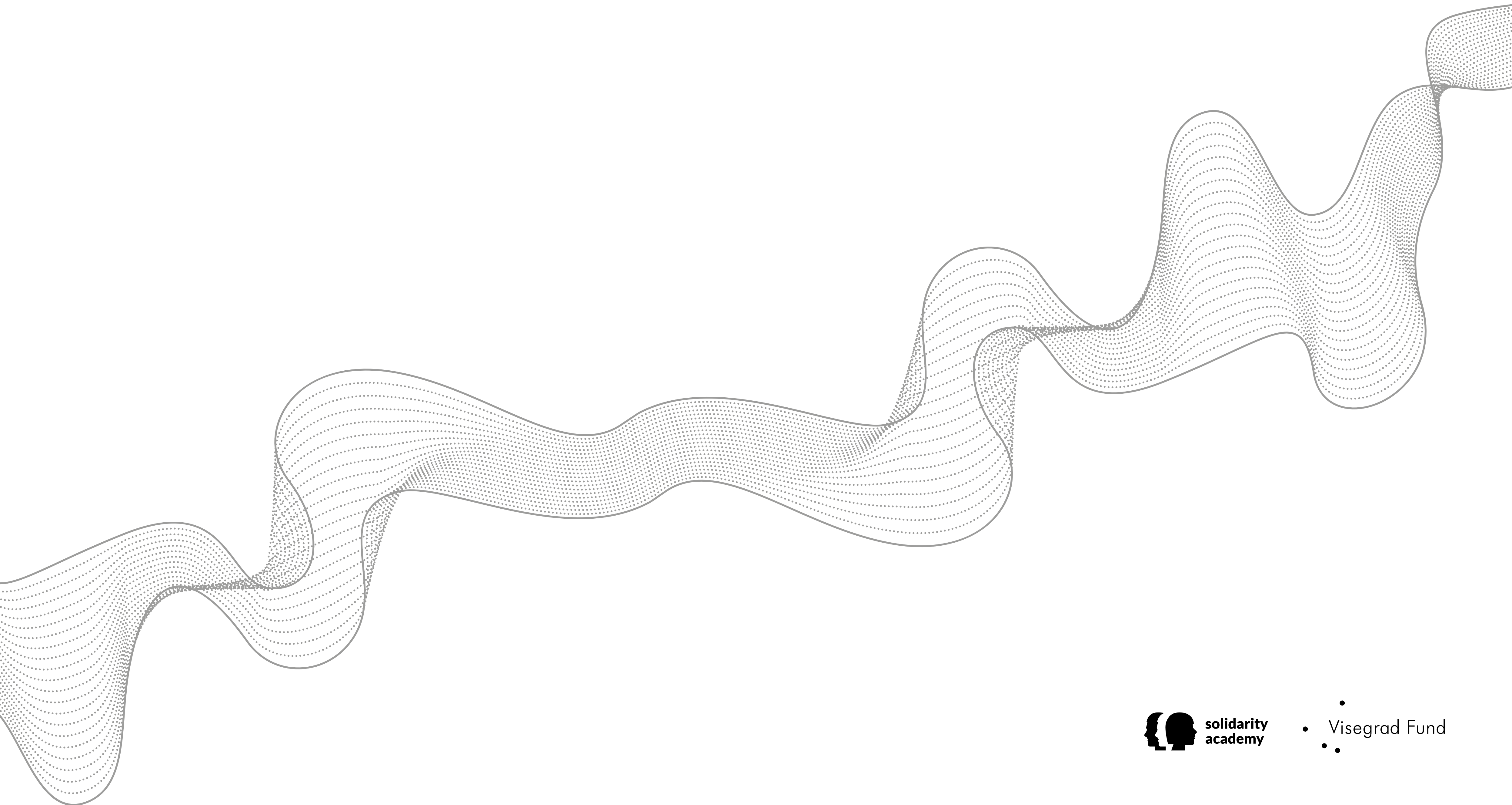
BORDERLANDS

BORDERLANDS



solidarity academy

Visegrad Fund

Borderlands

Edited by Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska, *New Eastern Europe*
Cover image by DoLasu | www.dolasu-pracownia.pl
Layout and design by DoLasu
February 2019
About the project:

Solidarity Academy is an international project aimed at inspiring and supporting the development of the young intellectual elites across Europe. The project's title refers to the Polish social movement Solidarność (Solidarity) and the peaceful socio-political transformations that took place in Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In such movements we can find inspiration for solving the problems of the modern world.

Project supported by the grant from International Visegrad Fund.

Dear Reader,

The following publication includes pieces written by the graduates of the Solidarity Academy 2018 – Borderlands, an international project aimed at inspiring and supporting young public intellectuals across Europe. This year's edition is supported by the grant from International Visegrad Fund. The participants have taken on topics related to the different facets of borderlands in Central and Eastern Europe, the region's difficult history and the resulting questions of memory, identity and remembrance.

During the project, the participants had a chance to rethink the idea of borderlands and what the idea of a border means in the contemporary world of borderless Europe, fluid identities, cross-border cooperation and migration. They looked at both theoretical and practical questions of what borders and borderlands mean in our region today and how this understanding can influence storytelling and translate into ethical reporting.

Divided into four groups, the participants travelled to borderland areas to report on issues faced by local communities. Trips to Kaliningrad, Kartuzy, Szczecin and Żuławy, where for centuries the borders have been shifting and people of various identities and memories were interacting with each other, creating a unique mosaic of today's borderlands, helped to put together the following collection of stories.

As editors and organisers, we would like to share the talent and work of the project's participants with a wider audience and encourage new generations of journalists to join future editions. We hope that more of you will cherish and pass on the values of solidarity and dialogue.

Yours,

The Editors and Organisers

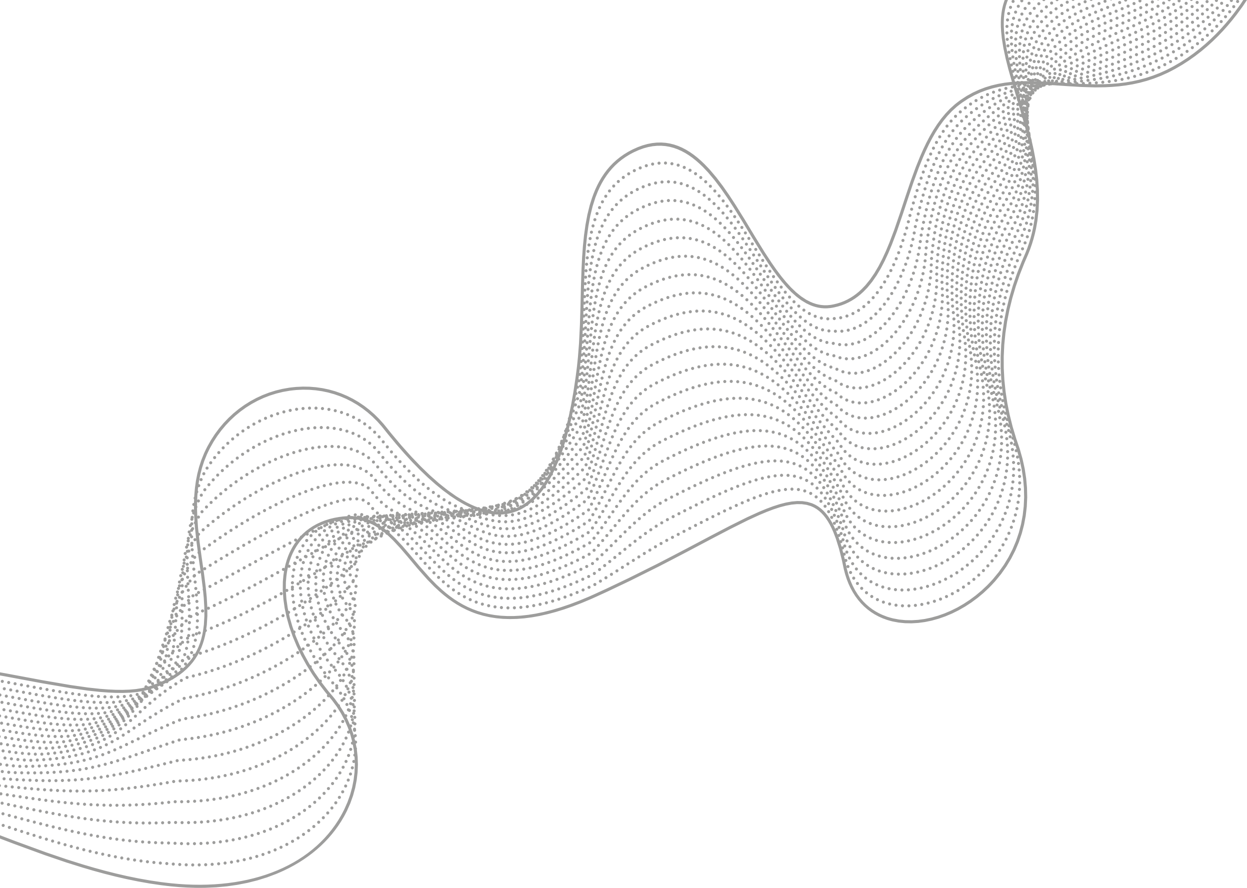


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Máté Mohos “Saving the forgotten homes of the borderland” 9

