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Would-be Settlement from Upper Silesia in Northern Bulgaria in 1882¹

Abstract

The aim of the article is to present the fate of the would-be settlement of Poles from the Koźle county to the district of Svishtov in northern Bulgaria in 1882, based on the Ministry of Finance's materials found in the Central State Archives in Sofia. As a result of the information provided by the missionary Grzegorz Piegza operating in the area of Svishtov, about 150 families from Upper Silesia expressed their willingness to move to the Balkans and live among the Catholic communities functioning there. It seemed that they could take advantage of the settlement action organized by the Bulgarian authorities from 1880, which assumed the distribution of land to the newcomers. However, these petitions met with a refusal by the authorities in Sofia, who wanted to bring only Bulgarians living outside the Balkans. Petitions sent from Upper Silesia to the Bulgarian authorities in 1882 are a source of information not only on the causes of migrations from this part of Prussia, but also provide knowledge about the identity of Silesians at the end of the 19th century. The analysis also served as a starting point for reflection on Bulgarian migration policy of this period.

Keywords: Upper Silesia, Bulgaria, Balkans, migrations, 19th century

The Principality of Bulgaria, established in 1878, became a witness to intense migration processes – on the one hand, the exodus of Muslims resulting from the collapse of the Ottoman rules in the region and, on the other hand, the surge of colonists seeking a chance for better life in a new state in the Balkans. The latter group was dominated by the inhabitants of Macedonia and Thrace, as well as Bulgarians from diasporas in Russia, Romania and Austria-Hungary, which had been formed in the period of the long reign of sultans in Bulgaria, although there were also the representatives of other nationalities. The report of the special commission investigating the immigration phenomenon from February 1902 indi-

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cated that among those settled in the Svishtov district (*okrag*) were not only Bulgarians from abroad, but also a significant number of Czechs, Slovaks and Serbs coming from Banat². Moving to Bulgaria was within the interest not only of the citizens of Austria-Hungary but also the inhabitants of Upper Silesia, which then was a part of the Kingdom of Prussia, the biggest unit of the German Empire, and it is demonstrated in the hitherto unknown petitions found in the fond of the Ministry of Finances of the Central State Archive in Sofia.

This article is aimed at presenting the fortunes of the colonisation manqué of Poles from Koźle county in the Svishtov region in northern Bulgaria in 1882 at the background of the Bulgarian migration policy. This topic has not been tackled so far in literature – it has been mentioned neither in publications concerning the history of Upper Silesia nor in those focusing on migrations in the Balkans in the 19th c. It is probably due to a small scale of this phenomenon, the fact that eventually the colonisation did not take place and due to the storage location of the related materials – among documents referring to various issues connected with the operations of the Bulgarian Ministry of Finances in 1882 in Sofia's archives.

The analysed petitions were from Koźle county (*Landkreis Cosel*) that, according to the census from 1890, was inhabited by 57,326 Poles, which constituted 83.1% of the population of that administrative unit. It was a part of Opole governmental district (*Regierungsbezirk Oppeln*), where in 1861 there were 665,865 Poles (59.1%), and in 1890 – 950,452 (59.22%)³. Together with Wrocław governmental district and Legnica governmental district, they formed Silesia province (*Provinz Schlesien*). In this region, likewise in the entire German Empire, in the 1880's, the significant growth of emigration was observed – in 1882 about 250,000 people left the territory of the entire Reich. This high migration trend was noticeable until 1894. Exits from Silesia province, as compared to whole Kingdom of Prussia in the first half of the 1880's were as follows:

Table 1: Emigration from Silesia province in the years 1880–1885

Year	Silesia	Prussia
1880	2,781	67,679
1881	5,908	145,679
1882	5,743	129,894
1883	4,679	104,167
1884	4,548	93,622
1885	2,869	69,272
Total	26,528	610,313

Source: D. Praszalowicz, K. Makowski, A. Zięba, *Mechanizmy zamorskich migracji łańcuchowych w XIX wieku: Polacy, Niemcy, Żydzi, Rusini. Zarys problemu*, Kraków 2004, p. 66.

² *Протокол на комисията, изучавала причините, поради които преселилите се банатски българи в Княжеството искат да се върнат в Банат, София 8.06.1902*, in: *Миграционни движения на българите 1878–1941*, т. 1: 1878–1912, съст. В. Василиева, В. Гигов, Г. Стоянова, К. Георгиева, К. Недевска, София 1993, pp. 171–179; P. Peykovska, *Migrations from Austria-Hungary to Bulgaria in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries: Evidence from the Bulgarian Censuses*, “Bulgarian Historical Review” 2012, no. 1–2, p. 81.

³ M. Pater, *Ruch polski na Górnym Śląsku w latach 1879–1893*, Wrocław 1969, p. 13; A. Brożek, *Wysiedlenia Polaków na Górnym Śląsku przez Bismarcka*, Katowice 1963, p. 21.

The emigrants from the eastern Prussia provinces in majority headed North America (in the 1860's, as far as Opole governmental district is concerned, they constituted 51.3% of emigrants), other parts of the Reich (from the 1860's to Berlin and from the subsequent decade to the Ruhr Valley; in 1907 there were 700,000 Silesian citizens living in the Empire outside Silesia), and also Russia⁴. Complementing this emigration landscape, as a result of Prussian deportations held in the years 1885–1887, there were 30,000 Poles, who had come from the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia, displaced from Germany, including 6,500 of those staying in Upper Silesia⁵.

