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Introduction of Bilingualism and Dual Naming in the Czech Republic Using the Example of the Polish Minority

Wprowadzenie dwujęzyczności i dwujęzycznych nazw
miejscowości w Republice Czeskiej
na przykładzie mniejszości polskiej

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Abstract: The article presents the process of introducing European standards in the field of bilingualism and dual nomenclature. It also describes its impact on the mutual relations between Czechs and Poles in Zaolzie. The article discusses the legal regulations in this area in the Czech Republic and the activities of the Polish minority striving to put them into practice. The article does not avoid describing sensitive issues such as the destruction of bilingual signs with double names of places and streets, or the growing wave of aversion towards Poles. At the same time, the issue of the Polish minority's rights is presented from the viewpoint of the national majority.

Keywords: Zaolzie, Polish minority, bilingual naming, Polish-Czech relations

Streszczenie: Artykuł przedstawia proces wprowadzania europejskich standardów w zakresie dwujęzyczności i podwójnych nazw miejscowości. Opisuje również jego wpływ na wzajemne relacje między Czechami i Polakami na Zaolziu. Omawia regulacje prawne w tym zakresie w Republice Czeskiej oraz działania mniejszości polskiej dążącej do ich wdrożenia. Nie unika on opisu kwestii drażliwych, takich jak niszczenie dwujęzycznych tablic z podwójnymi nazwami miejscowości i ulic czy narastającej fali niechęci do Polaków. Jednocześnie kwestia praw mniejszości polskiej przedstawiona jest z perspektywy narodu większościowego.

Słowa kluczowe: Zaolzie, mniejszość polska, dwujęzyczne nazwy miejscowości, stosunki polsko-czeskie

Poles are a traditional national minority in the Czech Republic. The autochthonous Polish population in the Czech Republic lives predominantly in Zaolzie, a part of Těšín Silesia west of the Olše River inhabited by Poles, which became part of Czechoslovakia in 1920.

Today, this group numbers more than 30,000 people. Apart from Zaolzie, Poles live in smaller numbers in Prague, East Bohemia and Brno. The subject of our interest will be the Poles living in Zaolzie, which, like the eastern part of historical Těšín Silesia, has been a borderland area since ancient times. It was here that nations and cultures came into contact, so that the whole area of Těšín Silesia, including the future Zaolzie, gained a strong multilingual character. It is so in Zaolzie up to this day. In multilingual environments, language relations are a clear sign of everyday life; their correctness is an expression of respect for neighbors who live together in this area, but speak different languages. With the emergence of the language issue in modern times, the governments, regardless of their power and political systems, use language as an instrument of political struggle to extend and deepen their influence. Violations of linguistic correctness, changes of place names, mispronunciations of traditional names, or the removal of minority languages from the public sphere, may then be regarded not only as simple signs of disrespect, but also as destructive to the cultural landscape. Local names are permanent historical monuments reflecting the specificity of the landscape, its history, settlements, landforms, and the mentality of its inhabitants, and should therefore be protected on an equal basis with material objects. For this reason, the language issue in multilingual communities is not simply a political question. By combining political elements and strong emotions related to the deepest foundations of each individual's being, it can become a flashpoint, a source of never-ending misunderstandings. Inappropriate actions of one or more parties may cause considerable emotional and negative reactions in a multicultural society. Sometimes, even in the environment of high political culture and brotherly atmosphere, which undoubtedly exists between Poles and Czechs in Zaolzie, things happen that should not happen. The calm and peaceful coexistence of Poles and Czechs has been disturbed in the recent past by acts of nationalistic vandalism, harsh debates on internet forums, or unambiguous statements of local politicians in the press about their foreign-language neighbors caused by the introduction of bilingual signs and bilingualism. In this article, we would like to look at the process of introduction of European standards in the field of bilingualism and dual naming, and its impact on mutual relations between the Czechs and the Poles in Zaolzie.