Alexandra Wishart “Ukrainians in the Polish-German borderland” 12

Balsa Lubarda “Kashubian Poles: Struggling with the ‘fifth column’ label” 19

Andreas Rossbach “Kaliningrad: ‘purported Germanisation’ in Russia’s west” 23

Agnieszka Zielonka “Kashubia: One needs two lungs to breathe” 26

Monika Szafrańska “The promised land of Mecklenburg” 30

Solveiga Kaļva “The cross-border race: A local initiative uniting both sides of the Oder River” 34

SAVING THE FORGOTTEN HOMES OF THE BORDERLAND

By Máté Mohos

Lodged between a line of trees fringing the road from Tujsk to Cyganek and the Tuga river in the Żuławy region of Poland, the Maly Holender (The Little Dutch Boy) gives off the impression of a typical exhibition house. The idea of pleasant country life is represented by a cutout of a cow and pieces of wooden cheese lookalikes nailed to the porch. The Polish flag hanging from the top gives the arcaded front a homely, yet alien feel, a distinct constellation of old forms and modern tools, underlined by the noises of the crackling river and cars speeding on the nearby road.

There is something special about this house, something that connects it to the troubled history of Poland and the status of the Żuławy region in the Pomeranian Voivodeship as one of the most storied borderlands of the country.

“After the Second World War there were about two hundred houses like this, now there are only about ten that have survived,” explains Marek Opitz, who had spent ten years of his life restoring this nearly -destroyed building to its former glory. He is now starting a business hoping that the flatlands of Żuławy and their rich cultural history will be of interest to tourists.

“We discovered some old cheese recipes and started selling them here. We also recreated the Machandel vodka from the 18th century, and here you can also taste it now and try the traditional way of drinking it,” Opitz explains. “The food is also based on an old recipe. It all comes in the framework of an all house and traditional experience.”

The history of arcaded houses like the Maly Holender, as well as the region itself, is heavily tied with the Mennonites who migrated into the region from today’s Netherlands and Germany in the mid-1500s to escape religious persecution by the Habsburgs in the turmoil of the Reformation. Soon, about a thousand members of the anabaptist community lived in Gdansk and in 1562 Michael Loitz, a wealthy merchant, invited them to settle to the area around the Tuga river.

Besides leaving their cultural mark in the Friesian-style arcades, windmills and other pieces of folklore over the region, Mennonites introduced new irrigation techniques that helped drain swamps in the area and save the land laying under sea level from flooding. Over the centuries, they became an integral part of local history.

This is the history that Opitz, along with a handful of historians, local experts and businesses wants to preserve. But, as he explains, such endeavours sometimes come with heavy cost. Even though the Polish government has allocated nearly 160 million euro funding for cultural purposes in the Pomeranian Voivodeship, up to two million of which organisations can apply for, struggles with bureaucracy and a still lacking interest in the region have created significant obstacles to those investing in arcaded houses.

"Renovating a house like this can consume millions and millions of zloty. If you want to do it by the book and keep all formalities, it is really expensive. If you do it on your own, at some point you'll just be fed up with it," Opitz said.

The ten-year-long process was tedious as it did not only involve refurbishing the building, but taking it apart brick by brick and putting it together on a land that took Opitz an entire year to acquire. First he thought he could use about 80 per cent of the original material, but as hidden deteriorations started to reveal themselves, he realised he could use less than half of the original building. The costs kept piling up. He finally finished renovation works in 2013 and set out to find a way for the house to earn back what had been spent on it. Now he is hosting visitors and is selling cheese, liquor and food based on local recipes for people looking for a taste of the real Żuławy.

Izabela Chojnacka had gone through similar struggles with her own passion project in the area. The writer who prides herself in collecting and preserving local histories had also bought and renovated an old village house years ago, and fell in love with it during the weary project of restauration. "My ex-husband though it was way too expensive. But I wanted to find myself a house that has a soul," Chojnacka said.

As they explain, the government to this day does not provide much aid to help with the renovations and many of the specialists who have knowledge of the arcaded houses craft have long since left the country. Figuring out things on your own can be hard.

"To renovate these houses properly, you need special types of wood that are of specific weight and height. A couple of my friends once tried to get a carpenter to help them with the material, but he simply said you couldn't get this stuff anymore," Marta Łobocka, a local historian with the We Love Żuławy association, says.

Attempting to bring arcaded houses back to life is quite a task, as the years following the end of the Second World War have weighed heavily on their walls. The area, which was the borderland between the Soviet Union and Hitler's empire, got ransacked by Russian soldiers as they pushed toward Berlin. Later the post-war reconstruction efforts also eluded the arcaded houses of Żuławy. It was still considered as a somewhat contested land between the Soviet Union and Poland, so the interlocking bureaucratic hierarchies overseeing the region were not keen on pouring resources into the area.

More importantly, the locals did not see the arcaded houses as part of Polish history but rather as remnants of the area's German heritage, something foreign that had been forced upon them. Most people did not want to live in such houses, did not want to take care of or renovate them. Consequently, after the war most arcaded houses were inhabited by the poorest who had nowhere else to go. Łobocka recalls one such arcaded house that was shunned and avoided by most locals after a German soldier hung himself inside of it, most probably to escape capture by the Russians. "They just did not want to live there," Łobocka says. "They thought it was bad luck."

Both Opitz and Chojnacka recall that once the dust of the war had settled, sometimes even three or four destitute families would move in together into these buildings. Chojnacka explains that they often lacked the means and the motivation to be responsible owners and helped facilitate the houses' deteriorating state. "They didn't know how to live in these houses," she says. "They washed their hair in the toilet, and they burned the windows and the doors in winter to keep warm."

But the government seemed to be on board with this approach: some owners were told that if their houses got destroyed, they would be financially aided to build new ones. That meant that besides the natural and war-caused degradation of these buildings, sometimes people would purposefully harm them in order to get support from the state. The Mennonite heritage in the land of Żuławy has thus been all but forgotten.

"Up to this day there are people who think like that. They are among those who want projects like this to fail," Opitz explains. "I always felt that in Poland we have this kind of thinking that we want to see others fail. I have to tell people that I need to run this as a business to earn money, not to get them suspicious. Some people wouldn't believe that you would do something altruistically."

The strive to put Żuławy on the map through agritourism continues. According to Opitz, more people are taking interest in kick-starting businesses here, and agritourism endeavours in the nearby Lubieszewo are also taking ground. And here, amidst the bowers and rivers of the lowland, under a painful history suspended in the thin air, he is taking his last stand to make it all happen.

"If this business doesn't work out, we'll either sell the house or just leave it. This is our last attempt, but I have faith that it is going to now. We don't need too much money, but we cannot be drained by this whole idea. It cannot be a burden to us. My wife once said: I hope this house will not end up as our coffin."

Even though the situation might not seem hopeful at times, Opitz does recognise the importance of his work and expresses a vague hope for those who will follow in his footsteps. "In other regions of Poland, this sort of agritourism has been working out fine for some time, but here we are the first ones. And the first ones always have it the most difficult."

Máté Mohos *is a postgraduate journalism student at the University of Sheffield. He holds a BSc in media studies from NYU. He has published non-fiction writing and journalism in New York, Prague and in Shanghai. He has worked for Index.hu and 24.hu, two of the most prominent Hungarian independent news sites. Currently he lives and studies in the UK, with aim to start a career in journalism there. His areas of interest include culture, tech and politics.*

UKRAINIANS IN THE POLISH-GERMAN BORDERLAND

By Alexandra Wishart

Where are our roots,
where are our roots?

On foreign lands
we were displaced to
on Sunday or holidays
– we cried bitterly.[1]

Before a young Ukrainian woman named Olga Werbowska, along with other inhabitants, left her native village of Kornie located in the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands, she had put all her energy in conserving her past in a memory book. Knowing that they would have to leave soon, her uncle drew a map with all landmarks of the old village life: the beautiful wooden church, the graveyard and the surrounding houses.

She filled her book with pictures, leaflets and other memorabilia from back home. Among them was a little booklet made by the Ukrainian community, listing all 150 family names and villages that were displaced within the Żuławy region in northern Poland. She also took with her an item she treasured most: a ritually embroidered scarf reminding her of her homeland.

When I first met Olga to learn more about the Ukrainian community in Poland, she was sitting to the left of me in a living room of her house in the village of Cyganek, located in the Żuławy region not far from Gdansk. For a woman of her age, Olga was moving with a rigorous speed. She had a friendly face, making her appear way younger than she was.

1 This poem, written collectively by Ukrainians from the Polish village of Kornie more than 36 years after they had been forcefully removed from the Polish-Ukrainian border to the region of Żuławy in Poland's newly "regained" territories in the North, poses the question of belonging. The title of the poem, *де корні, де корні*, in its direct translation refers to the Ukrainian word for root, *корінь*, a wordplay that includes their home village name *Корні* as the root and metaphor for home.

