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The Godsons of Ignacy Mościcki, President of the Second Republic of Poland

Abstract

Professor Ignacy Mościcki (1867–1946), as President of Poland, publicly announced the first program in independent Poland to support the pro-family policy of the state. It was, however, only in a private statement that the president declared that he will be the godfather of every seventh son in families that were indigenously Polish, Catholic and until then had no criminal record. The president's pro-family program was successfully implemented over the period of 13 years preceding the outbreak of the Second World War (1926–1939). President Mościcki's godsons were presented with a savings book from the state Postal Savings Bank with a deposit of 50 zlotys. The outbreak of the Second World War put an end to this program, and then the socialist authorities in the Polish People's Republic discredited it. The godsons and their heirs postponed any claims arising from this program until the 1990s. They primarily demanded the refund of duly revalued savings deposits from the state. They sent letters to successive presidents of the Republic of Poland, speakers of both houses of Parliament (the Sejm and the Senate) and others, but to no avail. In 2005–2006, they also tried to recover their money in court, but their claims were dismissed. It seems that, in the current state of the law, the possible claims of Mościcki's godsons can be considered in the category of a "debt of honour" incurred by the pre-war president of the Republic of Poland.

Keywords: Mościcki's godsons, Ignacy Mościcki, Second Polish Republic, Catholic baptism, godson, godfather

1. Introduction

On June 4, 1926, professor of chemistry Ignacy Mościcki¹ was sworn in as the President of the Republic of Poland and held this office for over 13 years (1926–1939). He was the third president of independent Poland. In the first days of holding the office, he publicly

¹ Ignacy Mościcki (born on 1.12.1867 in Mierzanów – died on 2.10.1946 in Varsoix, Switzerland). He came from a large family (he had five siblings: three brothers and two sisters) and was a father of five children

announced the first program in the history of independent Poland to support the state's pro-family policy. Namely, he declared that, as a Catholic, he would in the future be the godfather of **every seventh son in a family that was originally Polish, Catholic and had no criminal record so far**.² However, contrary to contemporary journalistic claims, Mościcki did not issue any formal legal act on this matter (such as a decree or a regulation).

The president's pro-family program was successfully implemented for 13 years before the outbreak of the Second World War (1926–1939). During this time, Mościcki became honorary godfather of 911 boys. Several hundred applications were, however, refused.³ After the war, Mościcki's godsons were discriminated against in the People's Republic of Poland. In the years 1945–1952 there was even a competing program, the so-called godchildren of Bolesław Bierut, the communist president of post-war Poland.

In Polish scientific literature on the godchildren of President Mościcki, there are basically no monographic historical and legal studies.⁴ However, there are many journalistic articles based on the memories of godsons who are still alive, or their families. Most of them concern the lack of reaction from the state regarding the return of revalued savings to Mościcki's godsons or their heirs. Further in-depth archival research seems to be needed.

2. Intention of President Mościcki's "Statement"

When making the above-mentioned declaration (commitment) in June 1926, Mościcki was guided by the public interest, i.e., the need to take care of the future of the Polish state and nation. The president's actions show a combination of civic, social and religious duty. Mościcki made the above declaration not only as the president of Poland, but also as a private person (being a father of five children) and a practicing Catholic belonging to the Roman Catholic Church. It seems that the above decision of Mościcki was also influenced by the fact that in 1926 German authorities restored the institution of godchildren of the President of the Weimar Republic.

The President's statement was constructed very carefully in its content and did not create an obligation for him to be a godfather of every seventh son in the family. If the verification process revealed serious circumstances that disqualified a family (e.g., criminal conviction of the father or mother), the President of the Republic of Poland could refuse the request. Moreover, he did not have to justify his refusal.

(three sons and two daughters) with his first wife Michalina née Czyżewska (died in 1932). Chojnowski, Wróbel, *Prezydenci i premierzy*; Koper, *Życie prywatne*; Stolarzewicz, *Włodarz Rzeczypospolitej*.

² Matusz, "Memories of Kazimierz Ignacy Pluciński"; "Chrześcianiacy Mościckiego".