The peaceful relations between Poland and the Czech Republic undoubtedly contributed to the regularisation of the situation of Poles in Zaolzie, but only to a certain extent. The democratic political system of the Czech Republic, which guarantees the rights of the Polish minority is crucial in this matter, whereas claims submitted by representatives of the Polish minority concern their application in practice. Therefore, we will follow our considerations on the introduction of bilingualism and dual naming in the Czech Republic in the context of the Polish minority in two ways. On the one hand, the subject of our interest will be legal regulations, and on the other, the activities of the minority aiming at the observance of the regulations in practice. Before we do that, it is necessary to emphasize that distinctive forms of bilingualism and double naming which existed in Czechoslovakia during the period between the wars¹ and communist times². We will not devote our attention to these issues, concentrating rather on the situation prevailing in the democratic Czech Republic since 1993 based on an analysis of printed source materials of state provenance, Polish organizations, articles in Polish and Czech local press and literature on the subject.

In 1989, after the triumph of the Velvet Revolution, the conditions shaping the social and political life in Czechoslovakia (the Czech Republic) changed. For national minorities many completely new opportunities of activity defined by new legal regulations opened up. First of all, the regulations defined in the *Constitution of the Czech Republic of 16 December 1992*³ (Ústavní zákon č. 1/1993 Sb. Ústava České republiky), together with the *Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms* (Ústavní zákon č. 2/1993 Sb. Listina základních práv a svobod) and the bilateral Polish-Czechoslovak Agreement *The Treaty between the Republic of Poland and the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic on Good Neighbourhood, Solidarity and Friendly Cooperation* concluded in Cracow on 6 October 1991⁴.

¹ A. Tóth, L. Novotný, M. Stehlik, *Národnostní menšiny v Československu. Od státu národního ke státu národnostnímu*, Praha 2012, p. 177-184, 259-287.

² R. Petráš, *Menšiny v komunistickém Československu*, Praha 2007, p. 31-32, 103-106, 167-173, 209-222, 303-305.

³ Polish language version of the *Constitution of the Czech Republic*: Konstytucja Republiki Czeskiej, libr.sejm.gov.pl/tek01/txt/konst/czechy-a.html (access date: 15.02.2025).

⁴ More on this: E. Pałka, J. Szymeczek, *Polityka narodowościowa Republiki Czeskiej*, [in:] *Europa Środkowa. Dekada transformacji. Republika Czeska*, ed. B.J. Albin, W. Baluk, Wrocław 2005, p. 181-203.

The Constitution of the Czech Republic does not contain direct, specific legal regulations on the situation of national minorities. However, Article 6 states that “Political decisions shall be based on the will of the majority expressed by free vote. The decisions of the majority shall take into account the protection of minorities”. “The Constitution of the Czech Republic refers to the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms”, which is a part of the constitutional order and which in Articles 24 and 25 specifies the rights of national minorities in more detail. The document is largely inspired by the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* from 1948, the *Covenants on Human Rights* from 1966 and the *European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* from 1950⁵. *The Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms* states in Article 24 that “No one shall be prejudiced by membership of any national or ethnic minority”⁶. What is more, Article 25 (1) states that “Citizens who form national or ethnic minorities shall be guaranteed comprehensive development, especially the right to develop their own culture together with other members of the minority, to disseminate and receive information in their mother tongue and to associate in national associations. Details are specified by the law”⁷.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms also guarantees minorities the right to education in their own language, to use their own language in official relations and the right to participate in decision-making concerning national and ethnic minorities (Article 25(2)). Article 3 of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms* notes that “Fundamental rights and freedoms are guaranteed to all without distinction as to sex, race, skin color, language, faith or religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, membership in a national or ethnic minority, property, birth or position” (Article 3(1)), and that “Everyone has the right to freely determine their nationality. Any influence on this decision, as well as any form of pressure aimed at nationalization, is prohibited” (Article 3(2))⁸.

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Polish language version of *Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms*: Konwencja o Ochronie Praw Człowieka i Podstawowych Wolności, chromeextension://efaidnbnmnnibpcajpcgclcfndmkaj/https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19930610284/O/D19930284.pdf (access date: 15.02.2025).

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Ibidem.

Within such a legislative framework, the political, cultural and social life of the Polish minority in Czechoslovakia took on a new dimension. It would be an exaggeration to say that the Polish minority had a direct impact on the creation of this legal framework. However, it is certain that even indirectly, the awareness of the existence of the Polish minority, its political activity, the existing Polish educational system, and the proper organizational structure were factors that the authorities took into account when creating the minority legal system. It was also a significant factor that the Polish minority supported political changes and actively participated in the process of political transformation and development of democratic structures of the republic.