With her donning short grey hair and a black and white striped pullover, she buzzed into the kitchen to make tea and coffee and fill us to the brim with cookies. We had heard about Olga from people in the community; she was well-respected and has been living in the area for many years. Olga is one of the people affected by Operation Vistula, which forced thousands out of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland to Żuławy.

Operation Vistula

Operation Vistula was a forced resettlement of the Ukrainian minority from the south-eastern regions of post-war Poland to the "regained territories" in the west and north of the country, implemented by Polish authorities in 1947.

During this time, many Ukrainians were dubbed as nationalists, "beasts" and "Banderovtsy", a derogatory term referring to the followers of the infamous military leader of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), Stepan Bandera. UPA, a Ukrainian nationalist paramilitary group operating during the Second World War, was the main perpetrator of the 1943 Volhynia massacre and mass murders of Poles in Eastern Galicia.

As a result of Operation Vistula, more than 150,000 Ukrainians were brutally deported to the newly acquired Polish territories, which were formerly part of Germany. Olga Werbowska was one of the many victims of the involuntary population exchange. She was originally displaced to the Mazury district in Poland's north-east and she moved to Żuławy after her marriage.

Her native village of Kornie (*Корні*), located about 75 kilometres north of Lviv, was seen as a potential cell of UPA support, as it had brought forward a notorious UPA commander, Mikhail Grytsina. During the Operation Vistula Olga was lucky – rather than being forced out immediately, she was given nine months to relocate.

The Ukrainian community under communism

Olga knew early on that there were people from her home region who were displaced to Żuławy, but as the community was separated during the Operation Vistula, only years later were they able to find out where their former neighbours were sent to.

"It was an open secret, but the communist authorities tried to hide it," Olga said. Back in the day, Ukrainians could not make up more than ten per cent of any local population. Organising the Ukrainian community life also posed a challenge. "A gathering of more than three or four people could be considered dangerous by the authorities," Olga adds.

This changed only in 1956, when the communist Polish government began permitting small regional activity and let a few thousand Ukrainians return to their homelands in the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands. Previously, many Ukrainians were imprisoned. Those who managed to return, saw their properties already taken over by Poles from western Ukraine brought to the region after 1945, and had no possibility to receive compensation.

When Olga, her husband and other displaced Ukrainians arrived in the village of

Image by Olga Werbowska

Kornie cementary after cleaning actions in 1983. Image by Olga Werbowska

Kornie village church and wooden bell fry. Image by Dorota Gmiterek

Image by Olga Werbowska

Cyganek in the wider Żuławy area, they were offered old and damaged buildings outside the village, often cut off entirely from infrastructure. A rare photograph of the community taken in 1952 at the Cyganek railway station shows them on their way to the church. None of them owned a car back then.

With a solemn expression on her face, Olga shows us an old photograph: a traditional village house of a bygone era reduced to ruins. It was her childhood home and the picture was taken when Olga visited Kornie in 1982, 36 years following her displacement. She travelled to Kornie with a group of Ukrainians led by a young Orthodox priest, Father Bunz.

They were followed all the way by a Polish border guard, whose official task was to ensure the group's security. Seeing Olga laugh about this particular memory, I ask whom the guard was supposed to protect. She explains that Ukrainians returning to their ancestral land were sees as a security risk, although the communist authorities would never officially acknowledge that.

Towards a common humanity?

For Poles living in the villages and towns that Ukrainians were resettled to, their new neighbours invoked old traumas and sorrow. Marek Opitz, a local from the area around Nowy Dwór, remarked that the problem was fostered by the fact that many survivors of the Volhynia massacre were moved to the same region, which put the victims and perpetrators only a stone's throw away from each other.

"The victims knew who the killers were as they recognised their faces," Marek said. His aunt, an elderly woman who took part in the defence of a Polish settlement attacked by UPA, until the end of her life feared that some of the perpetrators would recognise her.

This fear was shared by the survivors' families, too, as Monika Jastrzębska, a local from Malbork and a child of survivors, explains. "Many people don't like Ukrainians, even in the second or third generation, and even with the second wave of Ukrainians [recent economic migration to Poland] it can still be a problem in local communities," she said.

Her family was hidden by Ukrainian villagers after the first night of their escape from their home village. When the son of their rescuers turned against them, they again managed to escape, a traumatic experience that made their grandchildren promise them to never go back.

In 2016, the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party in Poland controversially recognised the mass killings of 1943 as "genocide". Historians estimate the number of victims to be close to 60,000 and often stress that the character of the operations carried out by UPA resembled the previous anti-Jewish operations by the German SS, where victims were murdered with axes. Not even women and children were spared.

A local anthropologist from Żuławy, Aleksandra Paprot-Wieloposka, described this past as an "evil history of Ukrainian hateful nationals." In Żuławy, this difficult memory changed only in the late 1990s, when the Ukrainian community opened its doors and started a dialogue with the local Poles. The new opening came thanks to a new Orthodox priest in the local parish. Overall, attitudes have changed.

As Marek explains, especially in the Polish media too much focus is being put on historical conflicts, while much of the everyday peaceful co-existence is rarely talked about. "On the level of community life, there are no problems. People come and go," Marek said.

According to him, the current glorification of UPA in Ukraine has opened new wounds, but there are no anti-Ukrainian sentiments in the area and many people have been openly supporting civic activism in Ukraine, such as the Euromaidan.

"Many local activists of the community organised help and were very involved," Marek said. Relationships have long normalised, and the mayor of Nowy Dwór, a Catholic, is present at every event organised by the Orthodox parish. It seems things have substantially changed for the better. Olga agrees.

Reconciliation and return

Eventually the Ukrainian community settled in Cyganek, which invoked fear among the local Poles and the Ukrainians' paranoia. "At the beginning, both sides were afraid of each other," Olga recalls. "Now, I have Polish neighbours and friends who contact me whenever I'm in need."

However, she admits that for a long time "it was better to be quiet" and not to reveal one's Ukrainian identity. Local Poles often referred to the incoming Ukrainians as "*bandity*" and "Bandera people," fearing that the newcomers could disrupt the peaceful village life.

In the end, all it took was getting to know one another. "When we started recognising each other's faces, we realised the other was an ordinary human being," Olga said. "They no longer saw us as Bandera people they could deal with. It all changed."

The fact that everyone in the area was a settler also helped, as few of the old inhabitants were left in Żuławy. Therefore, it was Polish and Ukrainians creating the new history of the region together; Ukrainians from eastern Poland and Poles from Kielce, Sandomierz, the south of Poland and Volhynia. Nobody was born in Żuławy which made it easier to start from scratch and motivated people to reconnect with the pre-1945 history of the region.

When I ask Olga about her dearest memory of Kornie, her face visibly lights up. She says that when she returned to Kornie after 36 years, all the women that came with her began to cry when they approached the former village church and the old cemetery. "It was such an emotionally overwhelming experience to be home for the first time in all these years, seeing the church where I was baptised and the cemetery where my grandparents were buried," she says.

Since the houses Olga and her neighbours were born in ceased to exist, the church in Kornie became the most important point of reference for their memory. When they noticed that the cemetery was neglected, they collected money, built a fence, and cut the grass covering the graves to restore it as much as possible.

"When the local Catholic priest of the parish invited father Bunz to hold a mass in the church nowadays turned Catholic, that's when we all felt closure," Olga said. "No eye was left dry, and we were able to let go of the pain of the past." Buzzing back into her room, Olga comes back with a ritual scarf embroidered in the traditional way which she says belonged to her grandmother. It was one of the few items her family was allowed to take with them.

The fact that she possesses something reminding her of her heritage which she can pass over to her grandchildren makes her truly happy. Closing her memory book, Olga looks at me with a warm smile. "You know, after all these years in Poland I can proudly say that this is my home too, it took some time but eventually I found my peace."

Where are our roots,
where are our roots?

Roots close to the valley
We are exploring
Our own roots now

Alexandra Wishart *is a graduate student of the Central and Eastern European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (CEERES) double degree programme at the University of Glasgow, University of Tartu and Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. Holding a BA in Cultural Anthropology and Development Studies, she is one of the founding members of Lossi 36, a student-led think tank covering news from the CEERE region where she works as both coordinator and a writer. Apart from specialising in political activism and social movements in contemporary Ukraine, she has an interest in Polish-Belarusian relations and how they affect identity and ethnicity in the region.*

KASHUBIAN POLES: STRUGGLING WITH THE 'FIFTH COLUMN' LABEL

By Balsa Lubarda

Under the gloomy November skies of Gdansk, a black-and yellow flag is fluttering in the wind blowing from the Shipyard, a subtle residue of long-lost times. A coat-of-arms with a "gryf" (griffin) symbol placed in the middle brings to mind the medieval castles dotting northern Poland.