For people who planned to move out permanently from Silesia it was particularly attractive when they had a perspective of land which they were promised to receive for their own on the spot – that is why the United States were so popular – there was information according to which it was possible to acquire a parcel of land in exchange for a small registration fee and that was really tempting⁶. In this context, the act announced by the authorities of the Principality of Bulgaria on 12 June (31 May according to the old style) 1880 on the colonisation of uninhabited lands must also be regarded as attractive for people who wanted to change their place of living permanently but did not want to resign from farming. As part of the programme, Bulgarians from abroad were to receive land free of charge – one family was to be given 30–60 *dönüm*⁷ of land for crops and the same area of pastures, which after ten years of use were to become their property. A colonist was granted a right to log trees to build a house and to prepare agricultural tools without any additional charges. Agricultural Banks were to open a special fund of low interest loans for immigrants. This act also provided for tax exemption for the period from one to three years and customs fee exemption for property they brought with themselves. Each colonist, pursuant to law, was granted a Bulgarian citizenship⁸. As a result, in the first half of the year in which the act was binding, the Principality attracted 418 families of migrants from Romania, 52 from Russia and 22 from Austria-Hungary. Those were primarily Bulgarians who in the period of the Ottoman reigns had created communities in those countries and encouraged by the act, they decided to return to the land of their ancestors. Migrations were not limited to 1880 – 142 families left Hungary in the subsequent three years, heading for

⁴ D. Przaszłowicz, K. Makowski, A. Zięba, *Mechanizmy zamorskich migracji łańcuchowych w XIX wieku: Polacy, Niemcy, Żydzi, Rusini. Zarys problemu*, Kraków 2004, pp. 63–69; M. Czaplinski, E. Kaszuba, G. Waś, R. Żerelik, *Historia Śląska*, Wrocław 2002, pp. 180–184, 197–200.

⁵ Vide A. Brożek, *Wysiedlenia Polaków...*, p. 9; A. Galos, *Rugi pruskie na Górnym Śląsku (1885–1890)*, “Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka” 1954, vol. IX, p. 94. Furthermore, the migrations in Silesia was also internal. People from rural areas often moved to towns where they became labourers and, as a result, a percentage of people making a living on agriculture was decreasing – although number of rural population was higher than city dwellers in the 1890's, these proportions were changed in the subsequent decade (in 1907, as much as 60% of Silesia inhabitants made a living on work outside the farming sector). M. Czaplinski, E. Kaszuba, G. Waś, R. Żerelik, *Historia Śląska...*, p. 310. *Historia Górnego Śląska. Polityka, gospodarka i kultura europejskiego regionu*, J. Bahlcke, D. Gawrecki, R. Kaczmarek (ed.), Gliwice 2011, p. 327.

⁶ A. Stocka, *Osadnicy i farmerzy. Amerykański Far West w świetle prasy warszawskiej II połowy XIX w.*, “Białostockie Teki Historyczne” 2012, vol. X, p. 139.

⁷ 1 *dönüm* = 919.3 m², in this case, this is from 275 to 550 ares. It also appeared in the forms “dunum”, “dulum”, or – as we will see in the cited sources – “dulan” and “dulmen”.

⁸ Закон за населяване на не населените земи в България (31 май 1880), in: *История на българите 1878–1944 в документи*, т. 1: 1878–1912, ч. 1: Възстановяване и развитие на българската държава, ред. В. Георгиев, С. Трифонов, София 1994, p. 418.

north Bulgaria⁹. Bulgarian Catholics from Banat, who settled in Latin Christian communities in Bulgaria (the so-called Paulicians), stood out among them¹⁰. In the northern part of the country there was a Catholic Nicopolitan bishopric with its seat in Ruse (Ruschuk), which in 1881 was inhabited by 3,600 Paulicians. They lived in the areas of Svishtov: Belene (1,450, 40.28% of the population of the village), Oresh (767, 21.3%), Tranchovitsa (749, 20.81%), and Lazhene (now: Malchika, 634, 17.61%). Missionary activity in the area was coordinated by the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ (Passionists)¹¹.

The largest of the northern Bulgarian Catholic communities, Belene, was visited in 1878 by a Passionist priest from Rokitnica (now a district of Zabrze), Grzegorz Piegza, who witnessed an intensive influx of Banat Catholics into his parish¹². The clergyman assumed that his countrymen could also benefit from the settlement programme, and he wrote to the members of his family remaining in Silesia about this¹³. Nevertheless, a key element was missing in those letters – according to the article one of the Act of 1880, only Bulgarians from abroad could be included in the settlement programme. The news that Bulgaria was accepting everyone spread through Koźle county and was met with interest of the inhabitants of Lower Silesia villages, where, in January and February 1882, the lists of people interested in moving to the Balkans began to be prepared.

⁹ K. Popok, B. Rusin, *Uchodźcy, czyli goście Boga. Studia z dziejów migracji bałkańskich w XIX wieku – przyrądek Bułgarii i Serbii*, Kraków 2022, pp. 358–359; Б. Нягулов, *Банатските българи. Историята на една малцинствена общност във времето на националните държави*, София 1999, pp. 87–90; Cf. K. Popok, *Uwagi na temat procesów migracyjnych wśród bułgarskich katolików w XIX wieku*, in: *Europa Środkowa, Bałkany i Polacy. Studia ofiarowane Profesorowi Antoniemu Cemarowiczowi*, J. Pezda, S. Pijaj (ed.), Kraków 2017, pp. 309–318.

¹⁰ Originally, the Paulicians were the members of a dualistic-gnostic religious sect that emerged in the 7th century in Armenia. They appeared in the area of Thrace in the 8th century as a result of resettlements organised by the Byzantine authorities, and their mass influx into Bulgarian lands took place over the next two centuries. Paulitianism was one of the main factors contributing to the development of the Bogomil heresy in the eastern Balkans in the second half of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th century, and these terms were treated interchangeably in relation to both sects until the 15th century. The Bogomils threatened the Bulgarian Orthodox Church until the 15th century; nevertheless, as the time passed, the militant heretics began to soften and make their lifestyle more similar to the remaining population of Bulgaria, against whom – notwithstanding these transformations – they kept isolating themselves. This fact was used by the Catholic Church, which, in the age of the Counter-Reformation, intensified its missionary activity not only in the areas of the “new heresies” of Protestantism, but also among the “old schismatics”. This activity was successful – in the 17th century, the Catholic community in Bulgaria was consolidated. Vide M. Walczak-Mikołajczakowa, *Piśmiennictwo katolickie w Bułgarii. Język utworów II połowy XVIII wieku*, Poznań 2004, pp. 11–21; K. Stantchev, *I francescani e il cattolicesimo in Bulgaria fino al secolo XIX*, in: *I francescani nella storia dei popoli balcanici*, V. Nosilia, M. Scarpa (ed.), Genoa 2011, pp. 201–267.