The fundamental question for the Poles in Zaolzie turned out to be the issue of establishing a new representative of the Polish minority⁹. In practice, two concepts were developing side by side. Some of the activists believed that people with political experience should be chosen to represent the Polish minority in matters of its further development in democratic conditions and whose mandate for representation must be obtained through elections. In this way their mandate would be unquestionable and their legitimacy for representation would be confirmed by the election result. Only a politically experienced activist, according to the representatives of this option, could make the right decisions.

Another group of Poles from Zaolzie, most likely influenced by the political philosophy of Václav Havel and the “velvet euphoria”, believed that representation should be established outside political structures. Only a free activist, independent of any obligations to a party, could be a proper, legitimate representative of the Polish national group. In practice, therefore, the first group of activists tried to establish representation on the basis of a political party. In this way, the Polish section of the Political Coexistencia-Coexistence

⁹ Under socialist Czechoslovakia, the leading role of the Communist Party was also manifested in minority politics. The party was the main decision maker in minority affairs. For the purpose of better control over the minority, a single minority association called the Polish Cultural and Educational Association (PZKO) was created, which became the exponent of the party policy among Poles in Czechoslovakia. The PZKO also served as a platform for minority dialogue with the authorities. Bilingualism was a frequent topic of Polish demands. The monopoly of the party authorities made it possible to realize many of the demands in practice, sometimes against the will of the majority society. For more on the history of the Polish minority in communist Czechoslovakia see: K. Nowak, *Mniejszość polska w Czechosłowacji 1945-1989. Między nacjonalizmem a ideą internacjonalizmu*, Cieszyn 2012.

Movement was founded, which drew its strength from the size of the Hungarian minority in southern Slovakia. The Hungarians were eager to make a deal with the Poles from Zaolzie because in this way they could extend their regional political agenda to the entire republic and present their political movement as representing all national minorities in Czechoslovakia. Such a philosophy had a legitimate basis and was not at all the product of the exaggerated ambitions and wild fantasies of Polish and Hungarian nationalists. At its peak at the beginning of the 1990s, Coexistentia-Coexistence had almost two and a half thousand representatives in municipal deputies in southern Slovakia and Zaolzie¹⁰.

Representatives of Polish nationality from this party (Władysław Niedoba, Stanisław Gawlik) sat in the legislative bodies of the republic. However, after the division of Czechoslovakia and the forced separation of the Polish and Hungarian partners who now found themselves in two separate countries, this movement lost its influence on the Czech side, and its significance became marginal. This does not mean, however, that the movement ceased its activities. It exists to this day. The number of representatives in municipal deputies on behalf of this party is about 50 people. As far as bilingualism is concerned, the movement achieved its greatest success by demanding the introduction of bilingualism on the Czech railroad between Mosty u Jablunkova and Chotěbuz. Although the final result was the culmination of various efforts, it cannot be denied that the initiative came from the ranks of the activists of the aforementioned political movement. Another group of Polish activists, associated with the Polish Section of the Civic Forum, created another model for recruiting Polish minority representation – the nine-member Council of Poles. This was later transformed into the Congress of Poles, and the Council became the executive body of the Congress. It was a typical form in the 'velvet times' – representation that was not selected as a result of political rivalry, but as a manifestation of the Polish minority's participation in the structures of civil society. Outside the political structures, the minority elected its representatives in individual municipalities and Polish communities and organizations, and these representatives then elected the

¹⁰ L. Kopeček, *Coexistentia-Coexistence and political representation of the Polish minority*, [in:] *Etnické a regionální strany v ČR po roce 1989*, ed. M. Mareš, Brno 2003, p. 173-211.

representative body of the Congress of Poles – the Council of Poles, at the General Assembly of the Congress of Poles¹¹.

