

Polska Wielki Projekt w Londynie. Kongres Polonijny

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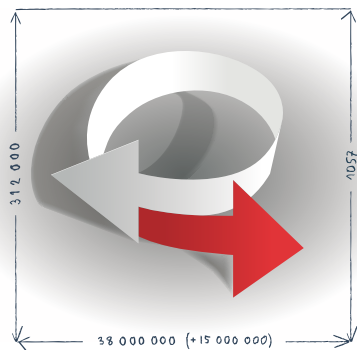


Kancelaria Prezesa
Rady Ministrów

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POLSKA WIELKI PROJEKT



Panel I

Polska ponad granicami. Jak Polska może efektywniej wspierać i integrować Polonię?

Adam Gajkowski

Działacz antykomunistyczny i solidarnościowy, współzałożyciel i honorowy prezes Światowego Stowarzyszenia Republika Polonia

Tomasz Lis

Muzyk, pianista i solista

Grzegorz Górny

Prezes Fundacji Polska Wielki Projekt

Jan Badowski

Dyrektor Departamentu Współpracy z Polonią i Polakami za Granicą Kancelarii Prezesa Rady Ministrów





**George
Byczyński**

Zapraszam serdecznie do niezwykle ważnej debaty pt. „Polska ponad granicami. Jak Polska może lepiej wspierać i integrować Polonię”.

Dzień dobry, witam państwa serdecznie. Bardzo mi miło wystąpić przed tak zacnym gronem. Jestem przekonany, że nie muszę nikogo z Państwa przekonywać o zmieniającym się charakterze Polonii na świecie. Obecnie nikt nie emigruje z Polski z powodów politycznych. Coraz mniej osób wyjeżdża z powodów ekonomicznych. Okazuje się, że zmienia się także kierunek wyjazdu Polaków.

Grzegorz Górny

Po 2004 roku, kiedy Polska weszła do Unii Europejskiej, niemal w ogóle ustał napływ Polaków do Stanów Zjednoczonych. Pojawiły się natomiast nowe miejsca, takie jak Norwegia czy Islandia. Jesteśmy tam w tym momencie niewielką mniejszością narodową. Zmienia się także częstotliwość kontaktów z ojczyzną. Nie są to czasy Latarnika, kiedy na list z Polski trzeba było czekać wiele tygodni albo miesięcy. Dzisiaj dzięki mediom społecznościowym i internetowi wiele osób w różnych zakątkach świata może uczestniczyć w życiu publicznym w Polsce w czasie rzeczywistym. Paradoksalnie podróżowanie z Londynu do Warszawy może być szybsze i tańsze niż z innych miejsc w Polsce, co dodatkowo zmienia sytuację Polonii.

Chciałbym zapytać Pana Tomasza Lisa, który mieszka w Londynie od ponad 20 lat, o perspektywę zmian, które zauważył w tym czasie. Proszę o przedstawienie spojrzenia na aktualne potrzeby i oczekiwania Polonii w Londynie wobec państwa polskiego.

Tomasz Lis

Generalnie wychodzę z założenia, że nie oczekuję zbyt wiele od państwa polskiego. Raczej wręcz przeciwnie, wolałbym, by Polacy starali się zastanowić, co mogliby zrobić dla państwa polskiego czy Polski. Nie wyjechałem do Wielkiej Brytanii z założeniem, że będę tutaj szukał pomocy Polaków czy nawet państwa polskiego. Wyjechałem, bo szukałem zupełnie innych możliwości, inspiracji i perspektyw, niż mogłbym to czynić przebywając w Polsce.

Natomiast jakie są oczekiwania? Trudno powiedzieć, ponieważ Polonia jest bardzo zróżnicowana. Wydaje mi się, że zarówno na świecie jak i w Wielkiej Brytanii są to różne emigracje. Obejmują one okres

powojenny, czasy stanu wojennego, emigrację po przystąpieniu Polski do Unii Europejskiej oraz emigrację taką, jak moja. Ta grupa emigrantów wyjechała jeszcze zanim Polska weszła do Unii Europejskiej. W naszym przypadku wyjazd nie był motywowany sytuacją polityczną czy gospodarczą, lecz był bardziej pragmatyczny, ponieważ Wielka Brytania jest wspaniałym miejscem do robienia kariery i do życia. Oczywiście nie wyklucza to możliwości powrotu do kraju, natomiast nie było do tej pory takiej konieczności. Wydaje mi się, że państwo polskie powinno zastanowić się w jaki sposób wykorzystać potencjał Polonii oraz licznej grupy Polaków rozsianych po całym świecie. Warto wdrożyć strategię, która by obejmowała różne aspekty promocji Polski na arenie międzynarodowej, zawierające aspekty gospodarcze, ekonomiczne oraz kulturalne. Powinno się szukać właściwych osób wśród tej Polonii, gdyż Polonia jest bardzo zintegrowana. Aczkolwiek domyślam się, że są ludzie, którzy się nie integrują, zarówno z Polakami, jak i w środowisku brytyjskim. Uważam to za istotne, gdyż ciężko wpływać na brytyjską politykę, nie będąc w tych strukturach, bądź nie będąc w jakiś sposób zintegrowany z nimi. Historycznie wiemy, że osoby spoza świata polityki, takie jak Paderewski czy Raczyński, największy wpływ mieli na to, co się z Polską działo. Takie osoby, doskonale obracały się w światowych kręgach i miały swobodny dostęp do różnych sfer dzięki czemu kształtowały politykę i pomagały naszemu krajowi. Wprowadzenie takiej strategii wydaje się obiecujące, ponieważ wśród Polonii znajduje się wielu zdolnych ludzi zainteresowanych angażowaniem się na rzecz Polski. Uważam, że obecnie Polonia radzi sobie znakomicie. Nie jest już konieczne, aby państwo polskie desperacko, z uwagi na motywy emocjonalne czy historyczne, szukało związków z Polonią, jak to miało miejsce w przeszłości, gdy te związki były utrudnione. Obecnie taka potrzeba nie istnieje, a świat ewoluował, co skłania mnie do przemyśleń nad nowym podejściem do tej kwestii.

Na to pytanie mogłaby udzielić odpowiedzi osoba o zupełnie innym punkcie obserwacyjnym, jak pan Adam Gajkowski. Jest on aktywnym działaczem polonijnym na Antypodach, od dłuższego czasu repre-

Grzegorz Górny

zentując emigrację solidarnościową. Jak z Pana perspektywy wygląda sytuacja? Jakie są potrzeby i oczekiwania Polonii w stosunku do państwa polskiego?

**Adam
Gajkowski**

Jedną z głównych potrzeb jest uproszczenie wszystkich mechanizmów, które powodują, że organizacje polonijne, w szczególności szkoły, zespoły taneczne czy harcerze, otrzymują dotacje na poszczególne projekty. Myślę, że jest to obszar, w którym jest wiele do zrobienia i możemy go bardzo uprościć. Przypuszczam, że przepisy w Wielkiej Brytanii są podobne do australijskich. Wszystkie małe dotacje, do 5-10 tysięcy dolarów, rozlicza się stosunkowo szybko. Wystarczy dobre sprawozdanie merytoryczne i nie trzeba prowadzić dokładnej dokumentacji. W momencie, kiedy coś z tym rozliczeniem się nie zgadza, wtedy owszem, urzędy wstępują i są skrupulatne. Natomiast w każdym jednym przypadku myślę, że można poluzować przepisy polskie i spowodować, że organizacje, które wszelkie działania biurokratyczne wykonują w czasie własnym, niejednokrotnie poświęcają czas, który mają przeznaczony dla rodziny, zostaną odciążone.

Uważam, że należy wyrazić wdzięczność wobec państwa polskiego za zainicjowanie projektu legitymacji szkolnych dla dzieci uczących się języka polskiego oraz historii Polski, co zostało wprowadzone przez Prawo i Sprawiedliwość. Jest to innowacyjny pomysł, który, chociaż nie dotyczy Australii tak intensywnie jak Polaków zamieszkujących Europę, może okazać się niezwykle przydatny, zwłaszcza dla dzieci mieszkających w Anglii czy Niemczech, spędzających często około 6 tygodni wakacji w ojczyźnie.

Jest jeszcze jeden dobry projekt, który może zabierać zdolnych, młodych Polaków mieszkających poza Polską, ze społeczności polonijnych i oddawać ojczyźnie. Ten projekt wspomaga powrót Polaków do kraju. Obecnie obserwujemy pewien trend, który, chociaż może nie jest masowy, to jednak wskazuje na coraz większą liczbę Polaków starających się o powrót. Jest to zauważalna zmiana w porównaniu do okresu rządów Tuska, gdy miliony Polaków masowo emigrowały.

Chciałbym również dokonać pewnego sprostowania. Jestem prezesem Stowarzyszenia Nasza Polonia, ale tylko honorowym. Przez

14 lat prowadziłem stowarzyszenie, a od 6 lat jestem prezesem Federacji Polskich Organizacji w Nowej Południowej Walii. Dziękuję.

Pan Tomasz Lis przed chwilą podkreślił potrzebę istnienia strategii państwa polskiego wobec Polonii. Czy taka strategia obecnie istnieje? Osobiście uczestniczę w spotkaniach polonijnych od początku lat 90. w różnych krajach – Hiszpanii, Irlandii, Stanach Zjednoczonych. Przez niemal 30 lat stale pojawia się ta sama kwestia narzekania, że Polska nie ma konkretnego pomysłu na Polonię, diasporę czy emigrację. Czy rzeczywiście brakuje takiego pomysłu, a może nie istnieje właściwa strategia państwa polskiego wobec Polonii?

Grzegorz Górny

**Jan
Badowski**

Oczywiście, że taka strategia istnieje. Posiadamy określone pomysły i kierunki, które zamierzamy realizować. Jednak zwrócę uwagę, że kształt, założenia, pomysły i potrzeby Polonii w ciągu ostatnich 13-15 lat bardzo się zmieniły. Przypomnę, że dawniej Polacy uciekali z Polski z powodów ekonomicznych, na przykład do Brazylii, lub z powodów politycznych, do innych państw. Później, w czasie powstania i odrodzenia państwa polskiego w 1918 roku, należy podkreślić znaczącą rolę Armii Hallera, czyli Błękitnej Armii. Polacy porzucili komfortowe życie, włączając się w walkę o niepodległość, o czym się bardzo często niestety zapomina. W okresie II wojny światowej warto wspomnieć, że kwiat polskiej inteligencji musiał również pozostać na emigracji.

Po odzyskaniu wolności w 89. roku pojawiła się opieka nad Polonią, która moim zdaniem, nawet w swojej definicji jest błędna. Chodzi o to, że my wspieramy Polskę, Polonię, staramy się wspierać Polaków za granicą, a termin “opieka” niesie ze sobą konotacje sugerujące, że jest to grupa, która nie radzi sobie sama, i dlatego potrzebuje naszej pomocy. Niektórzy złośliwie mówią, że to czasem jest opieka paliatywna. Osobiście nie używam tego sformułowania, uznając je za nadużycie. Faktem jest jednak, że nasze wsparcie to jedno, a drugim elementem jest budowanie partnerskiego modelu współpracy. Obejmuje on nasze wsparcie finansowe i niefinansowe, a także działania polityczne w różnych krajach. Z drugiej strony, ocze-

kujemy aktywności i zaangażowania Polonii. Prosimy i wymagamy od Polonii, żeby budowała pozycję Polski na świecie.

To jest mocne słowo, ale tak jak Pan Ambasador jest świetnym ambasadorem naszego państwa w Wielkiej Brytanii, tak wszyscy państwo i cała Polonia – jesteście ambasadorami narodu polskiego. Dzięki państwa opowieściom o Polsce, Brytyjczycy będą dobrze zaznajomieni z bieżącymi wydarzeniami w naszym kraju oraz z historią, która doprowadziła Polaków do Wielkiej Brytanii i innych krajów. To jest wielkie zadanie, żeby opowiadać o naszej historii zwłaszcza w takim państwie jak Wielka Brytania, która czasem zapomina, jakie były zasługi Polaków dla utrzymania wolności Brytanii podczas II wojny światowej. Dlatego prosimy o wspieranie naszych działań, mających na celu budowanie dobrego wizerunku.

Istotnym elementem jest również utrzymanie tożsamości. Zauważam obecność Pani Prezes Polskiej Macierzy Szkolnej, która nadzoruje kilkaset szkół w Wielkiej Brytanii, które realnie utrzymują znajomość języka polskiego i polskiej historii. Zaniechanie tego aspektu, zarówno w Wielkiej Brytanii, jak i na całym świecie, byłoby niestosowne. Środowiska edukacyjne odgrywają gigantyczną rolę w utrzymywaniu więzi z Polską, umożliwiając przyjazdy do Polski z dziećmi. W przypadku starszych pokoleń emigracyjnych będą to przyjazdy w celu zobaczenia jak Polska dziś wygląda i jak się zmieniła. W przypadku najnowszej emigracji, ważne są kontakty z dziadkami, pradziadkami i rodziną przebywającą w Polsce. Taki pobyt w Polsce buduje niezwykłą więź z naszym państwem i generuje pokolenia, które będą faktycznie wspierały Polskę, budując jej pozycję międzynarodową.

Pan Tomasz Lis przywołał pytanie co Polacy za granicą mogą zrobić dla Polski. W tym kontekście przypomina mi się pewna historia. Mianowicie, w 1991 roku spotkałem dwóch dwudziestoparoletnich Polaków, którzy urodzili się w Stanach Zjednoczonych i po upadku komunizmu przyjechali do Polski, żeby wspomagać reformy. Zaczęli pracować w Ministerstwie Finansów jako doradcy. W pewnym momencie stwierdzili, że skoro w roku 1991 wypada dwusetna rocznica

Grzegorz Górny

Konstytucji 3 Maja, jest to okazja, żeby powiedzieć o tym świecie i zrobić wielkie wydarzenie, na które można zaprosić ludzi ze wszystkich krajów. Okazało się, że natknęli się na mur niezrozumienia. Wszyscy patrzyli na nich wielkimi oczami i nikt nie rozumiał, czym jest polityka wizerunkowa czy dyplomacja historyczna. Wtedy w Polsce nie istniała świadomość tego, jak takie wydarzenia można wykorzystywać w skali międzynarodowej. Jak się zmieniły rzeczy właśnie od tamtego czasu? Czy dzisiaj potrafimy wykorzystywać tego typu rocznice i wydarzenia? Czy potrafimy korzystać z kapitału moralnego, jaki z naszej historii wynika na arenie międzynarodowej, czy też w dalszym ciągu jesteśmy w pewnych powijkach? Czy Polacy mieszkający dzisiaj w Wielkiej Brytanii, którzy lepiej funkcjonują w tym krwioobieg kulturowym i wiedzą, jak funkcjonują te mechanizmy wizerunkowe lepiej współpracują z państwem polskim? Czy znajdują tam takich partnerów, jakich nie znajdowali ci moi rozmówcy ponad 30 lat temu?

Tomasz Lis

Wydało mi się, że sytuacja diametralnie się polepszyła. Stosunki między Polską a Wielką Brytanią nigdy wcześniej nie były tak dobre. Jest to sytuacja dosyć bezprecedensowa, ponieważ w naszej historii z Wielką Brytanią, która zawsze teoretycznie była naszym sojusznikiem, nie zawsze wszystko układało się tak dobrze. Teraz jednak sytuacja geopolityczna sprawia, że otworzyły się drzwi, które chyba nigdy wcześniej nie były otwarte. Ostatnie 10 lat rządów w Polsce, które kładły nacisk na politykę historyczną, przypomnianie pewnych faktów oraz uświadamianie nie tylko Polakom, ale również światu, znacznie poprawiły tę sytuację.

Jeśli Polska, państwo polskie, chciałoby efektywniej realizować cele, to istnieją obszary, takie jak wspieranie biznesu i polskich firm, zwłaszcza młodych ludzi, którzy działają tutaj i nawiązują współpracę gospodarczą między brytyjskimi a polskimi firmami. To dotyczy również instytucji kulturalnych. To wymaga ciężkiej pracy specjalistów, którzy przebywają w Wielkiej Brytanii od dłuższego czasu, posiadają doskonałe kontakty, rozumieją realia brytyjskie, i potrafią nawiązywać dialog z dyrektorami muzeów czy instytucji kulturalnych. W ten sposób możliwe jest organizowanie wystaw, fe-

stiwali i innych wydarzeń. Oczywiście artyści mają to do siebie, że robią swoje i przykładowo Krystian Zimerman czy Piotr Beczała nie potrzebują wsparcia – robią to, co kochają. Dzięki ich sztuce są wielkimi ambasadorami kraju, z którego pochodzą.