¹¹ С. Елдърров, *Католиците в България (1878–1898). Историческо изследване*, София 2002, p. 15; Cf. P. Багашки, *Българската Православна Църква и римокатолически мисии в България (1860 – 30-те години на XX век)*, Шумен 2007. About the Passionists’ activity in northern Bulgaria, see K. Popok, *Misja pasjonistów wśród paulicjan północnych do 1878 roku*, “Studenckie Zeszyty Naukowe IFS UJ” 2014, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 89–106.

¹² Grzegorz Piegza was born in 1851, and after being ordained a priest in 1878, he was sent to northern Bulgaria as a missionary. He worked there for almost his entire life, among others as parish priest in Dragomir, a settlement founded by Banat Catholics in the 1880’s. In 1915–1922, he stayed in monastery in Ruse, in 1923, as a result of his loss of sight, he moved to the General House of the Passionists in Rome and then to Przasnysz. J. Mandziuk, *Śląscy misjonarze na misjach zagranicznych w czasach nowożytnych*, “Saeculum Christianum: pismo historyczno-społeczne” 2008, vol. XV, no. 2, pp. 31–32; H. Wojtyńska, *Ślązacy jako misjonarze-pasjoniści w południowej Rumunii i północnej Bułgarii 1865–1923*, “Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne Śląska Opolskiego” 1999, vol. XIX, pp. 178–179.

¹³ Централен държавен архив (ЦДА) ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 57 л. 58–59.

Table 2: People from Koźle county who declared their willingness to settle in Bulgaria in January and February 1882

Place	First and last name	Profession	Comments
Wronin	Karl Skiba	cotter, cooper	
	Adam Orlik	minion, bricklayer	
	Julius Siekiera	farmworker, bricklayer	
	Johann Flaszner	farmworker, brickmaker	
	Maksim Fleszer	farmworker, bandsman	
	Leopold Fleszer	farmworker, bricklayer	
	Frane Orlik	minion, bricklayer	
	Anton Sikora	farmworkerr, farmer	former prisoner
Przewóz (Przewos)	Gregor Prokscha		
	Jacent Wycisk		
	Anton Žemelka		
	Johann Prokscha		
	Franz Žemelka		
	Konrad Niklas		
Niesnaszyn (Niesnaschin)	Jan Ignacy	farmworker	With his family: wife, Katarzyna and children – Józef, Albertin and Franc
	Franc Piechulek	farmworker	With his family: wife, Tekla and children – Johann, Ludwik, Józef and Franc
	Berhard Niwka	farmworker	With his family: wife, Anastazja and children – Jan, Alois, Paulina and Filipina
Naczysławki (Klein Nimsdorf)	Annastazijus Wołek	no data	
Zakrzów (Sakrau)	Wincęt Danyz	cotter	
	Antton Karkosz	cotter	punishment of imprisonment for 8 days
	Juzeph Kochon	cotter	

Table 2: cont.

Szczyty (Tscheidt, currently in Głubczyce county)	France Pyrkocz	crofter	
	Lepolt Klauza	cotter	
	Walętin Papalla	farmworker	
	Jozepch Szatka	farmworker	
	Karl Paletta	farmworker	
	Franc Bęk	farmworker	
Grzędzin (Grzendzin)	Johann Berger	farmworker	
	Theodor Dambor	farmworker	
	Carl Malejka	farmworker	
	Ignatz Florka	farmworker	
	Carl Toško	farmworker	
	August Joryeknez	miller	
	Franz Joško	cotter	
	Walętin Lohubetz	cotter	
	Franz Lepiorz	cotter	
	Jozeph Lepiorz	cotter	
	Johann Prokseha	cotter	
	Johann Smolka	tailor	
	Paul Kiebiusa	cotter	listed in a criminal record
Roszowicki Las (Roschowitzwald)	Paul Lepiorz	farmworker (sower)	
	Johann Bochynek	cotter	
	Valentin Progscha	farmworker	
	Joseph Kostka	farmworker (sower)	
	Franz Morawin	farmworker	
	Vincijus Smolosz	cotter	
	August Smolosz	carpenter	
	Johann Wylierzich	miller	
	Anton Mrachacz	farmworker (sower)	
	Franz Sigmund	minion, servant	listed in a criminal record (for shooting a hare)
Dzielawy (Dzielau)	Ludwig Leisner	cotter	
	Franz Bohenek	farmworker	
Krasowa (Krassowa, currently in Strzelce county)	Johann Kurka	cotter	
	Peter Welerzal	cotter	
	Ludwig Barteczko	farmworker	

These lists were prepared by the village administrators or village municipal authorities, who also certified the lack of listing in a criminal record and a suitable reputation (which – in the event of deviations – was noted individually next to the respective surnames)¹⁴. Apart from the censuses of those willing to apply, there were also individual applications¹⁵. It is worth focusing on the declarations emphasised in these applications which refer to the lack of compulsion to be entered into such lists¹⁶ – this may indicate that respective village communities may have attempted to eliminate unwanted members in this way. Some of the lists also underlined that prospective settlers were Catholic¹⁷. Despite the fact that only the Niesnaszyn list included information about the wives and children of a potential settler¹⁸, the texts of the petitions give reason to deem that also in other cases there were not bachelors only, but the heads of families¹⁹.

On the basis of the preserved censuses and petitions, an attempt can be made to estimate the number of settlers declaring their willingness to emigrate from Koźle county to northern Bulgaria²⁰. The value presented in Table 2 should be accompanied by information from the petitions, which include only the number of prospective emigrants, without indicating specific surnames. A petition from Niesnaszyn of January 1882, which was signed by three families, and a letter from February prepared by sixty families from Polska Cerkiew and Niesnaszyn (they were mainly farmers, but also single bricklayers and carpenters) are kept in the analysed fond²¹. Thus, a total of 116 families applied to the Svishtov district in January and February 1882. The last preserved petition, from August, addressed to the Ministry of Finance in Sofia, mentions that 150 families in Upper Silesia expressed such a willingness in spring of that year – this may indicate that another 34 families applied after winter²². This data may be inaccurate, as the materials also suggest that there may have been more prospective settlers²³ – so these are indicative values.