None of the dozen people on the street I talked to could explain the origin of this flag. While it might have been just for the randomness of the sample, the history of Kashubia seems obfuscated and subsumed within the overall history of Poles.

I learnt only later that the black colour on the Kashubian flag represents the hard work needed to farm the infertile soil at the coast of the Baltic sea, while the gold colour symbolises the reward for the hard work. The gryf, a symbol of Pomerania – the broader region of Poland and Germany in which Kashubia is located, aptly resembles the murkiness of borders between identities, histories, and ultimately – life stories.

Kashubia is predominately delineated through the widespread use of the Kashubian language. It belongs to the west Slavic family, with more than 100,000 people using it in Poland nowadays. Although its capital is Gdansk, the historical heart of Kashubia is to be found in Kartuzy, a small town in Eastern Pomerania. With discernible history of their own, the Kashubians are now to a great extent assimilated into the Polish culture.

What historically differentiates Kashubia from the rest of the region is its resistance to the forced Germanisation which manifested itself in preserving the Catholic religion and the local language. According to Tomasz Słomczyński, editor of *Magazyn Kaszuby*, in the 1920s almost 90 per cent of people in the region spoke Kashubian, while the second most popular language was German.

"Once the Polish troops entered Pomerania, hence Kashubian lands, the developments in the aftermath led to a culture conflict between the Kashubians and Polish people in the interwar period, as the Kashubians felt culturally superior," Słomczyński said.

Back in the day, Kashubians saw Polish soldiers as ignorant, poor, and out-of-place outsiders unfamiliar with the Kashubian customs and tradition. They

also saw themselves as being incorporated without the due recognition of their cultural and ethnic specificities into the Polish lands.

The frailty of historical relations is epitomised in the Day of the Kashubian Flag, commemorating August 18th 1929, when the Kashubian flag was officially taken down and forbidden in public places by the Polish authorities. This act of repression, initially meant to solidify the unity of the land under Jozef Pilsudski, a legendary military commander and the first chief of the Polish independent state, was seen as an attempt to assimilate the Kashubians.

It is hard not to observe the feeling of mutual distrust, particularly strong during the communist era. Many Kashubian intellectuals were forced to work in other Polish regions as part of continuous attempts to disperse and decentralise potential dissent. This displacement was initiated by the Soviet troops in 1945, but continued during the era of communist Poland.

“Kashubians were perceived as a fifth column, a foreign element which might betray and switch sides in case of German invasion,” Słomczyński said. The suspicions stemmed from the fact that during the Second World War many ethnic Kashubians were forcibly incorporated in the Nazi Wehrmacht as *Volksdeutschers* – native Germans.

At the same time, however, there were Kashubians who voluntarily took part in the war on the German side. There were many families where the children would participate in the war in the opposite camps due to ideological positions or mere interest – a recurring and tragic theme of many wars.

Yet, the accusations of possible betrayal never held ground, as Kashubian people significantly contributed to the antifascist struggle during the Second World War. In fact, the “Kashubian Griffin” (Gryf Kaszubski) was the name of an antifascist organisation in the Pomeranian region. The view that Kashubians might be potential traitors, paired with the loosening grip of the party on social movements, enabled Kashubians to become vocal in articulating their distinctive culture and political identity.

This eventually led to the foundation of the National Movement of Kashubians (Kaszëbskô Jednota) in 2011. According to their official website, the group aims to “develop national, civic and cultural consciousness of Kashubians, protect their language, traditions, as well as initiate scientific and educational activity for the benefit and development of local communities, national and ethnic minorities using regional language.”

To Jednota, the key problem is the continuous Polonisation and Germanisation. In practice, the movement advocates lowering the threshold for financing activities of ethnic minorities from public funds, as well as the introduction of mandatory language, history and geography of the Kashubia into the educational curriculum in Pomerania.

Jednota gathers many people of Kashubian descent in Poland, but also all over the world. One of them, Sebastian Sierka, is currently living in the United Kingdom. “What you know as Pomerania for us was once Kashubia. For the rest of the world, Pomerania is a part of Poland, but in essence, it has always been a part of the Kashubian land,” Sierka explains.

“In North and South America, Kashubs are known either as Poles or as ‘Pomeranos’. It reminds me of the story with America – for the natives, indigenous people living there, it was never known under such a name.”

To some, Jednota is a nationalistic organisation with an aim to eventually secede from Poland. To others, it is only a structure with a potential to preserve Kashubian identity. The truth is somewhere in between. Jednota is an organisation with modest support among Kashubians.

According to Słomczyński, only 7.6 per cent of the Kashubian population identify themselves as Kashubians only. While there is certainly a greater number of those who are sympathetic towards the activities of Jednota, its overall impact on the Polish authorities and the Kashubian population remains moderate.

As in the case of many small ethnic groups whose territory was partitioned through history, the Kashubian diaspora is scattered across the world. Two major migration waves occurred during the 19th century. Though the first wave in the first half of the century was mainly induced by economic reasons, the second one was a result of the Franco-Prussian War and the following *Kulturkampf* – the policy of German assimilation.

Historically, the stronghold of the Kashubian diaspora is in North America, especially Canada. According to the website Kaszub.com, it is believed that more than several millions of people of Kashubian descent now live in the country. The centre of Polish settlements in Canada is Wilno located in Renfrew County in Ontario. Wilno, founded in 1858, is the first and oldest Polish settlement in Canada.

To Sierka and others from Jednota, while the European Union legal system opened up some opportunities to the Kashubians, as Poland was forced to institutionalise their minority status, the fall of the Berlin Wall was actually detrimental to the group.

“During the communist era, I was forbidden to speak Kashubian at school. For my mother it was completely different – she did not know Polish before she went to school. This whole oppression made us even more adamant in keeping the language alive, whereas in today’s times of freedom and ‘do-what-you-like,’ people don’t care about protecting our authentic values,” Sierka explains. “All my Kashubian neighbours who used to speak Kashubian up until 1989 would speak to me in Polish afterwards. We have to stick to our roots and tradition.”

Regardless of all the historical and cultural trajectories that differentiate Kashubians from other Poles, the overlaps remain evident. It would be unjust to depict a story of an alleged Kashubian-Polish tension, given the fact that Kashubians are recognised as an ethnic minority and are incorporated into the Polish state.

Polish president, Andrzej Duda, visited the Kashubian region in 2018 and expressed his gratitude for Kashubians’ contribution to Polish history. “There will never be Poland without Kashubia,” the president said.

Kashubian customs, although slowly eroding with the unremitting gust of time, remain discernible. Most of them can be found in the mysticism of folk culture with specific neo-pagan elements. Kashubian painting on glass, carvings, animal heads, and characteristic musical instruments

are a trademark of Kashubian culture, pointing to the spiritual specificities of the group. Yet, some of these elements are intertwined with local Christian customs and thus contribute to the broader cultural tradition of the Pomeranian region.

Looking at all of these elements, one needs to ask the question: where can the boundaries of Kashubian cultural identity be drawn? Perhaps seeking a clear-cut answer would only affirm the porosity of borders as socially constructed, rebuilt, and (re)negotiated. The mere existence of Kashubians in the now-Polish land demonstrates how futile it is to insist on clear demarcations when it comes to cultures and lands.

For, in Shakespeare's terms, not only time is what "is out of joint," but space is continuously reassembling. As Andrzej Dudziński, an artist and director of many films about Kashubians observed, "the borders resemble the mark of how beautiful the complexity of this world is. As such, the memory of them should be nurtured, not as an attempt to discern oneself from the others, but to acknowledge the bloody and troublesome history that lead us to appreciate the differences instead of fighting over them."

Balsa Lubarda *is a doctoral student at the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy at the Central European University (Hungary), and an early career research fellow at the Centre for Radical Right Analysis. His research focuses on the convergence of radical right politics and environmental topics (climate change, biodiversity, energy security, environmentally-friendly forms of agriculture) in East Central Europe. He is also a member of the Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (European branch).*

KALININGRAD: 'PURPORTED GERMANISATION' IN RUSSIA'S WEST

By Andreas Rossbach

"Shame to traitors! Shame to Kant! Glory to Russia!" read the photos of leaflets on VKontakte, Russia's alternative to Facebook. On the same day – Tuesday morning in November 2018, activists splashed pink paint on a monument to the moral philosopher Immanuel Kant and his tombstone in Kaliningrad, the former German city of Koenigsberg where the thinker lived between 1724 and 1804.

The monument to Kant, designed by the German sculptor Christian Daniel Rauch, was originally erected in the 19th century, then disappeared during the Second World War, and was recreated in 1992. Soon after the first incident, the director of the city's landmark cathedral, next to which Kant is buried, posted photos of a similar attack on his tomb.

Russian liberals, including prominent local activists Anna Alempieva and Jakov Grigoriev, criticised the attack they considered an act of vandalism. However, some contemporary artists in Kaliningrad treated it with humour as a possible act of performance art. According to Grigoriev the action clearly shows that there is a nationalist sentiment among some of the locals who are against the world cultural heritage in Kaliningrad. "I suspect that local Cossacks have been involved in the action," Grigoriev said. Kaliningrad and sections of northern Poland were once part of East Prussia, and then Germany, until the map of Europe was redrawn following the Second World War. The Red Army captured Koenigsberg in 1945 from Nazi Germany. It became part of the Soviet Union and renamed to Kaliningrad after ethnic German residents fled.