From the very beginning of its existence, the Congress of Poles in the Czech Republic, as a representative of the Polish minority, built its organizational structure and ideology on civic principles, i.e. on the foundations based on such values as democracy, tolerance, law, equality, freedom, brotherhood, respect for faith and tradition. The slogan of “solidarity” was of great importance at that time. It was not common in the history of Poles and Czechs that they stood so close to each other and showed such mutual empathy as during the political changes in Czechoslovakia. A clear sign of the new era after 1989 was the effort to change the position of the Polish minority so that within the new conditions it would not be a bone of contention, a problem between Prague and Warsaw, as it had been up to that point. Zaolzie was not intended to be a flashpoint that had ignited Czech-Polish political conflicts in the past. Rather, it should become a bridge between Poland and Czechoslovakia. Efforts were also made to influence the decision-making and opinion-forming process in Poland so that they did not treat Zaolzie as an embarrassing “stub” of the wrong policy of the pre-war Sanacja regime in Poland, but as a trustworthy partner in building constructive relations with the Czechs. A characteristic sign of the era was a willingness not to irritate and not to speak categorical truths on issues where the truth was disputed in debates lasting even several decades. This was not the best climate for unpopular postulates, such as those related to bilingualism.

Among the first provisions established at the First Congress of Poles in Czechoslovakia which took place after the political transformation on March 3, 1990 in Český Těšín, were resolutions¹² that suggested a new perception of the position of the Polish minority in the new democratic reality were adopted. The requirements were not of a demanding nature, but were formulated in a conciliatory spirit, fully accepting and supporting the new realities and looking to the future with hope. The minority groups realized that during the com-

¹¹ Also on behalf of this civic movement, representatives of the Polish minority Tadeusz Wantuła and Danuta Branna were elected to the highest legislative bodies of the republic. D. Chłup, “Smutek, tęsknota, blues...”. *Przyjaciele wspominają tadeusza Wantułę*, glos.live/Publicystyka/d/_smutek_tesknota_blues_przyjaciele_wspominaja_tadeusza_wantule/5 (access date: 16.05.2024).

¹² At this Congress, among other things, the first Polish Council was elected, which marked the beginning of the Congress of Poles in the Czech Republic. Cf. L. Drożdż, *Polacy na czeskim Śląsku po 1989 roku*, “Studia Śląskie” 2010, no 69, p. 135-146.

munist rule they had been removed from the field of vision of the Czech majority. The cultural activities of the minority were often limited to closed events taking place in the buildings of the Polish Association, churches or schools, and the Czechs did not participate in them. Polishness was experienced as a private phenomenon. In the public sphere, Poles from Zaolzie were treated as citizens of the Czechoslovak Republic of Polish origin. In the minds of many Czech communists, this was equivalent to the category of Czechs. The authorities considered the demands of the Polish minority within the framework of the internal national policy of the socialist state. The Zaolzie people were a national group of the Czechoslovak state, not representatives of the Polish nation. Spiritual ties with Poland were treated throughout the Ostrava region as “an important problem of ideological work”¹³. Even the Czechs, who were unfriendly to Poles, carefully concealed their negative attitude and did not make it public. Communist internationalism affected both Czechs and Poles in the same way. The Communist authorities' attitude toward the Poles was regarded by some local Czechs as a relic of the past regime that should not be continued in the new democratic reality. At the beginning of the 1990s, after the wave of “velvet euphoria” subsided and the local national councils were transformed into municipal offices, the old Czech-Polish inscriptions were removed and new ones, often only Czech, were introduced. The topic of bilingualism and dual naming was only present in the media thanks to various incidents, such as the one in Těrlicko, where the local mayor of Polish nationality tried to introduce dual naming to a greater extent than it was there before 1989¹⁴.

It was only the new pro-European political mood that encouraged Poles to raise their demands to the authorities for the protection of their minority language. In 1993, the Czech Republic, as a new independent state, became a member of the Council of Europe. In connection with its membership in this international organization

¹³ O. Káňa, *Změny v počestnosti a v postavení polské národnostní skupiny v ČSR po 2. světové válce a jejich obraz v postojích příslušníků této skupiny*, [in:] *Etnické procesy v ČSSR. Polské etnikum. Sborník referátů ze semináře, uspořádaného Ústavem pro etnografii a folkloristiku ČSAV v Praze dne 2. června 1988*, ed. A. Robek, K.D. Kadhubiec, A. Sulitka, Ostrava 1988, p. 79-85.