Four petitions from Upper Silesia from 1882 are preserved in the investigated fond of the Ministry of Finance of the Central State Archive in Sofia: two in Polish from January (one from Wronin and the other from Grzędzin), one written in Polish and German, from February (from the inhabitants of Niesnaszki and Polska Cerkiew) and the last one in Polish, from August (from Sławikowo).

As we read in a petition prepared by the inhabitants of Wronin dated 28 January 1882:

We, the undersigned Upper Silesians, of Slavic-Polish lineage, of Roman Catholic religion, under Prussian rule, have learnt from Father Grzegorz Piegza of Belene near Svishtov in Bul-

¹⁴ Ibidem, л. 60, 62, 65–68, 70.

¹⁵ Ibidem, л. 63, 68.

¹⁶ Ibidem, л. 61.

¹⁷ Ibidem, л. 61.

¹⁸ Ibidem, л. 62.

¹⁹ Ibidem, л. 58–59.

²⁰ Since the permission to accept a settler was issued by the Ministry of Finance, all applications must have gone from the district governors to Sofia – so it can be considered that the fond contains all the preserved letters and petitions addressed to Svishtov at that time. One petition mentions lists sent which were not found in the fond, but from the context it appears that they did not ultimately reach the addressee. Cf. Ibidem, л. 71–72.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Ibidem, л. 206a–206b.

²³ Ibidem, л. 58–59, 71–72.

garia, coming from our vicinity, through a letter written to his parents, in which he describes [...] the Bulgarian country and its small population and encourages the parents of others to sell their small estates and move to Bulgaria, that there they can have a better life than here. He also describes that the Bulgarian government will give each incoming family 30 to 60 *dulans* [i.e. *dönüm*] of land, also meadows and timber for making a building for free, that is, free of charge, and will make everyone free of tax and military service for three years, and after ten years will give the freedom to sell this land. For this reason there have been several [eight²⁴] volunteers from our village and from other municipalities who would like to move [...] to Bulgaria under these mentioned conditions.

I only ask complaisantly the honourable landrat [i.e. governor] to kindly inform us whether this is the case and whether the unmarried will be accepted and receive the same as the married ones, and whether we would have freedom of religion. We would also appreciate knowing how much one *dulan* is in Prussian or Austrian terms. We would also ask you to kindly let us know how many families could arrive there, when they could set off and whether they would build their houses in separate villages, that is among the local inhabitants²⁵.

The petition reflects the Bulgarian government's offer to the settlers quite accurately – only minor mistakes can be observed: the exact period of tax exemption is not correct (authorities in Sofia offered a relief in this regard not for a period of three years, but from one to three years), and there are no provisions for exemption from military service in the act of 1880 (this was introduced later by an amendment to the act in 1891²⁶). As it has been underlined, the question related to the issue of the settlers' marital status may indicate that, although the information about having wives and children was only in the list prepared in Niesnaszyn²⁷, not only bachelors were willing to settle in Bulgaria, however, this was not recorded at the application stage. It is also worth noting that emphasis was put on religious freedom and the question of settling among the locals – prospective settlers wanted guarantees to remain Catholic and protection against assimilation into the local Orthodox culture. The lack of familiarity with the term of *dönüm* is significant, yet it should not be surprising as this measurement unit was used only within the Ottoman Empire and the states that were

²⁴ ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 57 л. 62.

²⁵ “My, niżej podpisani Górnoślązacy, rodu słowiańsko-polskiego, religii rzymsko-katolickiej, pod panowaniem pruskim, dowiedzieliśmy się od księdza Grzegorza Piegy z Belene przy Swisztowie w Bułgarii, pochodzącego z naszej okolicy przez list pisany do swoich rodziców, w którym opisuje [...] kraj bułgarski i jego małą ludność i zachęca rodziców innych, żeby sprzedali swe małe posiadłości i tam do Bułgarii się przenieśli, że tam lżej życie prowadzić mogą aniżeli u nas. Opisuje też, że rząd bułgarski dzieli każdej rodzinie przybywającej 30 do 60 *dulanów* roli, także i łąki i drzewo do budynku za darmo, czyli bezpłatnie, i uczyni na trzy lata każdego wolnym od podatku i od służby wojskowej, a po dziesięciu latach da wolność do sprzedania tego gruntu. Z tego powodu znalazło się kilka ochotników z naszej wioski [tj. ośmiu] i z innych gmin, którzy pod tymi wymienionymi warunkami chcieliby się przenieść [...] do Bułgarii. Tylko proszę uniżenie wielmożnego landrata o łaskawe uwiadomienie, czy tak się ta rzecz znajduje i czy tak też nieznaci będą przyjęci i otrzymają tak jak ci żonaci i czy byśmy mieli wolność religii. Radzi byśmy też wiedzieli, ile jeden *dulan* na pruską lub austriacką miarę znaczy. Prosimy też o łaskawe uwiadomienie, ile rodzin by tam mogło przybyć, kiedy by się w podróż mogli puścić i czy się budować będą w osobnych wioskach, czyli pomiędzy tamtejszymi mieszkańcami?”. Ibidem, л. 58–59. In conformity with contemporary standards for editing historical sources, the texts cited below have been upgraded to modern grammar. J. Tandecki, K. Kopiński, *Edytorstwo źródeł historycznych*, Warszawa 2014, p. 206.

²⁶ *Разписка в Народното събрание по изменение на чл. 8 от Закона за населяване на ненаселените земи в България, София 12.12.1891*, in: *Миграционни движения на българите ...*, pp. 125–128.

²⁷ ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 57 л. 62.

created afterwards on its area. Nevertheless, the determination of the peasants who were interested in moving to distant Bulgaria notwithstanding the size of area they were to receive is worth noting.