Kolejnym obszarem do rozważenia są sfery akademickie. Użyję brzydkiego wyrażenia “infiltracja jednostek uniwersyteckich”, ale Chińczycy to robią znakomicie. Oczywiście, oni dysponują ogromnymi środkami i mnóstwem studentów na całym świecie. Wspieranie nauki, sponsorowanie różnych projektów, instytutów, studentów polskich, którzy tu są na pewno w dużej ilości na najlepszych uczelniach, i innego rodzaju punktowe znajdowanie przez państwo polskie osób, które mogłyby efektywnie wpływać na wizerunek naszego państwa, reklamować, szpiegować czy jakkolwiek to nazwać, na pewno byłoby również warte uwagi. Podobnie wygląda kwestia publikacji historycznych czy tłumaczenia naszej literatury. Tutaj ciągle jest ogromne pole do popisu.

Tomasz Lis

Kolejną sferą jest turystyka. Ludzie, którzy przyjeżdżają z Wielkiej Brytanii do Polski, zwykle są zachwyceni. Wydaje mi się, że ze strony państwa polskiego mogłyby być ułatwienia dla firm, które prowadzą taką działalność. Wszyscy, którzy przyjeżdżają do Polski, wyjeżdżają z niej pełni zachwytu i zwykle odkrywają rzeczy, o których nawet nie wiedzieli, że istnieją. Ogółem, muszę przyznać, że jest bardzo duży postęp. Jednak, wydaje się, że konieczne jest wypracowanie bardziej sprecyzowanego planu oraz podejścia do zagadnienia dotyczącego polonijnych spraw. Widząc tylu młodych zdolnych ludzi, warto skoncentrować się na zdefiniowaniu celów i efektów, które chcemy osiągnąć. W innym wypadku indywidualne działania mają charakter ogólnikowy. Organizacje wykonujące wspierała pracę często wspierają polonijne sprawy i Polaków, natomiast niekoniecznie mają możliwość, żeby ze swoimi inicjatywami i pomysłami wyjść do Brytyjczyków. Naszym głównym celem jest to, żeby to Brytyjczycy, Amerykanie, czy inni jak najwięcej wiedzieli o Polsce i mieli jak najlepsze mniemanie o nas. Korzystnie byłoby mieć wpływ na międzynarodową politykę i kształtowanie sytuacji na arenie międzynarodowej.

Pamiętam, jak po upadku komunizmu ówczesny minister kultury Austrii, Erhard Busek, powiedział: „Wy, Polacy, wychodzicie z tego komunizmu biedni, ale macie coś, czego nie ma nikt w Europie. Macie wielki kapitał moralny, który wynika z pewnej czystej karty, jaką wynieśliście z II wojny światowej”. Powiedziałbym, że żaden naród nie wyniósł tak wielkiego kapitału moralnego z powodu swojej postawy podczas II wojny światowej jak Polacy. Minęło 30 lat i widzimy, że z tego kapitału moralnego w wielu miejscach świata już niewiele zostało. Do Polski i narodu polskiego przylgnęła łąka antysemitów, szmalcowników czy grabieżców pożydowskiego mienia. Do tego dochodzą nowe zarzuty, że jesteśmy narodem ksenofobicznym, który nie chce przyjmować uchodźców, którzy chcą ze wschodu się dostać do naszego kraju. W związku z tym mam pytanie do pana Adama. Czy rzeczywiście dysponujemy jeszcze takim kapitałem moralnym, o którym mówił minister Erhard Busek? Czy jesteśmy w stanie budować na nim swoją politykę wizerunkową, czy też musimy uznać, że sprawa jest pogrzebana i należy starać się o odbudowę swojego wizerunku zagranicą w inny sposób?

**Adam
Gajkowski**

Myśmy tego kapitału nigdy tak naprawdę nie stracili. Nie można stracić dobrych czynów tylko dlatego, że ktoś uprawia politykę nienawiści wobec państwa polskiego. Nie zgadzam się również z jednym stwierdzeniem. Komunizm chyba naprawdę nie upadł. Oni się po prostu przefarbowali i dzisiaj świecą swoimi dumnymi twarzami na salonach europejskich. Poprzez rozgrabienie majątku narodowego w latach 89. i 90., zdobyli na tyle pieniędzy, żeby móc działać politycznie i odnosić sukcesy, gdzie to możliwe.

Jeśli chodzi o kapitał polityczny i moralny, uważam, że my go ciągle mamy. Musimy go używać na przekór wszelkim kłamstwom czy atakom w prasie. Sojusz ze Stanami Zjednoczonymi, który ma swój wynik w naszym zaangażowaniu na Ukrainie, powoduje, że zaważamy dużo mniejszą częstotliwość napaści na Polskę i Polaków. Nie pamiętam, kiedy ostatnio słyszałem o “polskich obozach koncentracyjnych”. To jest dobry sygnał. Oczywiście, temat pewnie wróci za jakiś czas, ale na razie jest cisza w tej kwestii. Pani Agnieszka Holland

staje na głowie, żeby, uderzyć w Polskę i pewne kręgi polityczne na zachodzie Europy, które miały zawsze tendencję do komunizowania, prawdopodobnie podchwycą to „dzieło” i będą się nim obnosili, mówiąc o strasznych Polakach. Przy okazji nie zauważą tego, że Polacy przyjmowali i wciąż przyjmują Ukraińców do własnych domów. O tym musimy mówić i tym musimy się chwalić.

Wracając do polityki historycznej państwa polskiego, uważam, że jest naprawdę dużo lepsza, niż była kiedykolwiek. Przy okazji chciałbym wspomnieć o akcji, w której Polska złożyła notę dyplomatyczną w sprawie reparacji, ponieważ ostatnio otrzymałem broszurę w języku angielskim zawierającą kwintesencję naszych żądań w stosunku do Niemców. Wiem, że to jest bardzo długi proces, jednak uważam, że warto byłoby dostarczyć ją w różnych językach do różnych państw na świecie. Organizacje polonijne powinny posiadać broszury w wielu egzemplarzach po to, aby skutecznie rozpowszechniać je wśród wszystkich polityków, niezależnie od kraju pochodzenia. Dzięki edukacji, w momencie kulminacji starań się o reparacje, możemy zapobiec atakowi głoszącemu, że nic się nam nie należy. Polonia może to zrobić najlepiej. Owszem, konsul lub ambasador w danym państwie mają swoje kontakty polityczne, ale konsul lub ambasador jest jeden, a nas są setki ludzi, którzy spotykają polityków lokalnych, których znamy od wielu lat, tych, którzy z nami współpracują, i tych, którzy może nie za bardzo chcą z nami współpracować. Spotykamy ich na różnych uroczystościach niekoniecznie polonijnych lub polskich, a często takich, które organizują władze australijskie. Mamy okazję, żeby być ambasadorem i przekazać tego typu broszurę, która pokazuje kwintesencję tego, czego żądamy od Niemców w sprawie reparacji.

Wyjazdy Polaków za granicę wiążą się bardzo często z negatywnym zjawiskiem drenażu wykwalifikowanych pracowników, ponieważ państwo polskie inwestuje w wykształcenie młodych ludzi, którzy później wyjeżdżają i pracują dla innego kraju. Z drugiej strony, ci ludzie często robią kariery i wielu z nich osiąga wysokie pozycje w świecie biznesu czy nauki. Jest wielu Polaków wśród wynalazców, którzy

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opatentowują nowe rozwiązania. Czy państwo polskie ma pomysł i strategię, aby przyciągnąć tych rodaków z powrotem? Wielu z nich nadal czuje się patriotami polskimi i chciałaby przyczynić się do rozwoju ojczyzny. Czy Polska ma pomysł lub program który wykorzysta ich osiągnięcia na rzecz kraju?

**Jan
Badowski**

To jest bardzo ważny problem. Tracimy wielu naukowców i osób o wyższym wykształceniu. Wyjeżdżają, ponieważ mają możliwość rozwoju kariery lub uczestnictwa w badaniach, których nie mogliby przeprowadzić w Polsce. Dodatkowym czynnikiem jest możliwość zarobienia większych pieniędzy, co stanowi istotny element tego zagadnienia. Pierwszą rzeczą, którą musimy zrobić, to powiedzieć Polakom, że w Polsce również istnieje możliwość realizacji takich celów. Bardzo wiele naszych uczelni już współpracuje z innymi uczelniami i ośrodkami badawczymi. Osoby wyjeżdżające na studia doktoranckie czy postdoktoranckie mogą zdobyć cenne doświadczenie i później powrócić do kraju. Wiem, że Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki pracuje nad programami stażowymi, wyjazdami zagranicznymi i dofinansowaniem studiów za granicą, ale później trzeba się Polsce za to odplacić, co jest w miarę naturalne.

Spójrzmy na to z drugiej strony. Nie można jedynie stwierdzać, że to oni emigrują – są także skłaniani do tego przez państwa, które korzystają z ich umiejętności, wydobywając potencjał Polski. Istnieje mądra polityka państw rozwiniętych, które dobierają sobie migrantów, którzy do nich trafiają. Nie ogranicza się to jedynie do Wielkiej Brytanii czy Stanów Zjednoczonych, ale także dotyczy Szwajcarii czy Niemiec. Każdy rynek wyszukuje obszary, gdzie ma braki i dokładnie celując swoją politykę, próbuje od nas podebrać pracowników, na przykład w obszarze zawodów technicznych, fryzjerów czy kosmetyczek. Wiele osób wyjeżdża do Niemiec, bo tam akurat takich pracowników brakuje. Jest to ułatwiane poprzez specjalne programy, które państwo niemieckie wprowadzało, żeby zachęcić do przeprowadzki. My działamy w drugą stronę. Wiedząc, że tracimy tego typu pracowników, staramy się ich ściągać zza naszej wschodniej granicy. Bardzo ważnym mechanizmem w tej kwestii była Karta Po-

laka i fakt, że sprowadzaliśmy, sprowadzamy i będziemy sprowadzać osoby mające związek z narodem polskim i polskimi korzeniami. Niektórzy tak naprawdę się z Polski nigdy nie przeprowadzili, tylko granica się przesunęła. To jest nasz rezerwuar, żeby te rezerwowe osoby po utracie wyjeżdżających na Zachód odzyskać. Rzeczywiście, powinniśmy skupić więcej skupić na tym zagadnieniu. Powinniśmy jako państwo polskie, uderzyć się w pierś, bo powinniśmy budować więź z tymi, którzy z Polski wyjechali i zrobili za granicą kariery. Są oni ambasadorami Polski, zajmują wysokie stanowiska, są lekarzami, naukowcami. Znam kilkanaście takich osób, które o Polsce dobrze mówią, ale mieszkają za granicą i pewnie się stamtąd nie przeprowadzą, bo mają tam rodziny, a ich dzieci zawarły związki małżeńskie z mieszkańcami tamtego kraju. W tym kontekście musimy opracować nie tyle projekt sprowadzenia ich z powrotem, a umożliwienie im efektywnej pracy na rzecz Polski i rzetelne opowiadanie o kraju. Zupełnie inaczej będzie, jeśli jakiś uznany lekarz będzie opowiadał o Polsce, a zupełnie inaczej, jeśli, nie ujmując nic innym zawodom, będzie to robił na przykład kierowca autobusu. Każdy może dotrzeć do innej grupy, a to jest bardzo cenne. Chciałbym podzielić się anegdotą na temat jednego z lekarzy, bodajże w Australii, który mając swoją praktykę, powiesił na ścianach reprodukcje obrazów Matejki, dotyczące polskiej historii. Pod każdym z tych obrazów znajduje się informacja, czego obraz dotyczy oraz opis historyczny. Ludzie oczekujący w kolejce do lekarza czytają te historie, pogłębiają swoją wiedzę i mówią: „Nie wiedzieliśmy, że pod Wiedniem to wcale nie Austriacy sami się obronili, a to wkład polski był dość znaczący”. Wykorzystujemy zatem każdą metodę, umożliwiając opowiadanie o Polsce. To może przynieść realne korzyści.

Czy problemem w tym wszystkim nie jest słaby stopień samoorganizacji społeczności polskiej? Na przykład w Stanach Zjednoczonych istnieje najliczniejsza polska diaspora. Tam Polonia jest, jak się mówi, najlepiej zorganizowana. Jeżeli weźmiemy pod uwagę skład Kongresu Stanów Zjednoczonych, to właściwie nie ma tam w tej chwili żadnego kongresmena polskiego pochodzenia, który by się przynajmniej do

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tego przyznawał. Dość powiedzieć, że osobą, która osiągnęła najwyższe stanowisko pochodzące z wyborów w Stanach Zjednoczonych, jest w tej chwili członek Sądu Najwyższego stanu Wisconsin, pani Janet Protasiewicz, wybrana zresztą wiosną tego roku. To pokazuje słabość organizacji polskiej społeczności za granicą. Jak wygląda to w Anglii? Pan George Byczyński otwierając konferencję, mówił, że w Wielkiej Brytanii żyje ponad milion Polaków, więc wydawać by się mogło, że jest to dosyć duża siła. W niektórych regionach ich liczebność dochodzi do 6-8%. Jednak czy to się przekłada na samoorganizację i tworzenie pewnego propolskiego lobby w brytyjskim życiu publicznym?

Tomasz Lis

To jest bardzo trudny temat, bo tak jak już wcześniej wspomniałem, wymaga to definitywnie pewnego rodzaju integracji ze społeczeństwem brytyjskim oraz założenia, że wyjeżdża się do obcego kraju, aby poznać między innymi kulturę tego kraju i wejść w jej struktury. Wydaje mi się, że to właśnie dzięki zainteresowaniu można mieć wpływ na podejmowane decyzje. Jednak trudno jest zachować równowagę jednocześnie integrując się i zachowując swoją tożsamość narodową, czy jest się Brytyjczykiem polskiego pochodzenia, czy Polakiem brytyjskiego pochodzenia. Uważam, że nigdy nie można tracić swojej tożsamości narodowej i każdy naród ma to do siebie, że jest unikatowy i posiada cechy, które są dla niego całkowicie charakterystyczne. Czy one są atrakcyjne dla innych czy nie, to właściwie nie ma znaczenia, bo przecież nie musimy być kochani i nie musimy kochać wszystkich. Wchodzenie w społeczeństwo, do którego się migruje przy zachowaniu swojej tożsamości jest szalenie istotne. Wymaga to starania się o pracę i robienia kariery. Patrząc na naszą historię, nie jest to prosta sprawa. Często są to osoby, które najlepiej reprezentują nasz kraj poza granicami. Są to osoby, które często są poniekąd poza systemem, które robią to zupełnie od siebie, nie czyniąc nadzwyczajnych wysiłków, żeby realizować dane działania w ramach organizacji.

Trudno jest jednoznacznie odpowiedzieć na to pytanie, bo jest to bardzo złożona kwestia. W kontekście Wielkiej Brytanii, migracje, poczynając od powojennych, aż do fali zarobkowej po wejściu Polski do Unii Europejskiej, raczej nie miały na celu aktywnego włączania

się w brytyjskie środowisko czy robienia kariery, żeby potem móc wpływać na wizerunek Polski. Głównym celem było zdobywanie środków finansowych i utrzymanie rodziny. Osoby te mogły się asymilować, ale nie wszystkie podjęły to wyzwanie. Niektórzy wrócili nawet do Polski. Przykładowo, znam rodzinę, która choć świetnie radziła sobie w Wielkiej Brytanii, postanowiła wrócić do Polski, gdyż nie czuli się komfortowo. To było 7 lat temu, więc stwierdzili, że w Polsce będzie im się lepiej żyło, zwłaszcza po zmianie rządu. To zrozumiałe, że podjęli taką decyzję, zwłaszcza gdy ich znajomość języka angielskiego była ograniczona. Tacy migranci często nie mają możliwości aktywnego wpływania na wizerunek kraju, gdyż brakuje im narzędzi do tego celu. Podsumowując, temat migracji i integracji społecznej jest złożony, wymaga wielu analiz i kontekstów, co sprawia, że odpowiedzi na postawione pytanie nie są jednoznaczne.