¹⁴ J. Szymeczek, *Realizacja praw polskiej mniejszości w Czechosłowacji na przykładzie dwujęzyczności i podwójnego nazewnictwa*, [in:] *Colloquium Opole 2007. Mniejszości narodowe i etniczne – edukacja i kultura*, ed. S. Senft, A. Trzecielińska-Polus, Opole 2008, p. 113-121.

that deals, among other things, with the protection of human rights, the Czech Republic became a signatory to several significant documents of international law. The most important of these documents are the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* and the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*. In accordance with Article 10 of the *Constitution of the Czech Republic*, they have priority over national laws. The ratification of the *Framework Convention* was a landmark moment in the process of shaping the protection of national minority rights in the Czech Republic after 1989. The *Framework Convention...* has been in force in the Czech Republic since 1 April 1998¹⁵. This became the impetus to start work on amending some laws and drafting a new *minority act* (*Act on the Rights of Members of National Minorities of 10 July 2001 – Zákon č. 273/2001 Sb. o právech příslušníků národnostních menšin a o změně některých zákonů*), which ended with the adoption of this act by the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic on 10 July 2001.

According to the *Minority Act*¹⁶, members of national minorities have the right to associate in associations of a national character, in political parties and political movements (Article 5), and belonging to a national minority cannot cause any harm to anyone (Article 4 (1)). Members of a national minority also have the right to use their name and surname in the language of the national minority (Article 7), and in the case of a minority that has traditionally and long-termly lived in the territory of the Czech Republic, the right to have the names of the towns in which they live, as well as their parts, streets, public buildings, public administration buildings and polling stations marked also in the language of the minority (Article 8 (1)). In addition, they have the right to use the language of the national minority in official contacts and in court proceedings (Article 9) and to use the minority language in electoral matters (Article 10). In addition, the Act confirms the right of members of national minorities to be educated in their own language in schools and kindergartens (Article 11), as well as the right to preserve and develop their own language, culture and traditions, whereas the State shall create condi-

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Zákon č. 273/2001 Sb. Zákon o právech příslušníků národnostních menšin a o změně některých zákonů, www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2001-273 (access date: 20.02.2025). More details on the act, see: J. Szymeczek, *Evropské standardy vzdělávání v oblasti práv národnostních menšin*, Ostrava 2011.

tions for these activities and support programmes and initiatives concerning theater, museums, galleries, libraries, documentary activities and other activities of members of national minorities (Article 12). It is also the duty of the state to provide support for minority press and television broadcasts (Article 13). The provision of the Act which defines the right of members of national minorities to participate actively in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, especially those concerning the national minority to which the person belongs, at the level of the municipality of the country and of the State as a whole, is of considerable importance (Article 6 (1)). As part of the implementation of the adopted provisions, the Government Council for National Minorities was established, which is an advisory and initiating body in matters concerning national minorities (Article 6 (2), (3)). It is formed by representatives of national minorities in at least half of its personal composition (Article 6 (4))¹⁷. *The Minority Act* is not a code of minority rights¹⁸, but it is fully in

¹⁷ J. Szymeczek, *Prawa mniejszości narodowych w Republice Czeskiej ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Polaków na Zaolziu*, [in:] *Mniejszości narodowe i prawodawstwo mniejszościowe w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej. Historia i współczesność*, ed. K. Nowak, J. Szymeczek, Český Těšín (Czeski Cieszyn) 2015, p. 151-168.

¹⁸ It summarizes only the basic rights of minorities and, in cases where a special law exists on the issue, refers to it. In relation to national minorities, the following special laws are involved: Act No. 561/2004. Coll. School Act, Art. 13 and Art. 14 sets out the right to education in the language of the national minority (Zákon č. 561/2004 Sb. školský zákon, <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2004-561>) (access date: 20.02.2025); Act no. 483/1991 Coll. on Czech Television, Art. 2 specifies that one of the tasks of television is to develop and maintain the identity of national and ethnic minorities (Zákon č.483/1991Sb. o České televizi, www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/1991-483), (access date: 20.02.2025); Act no. 484/1991 Coll. On Czech Radio, Article 2 specifies that one of the tasks of radio is to develop and maintain the identity of national and ethnic minorities (Zákon č. 484/1991 Sb. o Českém rozhlasu, <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/1991-484>) (access date: 20.02.2025); Act no. 89/2012 Coll. the Civil Code allows the establishment of national minority associations (Zákon č.89/2012 Sb. občanský zákoník, www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2012-89), (access date: 20.02.2025); Act no. 99/1963 Coll. Code of Civil Procedure, Article 18 includes the right to use the native language of a national minority before this court (Zákon č. 99/1963 Sb. občanský soudní řád, www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/1963-99) (access date: 20.02.2025); Act no. 141/1961 Coll. Code of Criminal Procedure Art. 2(14) establishes the right to use the native language of a national minority before court (Zákon č. 141/1961 Sb. o trestním řízení soudním, www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/1961-141) (access date: 20.02.2025); Act no. 182/1993 Coll. on the Constitutional Court, Article 33 provides the right to use the mother tongue of a national minority before this court (Zákon č. 182/1993 Sb. o ústavním soudu, www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/1993-182) (access date: 20.02.2025); Act no. 337/1992 Coll. on Tax and Fee Administration, Article 3 enables Czech citizens of other than Czech nationality to address the tax office in their own language (Zákon č. 337/1992 Sb. o správě daní a poplatků, <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/1992-337>) (access date: 20.02.2025); Act no. 128/2000 Coll. on municipalities, Article 29 (2) enables the use of the name of