Joseph Stalin expelled all remaining Germans from the region – a total of 14 million people – and the bulk of East Prussia has ever since been part of Russia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Baltic states and Poland joined the European Union and NATO, and the region and its roughly half-million Russian citizens became geopolitically isolated.

Kant is widely heralded as one of the great moral philosophers in human history and many Russians in Kaliningrad are proud of his connection to the city. Even Russian president Vladimir Putin has praised him. "Kant can and should be a symbol not only of your university but to some extent a

symbol of the entire region and beyond," said Putin during a visit to the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University in 2013.

In the recent years, however, an anti-German campaign in the Kaliningrad Oblast has begun, as some fear what they call a purported "Germanisation." As a symbol of the German past, Kant has become one of the main targets of the growing paranoia.

The Russian Navy vice-admiral Igor Mukhametshin, for example, was captured on a Youtube video disparaging the thinker as a „traitor" and author of "books none of us has read." Yet, there is no historical evidence that Kant was hostile towards imperial Russia.

The officer's tirade, delivered to sailors lined up on deck, came shortly before the Russian government organised an online poll to attach the names of historical figures to regional airports. Russian Duma Deputy Andrei Kolesnik also spoke out against Kant. Eventually, it was Empress Elizabeth Petrovna, the daughter of Peter the Great, who beat both Kant and Marshal Vasilevsky in the December vote. The empress's Russian army captured Königsberg in 1758 but abandoned it five years later.

Another example of what critics see as purported Germanisation of the region is the locally made beer. In early 2016, the brewery's well-known Dutch owner, Heineken, relaunched "Koenigsberg beer," using the German spelling of the name instead of the former Russianised version – Königsberg.

Last year, a campaign against the long-time director of Kaliningrad's German-Russian House, Viktor Gofman, accused him of promoting Nazism and extremism. The accusations came after he allegedly engaged in popularising the Koenigsberg-born German poet Agnes Miegel, who was a member of the Nazi party. Gofman was also suspected of having ties to members of the Baltic Avantgarde of Russian Resistance (BARS), an obscure fringe organisation that calls itself „nationalist" and „monarchist" but advocates Kaliningrad's entry into the European Union, and the return of the historic name of Koenigsberg.

As Alempieva, a former sociology professor at Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University explains, Gofman was exonerated of the charges in court, but he suffered a heart attack and resigned on his post. "A local ally of President Vladimir Putin, Genrikh Martens, took over the position," she said.

In an interview with Radio Free Europe (RFE/RL) Gofman said the campaign against him was aimed at taking over the independent German-Russian House. "We were independent and conducted cultural events that brought together all nationalities," Gofman said. "And that made a lot of people upset. How could there be something independent in Kaliningrad?"

But the belief in the supposed Germanisation of the region is not shared by everyone. "Despite the de-Germanification campaign in recent years, the majority of locals still see the remnants of the German past as world cultural heritage," Alempieva explains.

When walking through Svetlogorsk, one of the typical old spa towns that dot northwest Kaliningrad, with its whimsical art nouveau buildings, bratwurst and pretzel cafes, and bemused Russian and German tourists, this cultural heritage seems to disturb no one.

Along the coast to the east, is the little town of Chernyakhovsk. Locals there are trying to save the remnants of the German past, from a water tower and an old Protestant church to a school and a castle. The local authorities are actively supporting them.

"Our dream is to preserve the castle that was built by Germans when our little town was still named Insterburg," said Arina Smirnova, who works as a consultant to the mayor of the Chernyakovsky district. "We want to make it a safe cultural space for everyone."

While it is tempting to exaggerate the distinctness of Kaliningrad's identity – and exploit its past for political purposes, the region, in fact, is as Russian as any other. "We are just another Russian region with ordinary Russians living here," Smirnova said. "Though we do have extraordinary circumstances of living as an enclave with German past which offers us a huge platform for discussion and dialogue.

Andreas Rossbach *is a Russian-German journalist for online, video and print, focusing on human rights, social issues and politics in Russia and the neighbouring countries. He works as a journalist and fact-checker at Correctiv – the first non-profit newsroom in the German -speaking region, conducting investigations, uncovering injustices and abuses of power and making complex interrelations understandable. Andreas studied Economics, Politics, Global Communication and Journalism and is an alumni of the Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom and the Solidarity Academy in Gdansk.*

KASHUBIA: ONE NEEDS TWO LUNGS TO BREATHE

By Agnieszka Zielonka

A big yellow sign at the main road leading to the city informs the visitors that they are approaching Kartuzy, the capital of the Kashubia region. The sign is written in the Kashubian language. This is the only hint pointing to the city's unique identity. Kartuzy is a middle-sized, ordinary town of western Poland, with some remnants of German heritage. Grey, rough, communist buildings intermingle here with the landmarks of early capitalism: banks, small private shops, and pharmacies.

The everyday life still concentrates around the bus station and a surrounding market with sellers offering fresh fish, handmade baffies and even tulip varieties named after famous Polish politicians. There is hardly any sign of the Kashubian heritage. If people in the street speak the Kashubian language, which is rare, they lower their voices down and switch to Polish as soon as they notice somebody listening. There is a peculiar sense of a mystery and understatement in the grey streets of this foggy town.

"Yes, Kashubians are very careful and distrustful. But you must understand that it stems from a very difficult history. In order to preserve their identity Kashubians had to bound closely with their fellows and keep the distance from the others," Tomasz Słomczyński, editor-in-chief of *Magazyn Kaszuby* knows how outsiders feel. He moved to the region 15 years ago.

Kashubians are the indigenous population of Pomerania, a seaside region of Poland, which over the years has been subject to constantly shifting state borders. For many years Kashubians remained under the German influence, but in the beginning of the 20th century, the process of Germanisation became particularly strong and painful.

After the First World War, in order to protect Kashubians from harassment and losing their identity, Antoni Abraham, a Kashubian social activist, made his way to Versailles to convince the negotiators to incorporate his homeland into Poland. He succeeded, but the move did not bring peace to the region. Kashubia was better developed than the rest of the country. Thanks to the Prussian influence, houses were equipped with toilets, the standard of living was higher and culture more developed.

Polish soldiers who arrived in the area did not understand the Kashubian reality, which sparked misunderstandings and conflicts between Poles and Kashubians. Proud locals called the incoming soldiers "barefoot Antek" – a contemptuous way to describe an outsider who is uneducated, uncultured and ill-mannered.

The Second World War was undoubtedly one of the most painful periods in Kashubia's history. The land was immediately incorporated into the Third Reich. During the "bloody autumn" in 1939, 40,000 people were murdered. Nazi soldiers particularly targeted those who could protest and express rebellious views: the representatives of the intelligentsia and well-educated people including teachers, doctors and activists. Residents were forced to sign the *Volksdeutsch* list – a declaration of German roots. In practice, such an act was interpreted as willingness to collaborate with the Nazis. Young men were forcibly incorporated into the Wehrmacht, the Nazi armed forces, and had to fight on the side of the enemy.

Old residents of Kashubia remember photographs showing young men standing on the railway station in Wehrmacht uniforms being greeted goodbye by crying parents, sisters, lovers and singing out loud the "Rota" – a Polish patriotic song. Those who did not want to join the Germans were persecuted, deported to concentration camps or murdered.

After the Second World War the region was immediately conquered by the Red Army. Those who had agreed to sign the German list six years earlier in order to protect themselves were now treated as double traitors and German spies. Those who miraculously managed to survive the war without any dealings with the Germans were still treated as a suspicious element. The Kashubian culture and distinctness were perceived as a potential danger and fuel for separatist tendencies. All manifestations of the Kashubian culture were banned.

"When I was in primary school one teacher in my class always rebuked me for using Kashubian words in my essays. For a long time I did not even realise that, it was a language I knew from my early years, I did not distinguish between Polish and Kashubians words," says Róman Drzéżdżón, a Kashubian writer and activist. "Once, I remember, she gave me a reprimand in front of the whole class: 'Roman, didn't I tell you not to use Kashubians words in the class?', 'Jo (Kashubian 'yes'), I'm sorry',"' Roman recalls.

He was raised in the communist times in a traditional Kashubian family. He remembers his grandparents speaking between themselves a distinct, unrecognisable language, but he never asked them about it. The new, communist power kept a close watch on the Kashubians. They spoke a different language, were religious, and posed a threat to the idea of a homogenous, secular country. Speaking Kashubian was viewed as a shame and a sign of backwardness.

Roman, as a little boy who was raised in the region, could not even distinguish between Polish and Kashubians words. A Polish-Kashubian mix was his natural language. It was only a few years later that in school Roman found a book entirely written in Kashubian by Jan Drzeżdżon. Curiosity led him to discover his roots, the Kashubian language and by that, the culture and his ancestors' history which at the time was overlooked in the official narrative of the People's Republic of Poland.