Poruszył Pan ważny problem nazewnictwa. To nie jest wbrew pozorom błaży spór, bo jak mówimy, tak myślimy, a jak myślimy, tak działamy. Definicje są ważne i wskazują na potencjalne napięcie pomiędzy integracją czy asymilacją społeczeństwa, w którym się funkcjonuje, a chęcią zachowania własnej tożsamości narodowej. Z tym również wiąże się problem nieubłaganych statystyk, które mówią, że w trzecim pokoleniu, jeżeli obcokrajowcy się integrują, to następuje asymilacja, wynarodowienie. Dlatego tak ważna jest samoorganizacja. Pytanie do gościa z Australii. Jak w tym kraju wygląda sprawa samoorganizacji polskiej społeczności, wpływu na tamtejsze życie publiczne i zachowanie własnej tożsamości?

Grzegorz Górny

**Adam
Gajkowski**

Zacznijmy może od polityków i od tego, że mała społeczność polonijna w Australii, licząca raptem 160-180 tysięcy, skupiona jest w zasadzie przede wszystkim w dwóch głównych ośrodkach, w Sydney i w Melbourne. Te populacje około 40-45 tysięcy, potrafiły jednak na przełomie lat wydać z siebie ludzi, którzy zostawali politykami australijskimi. Obecnie mamy w State Parliament of New South Wales człowieka, który jest polskiego pochodzenia, i to już jest trzecia generacja – Pan Borsak, który całkiem dobrze działa, jeżeli chodzi

o jedno ze środowisk polonijnych. Mieliśmy również do ostatnich wyborów parlamentarzystę, który był w Parlamencie Federalnym. Mamy przybranych synów narodu polskiego, jak wielbny David Clark, który był przez wiele, wiele lat w wyższej izbie parlamentu New South Wales. Dlaczego używam określenia przybrani synowie? Dlatego, że kiedykolwiek David mówi o Polsce, mówi to z takim uczuciem, że ja się wstydzę, że nie potrafię z takim entuzjazmem opowiadać o Polsce. Myślę więc, że mamy niewielkie, ale jednak wpływy. Na pewno długo też pracowano nad tym, żeby Polonię zdeintegrować. Mówię o latach przed Sierpnem '80 roku czy po Sierpniu '80 roku. Cytując słynną dyrektywę Kiszczaka: „jedźcie tam, wysyłajcie swoich ludzi, oni niech się dorobią i niech wchodzą w organizacje polonijne, niech je przejmują”. Wygłosił to do oficerów służby bezpieczeństwa bodajże w 85. roku. To wszystko mogło doprowadzić do tego, że społeczność polonijna w sensie politycznym nie jest zwarta i nie potrafi zadbać o to, żeby ze swoich synów czy córek wybrać jedną czy jednego po to, żeby nas reprezentował czy to w Kongresie Stanów Zjednoczonych, w Parlamencie angielskim, czy nawet w Bundestagu, w Niemczech.

Moje pytanie dotyczy przede wszystkim stopnia skuteczności w budowaniu polskiego lobby. Jedną kwestią jest to, czy ludzie są wybierani do ciał reprezentacyjnych, a drugą czy udaje im się pracować na rzecz poprawienia wizerunku Polski, tworzenia pewnej grupy wpływu i nacisku na rzecz Polski.

Grzegorz Górny

**Adam
Gajkowski**

Wpływ na te zagadnienia mają również mniejsze wydarzenia i działania. Przedwczoraj mieliśmy okazję obserwować obecność posła Karczyńskiego, który zorganizował w Westminsterze wydarzenie o reparacjach. Podobne inicjatywy są czynione na całym świecie przy wsparciu polskich służb konsularnych, ambasad, a czasami również przez organizacje polonijne działające samodzielnie. Lobbying był zagadnieniem, o którym po raz pierwszy w moim życiu polonijnym usłyszałem, jak tylko wylądowałem w Australii. Wówczas dwie grupy powojennych żołnierzy oficerów Wojska Polskiego, reprezentujące różne obozy, nie zawsze zgadzające się ze sobą, zorganizowały

spotkanie. Mówimy tu o zwolennikach Romana Dmowskiego i marszałka Piłsudskiego. W sprawach polskich – byłem świadkiem takiego wydarzenia – do PRL-u jechał nowy ambasador australijski, który zwołał zebranie w jednym z klubów Polski zaangażowanej Polonii. W sprawach polskich, w nakreślanym kierunku, w ustaleniach jak ambasador ma się w Polsce zachowywać, żeby nie przyniósł ujemy Australii, ale też nie spoufalał się z władzą komunistyczną – w tych sprawach obie te grupy mówiły jednym głosem. Bez względu na to, jakie były ich prywatne przekonania, w kwestiach polskich wydźwięk ich wypowiedzi był identyczny. Życzyłbym sobie tego dzisiaj. Niestety ludzie, którzy dzisiaj tworzą Polonię, nie są tak zorientowani na sprawy polskie. Jest obóz patriotyczny, który będzie polonijny i zawsze będzie dbał o dobre imię Polski i Polaków. Jednak istnieje także obóz, który bez względu na okoliczności zawsze będzie podkreślać brak praworządności w Polsce oraz łamanie konstytucji. Na chwilę obecną nie mamy narzędzi, aby temu skutecznie przeciwdziałać.

Polscy emigranci bardzo często stają przed życiowym dylematem. Pytają, co robić dalej. Czy wracać, czy zostać, a jeżeli zostać, to na jakich zasadach, czy się integrować, czy asymilować, czy tworzyć diasporę. Tych możliwości jest bardzo wiele. Pytanie do pana Jana Badowskiego – które z tych procesów powinno państwo polskie wspierać, a którym przeciwdziałać. Jakie postawy wspierać, a jakie nie?

Grzegorz Górny

**Jan
Badowski**

Myślę, że na pewno nie możemy wspierać czystej asymilacji, bo wtedy będziemy tracić tożsamość, co jest pewnie naturalne. Chcemy jednak, żeby osoby, które trafiają za granicę, miały tę tożsamość i kontakt z Polską. W dzisiejszych czasach to jest dużo prostsze, bo jeśli ktoś wyjeżdżał do Australii w latach 80., to był to bilet w jedną stronę. Nie wiadomo było, ile jeszcze potrwa komunizm, a w latach 80. nie wyglądało na to, żeby on miał się za chwilę zawalić. Świadomość, że zegnamy się na zawsze z naszymi ideałami musiała być dużym wstrząsem. Ja sobie tego dzisiaj nie wyobrażam. Dzisiaj mamy wyjazd do Wielkiej Brytanii, gdzie leci się dość szybko, gdzie mamy już rozwiniętą technikę, jeśli chodzi na przykład o rozmowy

**Jan
Badowski**

video, których ja sobie w młodości nawet nie wyobrażałem, a dzisiaj to już jest standard. Technika nam bardzo ułatwia kontakt. Dzięki temu dużo łatwiej jest zachować tę tożsamość. To już nie jest wyjazd na bezludną wyspę, gdzie trzeba szukać kogoś, kto jest Polakiem, z nim się integrować i budować tę małą Polskę. Nazwa nasza, Polonia, ma przecież przekazywać, że my się integrujemy. Polacy po II wojnie światowej, tracąc kontakt z krajem, tracąc kontakt ze swoimi najbliższymi, najczęściej już nie mieli możliwości powrotu do Polski. Zwłaszcza ci, którzy o Polskę walczyli. Jeśli wracali do Polski, trafiali do więzienia w okresie stalinizmu i prawdopodobnie to by się dla nich tragicznie skończyło, więc budowali taką Polskę na emigracji. Tych dzieł jest bardzo dużo. Istnieją organizacje, które powstawały masowo. Przykładem są stowarzyszenia polskich kombatanów, w tej chwili tworzą je potomkowie tych kombatanów, ale wtedy to były grupy osób, które realnie walczyły wcześniej o wolność.

Kolejnym przykładem są szkoły polskie, macierze szkolne, zrzeszenia nauczycieli, organizacje oświatowe. Powstawały również inne grupy, takie jak grupy harcerskie, które przechowywały patriotyzm poza Polską. Przypomnę, że Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego Poza Granicami Kraju z siedzibą w Londynie jest organizacją harcerską powstałą na początku XX wieku w Polsce. Związek ten, podobnie jak rząd londyński przechował legalną władzę, przechował legalną organizację harcerską. ZHP, który w tej chwili w Polsce działa, został założony w roku 1956, co ludzie złośliwi wspominają. Tak jednak faktycznie było. Organizacje, które przetrwały, które przechowywały polskość, miały i nadal mają gigantyczne znaczenie. Dopóki one będą trwać, dopóki one będą działać, dopóki Państwo będziecie się w nie angażować i budować przy mniejszym bądź większym wsparciu państwa polskiego, to polskość będzie trwała. Najgorsze co możemy zrobić to uznać, że należy uczyć się języka angielskiego, zapomnieć o korzeniach, bo skoro mieszkamy w Anglii, to znaczy, że wybraliśmy być Anglikami. To skończy się w kolejnym pokoleniu stopniową, a może nawet bardzo szybką asymilacją. Niestety, znam rodziny z w mojej najbliższej okolicy, które wyjechały do Wielkiej Brytanii po 2004 roku i swoją konsekwentną decyzją uczą dzieci porozumiewa-

nia się tylko po angielsku, co skończy się brakiem więzi z krajem czy z dziadkami. Niestety tracimy takie osoby.

Jest taka piękna reklama o dziadku, który dostaje w paczce kurs języka angielskiego. Uczy się i po roku wyjeżdża do Anglii, gdzie spotyka się z małym chłopcem i mówi: „I’m your grandfather”. Wież pokazana w reklamie wzrusza. Jest jednak też druga reklama w ramach przez nas wspieranego projektu. Jest to identyczna reklama z niemal identycznym aktorem, w której dziadek nie uczy się języka angielskiego, tylko wyjeżdża do Wielkiej Brytanii, spotyka się ze swoim wnuczką i dzwoni do swojej rodziny: „słuchajcie, mój wnuczek nie potrafi się do mnie odezwać, nie zna języka”. Ta reklama nie zachęca dziadka do nauki języka angielskiego, tylko mówi o uczeniu naszych dzieci języka polskiego, żeby one miały więź z krajem, bo to daje im też szansę na przyjechanie do Polski, a może nawet powrót. Mamy bardzo wiele projektów związanych ze studiowaniem w Polsce i zachęcamy, żeby do Polski przyjechać. Studia w Polsce są na dość wysokim poziomie. Jednak bez znajomości języka polskiego studiować w Polsce będzie bardzo trudno. Dlatego zachęcamy poprzez macierz szkolną i inne organizacje do wysyłania dzieci do polskich szkół.

**Jan
Badowski**

W pewnym momencie mieliśmy wciąż pewne problemy związane z koronawirusem, a później z wojną na Ukrainie. Państwo polskie z pewnością wróci do tego tematu, bo jest to bardzo cenne. Drugą kwestią są ułatwienia powrotowe. Zachęcam do wejścia na stronę powroty.gov.pl. Znajdują się tam informacje jak do Polski wrócić. Cały czas tworzone są specjalne ulgi i pomysły jak zachęcić do tego, żeby do Polski się przeprowadzić razem z biznesem, razem z rodziną, bo nam na tym oczywiście zależy. Jest bardzo dużo osób, które mieszkaly w Wielkiej Brytanii, które po sytuacji związanej z Brexitem postanowiły wrócić do Polski, bo okazało się, że funkcjonowanie w Wielkiej Brytanii nie jest tak łatwe i wygodne, jak się wydawało. Według statystyk, w tym roku więcej osób do Polski wróciło niż z niej wyjechało. Jest to również sygnał, że w Polsce dzieje się coraz lepiej, i że można już wracać. Pamiętajmy rok 2004, rok 2015 i kolejne lata, kiedy wyjazdy były motywowane tym, że w Polsce nie było pracy, a sytuacja

gospodarcza była słaba. Aktualnie sytuacja gospodarcza w Polsce jest dużo lepsza. Bezrobocie jest na takim poziomie, że poszukujemy pracowników, więc ta przesłanka do wyjazdu się skończyła. Zdaję sobie sprawę, że kolejne pokolenia mają coraz trudniej. Jednak dla tych, którzy wyjechali w ostatnich falach po 2004 roku, to jest jeszcze ten moment, że do Polski można wrócić, przeliczywszy sobie też wszystkie związane z tym kwestie techniczne czy wychowawcze. Jeśli dziecko poszło do szkoły, jest już w drugiej, trzeciej klasie, to przesadzać, nieładnie mówiąc, z korzeniami jest dużo trudniej. Na pewno łatwiej jest to zrobić na początku szkoły podstawowej niż w liceum, kiedy dziecko będzie bardzo mocno zintegrowane i nie będzie chciało wyjechać. Tego rodzaju rodzinne uwarunkowania również są bardzo istotne. Dziękuję.

Chciałbym podzielić się historią znajomych, z którymi ostatnio rozmawiałem. Kiedy mieszkalem w Poznaniu, koleżanka robiła doktorat z biotechnologii i niestety nie była w stanie zrobić badań w Polsce więc wyjechali do Cornell w celu ukończenia go. Po pewnym czasie jednak wróciła do Polski, zmieniła branżę i obecnie wykłada na Akademii Ekonomicznej. Z uwagi na posiadane dzieci postanowili nie pozostawać na stałe w Stanach, uznając, że lepiej będzie wychować trójkę swoich dzieci w Polsce. Ich córka aktualnie planuje studia medyczne. I mimo rozważań o możliwości studiowania za granicą, zdecydowali, że wyślą ją jedynie na staż do szpitala w Oxfordzie. Argumentowali, że choć staż za granicą może być cenny, to ukończenie studiów medycznych w Polsce otworzy jej łatwiejszy dostęp do struktur służby zdrowia czy szpitali w kraju niż gdyby robiła te studia zagranicą i potem próbowała wrócić do Polski. Stąd wydaje mi się, że trend jest bardzo dobry. Z drugiej strony jest to sygnał, że biurokracja nie sprzyja osobom, które studiowały za granicą i ponownie chcą wrócić i pracować w Polsce. Muszę powiedzieć, że łatwiej jest w Wielkiej Brytanii dostać posadę na uczelni wyższej, nie mając doktoratu, natomiast w Polsce, żeby zostać profesorem, niestety są wymagane pewne formalności, nie zawsze adekwatne do osiągnięć czy doświadczenia.

Tomasz Lis

**Adam
Gajkowski**

Kolejnym istotnym aspektem do rozważenia w kontekście polityki państwa polskiego jest grupa osób, które wyjechały w latach 80. i dzisiaj osiągają wiek emerytalny. Część z tych ludzi, która ma już wnuki wychowane w Australii czy w Anglii, czy w Niemczech, nie bardzo ma ochotę zostawiać rodziny i wracać do Polski, gdzie żyłoby się im lepiej. Warto ich zdopingować, żeby jednak wracali do Polski. Dlatego powinno się na nowo przemyśleć umowy międzynarodowe pomiędzy państwem polskim a na przykład Australią i zastanowić się, jak te umowy poprawić. Dobrym przykładem są Grecy i Włosi mieszkający w Australii. Wracając do swojej ojczyzny, nie muszą płacić żadnego podatku na ZUS, bo płacili go całe życie w Australii. Dzięki umowie, rząd australijski musi zadbać o to, żeby obywatele australijscy mieszkający teraz w Grecji czy we Włoszech mieli opiekę medyczną. Warto by było ponownie pochylić się nad tymi umowami, które egzystują od 20-30 lat.