line with European standards. In 2004, the Czech Republic joined the European Union which further influenced the application of demands on the protection of minorities or regional languages.

Contemporary Czech law is based on the wording of the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*¹⁹. In the Czech Republic, the *Charter* came into force on March 1, 2007²⁰. The Language Charter was adopted by the Czech Republic in a wording very favorable to the Polish minority²¹. From this point, from a legal point of view, nothing stood in the way of introducing bilingualism and double naming in Zaolzie according to the European standards. In spite of the generally friendly atmosphere, there were some disputes and friction. Sometimes the form chosen by the representatives of minorities to realize their rights raised doubts among the Czechs about the sense of bilingualism. The most passionate responses revolved around the use of the bilingual signs since they are the most expressive accent of the Polish minority's presence in Zaolzie. During the communist period they were not used, so the Czech majority had

the municipality, its parts, streets and public spaces and the names of buildings of state and local government bodies also in the language of a national minority and regulates the conditions under which a committee for national minorities may be established in municipalities (Zákon č.128/2000 Sb. o obcích, www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2000-128) (access date: 20.02.2025); Act no. 131/2000 Coll. on the capital city of Prague, Article 78 (2) sets out the conditions for establishing a committee for national minorities in the capital city of Prague (Zákon č. 131/2000 Sb. o hlavním městě Praze, <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2000-131>) (access date: 20.02.2025); Act no. 129/2000 Coll. on districts, Article 78 (2) sets out the conditions for establishing a committee for national minorities in districts (Zákon č. 129/2000 Sb. o krajích, <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2000-129>) (access date: 20.02.2025); Act no. 301/2000 Coll. on registry offices, name and surname Article 26 makes it possible to record the first and last name in the national minority language; Article 69 and Article 69a make it possible to record the surname of women without the ending „-ová“ in the national minority language (Zákon č. 301/2000 Sb. o matrikách, jménu a příjmení a o změně některých souvisejících zákonů, www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2000-301) (access date: 20.02.2025); Legal documents concerning the Polish minority in the Czech Republic have been published in print by J. Branna, *Polacy w Czechach, Wybór dokumentów prawnych dotyczących mniejszości narodowych*, Warszawa 2004.
¹⁹ Czech language version of the *Charter*: Evropská charta regionálních či menšinových jazyků, www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rnm/dokumenty/mezinarodni-dokumenty/charta_cz_1.pdf (access date: 20.02.2025).

²⁰ J. Szymeczek, *Realizacja praw...*, p. 120.

²¹ The Charter is a document of international law that consists of a preamble and four parts. Some parts apply in all countries, but others are 'movable' and their wording depends on the agreement between the minority and the state. In different countries, the Charter may have different wording. For more on the application of the language charter in the Czech Republic, see: J. Szymeczek, *Stosowanie Europejskiej karty języków regionalnych lub mniejszościowych w Republice Czeskiej*, [in:] *Polityka państw narodowych wobec języka na Górnym Śląsku w XIX i XX wieku*, M. Lis, Ł. Jarczak, L. Drożdż, Opole 2013, p. 61-68.