A slightly different tone was noticeable in the petition prepared on 30 January by Grzędzin inhabitants:

All of us, who have gathered here, are good and faithful Catholics. [...] we have come here and humbly beseech the Most Gracious and Merciful Gentlemen, the Landrat and the Minister, we, who have heard the good news from Bulgaria from Chaplain Grzegorz Piegza of Belene, the town of Svishtov, that in Bulgaria [...] the Bulgarian Regency [i.e. the district] has a lot of land and few people. Here, in Prussia, there are many people and little land, and we, as good Poles and good Catholics and Silesians, would also like to receive these conditions and this kindness, and to become faithful subjects, your brothers, and to be subjects of your Most Gracious State; we rejoice that our hearts may blossom in Bulgaria like one new flower [...]. We earnestly request the Most Gracious and Merciful Ministry and the Lord Landrat to accept us as their patriots, and if they accept us out of their kindness [...], to let inform us when they will grant us this kindness and at what time we can fulfil it.

We wish the Honourable Principality in Bulgaria that it may grow and reign in peace and happiness, and that it may bloom like a beautiful flower in the garden among its subjects. We are also endeavouring [to find out] at what time we could get there. Because everyone here is a labourer who has to go out into the world to find work; so if it is possible for us to get a message from the Noble Lords as soon as possible, we will join in with the landrat²⁸.

The petition is much more general than the one from Wronin – it was the expression of willingness to move to Bulgaria and a request for settlement details. The previous letter already drew attention to the problem of the lack of land and overpopulation – similar aspects also appear in this letter, which are emphasised more clearly in passages concerning the problem of mass labour emigration from Upper Silesia. The elaboration of this issue is seen in another petition, drawn-up on 26 February by the inhabitants of Niesnaszki and Polska Cerkiew:

As we have learnt from our countryman, Father Grzegorz Piegza of Belene, hard-working, sober and calm foreigners, useful people, are expected to arrive in Bulgaria.

We, the undersigned, from 60 families, and many more, are planning to go to Bulgaria from Prussia, and we have already sent out 60 certificates on 10 February this year. And we kindly

²⁸ “My wszyscy, którzy się tutaj zebrałiśmy, jesteśmy dobrzy i wierni katolicy. [...] zgłaszamy się i prosimy z pokorą Wielmożnych i Miłościwych Panów, Pana Landrata i Ministra, my, którzy nowinę dobrą słyszeli z Bułgarii od księdza kapelana Grzegorza Piegzy z Belene, miasto Swisztow, że w Bułgarii [...] Bułgarski Regerunek ma wiele ziemi, a mało ludzi. Wszakże u nas, w Prusach jest wiele ludzi, a mało ziemi, także też jak to dobrzy Polacy i dobrzy katolicy i Ślązacy radzi byśmy też te warunki i tę dobroć dostąpić i wiernymi poddanymi się stać, waszmi braćmi stać się i poddanymi być Najmilszego Państwa; radujemy się, żeby nasze serca w Bułgarii zakwitnęły jak to jeden nowy kwiat [...]. Upraszamy serdecznie Wielmożne i Miłościwe Ministerstwo i Pana Landrata, żeby i nas za swoich patriotów przyjąć raczyli, a jeżeli by nas ze swojej łaskawości przyjęli [...], żeby nam też wiadomość dali, kiedy by nam tę dobroć udzielili i w którym czasie byśmy to mogli wypełnić. Winszujemy Księstwu Jaśnie Wielmożnemu w Bułgarii, żeby w pokoju i szczęściu rosło i panowało i żeby rozkwitało jak śliczny kwiat w ogrodzie między swoimi poddanymi. Jako my też staramy [się dowiedzieć], w którym czasie byśmy się tam dostać mogli. Bo każdy u nas jest robotnikiem, który musi za robotą w świat wyjeżdżać; tak jeżeli to można dostąpić, żebyśmy dostali jak najprędzej wiadomość od Wielmożnych Panów, tak się podłączamy z panem landratem”. Ibidem, n. 69.

inform you that if these certificates are considered sufficient [appropriate], or if they are to be prepared in a different way, we will also send back the other certificates [of retention]²⁹.

We are all of Catholic faith, only Silesian-Polish speaking, farmers, also most of us are bricklayers and carpenters.

Since we were burdened here with high taxes and trespases, we have been called to work in Poland from year to year in order to support our families and our small estates.

Being aware that only the rule of law and decent families can maintain the country in which they live, we have not neglected these two virtues since our youth, and by practising our faith in Bulgaria we will never give cause for any concern; on the contrary, we will always strive to respect and uphold the laws of the country, and by our behaviour we will win the friendship of Bulgarians.

[...] We ask you kindly to let us know whether we, with our diligence and good behaviour, can be trusted in Bulgaria, whether we and our families will have to buy a house and land, and if so, at what price we can buy it, or residential buildings already constructed or yet to be constructed, and finally, whether we will be accepted by the Bulgarian governmental district as their subjects, and whether we can be interceded for or trusted under the protection of the laws there.

We honour our unlimited love and sincerity towards the new Homeland and its Enlightened Regent, and we declare our promise by our constant obedience and sincerity in fulfilling our duties towards the country, its Regent and friendly people³⁰.

This letter provides us with additional information about the motivation for the departure to Bulgaria: high taxes and estates insufficient to support their families forced this population into seasonal economic migration to the Kingdom of Poland, which, as indicated earlier, was, apart from North America and other parts of the Reich, a popular destination for disadvantaged peasants. As in the case of the inhabitants of Grzędzin, the authors of the petition from Niesnaszki and Polska Cerkiew knew little about the settlement programme implemented in Bulgaria – hence the questions concerning the fee for land received on arrival, the issue of accommodation or granting Bulgarian citizenship. These matters were clearly regulated by the Act of 1880.

²⁹ These declarations are not included in the examined archive fond.