Dzień dobry. Mam pytanie dotyczące polskiego dziecka. Zdaję sobie sprawę, że decyzja o wyjeździe z Polski lub powrocie do niej zawsze zależy od rodziców lub osób dorosłych. Znamy przypadek w Polskiej Macierzy Szkolnej, gdzie rodzice, mający troje dzieci, pięciokrotnie podejmowali decyzję o powrocie do Polski, by później znów wracać do Anglii. Moje pytanie dotyczy edukacji w Polsce, a dokładniej mówiąc wsparcia, na jakie mogą liczyć dzieci wracające do Polski. Słyszałam bardzo dużo głosów, że dzieci nie radzą sobie w szkołach. Szkoła polska w Wielkiej Brytanii, choć doskonała, fantastyczna, dbająca o kulturę i o tożsamość dziecka, nie zawsze jest w stanie sprostać wymagom późniejszej edukacji w Polsce. Jakie są programy wspomagające? Na co mogą liczyć rodzice, kiedy zabiorają dziecko wychowane za granicą i rzucają na głębokie wody w Polsce?

**Elżbieta
Barrass**

**Jan
Badowski**

Dziękuję za to bardzo ważne pytanie. Jest ono ważne dla osób, które chcą się przeprowadzić i pragną, żeby dziecko się zaadaptowało. Znam rodziców, którzy wracali dlatego, że dziecko sobie nie poradziło. Wiem, że Ministerstwo Edukacji włożyło dużo pracy w rozwiązanie, takie jak tak zwany rok przejściowy. Jeśli dziecko trafia do Polski i wie,

że ma problem z językiem, może dostać dodatkowe lekcje języka polskiego, żeby się wdrożyć w system. Nic niestety nie zastąpi tego, żeby dziecko poznało swoich rówieśników i współpracowało z nimi. Tak naprawdę, to znajomości, przyjaźnie i dobre samopoczucie są najcenniejsze. Rodzice znajdują również rozwiązania takie jak pomoc psychologiczna, która jest wprowadzana, aby pomóc dziecku w adaptacji. Jeśli istnieją przypadki szczególne, problematyczne, prosimy je do nas zgłaszać, będziemy próbowali je rozwiązać.

Proszę państwa, niezmiernie dziękuję za tę jakże ważną dyskusję.

Grzegorz Górny

Myszę, że wiele mogliśmy się nauczyć.

Panel II

Polonia for Poland: The role of the Polish community in Polish-British relations

Magda Harvey

Director of the White Eagle Appeal, recipient of the British Empire Medal

Daniel Kawczyński

Member of Parliament, Conservative Party

Prof. Michał Łuczewski

Vice President of the Poland Great Project Foundation

Prof. Piotr Wilczek

Ambassador of Poland to the United Kingdom





We will discuss Polonia for Poland and the role of Polonia in Polish-British relations. We have learned that incredible activists and successful people exist in business, politics, or elsewhere. However, they are a bit like little islands all over the place. What can be done to enable this enormous energy, this fantastic group of Polish people, to contribute more to Polish-British relations? Furthermore, how can those already so successful share their experience and knowledge so that others can follow in their footsteps and produce even more remarkable achievements?

We have exceptional speakers on this panel. Professor Piotr Wilczek, Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to the United Kingdom, please welcome. Mr Daniel Kawczyński is a Member of the British Parliament for the Conservative Party. Daniel Kawczyński is also the Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Poland, a significant body within the UK Parliament with over ninety members from the Commons and Lords. Magda Harvey, the White Eagle Appeal. Magda Harvey has a vital White Eagle Club in Balham. Over the years, thousands and thousands of Poles and, more recently, Ukrainians have greatly appreciated her work. The Polish Club in Balham, led by Magda Harvey and other extraordinary people, raised so much important support, particularly at the beginning of the conflict, for which Magda Harvey was awarded the British Empire Medal, one of the very few Poles ever to receive it, which is very significant.

Today's panel will be chaired by Professor Michał Łuczewski, Vice-President of the Polish Great Project Foundation. Welcome, everyone. Professor Łuczewski, whom I met in Oxford and Poland, promotes the meaningful Polish-British relationship everywhere, not just in Poland. I have not properly introduced the Polish Ambassador who has assumed this position at such a difficult time. It was the 14th of February, almost a week before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, so perhaps he was not quite accustomed to his job. Professor Wilczek had a great challenge to help Ukraine as much as possible, to create communication channels between Britain, Poland, and Ukraine. He has done this remarkably, but much hard work still needs to be done. We shall now learn from these distinguished speakers. At the end of

this discussion, we will have a chance to ask them questions. What are the struggles and issues they face? What can they share with others? I wish you an exciting discussion.

Thank you very much. There are two meanings of Polonia. Polonia in our title, Polonia for Poland, and we will be talking about Polish-British relations, but there are two meanings. One is, of course, the Polish diaspora. The other is Polonia as the embodiment of Polishness, of Poland. At times, she is portrayed as a beautiful, suffering woman. I want to draw your attention to this double meaning.

**Prof. Michał
Łuczewski**

On the one hand, diaspora seems to be on the margins. On the other hand, it is a symbol of Polishness, distilled Polishness. Perhaps we can merge these two meanings and say that the Polish diaspora, Polonia, is the embodiment of Polonia, of Poland. So here is Poland in a distilled form. We cannot talk about Poland or Polonia without considering the whole network of relations, namely the relations between Polonia and Poland, Polonia and Britain, Polish-British ties, and so on. We cannot talk about the role of Polonia without the people who chose this role and our distinguished panellists and guests. Otherwise, the role would be an abstract notion. It has to be enacted. I would, therefore, like to start with Professor Wilczek and ask him what his contribution to Polish-British relations is. That is more of a personal note. I was at the University of Warsaw simultaneously with Professor Wilczek, so there is a connection between us. Professor, where do you see your most significant contribution to Polish-British relations? I am asking you this because we would like to get to know you, and, as George said, we, all panellists, would like to follow in your footsteps. Therefore, the first question is addressed to you.

**Prof. Piotr
Wilczek**

It will be difficult for me to discuss my contribution, so other people should discuss it. First, I should say that I am still a professor at the University of Warsaw, like Michał, but I am on a very extended sabbatical leave. It has been almost seven years, first in the United States and, as Jerzy said, from the 14th of February, in the United Kingdom. As Jerzy noted in his introduction, when I arrived, it was just ten

**Prof. Piotr
Wilczek**

days before the Russian full-scale invasion, as we have to remember that the illegal Russian presence in Ukraine has been happening since 2014. Many people in Europe and the world have forgotten that and have not considered that an ongoing process. However, what happened in February 2022 was a full-scale invasion. A few days before, at the end of the previous week, I had the honour of attending a meeting between my President, Andrzej Duda, and Boris Johnson. The meeting that I remember very well. We asked the question about a potential full-scale invasion, as it was known that this was a possibility. Before I arrived in London, I decided to have my first meeting. It was somewhat against the protocol. The first meeting in London was with the Ukrainian Ambassador, my close friend, Vadym Prystaiko, who unfortunately is leaving London very soon. We have had a great working relationship over the last year and a half. Before I went to my embassy, my first breakfast in London was with Vadym, whom I had known from Washington when he arrived as Ukraine's foreign minister. That is the second reason for this unusual visit: we all felt something would happen. From day one, my mission has been about supporting Ukraine and cooperation between Poland, Ukraine, and the UK. There is even a formal cooperation agreement between the three countries. Naturally, other countries have joined, but what we have seen under the leadership of Boris Johnson and Liz Truss, and we should assume now, is that the position of the United Kingdom is firm and very much in favour of supporting Ukraine until Ukraine wins. That is also the position of Poland. It was very helpful to be an ambassador in a country that fully supports Ukraine and Poland, as it is a frontline country. To see that the UK regards this war as not just a local war in Eastern Europe but a threat to European security was extremely important and helpful in my work. Our cooperation with the United Kingdom has been very much about defence, security, and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. In that respect, the role of the Polish community has been critical. Magda Harvey is one of the excellent examples of how it worked. This was the most important thing we could do, and what the Polish community could do to support Poland in our support for Ukrainian refugees, a direct support

for Ukraine. I did not intend to concentrate so much on this issue, but that is what happened. Together with the Ukrainian ambassador and other ambassadors within the European Union delegation, all our conversations and efforts were about this war and what we could do to stop the Russians and support Ukraine. I do not know what my contribution is, but that is what I have been doing for the last year and a half. There have been many other issues. Polish-British relations are flourishing.

There are numerous meetings and visits. We have great cooperation in cyber security, defence, culture, and research. I met a great many Polish activists and entrepreneurs who are very active and helpful. Perhaps, later, we may discuss the role of Poles in the UK. Speaking of Polonia, I have just looked in the Oxford English Dictionary, and there is no such word. Therefore, if you want it to be an official term, we need to start a lobbying campaign to include Polonia as an official English word, not just Latin or Italian. If we wish Polonia to mean Polish diaspora, we should approach Oxford University Press.

It could be the beginning of an important political campaign to make a change in the Oxford University Dictionary. Professor Wilczek, being a diplomat, did not answer the question about the contribution to Polish-British relations. However, if they are flourishing, they are probably doing very well, certainly much better than before. I think we know to whom we should attribute this success. Well, I look at Daniel. Perhaps you know some of Ambassador Wilczek's contributions to Polish-British relations, and then I will ask about yours.

**Prof. Michał
Łuczewski**

**Daniel
Kawczyński**

Thank you very much. I have been an MP representing Shrewsbury for almost nineteen years now. I am in my fifth term. I have seen many Polish ambassadors come and go over the last twenty years. When we had an event in the House of Commons on Thursday to highlight the destruction of Poland during the Second World War, I described Professor Wilczek as the best ambassador that Warsaw has sent to London in the twenty years I have been in politics. We, Poles, do not have to reinvent the wheel. We have to learn from history and create

**Daniel
Kawczyński**

the strongest possible alliances. Military alliances with key capitals worldwide, such as Washington and London, to protect ourselves or to try to defend ourselves against the possibility of further naked aggression from Russia. Piotr Wilczek was sent to Washington and the Bahamas as RP's ambassador, and now, after four years in Washington, he has been sent to the Court of St James. It was a wise move by the NSZ since they had chosen a highly eloquent and credible Polish diplomat to serve first in Washington and then in London. In addition to him being a brilliant diplomat, I would like to point out that you are seeing, as the ambassador said, tremendous unprecedented cooperation between London, Warsaw, and Washington in the face of the aggression against Ukraine. Not everybody in this room will agree with me, and some will be upset at what I am about to say. We are beginning to prove, and we want to continue to prove, that we do not need to be in the European Union to have close bilateral cooperation with Warsaw. We are told that it is impossible, that you cannot have close relations with Warsaw if you are going to leave the European Union. It is in stark contrast to Germany, ostensibly Poland's closest ally at the moment, which is behaving, in my view, in a very dangerous, selfish, and aggressive way towards Warsaw. There have been many campaigns in the House of Commons to try to stop the Nord Stream Two pipeline and impose sanctions. Can you believe that Berlin wanted to give Moscow an umbilical cord to the heart of Europe, bypassing countries like Poland? It is unimaginable. The Poles were very pioneering. If you consider the Polish government, they started to buy liquefied gas. They built the LNG terminal in Szczecin years ago. They understood the dangers of being too dependent on Russian energy supplies.

Moreover, the Poles were the first to say: "No, even though it may cost a little bit more, we will buy our energy supplies, such as liquefied gas from America and Norway, another NATO partner". They are building a pipeline straight to Norway. When you are a member of NATO, an exclusive club of thirty-two nations, an organisation that has not lost a square inch of territory since it was founded over seventy-five years ago, it comes with responsibilities. I think Poland,

more than any other country, is demonstrating whether it is spending – I think it will spend four per cent of its GDP on defence. Equally important is whether it spends the necessary money on defence and buys its energy supplies from other NATO partners on the 5G issue. We should buy an American solution, not the Chinese one. Therefore, Poland is leading the way in this relationship, and I am very proud of its leadership and the diplomat it has sent to build relations with London.

We appreciate that Daniel is an excellent and very enthusiastic supporter of Poland. However, I understand you are the only Polish-born and Polish MP out of six hundred and fifty MPs. I believe there will be more people like Daniel Kawczyński among these six hundred and fifty. Additionally, I think that when we discuss the support of Poland by the Polish community in the UK, we also talk about councillors who will become MPs. There are already many councillors here in the UK who, I hope, will become MPs in two, three, or four years. Polish MPs who will be loyal British citizens, but at the same time, like Daniel, support Poland because, in my view, that is also the role of people like Magda, who may become an MP one day. However, she will explain if that is her ambition. Even though it may not be true, I think it should be. People like her and many others here who support Poland this way will support Poland and Britain simultaneously.

Prof. Piotr Wilczek

Daniel Kawczyński

When we came here in 1978, on the 16th of October 1978, we came to this country on the day that John Paul II became Pope. That was transformative. We all know what an impact it had on all of us. When we came to this country, my mother, God bless her, and I had a lot of arguments about it. She tried to Anglicise us. In the late seventies, Polish immigrants had a mentality of being foreigners who had to integrate and try to lose virtually all of their Polish identity. I think the Polish community in this country is becoming more self-confident, recognising its extraordinarily disproportionate contribution to this island. We must use it as a bridge, as the debate title says. We must now use those nine hundred thousand or one million Poles to

move them into more important positions within our business and political establishment. I will end by saying, not wanting to embarrass him, that there is a very important man here today with us who plays a very prominent role in our society. Also, his son is interested in politics. He is in the army now but is twenty-eight years old and interested in politics. I will take him on. I will mentor and look after him so he can be on a shortlist for a Conservative MP. If anybody else in this room knows any young people who are interested in politics, I will even, as one exception in my life, accept socialists. You don't hear me saying this very often, but even if they are left-wing, even if they believe in socialism, God help them, we will find the right Labour MP or Lib-Dem MP to mentor them. Please get in touch with my office and George Byczyński if you know of a young Pole who you think can contribute. Whether you are a politician in this country, you work for the Bank of England, you work in Britain's top architectural firm, or whether you work at the very top of the NHS, we, Poles, must now start to think the way the Irish and the Jews have.

Therefore, we must help our people join us in these important positions. In this way, we will strengthen our diaspora and increase its influence. The most crucial point is that we start to use it to build relations with the Republic of Poland and protect it at a time when it will need it in future Russian aggression.

Thank you, Daniel, for that beautiful life story that is future-oriented. You came back to your grandfather, whose proud surname is Kawczyński. I saw maybe not tears in your eyes, but I felt my heart open by what you said. You said you also want to be a mentor, probably like your grandfather was to you, to the younger generation. It also reminded me of a story about my son. He is in love with veterans and with the army. At one point, we visited one of them, and he wrote in a booklet, "This is for Jeremy (my son's name), for him to take this baton of patriotism". My son asked me what a baton is. So, I described a baton as a stick you take when you run and pass it farther and farther. Then, he said, "OK, so I am getting the baton from the veteran. So does it mean, father, that I can pass it to somebody else for the

**Prof. Michał
Łuczewski**

next generation?" I said, "Yes, son, you are right." That is the kind of Polish story I saw in you, that you are taking that baton of patriotism and mentoring a new generation. And now it is high time for Magda Harvey. You were described by George and twice by Piotr Wilczek. What is your contribution to Polish-British relations? And my more personal question is – why are you always working? Whichever question you would like to answer.

**Magda
Harvey**

I do not know, but yesterday I talked about that, and I asked my partner, "Why do you work like that?" And he said, "I do not know. Maybe we have it in the blood. Maybe we are people who like to work, have to work, and take pleasure from working."

Where do you benefit from building public relations and Polish-Ukrainian-British relations? Where does the biggest joy come for you from that work?

**Prof. Michał
Łuczewski**

**Magda
Harvey**

The biggest joy comes from the fact that I came here. Like many people who migrate to another country, they have a reason. I came here thinking stupidly and am not embarrassed to admit that. I have been in this country for thirty years. When I came here, my family and friends were saying what I had to do with my life. I had a really good life in Poland. I did not need to escape from anything. I did not have economic reasons. I had a good family. I had good prospects, and I decided to stay here. Because many people predicted I would achieve nothing, I thought I had to integrate into society first. Like Daniel's mother, I felt I had to learn English to be among the people living in the UK. I had to get an education. I had to integrate, and I had to contribute to the local community and the economy. So, I started to study. Then, I opened my first company and always had strong links with Poland. I was very proud of being Polish. After about eight years, I thought I had everything in life. I had a good life here, but I was missing three things: I was missing my friends and family from Poland. I was missing the possibility of going to the forest, which does not have the wire around, because usually, there are gates in the UK,

**Magda
Harvey**

and the forest belongs to somebody. You must know where to go to get into the forest. The third thing that I was missing was the Polish food. I decided to open a Polish shop. And when I did it, I was so naive. I thought I could get Polish food from wholesalers in the UK and fill the shelves with whatever I was missing. I was missing what I was missing because it was unavailable in the UK. So, I started to import Polish food. When I started to import that, it was far too much for my shop, and I thought I had to do something. In 2004, I was fortunate, which was also the effect of my hard work.