³ The data provided following Ferfecki, "Chrześcianiacy Mościckiego"; Węcek, "Rodziny 900 chrześniaków"; Płociński, "Naczelny ojciec"; Reczkin, "Memories of Karol Piwowarek"; "Chrześcianiacy Mościckiego". Determining the exact amount applications is impossible because the files of the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland were lost during the Second World War.

⁴ Białobok, *Instytucja rodziców*. A few sentences on this subject can be found in Noyszewska, "Duchowe rodzicielstwo", 214–22.

In any case, for the baptized child and his parents, siblings, as well as the entire family and even the community it was a great privilege, or a kind of social ennoblement.

3. Requirements for the Candidate for Mościcki's Godson and His Family

President Mościcki was to be a qualified witness of the Roman Catholic baptism (i.e., honorary godfather) of a male child born as the seventh son in a natively Polish family of Roman Catholic denomination, which had no criminal record in the past. Such a privilege could not be used when a daughter was born, or one (or more) of the six older siblings was female. The similar program implemented in Germany did not discriminate against girls as candidates for goddaughters of the President of the Republic. Nevertheless, she had to be born at least as the seventh or further child in the family, to the same father or mother.

The criterion of citizenship and Polish nationality had to be met by the godson himself, as well as his closest family, i.e., the parents, grandparents (and even great-grandparents) and siblings. In practice, such qualifications were required from the godmother herself and even her family. Therefore, Mościcki's godson could not come from a family who was of Jewish, German, Ukrainian nationality, etc. In practice, this program was also used by families living abroad (e.g., in France or Germany) but originally Polish, if the requirements of Catholic faith and Polish citizenship were met.

A candidate for a godson had to be born "in the family." This meant that the status of his parents should be unambiguous, i.e., their marriage should be sacramental (or civil and sacramental).⁵ Therefore, if the seventh son was born out of the wedlock (e.g., in free concubinage, or cohabitation relationship, or even in a marriage of only civil character, which was possible according to BGB in the former Prussian territories), he was disqualified as the candidate for a presidential godson. The separation, or annulment, or divorce of the parents before his baptism could also constitute an impediment. Another disqualifying circumstance was the disclosure of the illegitimate origin of his ancestors (parents or grandparents), or the godmother.

The candidate (and his older siblings), his parents, grandparents (and even great-grandparents), and the godmother had to be Roman Catholic. They had to be Catholics who were not only baptized, but who also practised and lived according to the principles of the Catholic faith. No religious deviations or compromises were tolerated. Observing of all these conditions was examined and arbitrarily decided by the parish priest, as the head of the parish of the family's place of residence and the future place of the child's baptism. Therefore, a boy who was born in non-Catholic or religiously mixed (Catholic

⁵ The form of entering into a marriage in the territory of interwar Poland was then regulated by acts of partitioning countries. There were as many as five different codes of marriage law, i.e. BGB of 1896 in the post-Prussian territory, the tsar's decree of 1836 in the area of the former Congress Poland, the Code of Laws of the Russian Empire from 1832 on the so-called Eastern Borderlands, ABGB of 1811 in post-Austrian territories and Hungarian Marriage Act No. XXXI of 1894 in Spiš and Orava.

and non-Catholic) family could not become presidential godson. The candidate's parents or grandparents who were converts (to or from Catholicism) were disqualified, too. It seems, however, that the religious criterion did not contradict the constitutional principle of equal rights of all 42 religions recognized by the state at that time.⁶

The parents of the godson candidate had to have no criminal record. This condition also had to be met by his grandparents, great-grandparents and older siblings, and even the godmother. This lack of criminal record applied not only to Polish but also foreign courts. The idea was probably not to implicate the head of the Polish State in any relationship with families whose behavior could be considered pathological and could bring disrepute to the dignity and office of the President of Poland.

The parish priest of the local Roman Catholic church and government officials who checked the family had huge discretion in this regard. They could evaluate, for instance, whether the older siblings were baptized, their profession or occupation was not disreputable, or one of the family members lived an immoral life (was engaged in prostitution, pimping, addictive drinking, gambling, or committed an abortion), had extreme political (e.g., Zionist, communist, national-socialist, fascist) or socio-religious views (anti-Catholic, heretical), or had just returned to the country, e.g., from USSR, and so on.

In practice, it was examined whether the candidates for godmother and godfather's (i.e., the President's) representative met the religious, national, and personal criteria, which were the same as the ones that applied to the relatives.