to accept their introduction (as one of the European standards) as an unpleasant novelty. This issue is regulated by the aforementioned Act No. 128/2000 on municipalities. Pursuant to Article 29 of this Act, it is possible to introduce the designation of the name of the municipality, its parts, streets and other public places and the designation of the buildings of state and local government bodies also in the language of the national minority. The law states that this can be done if, according to the last population census, more than 10% of Poles live in the municipality. Initially, the introduction of inscriptions was to be preceded by a petition signed by citizens of Polish nationality. However, this obligation was soon abandoned and the act was amended in such a way that double inscriptions (Czech-Polish) may be introduced in municipalities in which citizens of Polish nationality constitute more than 10% of the total population, but only on the condition that Polish organizations put forward such a motion themselves. At this point, the Committee for National Minorities commissions the municipal council to implement the motion. In practice, the applications in particular municipalities were most often submitted by representatives of local Polish Association (PZKO) or municipal representatives of the Polish Congress in the Czech Republic²².

The attitude of individual municipalities towards bilingualism depended on the particular arrangements in each municipality. Generally, it can be said that the process of introducing bilingual naming develops naturally. Where Poles have influence and are respected, or where they “tip the scales” in municipal politics, the introduction of bilingual signs proceeds without emotional debate, sometimes preceded by a matter-of-fact discussion. The differences in individual municipalities, which decided to introduce dual naming, lie in the scope of its application. For example, in Český Těšín and Jablunkov, entrance signs, public buildings and streets are marked bilingually. In Trinec, despite requests from the Polish minority, streets do not

²² Cf. J. Szymeczek, *Wojenki, Kongres i walka o polskość* (interview conducted by A. Drobik, D. Legierski), [in:] *Rozmowy o Śląsku Cieszyńskim*, ed. A. Drobik. Ustroń 2014, p. 235-247; K. Marcol, *Współczesne autoidentyfikacje mieszkańców Zaolzia*, „Studia Etnologiczne i Antropologiczne” 2015, T. 15, p. 240-250. It should be emphasized that the national activity of the Polish minority in the Czech Republic is an important factor in maintaining the cultural security of this community. E. Szyszlak, *Wyzwania bezpieczeństwa kulturowego mniejszości autochtonicznych i allochtonicznych*, [in:] *Bezpieczeństwo Kulturowe*, vol. I *Kwestie Teoretyczne i Wybrane Aspekty*, ed. E. Szyszlak, R. Wiśniewski, R. Zenderowski, Warszawa 2025, p. 295.

have bilingual names. In total, more than 20 out of 31 municipalities in the region of Zaolzie have introduced bilingual signs. Occasionally, the process of introducing bilingual signs was accompanied by a stormy, emotional public debate. The largest number of media appearances on the issue of bilingualism took place in Třinec. This is due to the fact that in Třinec there were two local Czech periodicals (“Horizont” and “Hutník”). In Jablunkov, Třinec, Těrlicko, Český Těšín, and Hnojník, acts of nationally motivated vandalism were also reported. Signs were sometimes destroyed, which was reported not only in the local press (“Głos Ludu”), but also in central Polish and Czech periodicals (“Lidové noviny”, “Mladá fronta plus”)²³. The president of Poland at that time, Lech Kaczyński²⁴, and the former Czech leader, Václav Klaus²⁵, also personally addressed the issue of the destruction of bilingual signs. Sometimes the forms of protest against bilingual inscriptions took on a bizarre character. In Český Těšín one of the opponents of bilingualism placed a Czech-Polish sign next to two additional ones, looking exactly like the original but with Slovak and German names. The city considered it a provocation and ordered the owner of the fence on which the signs (Czech-German and Czech-Slovak) were hung to remove them. The owner announced in the media that, in his opinion, he had not committed any wrongdoing and that he did not intend to remove the signs. He explained to the press that he “wanted to provoke a discussion about why only dry numbers in a law should determine which national minority has the right to bilingualism”²⁶. The boards are still hanging on the fence to this day.

A separate chapter of the Těšín battle for bilingualism is the matter of restoring the former name of the Olza river. The original name of the river Olza, despite the protests of scientific circles, was changed in 1961 by the provincial authorities to Olše (“Olsza”). Political considerations were at the root of this change. “Olsza” is

²³ Among many media reports were, among others, the following: L. Palata, *Ničení polských nápisů na Těšínsku – Potížemi v soužití Čechů s Poláky se zabývali i prezidenti. „Čeští politici, mlčí a to je zle“*, “Lidové noviny” 23.1.2010, p. 6. Cf. Ł. Grzesiczak, *Największe problemy polskiej mniejszości na Śląsku Cieszyńskim w oczach polskich mediów na przykładzie gazety „Głos Ludu” i miesięcznika „Zwrot” w latach 2015–2016*, „Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Politologica” 2018, no 20, p. 43-56.