I managed to enter the British supermarket and start supplying them with Polish food on a mass scale. I am very proud that when I introduced Polish food in supermarkets, you could buy Krakus gherkins and kabanos, wiejska and sopocka, and maybe some more, so there were five products. Right now, you have about five hundred Polish products in British supermarkets. I can say that this is my hard work over twenty years, so I am very proud of that. I think this is my immense contribution to promoting Polish food, let us call it Polishness, not just to Poles but also to British customers. That is one of my achievements of which I am very proud. I am working with British companies, where I am on a big scale promoting Poland. They always say that our food is the best in the world. The second thing is, when the war started, my father was staying with me in London; he is eighty-nine now. He was born in thirty-two, so he does remember the Second World War. I am not going to elaborate that, like every Polish family, my family has lost relatives during the Second World War. I know all those stories, and I was watching TV, looking at the queue of women with children waiting to cross the border with Poland, and I asked my dad, "Should we do something? Should we try to help?" He just looked at me. "Do you think you can help them in any way?". I said, "I do not know, but we can try to get the basic aid and send it to Ukraine." That is how we started the Ukrainian appeal. We have put one small post on the Facebook of the White Eagle Club, and within twenty-four hours, thousands of people were queuing to donate. I am proud of building relationships with British people and people of every nationality who live in London. Since we launched the

appeal, we had people from all backgrounds and parts of life join our appeal to help Ukrainians. Many institutions have not recognised our work. However, one of the big achievements was that White Eagle won the BBC Make a Difference competition last year. They do this every year. The BBC gives an award called Make a Difference, and we won The Together Award for bringing communities of the UK together in a common cause to support Ukrainians.

Will you become an MP? You have a good mentor—or even two mentors.

**Prof. Michał
Łuczewski**

**Magda
Harvey**

No. You are asking a different question than I was going to answer. Still, being on a panel with two politicians is difficult because I am well-known for living in a country of political correctness. I am entirely politically incorrect, and I say what I think, and I do not have that political correctness. So, it isn't easy, and I will never become an MP.

I do not know whether you, Daniel, also espouse political correctness.

**Prof. Michał
Łuczewski**

**Daniel
Kawczyński**

I am not going to comment on that. But I would like to comment on one point which I find fascinating. I would never have left Poland myself. I would never have done it. As a six-year-old, I was dragged out here, so I had no option. There were many, like my parents, fierce anti-communists who hated communism and refused to live in the communist system. Little did we know that communism would collapse so quickly and that Poland would be free. What I find fascinating, and I say this to many of my colleagues in the British Parliament, is that we were subjugated to one hundred and twenty years of occupation. Poland was wiped off the map. I think my grandfather's generation, born in 1903, was not even allowed to read Polish books or learn Polish in their schools. Polish books were under the floorboards. The Germans tried to eviscerate and eradicate the Poles. We had over a hundred and twenty-three years of occupation. We had that tiny brief moment between 1918 and 1939 of independence, fascism and

communism. What I find notable is they murdered our elites, destroyed our elite institutions, and gave us a politically Orwellian and economically illiterate system called communism. And yet Poland is projected to overtake the British and French economies within the next fifteen to twenty years. Now, we should have a debate just on that one subject alone. How on Earth have these people, despite all the difficulties, managed to create an economy that is moving so quickly that it will overtake Britain and France? I find that fascinating, and I think we, Polonia, here in the United Kingdom, should recognise that and see the enormous opportunities for us because our mother country will now take a leading role on our continent economically and militarily.

I want to clarify one thing. I am not a politician but a diplomat. Diplomats represent politicians or governments. It is sometimes very difficult. As you know, I was discouraged from approaching you at some point because they told me, "Oh, she is very difficult." So that was a challenge, and I took it as a challenge because when I realised that you are doing so many good things, my ambition was to meet you and talk and ask what you want. But that is just clarification. I wanted to say that when I was listening to the previous panel, Tomasz Lis said that perhaps he does not want anything from Poland, but I understand he wants to do much for Poland. I believe that during this panel, we can also discuss another dimension of the activities of the Polish community. It is not just about helping ourselves here in the United Kingdom and creating organisations; what is natural is getting some funding from Poland for these organisations to work and thrive. What is also very important for me is how the Polish community here can help Poland. There is a Polish diaspora in countries such as Belarus or Ukraine and many other countries where there needs to be active support from the Polish government and the Polish budget. However, I believe that in countries like the United States, where the situation is different, but also in the United Kingdom, the Polish people can also think about helping support Poland in increasing the role of Poland in Europe and the world. One way is, as I mentioned, if you

Prof. Piotr Wilczek

become an influential British politician, you can directly or indirectly support Poland like Daniel is doing all the time. There are other ways of supporting Poland. As you mentioned the Jewish community, there are organisations, for example, in the United States, such as the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee, a lobbying organisation for Israel. I am thinking about how the Polish community here can actively support Poland and the Polish economy. I talked with one of the conference participants, who is in the audience supporting Polish companies and businesses that want to operate in the United Kingdom. I think this is one of the ways. I know a few organisations in the UK, like the Polish City Club and many others, could support themselves and try to organise conferences to attract businesses from Poland to present Poland as a good place for investment. I expect that the role of Polonia, or Polish diaspora in Polish-British relations, is also about how this community here, many of them entrepreneurs and successful businesspeople, can support Poland right now.

**Prof. Michał
Łuczewski**

Now, we move on to how to have a bigger impact on business, politics, and social life. Then, I would like to ask some more sceptical questions because I feel your energy, Magda. I will follow you and your appeal. I feel your energy, Daniel. If I were younger, I would go into politics. I feel your energy as well. Oh, I am a professor already, so. But we have that energy. We have these ideas. We have this history. George used the phrase “One million strong”. When I am looking at Great Britain, we can always ask where that strength is. Maybe we are one million weak if I were to put it more sceptically. My question to all of you is, why, despite all that energy, all the resources, despite our heart, our intellect, and our actions, are there still no relations between us? We are lonely islands, as Jerzy put it. Why are we so passive, if it is the right word? Magda, I will start with you. Why is that, given all the circumstances, given all the resources?

When we were talking over coffee, I said that I categorise Polonia abroad into three categories. One of them is the professionals coming here with good English and good professions. They integrate very

Magda Harvey

quickly and are very confident. They are sure and confident about their skills and know they hugely benefit the economy and the local community. Whatever field they are working in, they are good specialists. That group is very strong and very powerful. Then, there is the group of hard-working people and those from the medium group. I think nine hundred fifty thousand groups of people are being seen as, or are, a bit weaker because they lack confidence. We have that stigma as a nation that we come from Eastern Europe and are not as good as people born in Western Europe only because of the place where we were born and the system in which we were born. We were under occupation for so many years. As Daniel said, our country was not on the map of Europe for so long. We are somewhere behind with confidence. I came here over thirty years ago and was very fortunate to have the permit to work from the beginning. I remember times between the 1990s and 2004 when so many Poles were working illegally, and they were criticised for allegedly stealing jobs and weakening the economy, which was the opposite. After Brexit, we can say that the Poles were doing the jobs others did not want. They are now missed. The role of the people from the City Club or those with solid positions and good jobs is to educate hard-working people and convince them that we should be proud of being Polish because we have good ethics and are hard-working. I do not remember exactly when it was, but I was invited on News Night, and there was a debate about the Poles not doing anything but claiming benefits, and I just laughed. I laughed loudly and said, "We are not used to claiming benefits because, in Poland, you do not have benefits. You have to work. You have free health services and free education. For everything else, you had to work". We have to prove that we are hard-working, feel more confident as good workers, and do not feel shy. We were not born here; we come from Poland. That is how we should build a stronger relationship with the British people. Do not stay somewhere in the background, in the crowd. Show what we are and what we can do.

**Daniel
Kawczyński**

I agree with you. There was a moment when, immediately after Poland entered the European Union, we had a big flow of workers coming to

**Daniel
Kawczyński**

the United Kingdom. It was all Polish plumbers coming over. I can see Kasia Madera at the back of the audience, so I had better be careful about what I will say about the BBC. I said the following openly in Parliament, which is why they also invited me to Newsnight. I stated that there was a concern about migration because it was reaching such huge proportions. I felt at the time that the BBC was picking or focusing on the Polish community because it is a soft touch. After all, they are legally here, work hard, and integrate into society. It is very difficult to be accused of racism. I wonder whether the BBC at that time would have focused so assiduously on Somalians or other people. I made that point, and it was somewhat controversial then, and I was invited onto Newsnight. To answer your question specifically, I do not think we are passive. We are not passive because the nine hundred thousand Poles do a tremendous job daily to give the British, their interlocutors, confidence that they are making a massive contribution to this country. How many times do you hear of Polish criminal gangs? How many times do you hear of Polish people raping women or stealing? Very rarely. We are a community that has come here, integrated, and has been working hard and building solid relations with the British. In my constituency of Shrewsbury, I went to the owner of twenty-four care homes. He said, "Mr Kawczyński, I need you to find me some Polish nurses to look after all the elderly people." I replied, "Well, why cannot you find them locally in Shropshire?" "We have surveyed all the elderly, and they want Polish nurses. They are the kindest and most attentive." I think we have been taught in Poland to look after elderly people. It is taught to us by our grandparents and our parents. There is an innate interest, satisfaction, and a sense of responsibility and decency in looking after elderly people.

I have said this to my mother a thousand times: "Over my dead, cold, listless body will you go into a care home. That is not going to happen." We are taught to look after elderly people. The Polish brand in this country is very strong. It is much stronger than many people realise. All we need to do is continue to have events like this where people are brought together in London, Manchester, and Birmingham so that we can exchange best practices. I would like to thank the

event organisers for allowing us to come here and meet one another because we will continue to help each other as a diaspora through this kind of interaction.

Why is there only one Daniel Kawczyński?

**Prof. Michał
Luczewski**

**Daniel
Kawczyński**

Only one person is stupid enough to do the job. When I was ten years old, I told my mother: "I am going to be a member of parliament." She looked at me in disbelief. There had been nobody in my family who was involved in politics. The Chinese have a saying, "If you do a job that is a hobby, you will never do a day's work in your life." Can you imagine going to work every day and being paid to do your hobby? It is an extraordinary situation. I have not done enough personally to find young Polish people to get involved in politics. I saw somebody here today. His father has told me he is interested in politics, and I will follow up on that. I agree that we need more and more Polish people involved in politics. Unsurprisingly, the best lobby in the House of Commons is the Jewish lobby. It is mind-blowing how effectively they operate in the House of Commons. We need to make sure that our diaspora is as effective. We should all pray that Poland will not have a border with Russia. The reason is that, unfortunately, having a border with Russia is like having a giant brown bear in your garden. His claws are on your windowsill, and they are scratching your windowsill just to let you know that he can push the window through to come inside and eat all your food or you.

And Polish food is the best in the world.

**Prof. Michał
Luczewski**

**Daniel
Kawczyński**

Polish food is the best in the world. We have a wonderful place in Poland called Piaski. It is my favourite place in Poland. It is on the Polish coastline. Piaski is right on the border with Kaliningrad Oblast. We have been there on holiday for six years in a row. When you go to that part of Poland, you realise and recognise that this is the most highly militarised part of Europe, where Russia meets NATO. We need to be strong because with that lunatic in Moscow, or somebody even

worse who may replace him (they have shown us that they have not learned from history), we need to focus on making sure that we use our diplomatic, political, or business positions, to ensure building the strongest support for Warsaw from the United Kingdom and America. God forbid if there is a confrontation with the Russians. We need as much backing and support as possible. It did not work for us in 1939, and I have studied Beck's speeches repeatedly. I have gone through those speeches and the debates in Poland from 1938 to 1939. It did not work for us. The dynamics of the constellation we created in 1938 and 1939 did not serve us well. We did not get the support we needed. This generation must not make the same mistakes. We must be ready for any eventuality with the Russians. We must build the strongest possible alliance with London and America.

I do not think these nine hundred and fifty thousand Poles are passive. This group is not confident enough or loud enough to say we are as good as the rest of the people in this country. We need to be a bit louder and more confident. What we provide for the community is good enough or better than the others. On that debate, when I was on News Night, Dominic (Grach), the owner of Giraf and the owners of a few other companies were present. From the employer's perspective, he said that the British workers are ten times slower than the Polish workers and that the Polish workers are much more effective. We should talk about it loudly and be more vocal about our politics.

Magda Harvey

***Prof. Michał
Łuczewski***

How did you get that confidence in your life? You say we should be more confident and louder, so what was that breaking point for?

I do not know. I always thought I could be confident if I worked hard and was humble. I feel good about myself. Every morning, when I get up, go to the bathroom, and look in the mirror, I see a hard-working, decent person who feels good about what she does daily. I do not have any problems with what I do. I believe in what I do; if you live by what you believe in, you get confidence. I do not feel that people who want to work for six hours a day, starting at nine and finishing at four,

Magda Harvey

can be very confident. Many years ago, I was told to work hard and be humble.” I think that is what I am doing. At the same time, I enjoy what I am doing. All of it gives me confidence. Thank you.

**Prof. Piotr
Wilczek**

Let me comment on this nine hundred thousand, or the exact number of Polish citizens in the UK. Firstly, I want to say that it is no longer these hard-working people. You mentioned nurses or construction workers. It is great that the Brits like Polish nurses and Polish construction workers. However, nurses and construction workers are not the only indispensable and very important in Polish communities. I was in Northern Ireland a few times or at least a few times since I arrived in the UK. That is a very interesting community because now there are about twenty-seven thousand Poles or Polish citizens in Northern Ireland. About ten years ago, it was about forty thousand. It's a pretty homogeneous community. All of them, except for ten, twenty, or thirty people, arrived after 2004. This community is different from 2004 when they were in their twenties; now, they are in their forties. They have families and, very often, excellent jobs. Also, as I heard from many people, they are very respected in this community. When I was at the conference in a hotel in Northern Ireland in Newry, someone asked me: “Where are all these hard-working Polish people working in this hotel? When will they return?” I told him: “They will never return. Do not expect these hard-working people to work in our hotels. It is the past. Now, the situation of Polish people is different. It all changed. I think that is the time to quote John F. Kennedy, who once famously said: “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.” I think that we are entitled to ask this question here. It's not only about nine hundred thousand Polish citizens who need protection but also support from the Polish consulate or the Polish consulates across the UK. Naturally, they are Polish citizens, and they will be provided with any help when they are in need. At the same time, we at the Polish Embassy think it is high time for this community to think about what they can do for their country. Many of them are successful. Many of them are confident like you, but it's not only you. Many confident and successful people have helped

Poland as academics, entrepreneurs, engineers, and doctors. I want to return to the issue of what Polonia can do for Poland. I think it is high time for the active members of this community to think about how they can support Poland. They are Polish citizens. The situation in the United States is different because about nine million people claim Polish ancestry or Polish heritage in the census. However, only about three hundred thousand of them are Polish citizens who can vote. In this country, it is way different. It is about eight or nine hundred thousand Polish citizens, and almost all Poles here are Polish citizens. Many of them, unlike Americans, arrived in the UK relatively recently. Their situation is different, but I think that both in the United States and here, it is time to think about our impact and our way to support not just the Polish government supporting the Polish community in the UK but also the Polish community supporting Poland. As I said, doctors, engineers, artists, construction workers, engineers, and many academics are involved in various exchange programs in multiple corporations. There are many people like this in this room.

Let me come back once again to Piotr Wilczek. You say that it is high time that Poles engage in Polish-British relations. Polonia should engage in Polish-British relations and support Poland as such. What would be the first step or the first of several steps you would envision to make this happen?