³⁰ “Jakośmy się przez naszego ziomka, księdza Grzegorza Piegzy z Belene dowiedzieli, mają przybyć do Bułgarii pracowici, trzeźwi i spokojni cudzoziemcy, pożyteczni ludzie. My podpisani, z 60 rodzin się składający, i także też jeszcze i więcej innych, jesteśmy umyśleni z Prus do Bułgarii wyruszyć, a jużesmy 10 lutego b.r. 60 wyświadczeń odesłali i prosimy uniżenie Was łaskawie uwiadomić, jeżeli te wyświadczenia za dosyć [odpowiednie] uznane będą, albo jeżeli takowe inaczej sporządzone być mają, za czym też jeszcze i te drugie wyświadczenia zachowalności [tj. dotyczące zachowania] odesłane zostaną. Myśmy są wszyscy katolickiej wiary, tylko śląsko-polskiej mowy, rolnicy, także większą częścią murarzy i cieśle. Ponieważ tu wysokimi podatkami i daninami obciążeni, byliśmy aż dotąd przyniewoleni, od roku do roku na robotę do Polski chodzili, żebyśmy nasze familie i nasze małe posiadłości utrzymać mogli. Dobrze wiedząc, że tylko praworzędność i porządne familie kraj, w którym mieszkają, utrzymać mogą, od naszej młodości tych dwóch cnót nie zaniedbywaliśmy, a naszym praktykowaniem wiary w Bułgarii nigdy powodu do niepokoju nie damy, naprzeciw temu zawsze usiłować będziemy prawa krajowe, szanować i wypatrywać, a przez nasze zachowanie przyjaźni Bułgarów [będziemy] nabywać. [...] prosimy uniżenie nam łaskawie uwiadomienie dać, czy my przy naszej pilności i dobrym zachowaniu ufać możemy w Bułgarii, czy my i nasze familie będziemy musieli kupić dom i rolę, a jeżeli tak, to w jakiej cenie nabyć możemy, czy też mieszkalne budynki już zgotowanego, czy dopiero wybudowanego być muszą, a wreszcie, czy od bułgarskiej rejencji [okręgu] za tamtejszych poddanych przyjętymi będziemy, a pod opieką tamtejszych praw wstawiony bądź ufność mieć możemy. Nieograniczoną miłość i szczerłość naprzeciw nowej Ojczyzny i jej Oświeconego Regenta zaszczyt wyrażamy, a tę to naszą obietnicę przez ciągłą posłuszność i szczerłość wypełnienia naszych powinności naprzeciw kraju, jego Regenta i przyjacielski lud oświadczamy”.

ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а е. 57 л. 71–72.

After receiving these petitions, the district head of Svishtov, Todor Dzhebarov, in March (February) 1882, addressed a question to the Bulgarian Ministry of Finance concerning how to answer letters addressed from “some Poles from Silesia”, at the same time informing that Grzegorz Piegza came to the local authorities to consult about bringing in settlers under the law of 1880. The answer from the authorities in Sofia was unequivocal and referred to the basic principle of the settlement programme: “Bulgaria does not accept anyone except Bulgarians”³¹. As a consequence, requests from Upper Silesia were ignored and stopped being received by Svishtov district authorities – the last of them was received by the Bulgarian Ministry of Finance in August 1882. It was drawn-up by the inhabitants of Sławikowo (Bergkirch, currently in Racibórz county):

We found out from the letters of Father Grzegorz Piegza, who resides in Belene [...] in Bulgaria, that, at the request of the famous Bulgarian Ministry, he would accept people as residents; they would gather as one village and each family would be given 30 to 60 dulmen [*dōnūm*] of land, as well as some timber for the construction of houses, and 10 years’ worth of money for sowing the land, for cattle, and to pay workers for the construction of buildings. Nearly 150 families wanted to go there right in the summer or spring, and that is because they only want people who are good Catholics, hard-working and sober; the famous ministry demanded certificates and they all sent back their certificates, and our two certificates of the undersigned are also sent back there.

Nevertheless, as soon as Father Grzegorz Piegza sent a letter writing that they would not get that field free of charge, but had to pay 5 levs, i.e. 15 marks for one dulmen, people lost their willingness to go there, because most of the people who wanted to go there were poor, owned nothing or very little. So they said that if we had farms in Bulgaria and [if we] took on a lot of debt, then we would have to suffer as much poverty as we do here; we would have to travel there, and there were a lot of people among them who had never been to the world before and were afraid to go that far.

But here are 6 families of decent people, Poles, hard-working Catholics, not drunkards, each owning from 300 to 900 marks, who necessarily want to get there [...], despite the fact that one dulmen of land costs 15 marks. Thus we, the 6 families undersigned, bow as low as we can and humbly request the Honourable Minister to be so kind as to grant us favours in [Belene] between Catholics [the underlining of the petition’s author] and want to sell the land to us; we do not have enough money to be able to pay for the land right away, but we humbly ask the Honourable Minister to wait for 5 or 6 years; by then we would be able to borrow the money and pay; only that we would get trees to build houses, and the rest we would have to pay for, but not right away. As for cattle to buy, grain to sow, equipment to farm and to feed from spring to harvest, we would have our money.

We bow as low as we can and ask the most humbly the Honourable Bulgarian Minister to write us back in a short time how many dulmen of land for six families they would sell us or how many marks of our money for one dulmen they would want, and if they want to get again [certificates], we will send them back as soon as we get the message.

If 6 families gathered there and we settled down well, then the whole village or even more from Silesia would be attracted there, as there are many of us here, but we earn little and have to live poorly.

We bow as low as we can and humbly ask the honourable Bulgarian Minister to accept our unimposing request and to be faithful and sincere submissive Bulgarian citizens³².

³¹ Ibidem, л. 57.

³² “Doszła nas wiadomość z listów księdza Grzegorza Piegzy, tam w Bułgarii zamieszkałego w Belene [...], że za prośbą sławnego Ministerstwa Bułgarskiego przyjmie ludzi za mieszkańców; byłiby się na jedną wieś ze-

We can learn from the petition under what circumstances the interest of Upper Silesia in the settlement in northern Bulgaria disappeared. The person responsible for all this confusion, Grzegorz Piegza, was said to have started to inform that land would be granted for a fee. The clergyman must have realised from his conversations with the local authorities, as mentioned by Dzhebarov in his report from March (February), that the Silesians were not subject to the Act of 1880 and if they were willing to move to the Balkans they would have to buy the land on their own, without any exemptions or support from the Bulgarian authorities. On top of that there was a long journey, which, for Silesian peasants not accustomed to large expeditions and unfamiliar with the world, was a discouraging factor. Since Sławikowo inhabitants were aware of the lack of response from the authorities in Sofia, the last of the petitions exposes their determination to move to Bulgaria and thus improve their lives. They expressed their willingness to pay for the granted land (in the form of 5–6 years' loan) and a declaration to bring their own money with them. The peasants were therefore not fully aware why their requests from the first half of the year remained unanswered – they were convinced that the problem for the Bulgarian authorities was the fear of bringing in “poor people” and “drunkards”³³, who were to be solely dependent on the state, rather than their nationality, which was crucial for the government in Sofia. Hence, the perspective of more settlers from Silesia, presented at the end of the petition, was a negative factor for the Bulgarians.