The communist era elapsed some time ago, democracy brought freedom and more tolerance to the minorities in Poland, but the old wounds are still bleeding. In Kartuzy it is hard to get any honest answers to the difficult questions about the past and a vision for the future.

The most difficult subject seems to concern the German legacy in Kashubia. Locals would bend over backward to give an evasive, politically correct answer. Residents deny the German influences in the Kashubian language and they do not want to talk about the events of the Second World War in Pomerania.

"Because you, Kashubians, are German" – this phrase Róman Drzéżdżón hears all too often. He laughs at it, but he can understand why people feel suspicious. Such prejudices have followed them since the communist times. The propaganda claimed that Kashubians need to be carefully watched, because they want to merge with Germany. Despite years of trying to prove Kashubia's connection to Poland, the past prejudices are a recurrent theme.

They also affected the President of the European Parliament, Donald Tusk, whose grandfather's connection with the Wehrmacht was the main topic in the Polish media during the presidential elections in 2005 and the main argument used against him. At the time not many people made an effort to take into consideration the harsh realities of life of Kashubians during and after the Second World War and the reasons why they were cooperating with the Germans.

Thus Kashubians learnt to omit this period of their past in the public discussion. "I don't want to think in this way, because I'm a patriot, but we could imagine that, objectively, the Kashubian path would be much easier if they had chosen Germany over Poland," says Tomasz Słomczyński.

But the Kashubians chose Poland. And despite many troubles over the years stemming from this choice, they still remain faithful to the country. In 2011, the Kashubians gained the opportunity to officially mark their national identity during the census and thus declare a dual nationality. 232,000 people claimed the Kashubian identity. Out of this number 17,000, which is 7,6 per cent declared it as the only nationality.

Słomczyński believes that people who declare Kashubian nationality only and deny their Polishness, expose the entire minority to mistrust and exclusion from the rest of Poland. "Kashubian patriotism is a bit different but it exists. For the vast majority, the Polish identification is indisputable. You need two lungs to breathe. There is no Kashubia without Poland and no Poland without Kashubia," he says.

Kashubian activists stress the difference between nationality and citizenship. As defined by the Central Statistics Office nationality is "a declarative (based on a subjective feeling) individual characteristic of each person, expressing his or her emotional, cultural or parental relationship with a specific nation or ethnic community." Citizenship, on the other hand, means "the legal bond between a person and the State. It does not indicate the ethnic origin of a person and is independent from his or her nationality."

Róman Drzéżdżón calls himself a nationalist. The Kashubian identity that he discovered in himself as a little boy and nurtured throughout his life is natural for him. Today he is politically and socially active. He tries to introduce the Kashubian culture to others and to extend the rights and freedoms of Kashubians to live according to their own principles.

He believes that ethnic minorities' freedom should not be restricted by any kind of external control, like courts and governments. He is afraid that the centralising trend in state policy seeks to eliminate all differences in society, which may result in the decline of diversity and minority cultures, including the Kashubian one. However, even despite his strong stance, Roman does not deny the Polish part of his identity. "My nationality is Kashubian, but I'm a citizen of Poland. I vote in the elections, I support Polish sportsmen, and I speak the Polish language," he says.

Misunderstandings and mutual distrust will most likely remain an issue on the streets of the tiny Pomeranian towns. The past is the inhabitants' ball and chain. It influences everyday decisions, the development of the region and causes divisions. According to Tomasz Słomczyński, change can come with the new generation: people who grew up in free Poland, for whom the Kashubian identity is not only folk ceramics and an incomprehensible, inaccessible language their grandparents shamefully whispered among themselves.

"The greater a problem the Kashubians have with Polishness, the more silent they are. The more they feel at home, and this is the case with the new generation, the louder they speak about all the difficult things," he says.

Agnieszka Zielonka *is a Polish photographer, journalist and psychologist, who graduated in psychology from Jagiellonian University, Kraków. She currently lives in Tbilisi, Georgia, and works there as a freelance photojournalist. She is cooperating mainly with Georgian media outlets and Polish non-govermental organisations and reporting from the South Caucasus region. She focuses on topics related to social justice, minorities, disputed areas and is passionate about people stories.*

THE PROMISED LAND OF MECKLENBURG

By Monika Szafrańska

"When in 2004 Poland joined the European Union everyone here was saying that Germans would buy us out. It turns out it is exactly the opposite," Jarosław Kwiatkowski, one of two founders of West Pomeranian Folk University in Mierzyn near the city of Szczecin, jokes. We are around 15 kilometers away from the Polish-German border on the Polish side.

Here, together with Angelika Felska, Kwiatkowski runs the university. They decided to make it a place of cross-cultural meetings and language study – both Polish and German. Jarosław and Angelika commute to Poland every day. They are Poles living in Germany.

Western, westerner, the westernest

The magical West has always had a special place in Eastern Europeans' imagination. Poles tend to point to Germany as a symbol of welfare and a dreamt destination for economic migration. Most of them do not even realise that some Germans have their own West, too. Due to relatively low salaries and a lack of big industry and companies, many young Germans leave the north-eastern lands to look for better opportunities in the central regions of Germany.

Between 2008 and 2018 the number of inhabitants of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania decreased by around 62,000. While people were leaving in search of jobs and better life, their flats, houses and barnyards remained empty and in the 1990s whole towns and villages became desolated. It was only when the Poles arrived that life returned to the area.

Over the past twenty years small cross-border migration evolved into quite a significant phenomenon. Even though it is far from being a large scale movement, the interest in moving to Germany on the Polish side of the border grows every year. It has also become a profitable business for estate agents: banners advertising property sales are hanging all over the cross-border area and are more often in Polish than in German.

At the time of writing, there were almost 30 offers of house and flat sales in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania. Radosław Popiela, an estate agent who for the last ten years has been living in a German village of Rosow, one kilometer from the border, refers to the area as the Poles' "promised land."

From the bridge over the Oder River, connecting the town of Gryfino in Poland and a village of Mescherin on the German side, the difference in landscape is plain to see. Backyards, farms, and small businesses in Germany appear to be much more orderly, elegant and clean than those in Poland. A perfect manifestation of the proverb "Ordnung muss sein" (there must be order) fathered on Germans. But the main reason why most Poles decided to move to Germany has been economic.

The difference in prices is huge. While a flat in Szczecin costs around 70-80,000 euro, a comparable one on the German side is only 20-30,000 euro. The same flat in Berlin or other big German cities can cost up to 300-500,000 euro. When it comes to houses, the difference is even greater – on the German side they can be bought at a price of a flat in Szczecin.

It is also the *Kindergeld* (child benefits) that attracts Poles. Even though Polish parents have recently started receiving a child benefit called 500+, the money is granted for the second and each consecutive child only. In Germany it is owed to every child regardless of the parents' income. Another reasons pointed by Radosław are nurseries and kindergartens – much more easily available than in Szczecin – the benefits of bilingualism for children, such as greater employment prospects in the future, while for adults it is the opportunity to learn the German language and find a better job.

Migration to the German regions bordering Poland has so far been popular among Poles living up to one hour's drive from the border. Currently, on the German side, ten to 20 percent of inhabitants are Polish, although there are locations where these numbers are even higher. In one school in Gartz (Oder), 13 kilometers from the Polish border, around 40 percent of students come from Poland. The school, just like many others in the area, offers Polish language classes from the first year of schooling.

In a country where most people's first migration choice is Germany such a situation should not come as a surprise. What makes this phenomenon so unusual, however, is the fact that those hundreds – or thousands – of people live in Germany, but often work in Poland, choosing to commute across the border every day.

With time, however, many Poles decide to find employment in Germany. This is not surprising considering the pay gap between both countries. In Poland an average salary is about four times lower than across the border. No wonder it is a great opportunity for people in the borderland to receive a better paid job, since the commute time might be the same.

Who are they?

Radosław Popiela points out that workers are not the only ones choosing to live on the German side. Young university graduates are also highly represented in the group. With time they often open up their own businesses or find good jobs in Germany. Nevertheless, there are still many people who continue working in Poland, just like Jarosław and Angelika. As they say, for a young generation the border means little more than border posts.

Living next to the border has other benefits, too. While the rest of the country struggles with the recently introduced Sunday trading ban, Poles living next to the border do not have this problem, as

German supermarkets are open on Sundays between 12 am and 4 pm. "I wake up in the morning and discuss with my wife whether we are buying milk on the Polish or on the German side," Jarosław jokes. At the same time, big supermarkets in Poland attract lots of Germans, too.

The quality of healthcare is also better on the German side. Jarosław had an chance to experience the difference in waiting times for emergency healthcare when he broke his finger and twisted his ankle in Poland and Germany, respectively. It turned out to be two hours to 21 minutes in favor of Germany. "I counted it on purpose," he laughs.