**Prof. Michał
Łuczewski**

**Prof. Piotr
Wilczek**

I'm not a president of any Polish association. When I arrived in the UK, there was a headline on one of the Internet platforms saying that not everyone understands Polish, *Polacy w UK mają swojego Ambasadora*. I just wanted to declare that I am not the ambassador of Poles in the UK. I am the ambassador of the Republic of Poland. That is the difference. I do not represent Poles in the UK but the Republic of Poland. Many organisations represent Poles in the UK. I think that this is the question for these organisations: In what way do they think they can help support Poland? It is not a question for the ambassador or the embassy. Again, I believe many people in this room can answer this question, and there are already initiatives from Polish organisations,

especially initiatives about making connections between Polish and British businesses, business projects in defence, cybersecurity, high tech and fintech, and med tech. The embassy also supports such initiatives. We organised a few conferences about cooperation, technology, AI, FinTech, and medical tech with the Polish Trade and Investment Agency, trying to connect Polish and British businesses with the support of both governments. I am not saying that the Polish embassy does not have such initiatives to support connections between Poland and Britain. Still, I think there is also a lot to do for the organisations that can propose ways to support their country. In the late eighties and early nineties, many entrepreneurs and businesspeople in the United States and other countries in the West supported Poland's transformation as consultants and investors.

**Prof. Piotr
Wilczek**

One of the ways is looking for investors. Polish entrepreneurs can invest themselves, encourage other people, and tell them Poland is a good place for investment. This is a very important issue because when speaking of BBC and the magnificent work BBC journalists, including Kasia Madera, did last year, especially in the first few months after the beginning of this invasion, they showed the Polish-Ukrainian border all the time. I had questions from several investors from various countries who reside in London. "Is Poland investable? Is Poland a reliable place for investment during this war? You are a frontline country." All we saw on BBC, which at that time was like a Polish propaganda machine showing generous Polish people receiving lots of refugees. At the same time, it projected the image of Poland as a dangerous country. Can they invest? I am thinking about Greece, Finland, and Poland. And why Poland? Poland is just close to Ukraine. Poland can be invaded soon. I had many similar conversations, especially in the spring and summer of last year. It does not happen right now. Is Poland investable? What is the reason to invest in Poland? I think the role of Polish organisations and the Polish community is to present the actual situation of how it all works in Poland and encourage friends to invest in Poland for their benefit. So that would be my advice, for example.

This is the time for your questions, comments, or action plan. Please go ahead.

**Prof. Michał
Łuczewski**

**Audience
member**

Thank you very much. Mr. Kawczyński touched on the most important subject of finding leaders. For us to have any meaning in Polonia, in this country, or anywhere else here, we must be represented by leaders. Your undertaking to take somebody under your wings is great, but we need to find them. My question is, how do we find these leaders? How do we hand-pick them? How do we help them grow? How do we support them? One of the ideas I have had personally is for Maria Byczyńska to run courses; she has managed to stand right next to me to create leaders. I am looking forward to your answer. Thank you.

Yes, I am delighted to be taking on one young Pole who I will mentor to become a politician, a member of Parliament. However, we all have a responsibility. We can all spot talent when we go to schools and listen to people addressing us. If you, in whatever circumstances, find the young Pole, we have the duty and responsibility to help them, nurture them, and encourage them. I think our moderator talked about the very important concept of a baton. When you reach my age, I am fifty-one now, you start to think differently. You start to think about the next generation. You start thinking about wanting to help and give them the help we did not get. For us, it was much more difficult. I remember when I was at boarding school in 1998. I always talked about Poland and how much I miss it. One boy turned around to me in the canteen and said, "If Poland is so good, why don't you just... off to Poland?" Now, that would be unacceptable. Things have changed an awful lot. So, my answer to you, sir, is to go out there with Polonia in ognisko, to any other institution you find or any school. Interestingly, I chair two main groups in Parliament. One is the Poland group, and the other is the Lithuania group. I am very interested in Lithuania because I want Poland to have closer links with Vilnius and the Lithuanians. I think there is a lot of interdependence. A key concept of emotional intelligence is interdependence, and I think there is, or should be, a lot of interdependence between Vilnius and

**Daniel
Kawczyński**

Warsaw. The Lithuanian ambassador I met earlier today took me to a Lithuanian school, a Saturday school of Lithuanian children in East London. I spent the day there with these Lithuanian children. They have the same passion and energy for Lithuania as we do for Poland, and I met some very raw talent there amongst the Lithuanian diaspora. If you find a young Pole who wants to go into politics, contact George Byczynski. If he is a conservative, we will mentor him ourselves. If he has views of the Labour Party, or if he is a socialist, we will find somebody. It does not matter whether he is Labor, Conservative, or Lib-Dem. It just matters that they are there in Parliament because, as we all know, political governments come and go. There is a possibility of a change of government next year. I will fight it tooth and nail, but it is possible. We need to have young Poles in all three major political parties.

**Audience
member 2**

Why not encourage George to go into politics?

I have made the offer to George, and I do not mean to praise him too much at these events, but he can. He has demonstrated to all of us what a young Pole can do.

**Daniel
Kawczyński**

**George
Byczyński**

You are very kind. We've got time for a few more questions. Lady Helena.

I am a recently retired academic from University College London. I am more British than the British are. I am also a very patriotic Pole. I would like to draw attention to the fact that the Polish brand is very strong amongst various organisations in Great Britain. Great Britain is famous for its business acumen, and they are keen to cooperate with Poland. There are companies, Royal Colleges, the Department of Trade, the British Chamber of Commerce, you name it. There are so many organisations with funds. They will be keen to invest in Poland. We have to know that such funds do exist. I suppose our role is to identify these organisations and people who know how to legally and without nepotism apply for the funds to use for British-Polish

**Audience
member 2**

cooperation. One of these examples would be a touring scheme. From the time when Great Britain decided to leave the European community, the Erasmus scheme stopped sending British students to Poland. This touring scheme is rich, with a global approach, and British students would be very keen to come and study in Poland. I would encourage many Poles who want to go to Poland to study to check the availability of places through the touring scheme.

**Prof. Michał
Łuczewski**

One last question.

I want to know how young is young to mentor an MP in the future. Would an early thirty-one-year-old be included as young? I have a friend who I want to talk to about this.

**Audience
member 3**

**Daniel
Kawczyński**

When you're fifty-one as I am, thirty-one is young. I think I became a Member of Parliament when I was thirty-three. My strong recommendation to anybody going into politics is to build a career first. Something that you can always fall back on; in my case, it was commerce and exports. Thirty-one is a perfect age. It takes some time. You do not just become a politician like that. I was my university's chairman of the Conservative Party from 1990 to 1994. I spent four years at university campaigning for my party and was chairman of the local branch there. Then, you get involved in the local association where you live. Then, you stand potentially for the Council. Then, you ultimately apply to be a Member of Parliament. In my day, you had to fight for an unwinnable seat first, to prove yourself before you were allowed to challenge for a marginal or a safe seat. It is quite a lengthy process. Still, my guarantee to you is if you know of a young Pole in their late twenties, early thirties, mid-thirties, early forties, whatever it is, who is seriously considering a career in politics, then let George know. He will arrange for them to come and see me in the House of Commons. We will assess them and either mentor them or signpost them in the right direction. Some days ago, the United Kingdom entered the world's largest trading bloc. The CPTPP is about eighteen countries in the Far East. Our continent is shrinking daily as a percentage of the

global population, and there is a percentage of the global GDP. The Far East is growing at a phenomenal rate, with huge opportunities. My only concern is that Poland puts too many eggs in one basket on trade with fellow European countries. Many of our goods are sent across the border to Germany. I am very keen for Poland to create links in the Far East, the Caribbean, Africa, and other parts of the world. With new technology, we should be building solar-powered merchant ships, which will transport Polish goods all over the world, not just Europe. We also must help Polish companies build links with their British counterparts with joint venture operations to piggyback off British companies to enter the CPTPP. Now we have ninety-nine per cent of all goods and services between Britain and the Far East that are tariff-free. That is extraordinary. The future is with countries like Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Australia, and New Zealand. Contact us if you know of any Polish companies that want to collaborate with British entities to enter the Far East markets. We will find the appropriate British counterpart for the Polish company. We Poles must not focus only on our continent because it is a shrinking market. We have got to have the vision, like the British have, to start looking at markets in the Far East and beyond.

Any last comments before we wrap up?

**Prof. Michał
Łuczewski**

**Prof. Piotr
Wilczek**

My mission is, on the one hand, to represent the Republic of Poland in the United Kingdom. On the other hand, the mission of the consulate and the embassies is to protect and take care of Polish citizens who are in need. First, it is to encourage Polish citizens in the Polish community to work more on behalf of Poland, initiate cooperation projects with Poland, advertise Poland, and organise all things Polish here in the UK, like the Polish Heritage Days. That is a very important festival, as everyone knows, supported by the embassy every May. It proudly presents Polish heritage across the UK and, at the same time, promotes Poland as an attractive tourist destination not merely for a city break to Kraków, as it is for many of our British friends.

Magda Harvey, the last word belongs to you.

**Prof. Michał
Łuczewski**

**Magda
Harvey**

Stick together, support each other, and involve others of different nationalities to join us and create a bigger community. Thank you.

I started by saying that Polonia, the Polish diaspora, embodies Polishness. While I was listening to you, I tried defining what Polishness is. I will finish the whole panel by saying what Polishness is. It is friends and family and good food. It is pride and heritage. The Polish caring, kind, and respectful nurse embodies Polonia. Polishness also means working hard and having a broader perspective. I told you that we would focus on Polish-British relations, but we have focused on Polish, British, Ukrainian, American, Caribbean, and African relations. We focused on the whole world. We return to the past to our heritage but then go to the future for a broader perspective. For that, I am very grateful to all of the wonderful panellists. Thanks so much.

**Prof. Michał
Łuczewski**

**George
Byczyński**

Thank you very much for this fascinating chat, the diplomatic, political perspective and entrepreneurial perspective.

Panel III – With Poland in the heart: Cultivating Polishness beyond borders

Justin Maciejewski

Director General of the National Army Museum

Kasia Madera

BBC presenter

Elżbieta Barrass

Chairperson of Polish Educational Society in Great Britain

George Byczyński

Editor-in-Chief British Poles





**George
Byczyński**

We will discuss nurturing Polish identity beyond borders. Although we have spoken about similar topics in today's panels, we have learned much. There were some moments when some of us were touched. There were moments when some of us were shocked. We were impressed. We have seen a lot today, but this panel has very special guests that I would like to invite: Justin Maciejewski, the director general of the National Army Museum. Please take a seat. Welcome. Kasia Madera, BBC presenter, welcome. And Elżbieta Barrass, chairwoman of the Polish School Association. Justin, I will start with you. Your father fought in the Warsaw Uprising. How did that impact you as a human and a Brit with Polish roots?

I would love to start by touching on some things mentioned in the previous panel because they struck a chord with me. The first one was Daniel's point about integration. My father arrived in this country in 1947. He wanted to start a new life in this country. He wanted his children to be British. And we are. I am British, and I am also very proud of my Polish heritage. I feel part of what was described as Polonia in the previous panel, but I am glad my father came to this country because I think this is a great country, and it is a country where, within one generation, you can do anything. When my father married an English woman, my father said we must change our names. He said, "Why don't we change it to Macie, M, A, C, I, E. That sounds nice in English, and I want my children to be successful. They will never be successful with a Polish name." My mother, thank God, said to my father: "Bogus, the one thing you must learn about this country is they will never trust anyone who changes their name." Thankfully, unlike Daniel's family, the name was not changed because my English mother said, "No. You got to be proud of your Polish name, and your children will be proud of it, and you do not change it." That was an English intervention into Polish insecurity in a funny way. My father was surprised that every door opened for me during my life. Because he thought somehow there was going to be some impediment to my progress. There never was. Because this is a very welcoming country. This country has a real affection for Poland. It is a deep affection. It

**Justin
Maciejewski**

may partly be because these countries never really fought against each other, apart from when the Poles stupidly allied themselves to Napoleon. We have never fought against them. Also, in our greatest hour of need, the Poles were here with us in the Battle of Britain, on the beaches of Normandy, in Italy, Africa, and even in Burma, where Poles were commanding West African troops. In our greatest hour of need, the Poles were there wherever we needed them. That shared history is very powerful. The Warsaw Rising is not part of that shared history. If anything, it is a bit of an embarrassment for British people because they know that it was the beginning of Poland being betrayed and let down. I think the difficulty with that history is that it does not end well. The Second World War did not end well. The British who know about the history are acutely aware of the sadness of the lack of victory of Poland and the war's final years. Growing up, I mentioned that my father was in the Warsaw Rising. It was always met with a bit of silence. Then, there would be a comment about how terrible the war was for the Poles, how it ended, and how sad or embarrassed they were that the Poles were let down. My father wanted to put that all behind him and move on. He is buried in Warsaw, but I think, if he were here now on the panel before, he would say that the problem with the Poles of his generation in this country is they spend too much time looking backwards and not enough time looking forwards. Poland needs to be secure in its history. It needs to reclaim its history as its own, which is happening. Still, at that point, its history must not define it. I think it has to look forward because there is a great future there, as Daniel mentioned. I would like to tell you one anecdote about Poland.

**Justin
Maciejewski**

In 1997, I commanded a company of a hundred and forty soldiers from Germany to train in Drawsko, Pomorskie in Poland, and Pomerania in western Poland. I was tasked with commanding the train of all these tanks and armoured vehicles, going for a sort of NATO exercise in Poland, a British exercise in Poland. We reached the railway stop near the training area four hours early. The train was early. I was sort of conscious of my father coming in the other direction in 1994, after the Warsaw Rising, going through Germany

into Poland with all these armoured vehicles. It was quite an experience. We were early, and there was no ramp to take the tanks off the train. We waited, and finally, the Polish army arrived with the ramps to take the armoured vehicles off the train. I said in English, "I'm terribly sorry. We were four hours early." There was a pause, and he said, "I think you were about fifty-eight years late." I thought this young Polish officer's answer at seven in the morning was very clever. In terms of growing up with that history of the Warsaw Rising, my father being sent on a train West was a big part of my growing up and made going back the other way, all those years later, a very emotional experience.

**George
Byczyński**

Thanks for sharing. Maybe we look too much at the past, but sometimes it is not easy to look to the future without knowing the past, as discussed in the previous panels. Kasia, you are a BBC presenter that people often see on TV. I have heard that Polish children in the UK, when they see you on TV, sometimes say: "Oh, she is Polish". They connect with you because people know you have a connection with Poland. Before we get into serious topics like Polish-British relations, I would like to ask about your background. How did you grow up? How connected do you feel to Poland?

Unlike Justin, I changed my name. Since I was born in the UK, my mum was desperate to integrate me as much as possible. She gave me the name Catherine. My name on my birth certificate, Polish ID card, and Polish passport is Catherine Madera. My father died when I was about nine months old. He was a sailor, a captain. She used to talk to me in Polish all the time and call me Kasia. So, I did not know who this Katharina was. I was Kasia in primary school. I was Kasia in my first secondary school. Then, when I got to my secondary school, I thought: "You know what? I have been pretending to be this Kasia Madera a little bit. Maybe I should go back to being Catherine. Or use Catherine". So I used Catherine, but I could not spell it correctly because it was a name that was just so foreign to me. I immediately went back to Kasia. The first language I spoke was Polish. That is when you

Kasia Madera

start going to school, but then you turn around. Now, I am doing terrible things to the Polish language, and English is my first language. I was Catherine Madera. If I had taken my partner's surname, I could be Kate Russell, but I never did. I have always insisted that I am Kasia Madera, and I have never felt the need to change my name during any of my jobs in the UK. As you can imagine, working in the media is a fickle beast. Daniel mentioned the BBC several times, but I will politely refrain from responding because that is not what I am here to discuss today. I have always been Kasia, and it is really important to me to keep that. It is that kind of "who are you?" feeling. I was born here, and I live here. I am not going to live in Poland. I am not going to live there, and my children will not live there either. I feel like one half and the other half. I go to Poland a lot. When the war started, I was there a lot. I do different events there. I am going to be there in October for the Warsaw Security Forum. I was there for three weeks in the summer. It is as much a part of me as my British identity. The only time I feel torn is when the football is on. When England plays Poland, I will not use social media. I shut myself off and do not talk about it. That is the only time I am torn, and ironically, one of my first media jobs was for *Wizja Sport*. I was the producer of Jan Tomaszewski, 1973 goalkeeper. If you ask me who I am, I honestly cannot tell you whether I feel more British or Polish. I identify with both and do not see why I have to choose.

