polemics the Commonwealth witnessed in the sixteenth century. She dealt with the issue from the standpoint of the Protestant community who used the argument in their struggle for religion-related rights. The Jewish people living on a permanent basis in the Commonwealth provided, in their opinion, evidence in support of the long years of tradition of coexistence of diverse religious denominations within the country. Referring to David Nirenberg's and Keith Luria's research in religiously diverse communities, Andrej Špirt discussed the concept of 'religious border'. The existence of such borderline was important given the emergence and formation of the identities of the religious groups, whilst determining it was quite frequently associated with a conflict. The theoretical assumptions were referred to the mutual relationships between the Christian and Jewish communities in the seventeenth-century Brest (Brześć) and Pinsk (Pińsk).

‘Diversity’ was the leitmotif of the subsequent panel. The paper presented by Andrzej Buczyło discussed the patronage exercised by the Roman Catholic Church over the Uniate churches in the Brześć district (Pol.: *powiat*) in the eighteenth century. Using the example of Radziwiłł-owned Sluck (Sluck) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Maria Cieśla described the daily existence of the hub’s religiously diverse inhabitants. Apart from a large group of Jewish people, the town was home to Orthodox Church believers, Protestants, as well as Catholics – each of these communities functioning according to their own calendar. Based on several specific examples, the speaker remarked that although conflicts tended to appear in such circumstances, there was a prevalent need for a consensus.

The next panel dealt with conflicts. Martin Faber discussed aspects of anticlerical attitudes among the nobility. Dawid Machaj focused on the conflicts between the Catholic community and its Evangelical counterpart dwelling in Wilno and Cracow, the two capital cities of sixteenth-century Poland-Lithuania, pointing to the fact that the main perpetrators of the confessional tumults breaking out in those hubs were students of the local academies. They formed communities that were not associated with the city and its residents, whereas their sense of identity, as students and Catholics at the same time, was strong. The student communities guarded their space within the urban environment, which was particularly evident with the ‘student quarter’ in Cracow. Przemysław Zarubin analysed the origins of the antagonisms that occurred between Jewish kahals in the Greater-Poland District (Pol.: *Ziemstwo Wielkopolskie*) in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, pointing to the distribution of the tax levies among the individual Jewish communities as the key reason. The other identifiable points of contention were the staffing of the district’s authorities, the economic competition between the Jews from the adjacent kahals, and the circumstances of emergence of new communities, propelled by migrations, and the way those new communities grew independent of their mother communities. A rivalry between the region’s major communities – those of Gniezno, Kalisz, Poznań, Leszno, and Krotoszyn – was part of the background.

Conflicts occurring within a religiously and ethnically diverse community were dealt with also by Łukasz Truściński, who presented the relationships between the Polish and the German communities in Grodzisk Wielkopolski in the eighteenth century. Alexandr Osipian compared the arguments raised in anti-Jewish and anti-Armenian lampoons published in the former half of the seventeenth century. Lastly, Adam Kaźmierczyk touched upon religious conversion – an issue of importance from the standpoint of Jewish community. Using selected examples, he pointed to the determinants behind the decision to alter one’s religion, discussed the consequences borne by the converts, and the social position of the latter.

'Identity' was the keyword of the last panel. Referring to the research undertaken by Western European historiographers, Marzena Liedke sought to examine the influence of the denominational factor on the demographic processes among the Commonwealth's magnates in the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries. With a limited scope or amount of the historical records available, the research encompassed a total of forty-one Orthodox, forty Reformed Evangelical, and ninety Catholic families. The analysis demonstrated that the religious factor and the mentality related to it had no impact on the procreative attitudes among the magnate families – as opposed to the other aspects, including the family's financial standing. The influence of the age at which marriages were contracted and the lengths of marriages call for further research, Liedke stressed.

Thomas Richter discussed the coexistence of religiously diverse communities in the borderland area between the German Reich and the Netherlands. In the former half of the seventeenth century, the Catholic town of Aachen restricted the Protestants' right to public worship, which implied the phenomenon of 'Sunday migrations': the local Protestants travelled to the small town of Vaals, just behind the border, to participate in services. Vaals housed temples of as many as five religions and denominations: Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, Mennonite, and Jewish. Using this as a benchmark, examples of peaceful interdenominational relationships were discussed, along with the causes and origins of the occurring conflicts. The last to have delivered a paper was Wioletta Zielecka-Mikołajczyk, who described the actions of Orthodox nobles taken in defence of the Orthodox Church in the area of Przemyśl eparchy between the late sixteenth century and the year 1691. The vast majority of these noblemen were of a low material status, save for the magnate family Ostrogski. Foundations of monasteries came as a reply to the acts of the first local Uniate bishop Atanazy Krupecki. Three noted foundations, including the monastery in Topolnica (founded by Grzegorz Turzański, 1616), the cloister in the Hruszów forest (founded by the Lityński family in 1621) and the monastery at Bilina Wielka (erected 1669; founded by Katarzyna Skarżewska, née Żeliborska), were discussed in more detail.

Altogether, twenty papers were delivered. The organisers managed to gather at one location scholars from Polish and foreign scientific centres who take different perspectives in analysing issues related to the history of Polish Reformation and Counter-Reformation, with special focus on the relationships between the specified religious and confessional groups. This made the conference a good opportunity to debate and to present new research projects. Hopefully, these threads will be followed up in the scholarly publications to be prepared by the participants.