But such injuries are nothing compared to medical migration, in particular of pregnant women. While women usually need permission to give birth abroad, as Polish hospitals offer free healthcare, some of them find a way to give birth in a German hospital. When the due date is about to come, many women go to the German side and when the labour starts, they are immediately accepted in comfortable German clinics. In the city of Schwedt alone (less than an hour drive from Szczecin) every third newborn child is Polish.

The Polish inferiority complex

There are plenty of stereotypes about Germans in Poland, although over the past ten or 15 years some of them have changed. Germans "buying out" Poland, for instance, a common stereotype recalled by Jarosław, is one of those which have recently lost relevance. For a long time the western neighbour appeared to be an occupant nation.

In 2006 – two years after Poland joined the European Union – the majority of Poles declared unfriendly attitude towards Germans. Interestingly, the predictions bolstered by right-wing and Catholic media in Poland about Germans buying out Polish land or subordinating Poland to Germany within EU structures did not materialise.

In general, however, the image of Germany is no longer negative and throughout the years it has changed into that of a land of order and harmony. Already in 2009 around two-thirds of Poles described Polish-German relations as very good or good. Currently these numbers remain on a similar level. Nevertheless Poles continue to experience an inferiority complex towards their neighbours since Germany is not as interested in Poland as Poles would like it to be.

At the same time, the number of Poles feeling "different" from Germans is continuously falling. It might be connected with the generational change as well as with the fact that relations between the two countries over the past years have been based on partnership. Many Poles no longer look at Germans with admiration and gratitude. Practical concerns have begun to predominate, for example when it comes to migration or commuting; when one wants to get to Szczecin from towns and villages around the city, it is often easier to take a German highway than Polish roads.

At the beginning of the Polish presence in the EU, German society was not very optimistic about Polish accession and was afraid of an unregulated inflow of cheap labour and petty criminals. The common image of Poles as thieves soon started to fade, especially in the eastern lands.

As the results of the Poland-Germany Barometer 2018 show, 56 per cent of Poles have a positive attitude towards Germans but only one third of Germans return this sympathy. However, these statistics do not reflect the situation in the Pomerania borderland. The young generation of Poles from this part of the country was the first one to experience full integration with the neighbours. Jacek Sobuś, a Polish sportsman and blogger from Szczecin, told me that only in high school during a school trip to Germany he realised that "Germans were people just like Poles, maybe wearing different clothes, but in general no different at all."

Also the Germans got used to the presence of Poles in their neighborhood and appreciate their integration. The newcomers buy real estate and renovate German properties, shop and send their children to local kindergartens and schools. In fact nobody buys out the other. It is a real win-win situation.

Monika Szafrańska *is a student of Journalism and Social Communication at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków (Poland). She also holds a BA degree from the faculty of European Studies and works as an editorial assistant with „New Eastern Europe" magazine. In 2017 she took part in the Inter Polit Leader project where she received the certificate of Texts' Editing in Foreign Languages. Her interests focus on the image of the European Union in Polish media, especially the press.*

THE CROSS-BORDER RACE: A LOCAL INITIATIVE UNITING BOTH SIDES OF THE ODER RIVER

By Solveiga Kaļva

It is Friday, November 23rd. After a short train ride from Szczecin, we arrive in Gryfino, a border town between Poland and Germany located at the shore of the Oder River. We walk through the streets of Gryfino wrapped in grey autumn mist. It is a typical middle-sized town: small houses, a few beautiful churches, dogs barking here and there, and people going on their daily routines. But there is something special about the city: for the past 25 years it has been hosting a German-Polish cross-border race.

At OSiR Gryfino sport centre we are meeting the organiser of the race, Jan Podleśny, an exceptionally energetic man who has signed up for Berlin Half Marathon 2019 as a present for his 70th birthday. Running keeps him in shape and full of energy. He is not only involved in organising the cross-border race, but also works as a sport trainer and organises Olympics for kindergarten children and other activities.

The cross-border race is organised twice a year in order to mark two important dates: May 3rd – the Polish Constitution Day and October 3rd – the Day of German Unity. In the first event, those who run half marathon begin the race in Gryfino, reach the German town of Gartz and then return to the start. Those who run ten kilometres begin in Gryfino, run up to the German village of Mescherin and back. The second race follows the same path but starts and ends on the German side – in Gartz. The participants are from both Poland and Germany.

Filip, one of the race's participants is a Polish engineer. He took part in the event for the first time in 1998 when he was in high-school. He was training in duathlon, so their club saw it as a good training opportunity and a way to give the club exposure in the local media. The border crossing in Gryfino at that time was for pedestrians only. So far Filip has participated in two cross-border races, including in 2018. While he was not doing any sports for several years, he is planning to run in both races regularly.

When I ask Filip what the cross-border race means to him, he says he treats it as a hometown event and a great opportunity to meet old friends. Having been brought up in Gryfino, they are all used to the border. For him, a person with sports background, all the runs are primarily competitions or workouts, only secondly he thinks of the cross-border aspect. Nevertheless, he sees the race as a nice way to get closer to his neighbours, whom – because of the history – the local inhabitants know little about.

According to Filip, in its early days in the 1990s the cross-border aspect was very different than now, and the race allowed people to get closer to their neighbours living across the border. It also helped to unite people through the universal experience of sport.

"These days, ironically, many Polish people from the region, due to the strange ways of the economics, buy properties and decide to live in Germany right across the border, and work in Poland. The neighbouring region of Germany is relatively poor and Germans move out to the other parts of the country," Filip explains. "Many Germans come to Szczecin for cheaper shopping for basic goods and building materials. Germans used to look down on Polish neighbours, but now their extreme right political parties have the immigrants to look down at and suddenly Polish neighbours are okay." According to Filip Poles and Germans in the borderland appreciate each other for what they can offer.

Krzysztof Czosnowski, a Polish investment advisor and a cross-border race participant, was born in Szczecin, but has lived all his life in Gryfino – now together with his wife and two daughters. He participated in the race for the first time in 2014. The race has a well-known history in Gryfino and its surroundings and he wanted to be part of this history, too.

Since 2014 Krzysztof has participated in the cross-border race already nine times, as he enjoys its atmosphere. For him, the main mission of the event is to gather together people from both countries who enjoy active and healthy lifestyle. As he points out, there are currently a number of cross-border cultural, educational and sports activities, as Gryfino and Gartz are partner cities.

For the last 30 years there have been many examples of joint cross-border activities and investments. Thanks to EU funds, a waterfront was built in Gryfino as a joint project with the town's partner – the city of Schwedt. There are also bicycle paths connecting the Polish and the German side. Krzysztof says he crosses the border without realising it, as he often uses German roads as a faster way to get to Szczecin. He describes the relationship between Poles and Germans as friendly, helpful and cooperative.

I am really curious – do most of the runners participate in the race because they want to take part in a running competition or because they are attracted to it by patriotic feelings? Is the winning important? Is there competition between the two nations? Is a Polish person happier if the winner is from Poland and the other way around?

Filip thinks that most of the people treat it as a running competition, although, of course, its idea is to connect the nations. "Of course, I prefer if 'we' win! But in a long-distance-run amateur events the spirit of fair play is alive and there are no hooligans fighting over the victory," he explains.