**Justin
Maciejewski**

My father was a Manchester fan when Jan Tomaszewski played in the World Cup. It is an identity crisis because I was proud but disappointed at the same time.

That is extraordinary. Jan Tomaszewski is as you would expect in real life. He says it as it is. I learned an awful lot. Thanks to all the Polish schools, I kept up with my language skills. I didn't swear in Polish until I started working for *Wizja Sport*. After a few months of working with all the sports guys from *Wizja Sport*, my mum was in shock: "*Kasia, skąd ty się tak nauczyłaś przeklinać?*" It was an eye-opener in every sense of the word.

Kasia Madera

**George
Byczyński**

This is a rich heritage from Poland and Britain from which we can draw. Ela Barrass. I have never asked about your name. I always thought I was reading Lord Andrew Roberts' book about Napoleon. Lord Andre Robertson, a trustee of the National Army Museum, of which Justin is director and one of Napoleon's closest soldiers who stayed in Poland, was called Barrass. I always wanted to ask you if there was a connection. Moreover, you have such an important mission, the Polish Educational Society. You help a hundred or more schools in the UK, and you deal with identity crises all the time. How do you manage such a difficult task?

I am not sure if I should claim that identity. I am extremely grateful to speak from this angle because it took us to the second panel. I listened to Magda Harvey, who was talking about how we Poles feel a little bitter, perhaps less than everybody else, how we perhaps are ashamed of our identity and how we change our name. That is where your father can be brought into. He wanted to provide you with a better future by just changing your name while your mum, who was not Polish, said, "No way. You are not changing your name. Be proud of who you are." If I were to sum up the Polish Educational Society's work, it would be the following: be proud of who you are no matter what your name is, where your roots are, or whether they are from Napoleon. That is the person that you are, and do not change your name. The world of the Education Society is vast. We have a massively broad spectrum of activities to help, provide support, train, meet, have a glass of wine now and then, or speak about how we all feel because our Polishness is so important to us. I am trying to think of all the nice things we do. If I were to name a few, we support our teachers' continuous professional development and help people who want to open new Polish schools. If we were to look at the calendar, the Polish Educational Society is busy every weekend, both Saturdays and Sundays. We travel and visit schools. We produce documents, do risk assessments, and various things that will help comply with English and British law. We even travel as far as Scotland because we are the Polish Educational Society in Great Britain. We look after

***Elżbieta
Barrass***

Scotland, Wales, and England. We have a fantastic community with twenty-two thousand children and one hundred and twenty schools under our wings. I think it needs to be emphasised that it is still only ten to fifteen per cent of Polish children. There is still such a massive task to carry on and encourage more and more to come because Polish schools, and I am sure Kasia will agree, are quite elitarian. They are not for everybody because there are other things that children born in this country do, like all three of my sons born in England. They have a great deal of many other activities. For instance, football, because they may be future Jan Tomaszewski or Robert Lewandowski playing for Poland. That is for the elites because not all parents have time to come to Polish schools. They may work then since they are migrants who want to build a better life in another country with dignity, being a true representation of their country. The Educational Society helps to make everybody feel welcome.

***George
Byczyński***

Justin, your museum has become an icon for the Polish community in the UK for many reasons. First and foremost, the bust and statue of General Anders, one of the most famous Polish soldiers and generals, is located in a very prestigious place. In your museum, you allowed that to happen not just because you are biased because of your roots but also because you thought that it was appropriate for this Polish general who fought during the Second World War with the Allies to be commemorated in the right way. How else do you have a chance to speak about the Polish contribution to Polish-British relations in your work? There are so many stories that are not known. What else do you do, or plan to do, to promote the Polish heritage and contribution?

Thank you, George. My father would say look forward. I believe passionately in the power of history, what it can teach us about today And how it shapes tomorrow's world and our sense of identity. History is really important. I used to get bored as a child and, indeed, as an adult, being asked, "Was my father a Spitfire pilot in the Battle of Britain?" He was not there. Not every Pole was flying a Hurricane to-

***Justin
Maciejewski***

wards a Spitfire, although there were some. We spoke about the bust of General Anders in the museum, and it was a kind of community project that was so powerful. I wanted to bring it to the museum because the relationship between the British Army and the Polish Army in the Second World War is genuinely unique. The Polish army was its army, but it was fully integrated into the British Army. It was integrated into northwestern Europe, Africa, and Italy. The French would never come under the command of the British general in the Second World War, whereas the Polish were fully invested in the British Army in the Second World War. Their story has to be told as part of the integrated story. That is the story of soldiers who fought with Britain under the Crown in the Eighth Army in Italy, the twenty-first Army Group in northwestern Europe. It is part of that story. The Polish army is the only army in the world whose symbology is on the uniforms of British soldiers. Today, four regiments in the British Army were the maids of Warsaw, or they wore Irish Eagles in their squadrons or their regiments in the symbology in their uniform. No other army in the world has that unique cultural bond with the British Army. That relationship was formed in Italy. When I applied to join the army, it was full of people who knew about the depth of this relationship. When I joined my regiment, three of us had a Polish surname. There was me, a man called Stefan Mieczkowski, whose father recently died. He was called Zbyszek Mieczkowski in Warsaw, a veteran of General Maciek's division. There was also a man called Charlie Sawadski, whose father had fought in Italy. Everyone thought it was the Polish theme year because we had turned up in the same year.

**Justin
Maciejewski**

Whenever you had your Polish name in those situations, people always commented on the war and the depth of this comradeship. That is why putting the bust in the museum is very important. The other thing is mainstreaming Polish history as European history. Too often, Polish history is seen as another history. You have French, German, Italian, and British European history. Then, you have these histories, such as Polish history, on the edge. Poland is seen as on the edge, and we must bring it into the mainstream. That is why we do a lot of public programming on Polish history, including the Nation-

al Army Museum, military history, and broader history. People are fascinated by it, but we have to keep it. We have a mainstream Polish history; the British Army sent its top course of brigadier generals this year. They do a European Tour every year for two weeks. They now start in Warsaw, not in Paris, which is significant. I was invited to do a morning seminar on British-Polish shared history. It was a fantastic morning in Warsaw with these young brigadiers. There is a fascination with this shared history, so I found myself pushing on an open door. Whenever I get the opportunity, I try to plant another seed to remind people that this history goes beyond the Battle of Britain. The history we have shared between our two nations is much bigger than that.

**George
Byczyński**

Kasia, I think there is a feeling among many Polish people in the UK that there is not much about Poland in the media. Naturally, since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, Poland helping the Ukrainians is shown everywhere. Before that, you could associate it with Britain and some other battles. There are not many Polish presenters in the main British media groups. Many people would say that because of the war, the Polish story has been somewhat marginalised, and it is not in the mainstream now. Do you share the feeling that there might not be enough Poland out there, and perhaps there is some misconception about Poland? If that is the case, is there anything that can be done about it?

It is difficult because I work for the BBC, so obviously, I am not biased. I am not partisan; I have no opinions. I have private opinions, but you will not know about them. It is a very leading question. Daniel mentioned many negative articles. Show me those articles. Let's quantify them. It is about the data. If you can show me something misleading or inaccurate, then any broadcaster will try to make amends, especially the British media, whether BBC, Channel 4, or ITN. The thing about British news channels is that they are fundamentally unbiased. Whether you agree with that or not, that is your opinion. We get as many complaints from one side as we do from the other. The

Kasia Madera

Conservatives like us as much as the Labour Party. I would almost throw the question back at you: what do you mean by that? There was much coverage of the impact on the Polish community in the run-up to Brexit.

On the other hand, the largest population in this country is now, I guess, under a million. How is it that I am the only Polish-born news presenter on the BBC? Of course, we have Tomasz Schafernaker, who is a weather presenter. A big shout-out to Tomasz. When I started at the BBC, there were two Kasias. I always get messages from my other colleagues because our surnames differ. We both worked in the news, but I was the only one on the air. Now, there are lots of Kasias working at the BBC. I no longer have to spell my name when I introduce myself. I do not necessarily think what you are saying is fair.

**George
Byczyński**

I understand your point. Many people have told me that when they turn on the BBC, they do not hear Polish voices; they hear British Indians, British Jews, or Irish people speaking for their communities. There are many ethnicities and minorities, but you do not hear that many Polish voices. There are some presenters, but the Polish voice is not heard. I think I can look for some statistics behind that claim.

I would have to see the numbers. **Kasia Madera**

**George
Byczyński**

That is an interesting topic because I have heard many such opinions. Let's look up the figures, and we can talk about it.

Ela, you work with many bilingual children who are sometimes a little bit lost. I have heard that very often in Polish schools, they speak Polish during class, but then they speak only English during the break. They do not speak Polish to each other. Is this something that you encounter? How do you deal with it? What is your perspective on young children? Are they generally very keen to learn about their roots, or are they sometimes pressured to attend these Saturday classes?

**Elżbieta
Barrass**

I would like to refer back to this wonderful dialogue. Justin talked about shared history and planting seeds. I like that. As we spoke with Mr. Ambassador a second ago, it will not last unless we put it in the books. As the Polish Educational Society, when we publish and write books, we always try to include British elements because we raise our children in this country and feel strongly about showing the British history of British-Polish links. We feel that our role together, not just the Polish Education Society's, is to go further and influence the debate about various Polish elements in British history books. In the long term, at some point, when Poland will not be as famous as it is now due to Ukraine and the war, there will be less talk about Poland. If we do not follow up on it and do not have it in writing, referring to Kasia's statistics, it will disappear at some point. Our children, born in this country, go to Polish schools. I think bilingualism, multilingualism, and children from mixed marriages, not just Polish-British or Polish-Polish, but even children speaking three languages or more, are amazing treasures. We must not insist on our children speaking the beautiful Polish language. We should do it but also teach them to be part of what they are because they are brought up in this country, and we need to care that they have a massive love for the country. They are proud of who their parents are and what they are trying to be. They go to school every Saturday. Let them be what they are and not worry about the mixture of languages. That is wonderful as it is.

**George
Byczyński**

Have you noticed that many parents would be ashamed to teach their children Polish in the past? Do you think this has changed, or does this still happen?

**Elżbieta
Barrass**

I am happy to say that I am sure it has changed in these thirty years. It has been hard work for old Poles who came here in the 1980s and later. They paved the way, and now we have nothing to be ashamed of and are perceived as ambitious and hardworking, not only as construction workers. This will be a personal anecdote. When my eldest son, who is now twenty-six, was in secondary school, he was, I think, close to being bullied because he was called a variety of names like,

“You’re a Pole.” or “All Polish people are builders.” I am extremely proud of him for saying, “No, not all of them. My mum is a teacher.” I think it’s such a nice comeback to say, “No. Not all of us are doing this”. We are very proud of my husband, who is a very good construction worker, by the way. He works all over the world now because he is just so good. Whoever we are, we have nothing more than to be proud of ourselves. It is different demographics and times, and I think we are far from when we were at the bottom of the ladder.

**Justin
Maciejewski**

When my eldest was thirteen, he joined the cadets. One time, when he was standing there on the first day, a sergeant was going through the list and could not read the surname. He tried to pronounce it, and my son helped him. The sergeant asked, “Is your dad a plumber?”. My son replied, “No, he is a brigadier in the army.” That is quite funny.

I think many of us have such funny stories. When I was on the London Underground coming back from an event like this one, my friend, who was a banker, and I were speaking Polish. Somebody approached us and said, “Stop speaking a foreign language. Stop speaking Polish.” You hear that, and you ask yourself if it is even real that somebody would attack you just because of your language and, I guess, your nationality. I quickly said, “Would you say that to the Polish pilots defending British Sky?” He stood there with no answer. We must teach ourselves self-confidence and not allow anyone to denigrate where we come from. Justin, Poles, and Brits may have different approaches to history and the promotion of history. Have you noticed this, and what would you advise us to learn from each other?

**George
Byczyński**

**Justin
Maciejewski**

When my son finished the plumber brigadier story, my wife looked at me and said, “I just wish he was a plumber sometimes.” It is because I can barely change a lightbulb. To answer your question, yes, there is a difference in history. I have noticed this, and I think it is one of the reasons why so many British historians have become so prominent in Poland. We have very good historians in this country who are very good at writing nuanced histories engagingly. I think one of

the challenges that Poland faces because Poland's history has been denied for so long during the Communist period, the Nazi period, the partitions, and the period of the one hundred and twenty-three years that Poland did not exist, that Polish history has had to survive by word of mouth. The way to tell a story that people remember is by making hagiography. You make it a hero story. The stories of heroes are passed down through the generations. Real history is not about heroes but normal people and what they do in difficult times, how they survive and struggle, and how countries and communities grow. If I were to make one observation about Polish history, it would be that it needs to be a bit less hagiographic and a bit more nuanced and balanced in some of the ways it tells its stories. The Polish history is extraordinary. Churchill said that Poland is like a rock in the sea. The sea will come across the rock and submerge it, but when the sea comes back, the rock will still be there. It is a beautiful description. Polish history has kept Poland's soul alive in its most difficult hours of need. But for Polish history to enter the mainstream, it must migrate from hagiography to a more British approach to history.

Could you perhaps give some examples of a story that Poles tell but does not get to the mainstream because of the way it is said?

**George
Byczyński**

**Justin
Maciejewski**

One example is the 1939 campaign – the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany and then the Soviet Union. The history of Poland is a brave, heroic defence. No country could survive being invaded by Germany and the Soviet Union. That is all true, but what is less studied is the incompetence of the Polish generals in 1939. The secrecy with which they kept their plans, the lack of cooperation, and the lack of information sharing between the different divisions meant that the soldiers were kept in the dark. The soldiers did not know what was expected of them because the divisions did not talk to each other. The Polish army had a terrible disadvantage because of poor leadership in Poland in 1939. That is because the Polish army had been politicised in the twenties and thirties. These stories, I think, are not told in a way that we can learn from them. That would be a tangential

example of a history that needs to move from the very proud story of the Polish defence in the 1930s and the defence of Warsaw to a more nuanced story that says what went wrong, what happened and why we collapsed so quickly in the West even though we had a significant army in terms of size.

Another example would be on the other side – how very good the Polish army division was in northwestern Europe. It was an excellent division. The stories are more about the heroism of individual Polish soldiers than how they were trained in Scotland, why they were so good, and what it was about their training that made them an outstanding division in 1944. Those stories are harder to find because they are about the individual heroes and generals rather than the whole from top to bottom. I think Polish history and how it is studied has a long way to go. It is on that journey. British historians such as Norman David or Roger Moorehouse have made an enormous contribution to Polish history by looking at it through Anglo-Saxon eyes.

We will speak about more stories. Kasia, I would like to ask you about stories you hear when you speak to your British colleagues and friends in media and politics. When the Polish topic comes up, what do people usually connect it to? Is it food, history, or something else? Is there no special treatment like any other nation?

**George
Byczyński**

**Kasia
Madera**

Before I pick up on that, I want to return to what Justin said because I spent a week just before the summer with my son researching family history. I have to big up the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum. It is an exceptional place run predominantly by amazing volunteers. We were looking into one of my relatives, an uncle, General Lityński, who was involved in the Battle of Poznań. What you talked about resonated when we looked through some of the testimonies of the soldiers involved. Not everything went very well, and there was this kind of secrecy. It is all in the archives kept so beautifully, not just in the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum but also in *Płock*. They have an extraordinary library in which we then read a tribute to this relative

**Kasia
Madera**

of mine, general Lityński, in which we found out that General Anders was at his funeral. I did not know that it happened to my family.