During a session of the Council of Ministers of the Principality of Bulgaria on 28 (16) August, the Minister of Finance, Grigor Nachovich, told the members of the government

brali i że dostanie każda familia 30 do 60 dulmenów [dönüm] pola, tak i po kawałku lasu drzewa na wybudowanie domów i na 10 lat pieniędzy pożyczac na obsiew roli, na bydło i dla wypłacenia robotnikom za budowanie budynków. Tak tam zaraz z lata, czy też z wiosny, chciało tam jechać blisko 150 familii, a dlatego, że tam tylko żądają ludzi dobrych katolików, pracowitych, dobrych robotników i nie pijaków; sławne ministerstwo żądało atestów i wszyscy odesłali swoje atesty, jak też i nasze dwa atesty niżej podpisanych są tam odesłane. Lecz jak tylko ksiądz Grzegorz Piegza przysłał list, że tam tego pola za darmo nie dostaną, tylko trzeba płacić 5 lewów, czyli 15 marek za jeden dulmen [dönüm], tak ludziom chęć odpała tam ciągnąć, bo tam najwięcej chcieli ciągnąć ludzi ubogich wcale nie albo niewiele posiadających. Tak sobie rzekli, że byśmy mieli w Bułgarii gospodarstwa i [byśmy] wzięli dużo długu, tobyśmy musieli tak biedę cierpieć jak ją i tu cierpimy; w podróż tam mamy jechać, a osobliwie było dużo takich ludzi między nimi, co jeszcze nigdy w świecie nie byli, to się i boją w tak daleką stronę puścić. Lecz nas tu jest 6 familii porządných ludzi, Polaków, katolików pracowitych, nie pijaków, każda od 300 do 900 marek posiadających, co się tam koniecznie dostać chce [...], choć i te 15 marek jeden dulmen roli kosztuje. Tak my, 6 familii niżej podpisani, kłaniamy się jak najniżej i prosimy jak najpokorniej Sławnego Państwa Ministra, żeby sławne Ministerstwo była tak łaskawa, ażeby nam łaski w [Belene] pomiędzy katolikami [podkreślenie autora petycji] roli sprzedać chcieli; pieniędzy nie posiadamy tyle, żebyśmy za rolę zaraz zapłacić mogli, tylko prosimy pokornie Sławnego Państwa Ministra, żeby albo do 5 albo do 6 lat nam czekać chcieli; do tego czasu byśmy się mogli zapomóc i zapłacić; tylko żebyśmy drzewa na wybudowanie domów dostali, na reszcie choćby i co zapłacić za nie trzeba, byle nie zaraz. Co się tyczy bydła kupić, zboża na obsiew, sprzętu do roli i do wyżywienia od wiosny do żniw to byśmy swoich pieniędzy mieli.

Kłaniamy się jak najniżej i prosimy jak najpokorniej Sławnego Państwa Ministra Bułgarskiego, żeby nam z ich łaski w krótkim czasie odpisali, jak wiele dulmenów roli dla sześciu familii by nam sprzedali albo jak wiele marek naszych pieniędzy za jeden dulmen by chcieli, a jak będą chcieli dostać znowu [zaświadczenia – K.P.], to ich odesłemy, jak dostaniemy wiadomość. Jak by nas tam 6 familii zebrało, a osiadłoby nam się dobrze, to później na całą wieś lub więcej ze Śląska tam by przyciągnęło, bo tu nas ludzi dużo, a małe zarobki i trzeba biednie żyć. Tak się kłaniamy jak najniżej i prosimy jak najpokorniej Szanownego Państwa Ministra Bułgarskiego, żebyśmy z naszą prośbą pokorną przyjęci zostali i chcemy być wiernymi i szczerymi poddanymi obywatelami bułgarskimi”. Ibidem, л. 206a–206b.

³³ That last element may also indicate the awareness of the scale of the problem of alcoholism in Upper Silesia. *Historia Górnośląska...*, p. 326.

that he had received a petition from five (although the petition referred to six) “Slavs from Prussian Silesia” who wished to settle in the Principality on the condition that they would be given 30 to 60 *dönüm* of land to own, which they would repay within a few years. Again, the Bulgarian position was unequivocal – the Settlement Act was to be directed exclusively to Bulgarians, hence this petition was deemed unfounded and not requiring any response³⁴. However, one should be aware that as long as the Silesians declared their readiness to buy the land on their own, without loan support from the authorities, the response could be positive.

The last episode related to the would-be settlement from Upper Silesia in Bulgaria in 1882 was a letter from October from the German consulate in Ruse to the district authorities there, asking for clarification on what terms the Prussian citizens were allowed to settle on the Bulgarian territory. An annotation by the Ruse district head in the margin of the letter expresses also a doubt as to whether the matter was related to the issue of Silesian petitions or the bringing of workers by German companies for the construction of railway lines within the territory of the Bulgarian state³⁵. Since the case was not followed up in the preserved archival fond, it may indicate that we were dealing with the second case³⁶. However, it cannot be ruled out that the letter was the result of requests for interference addressed to the German authorities by would-be Silesian settlers.