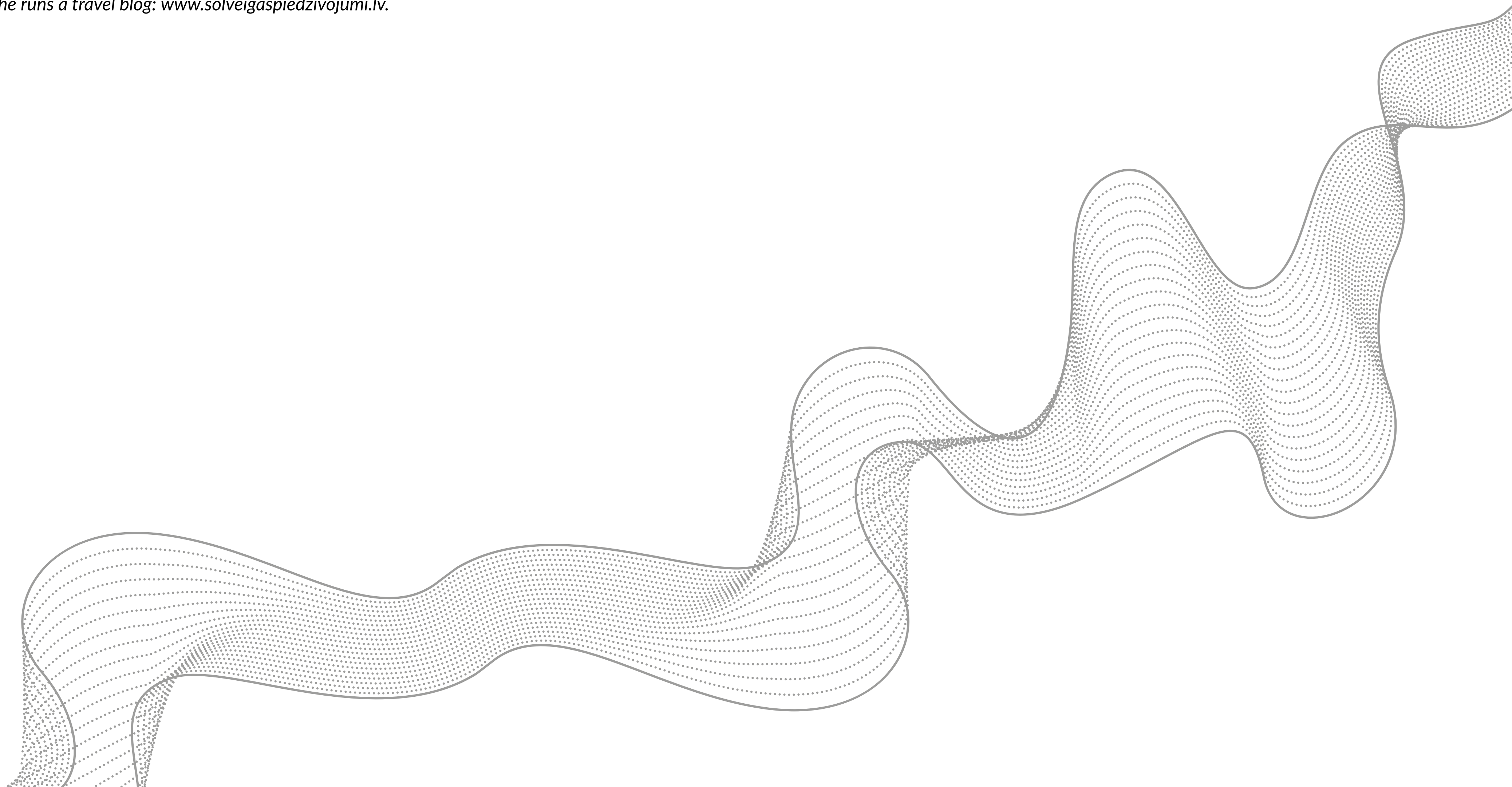
Krzysztof agrees that most participants take part in other races too, but at the same time he agrees that for the majority

of runners winning is not the most important thing. Many people from both countries run in the race because it is a local event and some take part in the cross-border race only. According to Krzysztof, spectators from Gryfino and Gartz enjoy the race and cheer all the runners, no matter where they come from.

When I ask about their future vision for the region, both runners say that in the coming years, the relationship between Poland and Germany might get even closer, in one way or another.

Far detached from politics of state governments, local initiatives bring people together, no matter what their nationality, occupation, age and interests. As long as there are men like Jan Podleśny who organise cross-border activities, and as long as there are men like Filip and Krzysztof who participate in the races, the future is in good hands. Local hands.

Solveiga Kaļva, *originally from Riga, Latvia, is a student of Folkloristics and Applied Heritage Studies Masters Programme at the University of Tartu, Estonia. Her interests include writing, photography, art, music. She runs a travel blog: www.solveigaspiedzivojumi.lv.*



PARTICIPANTS

Hakim Asagarov is currently doing his PhD in Public Administration and Governance at the National University of Public Service of Hungary. Hakim's formal education includes MA in Public Administration from the University of Nottingham (joint scholarship of Open Society Foundation and the University of Nottingham) and BA in Economic and Management from Azerbaijan Technological University. He completed a six-month Academy of Diplomacy Budapest Advanced Training and Research Programme at the National University of Public Service in 2014/2015 academic year and became a certified International Public Service Diplomacy expert.

Azad Jahangirov is a graduate student of Administrative Management at Azerbaijan State Economic University. He has over 5 years experience in accountancy. He is fluent in English, Azerbaijani, Turkish, and he has a good understanding in Russian. Apart from that he also worked as a mountain guide and administrative specialist in Camping Azerbaijan LLC that was founded by his friends, who are making hiking tours to mountain areas and peaks in Azerbaijan. They also have social projects like "Santa Claus in remote villages".

Solveiga Kaļva is Folkloristics and Applied Heritage Studies master's student at University of Tartu (Estoni). She is from Latvia and holds a bachelor degree in Material Technology and Design. Solveiga has been an EVS volunteer for one year in France and has spent three months in the Pamirs, Tajikistan as a GLEN volunteer, where she developed deep interest in Central Asia. Photography and written word is the way how she communicates with the world and shares her experiences.

Anna Kolláth is dedicated to cross-cultural dialogue in Central and Eastern Europe. She is currently working at the Czech Centre Budapest and Csirimojó, a publisher focused on contemporary CEE literature in Hungary. She is also working as a freelance translator and tour guide. She has graduated in International Studies from ELTE, Budapest with an exchange year at Masaryk University, Brno. Her thesis focused on cross-border cooperation in the historical region of Teschen (Cieszyn), Silesia.

Balsa Lubarda is a PhD candidate and a teaching assistant at the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy, Central European University. His research is primarily focused on the far-right environmentalism and environmental and agricultural politics in post-socialist settings. He completed his master's degree at Aberystwyth University, Department of International Politics, where he was on the Chevening Scholarship Programme. He presented his work at several international conferences and universities, such as Cambridge, Cardiff and Oslo University, International Institute of Social Studies (The Hague), Istanbul, etc.

Máté Mohos is a postgraduate journalism student at the University of Sheffield. He holds a BSc in media studies from NYU. He has published non-fiction writing and journalism in New York, Prague and in Shanghai. He has worked for Index.hu and 24.hu, two of the most prominent Hungarian independent news sites. Currently he lives and studies in the UK, with the aim to start a career in journalism there. His areas of interest include culture, tech and politics.

Luka Neskovic is a contributing writer and blogger for the Huffington Post and The Times of Israel. He holds an MSc degree in International Relations from the University of Donja Gorica, Montenegro. As a researcher he worked at the Charles University in Prague and Hochschule Furtwangen, Germany. During his studies he attended many conferences, seminars and schools in the country and abroad, and is a holder of many prestigious scholarships. His working experience and engagement includes academia, political and NGO sectors.

Katarzyna Pyrka has studied sociology and cultural studies at the University of Wrocław and Charles University of Prague. Her interests focus on the social life of the Polish minority in Lithuania. She has conducted research in the Lithuanian-Belarusian borderland. After several years of working as a project coordinator in NGOs, she decided to co-found the Pobliża Foundation focused on culture, education and science activities with the aim to better understand the countries in the vicinity of Poland.

Andreas Rossbach is a German-Russian freelance journalist covering politics, social issues and economics in Russia and Eastern European countries for international online and print media. He speaks fluent German, English, Russian, some Italian and a little bit of Polish. He collaborates with various media including: *Die Zeit*, *Die Welt*, *DW & Coda Story*. He has also experience in documentary filmmaking and a passion for podcasts. He studied European Studies with a focus on Eastern Europe and Russia as well as International Journalism and Global Communication.

Monika Szafrańska is a student of Journalism and Social Communication at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków (Poland) where last year she also obtained a BA degree at the faculty of European Studies. Her interests focus mainly on the image of the European Union in Polish media, especially the press. In 2017 she was an intern with *New Eastern Europe* magazine and since April 2018 she has worked there an editorial assistant. Her achievements include a few articles published on the magazine's website, translations and co-edited texts. In 2017 she took part in the Inter Polit Leader project where she received a certificate of Texts' Editing in Foreign Languages.

Alexandra Wishart is a graduate student in the IntM Central and Eastern European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (CEERES) double degree program at the University of Glasgow, University of Tartu and Kyiv -Mohyla Academy. Holding a BA in Cultural Anthropology and Development Studies, she is one of the founding members of Lossi 36, a student-led think tank covering news from the CEERE region where she works as both a coordinator and a writer. Apart from specialising in political activism and social movements in contemporary Ukraine, she has an interest in Polish-Belarusian relations and how they affect identity and ethnicity in the region.

Agnieszka Zielonka is a Polish photographer, journalist and psychologist, who graduated in psychology from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków (Poland). She currently lives in Tbilisi, Georgia, where she works as a freelance photojournalist. She cooperates mainly with Georgian media outlets and reports from the South Caucasus region, including disputed areas. She focuses on topics related to social justice, minorities, disputed areas and is passionate about people stories. In the future she would like to combine photojournalism and social work.

Published by European Solidarity Centre (Europejskie Centrum Solidarności)
Project website: solidarityacademy.eu
Project supported by the grant from International Visegrad Fund

PARTNERS:

Balkans, let's get up
Emina Frljak
Mirko Savković

Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Germany)
Bastian Sendhardt

Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (Czech Republic)
Čeněk Pýcha
Václav Sixta

József Attila Kör (Hungary)
Ferenc Czinki

literarnyklub.sk (Slovakia)

New Eastern Europe (Poland)
Adam Reichardt
Iwona Reichardt
Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska

The Common Europe Foundation – editorial office of Eastbook.eu (Poland)
Bartosz Tesławski

ORGANISERS:

European Solidarity Centre
Kacper Dziekan
Dorota Brzezińska
Dobrosława Korczyńska-Partyka
Aleksandra Musielak
Bartosz Rief