In the same way, my grandfather was in the *Armia Krajowa*, and it is talked about to this day. I took my grandfather's Benemerenti Medal to be blessed by the Pope. We did not even realise there was a medal. We had the certificate hanging up in our house in Poland. Then suddenly we realised that there was a medal. My grandfather never talked about it. I know you are going to talk about Poles not beating themselves up, but when it comes to my family, they seriously should. When it comes to Polish stories, look. I am of Polish origin and very proud of being of it. I am proud of making a life here in the UK as well. I am proud of my two sons. It was too difficult for my sons, who are fifteen and eleven, to study at a Polish school because of the level at which the Polish schools were. It was at a level where I should have put them into a Polish school with Polish for foreign nationals, but I did not. The headteacher explained that it was better for them to be immersed. I thought the fantastic head teacher was right, but it did not work out for them. Now, my sons are learning Polish via Duolingo, and at least they are trying. We spend time in Poland, and they want to learn. They had a bit of a go at me. My oldest one said, "Why didn't you keep it going?" I replied that I did, but it was quite hard.

The work of a journalist, which professionally comes first, is on the story's merit. Going back to what you said that you have heard many times, how many is many? Right? It would help if you gave us the facts, and we will return to that. Maybe one day we will do some research on that. Stories are on merit. Anybody who knows the story of the *Błyskawica* will know that Poles in the Isle of Wight are just revered. We were able to tell that story. I was able to tell that story because we found one of the last living people who was on the boat when the strikes against the Luftwaffe were launched. We were able to tell that story because we had this firsthand testimony of this incredible guy. He was an engineer working on the *Błyskawica*. He was in a nursing home where we went and filmed him. Then, we went to the Isle of Wight and did some of that story. Arguably, that would not have been told if it was not for the fact that I have a lot of interest

in that kind of Polishness. It does not bias what I do in my work. My work is unbiased. It is on the merit of the story. You do your best to balance it. You have to be balanced, especially in working for the broadcaster that I do.

**George
Byczyński**

You mentioned the Polish Institute and the Sikorski Museum, which are incredible places. Yet again, you know my question. You cannot quantify it, but have you heard, for example, a British person that, when the Polish topic came up, they would say, “We went to the Sikorski Museum, and it is so interesting.” One of the best Polish museums in the world has the Monte Casino flag, artefacts, and the bayonets and equipment of Krystyna Skarbek, Winston Churchill’s favourite spy, but not many people know about it. If you want numbers, we can go on the street and ask one thousand people if they have been to that museum, and I am afraid not many would answer yes. But when you ask about another museum or other topics, you will suddenly hear more answers. What worries me is that people do not dig up their history enough, and gems such as the Sikorski Institute could do a bit more to go out to the British public.

**Kasia
Madera**

The other museums are available. If it merits it, people should be talking about it. They rotate the London Book Week every year; they put a spotlight on a particular country. When London Book Week chose Poland as its country, I then had on Jacek Dehnel, a famous author in Poland, and Claire Mulley, the author of Krystyna Skarbek’s biography, the spy who was Churchill’s favourite spy. I got them on my program to discuss it; maybe other people would not have done it. I talked to my editors about the merit of it.

I know you do great work, but I want more of it from others.

**George
Byczyński**

**Kasia
Madera**

Still, it has to be on merit, as, for example, when the Polish A level was coming under attack, I think eight years ago, it has to be on merit. I cannot just because it’s Polish. The examination boards looked at other A levels—Turkish, Bengali, Portuguese, and, I think,

Hebrew. We did not speak only about the Polish language. I had somebody advising the government who talked about all of the languages. I cannot appear to be biased just because it is Polish. It has to be on the merits of the story. I talked to my editors; they thought it was fantastic, and I should have done it. Poland is in the spotlight at the moment. I will go back to what the ambassador said. In those first days, I was one of the first international broadcasters to get to the Polish-Ukrainian border when the full-scale Russian invasion happened on the 24th of February last year. And, of course, the spotlight was very much on Poland. The ambassador said people were worried about investing in Poland, but we were there showing what was happening. I could not distort it and say investments are fine and opportunities are there. Let me tell you a very short anecdote. We were flying over, and we had a lot of people. Jeremy Bowen was on the plane, and a couple of colleagues were going to cross the border. There was also a lady and her family. She was going to Krakow. We flew to Krakow on the 25th. She said to me: "I am really worried as I am having my sixtieth birthday in Krakow, and we are going to a war zone. I said Poland is not a war zone. Poland is within NATO, and the border is far away. I told her she would be fine, had a great time and loved Krakow as it is a beautiful place. Then one of my colleagues ran up to me and said, "Kasia, what am I going to do with my bulletproof helmet? I cannot fit it under the seat." The lady looked at it, and I looked at him as if saying, "Go away, go away." She was fine and had a great time. The thing is that I am a reporter, not a columnist. I do not give my opinion. I report what happens, and it is really important that when you talk about mainstream media and what is written down there, you remember that we report what is happening. We do not make it up. We get eyewitness accounts, and that is how news works.

That is a great answer. I understand that Poland has every right to promote itself and its history based on merit, but nothing can be skewed. From your experience, what are some of the stories that get the Polish, Polish-British, or British children with Polish roots that

**George
Byczyński**

you encounter that connect them to Poland? Could it be, for example, a trip to Poland?

**Elżbieta
Barrass**

I think this is such a huge issue. I would like to refer to Sikorski's museum and the institute that Kasia mentioned. Regarding all the hidden artefacts, no one goes there, or it is only one Saturday a month that you can go and see them. You cannot have a wonderful future without knowing your past. If you try to combine the two, given the make-up of our bilingual or multilingual children today, these bilingual, multilingual children, for whom Polish is really difficult, will try their best. They will struggle no matter what. How can we help them in this very difficult task of nurturing their identity and teaching them our language? This year, we will run four sessions from the Instytut Sikorskiego, where we bring an artefact, such as "mundur generała", General Sikorski's uniform. It will be a live session. We will be recording on our mobile phones, which might be a disaster. It will be live on Saturday, forty minutes, forty-five at the most. It will be a dialogue between the person who looks after the museum and shows us these artefacts and the dialogue between a teacher and that person who brings it down to the level of children.

We do not want to bore children. We are doing this because we want to make our children interested in history so they can be more knowledgeable. You cannot promote your country without knowing its history. They will then talk to their mates in English schools and say that they attended this fantastic lesson and saw this wonderful uniform'. We will also discuss Krystyna Skarba when we talk about Polish women in the Second World War and other topics throughout the year. The whole point of it is not only to awaken this massive fascination for Polish history in the eyes of children so that we reach them without making them read a huge text that they do not understand but to talk to them, show them artefacts so that they will take it further into mainstream schools. The task is enormous. It is to address the needs of our children today, in 2023, through an organisation that is seventy years old. Thinking back to 1953, when the Polish Educational Society was funded, we know we are different.

Back then, the founders could not go back to Poland, and they could not travel as freely as we do. The needs are completely different. We jump on a plane, and we are in Poland. During this wonderful session, we discovered that most of our children spend their summer holidays in Poland. So, they spend five to six weeks with their grandparents. The most important thing is to make it more relevant for them. We need to teach our history so they can absorb it. Still, we must not forget that they also have their interests. They like contemporary Polish music, not necessarily music from seventy years ago. We should play them Sanah singing Polish poetry. Let it even be Disco Polo since we all have different tastes in music. I hate this word, but make it modern. Let's make it relevant to our children. They must be proud of our Polish history. However, they must also be very much set in the present, not the past, because these will not marry up. It will not help them love the country.

You organised the Chelsea History Festival. There have always been some themes about Polish history, or at least in the few years I can remember. Could you tell us a bit more about that? Are there other stories that you think need to be told?

**George
Byczyński**

**Justin
Maciejewski**

What is fascinating is that our Polish history sessions at the Chelsea History Festival almost always sell out. People are interested in Polish history. We have covered the medieval history of Poland, the kings and queens of Poland, the Second World War and the Bolshevik-Polish conflict. These events are all selling out. They are generously sponsored by the Polish Cultural Institute, which makes it possible for us to do these events. The British people have a real fascination for this kind of history that is mysterious to them. Also, there has always been a fascination with the Second World War. The Second World War is the biggest issue for this country and, I think, for Poland. We share this fascination and the tragic history of Poland. This monumental struggle seems deeply ingrained in Polish and British alike. We have a very good session on the story about the Enigma and the Polish role in it next week at the Chelsea History Festival. People are fascinated

to hear about the role of Polish intelligence in getting the machines out of Poland and into the hands of those at Bletchley Park and the contribution of Polish mathematicians to that endeavour. The Polish army in Normandy and Italy is also fascinating.

The British know or are interested in military history, the second biggest category of books sold in Britain. Military history is the second biggest category of books sold in bookshops in this country. Military history includes biographies of generals or the Napoleons, so it is broadly defined. It is the second most popular subject, more than novels. So there is a fascination. Poland has some incredible military history stories. We talk about them because they are popular, and I naturally have a personal interest in them. I have a real mission to mainstream Polish history in this country where I can. Because a million or a million Poles live in this country, I want some of them to come to the museum, buy a coffee, enjoy it, and bring their children. The other thing is, when I was growing up, I had my Polish and British worlds. I tried to bring them together in my head. Military history and the Second World War are subjects where you can bring the Polish and British worlds together. I want young Polish children who have grown up in this country to come to the National Army Museum and feel that they have a stake in the country's history, which comes from their Polish origins. That brings everything together. It is a mission of integration and telling a distinct Polish story.

Kasia, would you have any advice to young aspiring Polish or British reporters or journalists here in the UK who may feel they do not fit in because their accent is slightly different or, for some other reasons, they think they're not British?

**George
Byczyński**

**Kasia
Madera**

The BBC has a "We were there" page where we desperately try to talk to veterans before it is too late, especially veterans of the Second World War. A Polish gentleman celebrated his centenary in the Midlands. Edyta Górniak appeared at a massive event in the cathedral. Unfortunately, I cannot remember his name. Our crew went up there, and one of our local crews was able to interview him. His funeral, or

pogrzeb, was a few days ago. Maybe his voice would not have been recorded if I did not have a Polish background. It is one of those situations where we talked to our editors, and they insisted on recording him. If anyone knows of veterans still alive, do not hesitate to contact me. We need to record these voices.

Do not become a journalist. It is an arduous job. The pay is shocking, the hours are terrible, and everyone is out to get you. On a serious note, it is the most fascinating job in the world and an absolute privilege. I think Daniel mentioned that you do your hobby as your day job. I love talking to people; I am inquisitive. To be able to talk to people day in and day out for a living is fantastic. Coming from a different background, would I have had an easier life if I were Kate Russell? I do not know. My bosses would say that surely not. The opportunities I have had have been incredible. Going back to the Enigma code, I think we did a live broadcast when the Polish Embassy unveiled the plaque. I covered it for the BBC. The Polish voices are not heard, such as when a British lorry driver raised money for the Polish lorry driver who died in one of the crashes at a Christmas fair in Germany, I think in Munich or Berlin. When he was invited to the Polish embassy, I did a live broadcast for the one o'clock news. Maybe I would not have pushed the story so hard, but that would have been unfair as it deserved attention. It was a compelling story.

In terms of people with foreign-sounding names, the days are gone when you just had to have a very British accent with "Hello London calling". Diversity of voices and lived experience is hugely significant. I encourage you to go out and do that. It is different for British broadcasters, of course, because it is not about my opinion. My opinion does not matter. It is about the voice of the person I am talking to. It is brutal and cutthroat for people trying to break into the industry. Everyone will have an opinion about you, but you have to do it if you want to.

Thank you for your work, which is applauded on its merits. Some of these stories are undertaken due to special access or unique understanding, which is fantastic. A fan in the audience just sent me

**George
Byczyński**

a message saying that Lieutenant Edmund Szymczak was the subject of one of your stories. Thank you, Tomasz, for this information.

Ela, could you share your advice for parents, whether Polish or from mixed marriages? What is the best way to raise children to feel connected to this rich heritage? How can this accomplished effectively?

**Elżbieta
Barrass**

I think about the measurable benefits of speaking another language. It has nothing to do with emotions, although I believe a deep connection is necessary to love a country and its language. Speaking another language improves your exam results by thirty per cent compared to not speaking a language. That is a remarkable advantage.

Another point to remember is that emotions can only be expressed genuinely. Pretending to be someone else is counterproductive. For parents who were not born in this country but are raising children born in England or Great Britain, my advice is not to speak English to your children. The language of emotions always comes from the heart and the environment you have been brought up in. Just be yourself.

To illustrate the complexity of this issue, I have three sons, all born in England. Our youngest went to nursery from the age of eight months due to our work commitments. Circumstantially, his first language became English, as he spent many hours there. Despite the limited Polish interaction during the week, he is the one who has expressed a desire to live in Poland when he is older. My husband and I are considering returning to Poland when we retire at sixty-seven.

Encourage your children to visit Poland regularly if circumstances allow. It is a beautiful country, and exposure to different regions such as Podlasie, Rostocze, and Zamość will create wonderful memories. Use holiday trips to instil a love of the country.

Consider enrolling your children in Polish schools. Only fifteen per cent of children currently attend Polish schools, and we would be happy to help you open more. Teachers in Polish schools are dedicated and passionate about their work. The educational land-

scape has evolved, with resources and materials designed to meet the needs of bilingual children. Sending your children to Polish schools will foster a genuine love for the country.

Thank you very much. This is a unique opportunity to ask these distinguished panellists, who are usually very difficult to access.

**George
Byczyński**

**Audience
member**

The first question is for me because I was just wondering why I have been moved many times by what you are saying. I cannot understand or explain it. Why is there something in all these stories that moves me? I would like to ask you a somewhat personal question – why did you come back to your family history, for example, to the archive of your father's story.

I think identity is more important now than ever. We live in a world that is changing fast, and identity is being challenged in all directions. Our Christian heritage, European identity, worldview, and sense of national identity are being challenged. Technology is driving all of these challenges at a pace that bewilders people. People seek things to hold on to in such a fast-changing and insecure world. I think identity is what people are looking for. When you describe going to the Sikorski Institution, or finding these stories, or having the medal consecrated – all such things, and I have seen this as a museum director, people are looking for as points of reference that they can hold on to. I have been researching my father's story for the first time in five years. He told me some anecdotes, but I never understood the whole story. Now, I think I do, with the help of the Sikorski Institute and the army records held by the Military Defence of Polish Soldiers. It is about identity and how people search and long for it. There are a million people in this country for whom Polishness and Britishness are crucial to that sense of identity. They go together. The beauty of it is that they rarely clash, apart from football. If you were German-British, there are many areas where you would find real tension. Polish-British feels like a wonderful blend, except on the football pitch.

**Justin
Maciejewski**

**Kasia
Madera**

When I start a conversation in Polish with someone who does not know me, their first reaction is often: “Oh, you have forgotten your Polish. You have this English accent”. I then clarify: “No, no, I was born here, and Polish is my second language”. They respond with, “Oh my God, you speak well”. Suddenly, they see me as one of their children. When I visit Polish schools to give talks, I stand there and say: “I am you, only a lot older and much uglier. But I am you.” You have this unique thing that makes you different, but it does not make you weird or strange. Just embrace it, depending on how you feel about it. It is about ensuring that children see that it is normal to have dual nationality. Schools can be challenging places most of the time, but the key is for them to recognise that having this dual identity is perfectly fine, and that is why it gets a bit emotional.

I do not face this problem because my identity is purely Polish, as are my children’s. I do not think they have an issue, either. Someone said that it was a matter of course during all the years they went to Polish school – 14 years for each of them, from the age of four until they finished school. We got up, packed our bags and went to school every Saturday. My boys never said, “Mum, can’t I go to school today?” Not because we are exceptional parents, as I am sure we are not, but it was undeniable. We always spoke Polish with our children. We work in English schools and are immersed in English culture and language, and they respond to us in English. However, I never switch to English with them. It is a lifelong gift which you give at no cost. You are just being yourself, speaking Polish to your children, and suddenly, they are speaking this language, which is so challenging. They write in it because they go to school, take exams and succeed – a gift for life.

**Elżbieta
Barrass**

**George
Byczyński**

I would like to thank again our brilliant panelists. I learned many personal stories. Thanks to the Poland Great Project and the British Poles for running the show.

It is a very important day in the history of the Polish community in Britain. Thanks also to the Chancellery of the Polish Prime

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