* * *

Although the petitions from Upper Silesia to the Bulgarian authorities in 1882 did not have any real effect, as they did not lead to any settlement, these materials do tell us a little about the reasons for the migrations, which by the end of the 19th century became significant in this region of Prussia. The documents highlighted the economic hardship of the peasants, emphasising the lack of land, high taxes and low income resulting from hired labour. The problems resulted from the increasing fragmentation of peasant ownership and the concentration of land in the hands of large landowners (reaching 60% across the Silesian province in the second half of the 19th century). There were also problems of poor soils, as well as natural disasters – Koźle county was regularly flooded by the Oder River. In fact, it is emphasised that agriculture in Upper Silesia was backward (as evidenced by the dominance of cereal cultivation and the small role of industrial crops) and could not compete with American and Russian products. The modernisation of this sector of the economy (manifested, among other things, by the use of phosphate fertilisers or mechanisation) was essentially limited to the manor farms³⁷. By the end of the century, crop failures in the region resulted in famine – between 1879 and 1880, more than 100,000 people in Silesia were

³⁴ ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 57 л. 205.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, л. 392

³⁶ About the development of a railway network in Bulgaria at the turn of the 19th and 20th century in cf. А. Джалева-Чонкова, Е. Костов, М. Филипова, В. Харизанова, *История на железниците в България*, София 1997, pp. 35–49.

³⁷ *Górny Śląsk i Zagłębie w dawnych opisach wiek XIX*, anthology, introduction and compilation A. Zieliński, Katowice 1984, pp. 220–225, 255; *Górny Śląsk przed stu laty. Jak o nim gazety owoczesne pisały*, anthology and introduction W. Janota, Katowice 1984, pp. 66–68; M. Lis, *Górny Śląsk. Zarys dziejów do I wojny światowej*, Opole 1986, p. 120; M. Czaplinski, E. Kaszuba, G. Wąs, R. Żerelik, *Historia Śląska...*, p. 300.

affected as a result of bad weather which destroyed the potato and cabbage crops³⁸. The petitions indicated economic reasons, but one should not forget the factors of discrimination against the Polish population living in Upper Silesia related to Germanisation³⁹. As a result, poorer peasants (the authors of the petitions were mostly farmworkers and cotters) did not see a future for themselves in Prussia, became involved in the national movement to a limited extent, and, faced with economic dependence on the Germans and the social isolation of the rich peasants, often decided on emigration⁴⁰. They were even ready to consider such exotic destinations as Bulgaria.

The petitions can also tell us a little about the identity of the inhabitants of Upper Silesia at the end of the 19th century. They describe themselves as “Upper Silesians, of Slavic-Polish origin, Roman Catholic religion, under Prussian rule”⁴¹, “good Poles and good Catholics and Silesians”⁴², “of Catholic faith, only Silesian-Polish speech, farmers”⁴³, which indicates three levels of identity of this population: local (Silesian or Upper Silesian), national (Polish) and religious (Catholic)⁴⁴. It is also worth noting that if citizenship-related categories appeared in these lists, Prussia, not Germany, was referred to, which was in line with the legal situation (the category of German citizenship was not introduced until 1913). Silesians were aware that they lived in Prussia and were subjects of the King of Prussia, which was a superior category for them over the German Reich and the German Emperor. Religious attachment was emphasised in the petitions – they wanted to settle among the Catholic communities operating in Bulgaria for fear of the perspective of living among the Orthodox population⁴⁵. This is a key aspect of these would-be events – without Grzegorz Piegza, who was active among the Paulicians, and the context of the activity of the Passionists’ mission in the Eastern Balkans, the situation presented would not have happened at all.

The analysed material constitutes also a source of information about the Bulgarian migration policy at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. It could appear that it was unambiguous and expressed by the answer of the Ministry of Finance in February 1882: “Bulgaria does not accept anyone except Bulgarians”. This was significant for the authorities in Sofia, since in that time one in four Bulgarians was a representative of a minority (primarily Turkish, but also Greek, Roma, Jewish, and Romanian)⁴⁶. The perspective of bringing in non-Bulgarian settlers was a contradiction to the idea of building a homogeneous nation state. Nevertheless, the reality was far more complex. In the introduction of this article, there is a mention about immigrants from Banat who lived in the Svishtov district at the beginning of the 20th century, which indicates that the representatives of other nationalities could also participate in the settlement programme. So what did the Silesians lack, and what did the Banat newcomers have? This is well illustrated by the case of the

³⁸ *Górny Śląsk i Zagłębie...*, pp. 215–217, 224; M. Czaplinski, E. Kaszuba, G. Waś, R. Żerelik, *Historia Śląska...*, p. 310; *Historia Górnego Śląska...*, p. 326.

³⁹ *Górny Śląsk i Zagłębie...*, pp. 192–193, 211–213; *Górny Śląsk przed stu laty. Jak o nim gazety owoczesne pisały...*, pp. 78–87; M. Pater, *Ruch polski...*, passim.

⁴⁰ M. Pater, *Ruch polski...*, p. 46.

⁴¹ ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 57 л. 58–59.

⁴² *Ibidem*, л. 69.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, л. 71–72.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Historia Górnego Śląska...*, pp. 57–72, 467–473.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Górny Śląsk i Zagłębie...*, pp. 193–199.

⁴⁶ К. Попов, *Стопанска България (София 1916)*, in: *История на българите...*, т. 1, ч. 1, p. 140–141.

influx of Russian Jews who settled in Southern Dobrudja at the beginning of the 20th century, with the open opposition of the Bulgarian government trying to block this phenomenon by various means, including the illegal cancellations of the land acquisition transactions. With sufficient money and support from the Russian consulate, the unwanted newcomers were able to settle permanently in Bulgaria⁴⁷. That was what the poor peasants of Upper Silesia lacked. Apart from capital and influence, the other option was to try to convince the authorities in Sofia that they were dealing with Bulgarians. This did not require knowledge of the Bulgarian language (we know of the cases of Romanian-speaking settlers from Wallachia claiming to be the descendants of Bulgarian migrants from the Ottoman period) and the Orthodox religion (as evidenced by the case of the settlement of Banat Bulgarians). Perhaps if the Silesians had not emphasised the Catholic religion so much in their petitions and claimed to be descendants of the victims of “500 years of Turkish yoke”, the decisions of the authorities in Sofia would have been different, as it would have given hope for their assimilation with the Bulgarian culture.

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⁴⁷ K. Popek, *Emigration of Russian Jews to Southern Dobrudja at the beginning of the 20th century*, “Bulgarian Historical Review”, no. 3–4 (2022), pp. 136–156.

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