²⁴ L. Kaczyński, *Na Zaolziu zdarzają się rzeczy, które zdarzać się nie powinny*, „Głos Ludu” 23.1.2010, p. 1.

²⁵ lup [Luboš Palata], *Krizi s Poláky pojede řešit sám Klaus*, „Lidové noviny” 23.1.2010, p. 6.

²⁶ E. Przczyko, *To nie była prowokacja!*, „Głos Ludu” 6.1.2009, p. 4.

questioned by both Czech and Polish linguists, but, according to Prof. Karol Daniel Kadłubiec, “the arguments of experts are invalid in the face of an infantile belief that Olsza is a Czech form and Olza is a Polish form. However, thanks to this infantilism, the infantile form is the binding form”²⁷. The issue of using the proper name of the river is supported by many mayors of Czech nationality. Leading Czech linguists also support this cause in the relevant offices on a long-term basis. The Minister of Human Rights, Michael Kocáb²⁸ also called for the use of the correct name Olza in 2009, albeit to no avail. The Polish minority's demand to restore the correct name is rather unconvincing, as it only reinforces the stereotype of the Polish “Olza” and Czech “Olše”. This matter should be dealt with by higher authorities, and not by a minority regional initiative.

Double naming and bilingualism clearly arouse emotions. The civic model of the Polish minority representation, despite its many advantages, turned out to be insufficient on this point. It is difficult in the realities of the political life of the Czech Republic to realize the claims of the Polish minority put forward by the Congress of Poles as representative of the Polish minority without the natural support of any political entity (governmental or even opposition) and in the absence of interest of the Polish state. There is a further problem; namely, the representatives of the Congress acted in this matter in the form of cabinet policy, without mass publicity. This policy was not ineffective; on the contrary, it succeeded in settling many issues. Such a method was accepted by the governmental factors, which favored the implementation of the Congress' demands without unnecessary publicity. The problem was that in this arrangement, each achievement of the Polish minority was not treated as the introduction of a European standard, but as forced upon the Czech authorities by a group of negotiators, who according to the Czech majority, did not have the support of the Polish minority because such support was not visible anywhere. The Polish demands submitted to the authorities were not accompanied by public debates, petitions, meetings, mass campaigns in the media or resolutions of the inhabitants. If there was a debate between negotiators and the Czech society, as it happened in the presence of

²⁷ D. Kadłubiec, *Czy jeszcze nas to obchodzi?*, „Głos” 13.3.2020, p. 4.

²⁸ M. Kocáb's letter on the Olza River published in B. Małysz, *Kontroverze současnosti v dějinné souvislosti*, [in:] *Poláci na Těšínsku*, ed. R. Kaszper, B. Małysz, Český Těšín 2009, p. 112.

minister Michael Kocáb in Smilovice on February 18, 2010, where Polish arguments were flatly rejected by Czech activists²⁹. The majority society in Zaolzie became convinced that bilingualism was wanted only by a group of fanatical lunatics, who with their imaginary fantasies want to stir up national rivalry between Poles and Czechs³⁰ in Zaolzie to achieve their own goals. It seems obvious that Poles and Czechs still have a long road ahead to achieving the acceptance of views on both sides.

In conclusion, it can be said that the local Czechs in Zaolzie treat “their Poles” as a minority group that belongs to the Czech majority society while they consider other approaches misleading or even usurpatory. These categories include dual naming and bilingualism. Sometimes out of ignorance, sometimes out of reluctance, they do not realize that their hostile attitude towards European standards removes from the physical space and from their minds one of the most beautiful manifestations of Těšín culture – its multiculturalism.

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²⁹ Ikz [Izabela Krauz-Žur], *Michael Kocáb se zajímal o národnostní menšiny*, „Hutnik” 24.2.2010, p. 1 and 3; hs [Halina Sikora], *Kocáb mapoval národnostní situaci*, *Horizont*” 23.2.2010, p. 2.

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