4. Procedure for Selecting a Candidate for a Godson

The officials of the Presidential Chancellery were responsible for searching for the seventh son in the family. For this purpose, among others, they published advertisements in the press, and instructed lower-level officials. Roman Catholic parish priests passed information in the churches. People could learn about this privilege by accident, e.g., while hearing mass in church, or when arranging a child's baptism (from their parish priest or organist), or just from well-informed friends. The boy's parents often came from the lower classes. They were poor peasant or working families, which struggled with financial and housing problems, or were even illiterate.⁷

If the parents wanted to have President Mościcki as a godfather for their son, they had to formally initiate the entire procedure themselves (possibly with the help of third parties). For this purpose, they had to submit a written request to the President of the Republic of Poland to the address of the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland in Warsaw with an appropriate request in the form:

⁶ Art. 114 of the Act of March 17, 1921 – Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Dz.U. 1921 nr 44 poz. 267): “The Roman Catholic denomination, which is the religion of the overwhelming majority of the nation, occupies the leading position in the State among denominations with equal rights.”

⁷ Boruch, “Memories of Ignacy Bolesław Jagaczewski from Białystok”.

On account of the arrival of my seventh son in a row, I have the great honor to ask the President to allow me to be listed on the baptismal record as Godfather of my newborn son, who will be named Ignacy at baptism.⁸

Usually, the procedure was time-consuming, and often ended after several or even a dozen or so months, when the child had already outgrown infancy and often went to baptism on his own feet.⁹ The process (including “verification”) involved not only presidential, but also lower-level officials, e.g., from the county office, the police, and in practice, also Catholic parish priests and members of church auxiliary apparatus (vicars, organists).

The baptism took place in the local Roman Catholic church or parish chapel, in a ceremonial setting. In practice, hardly ever was the boy held personally by President Mościcki.¹⁰ There were only a dozen or so such cases over 13 years.

The president was usually represented on-site by an authorized chancellery official, by a local government official – the *starosta* or by another person deemed worthy of this honor (e.g., a senator, member of parliament, minister, voivode, city mayor, head or secretary of local commune, local landowner, forester or even a man from family).¹¹ The representative was usually accompanied by other people, such as the police chief, officials, their wives, etc. Thus, the baptism and the entire ceremony were a major local social event. The appearance of the officials arriving in a small town by automobile added even more splendor and gave more excitement to the gathered people.¹²

The entire event ended when the parish priest entered the name of the illustrious godfather in the baptismal book and issued a copy of the baptism records with this information. A custom developed in parish offices to attach to the parish records a document from the presidential Chancellery with Mościcki’s consent to become a godfather.

The church baptism certificate included the names of the child’s godparents: Mościcki, if he witnessed personally (if not, a note was made next to his name: “honorary godfather”),¹³ and those of the actual godfather and godmother.

It quite often happened that godchildren were given their first name after their godfather (Ignacy), and their middle name after their biological father,¹⁴ or *vice versa*. However, the parents were not obliged to use the president’s name.¹⁵

⁸ Cf. “Prezydent Mościcki. Ojciec chrzestny 20-lecia międzywojennego.”

⁹ Reczkin, “Memories of Ignacy Badora.”

¹⁰ President Mościcki personally held his godson Zbigniew Fyda in Warsaw in February 1928. He was the son of the deputy head of the Military Cabinet of the President of the Republic of Poland, Lieutenant Colonel Wojciech Fyda. See NDA, no. 1-A-1748. Also Ignacy Bolesław Jagoszewski from Białystok was personally held by Mościcki. See Boruch, “Memories of Ignacy Bolesław Jagaczewski from Białystok”.

¹¹ Reczkin, “Memories of Ignacy Badora”.

¹² Sternal, “Memories of Władysław Ignacy Ratajczak from Kościan”.

¹³ See Barszczewski, “Książeczka PKO”.

¹⁴ Sternal, “Memories of Władysław Ignacy Ratajczak from Kościan”.

¹⁵ Reczkin, “Memories of Karol Piwowarek”.

5. Rights of Mościcki's Godson and His Relatives¹⁶

The baptized boy (and his siblings) was entitled to certain rights or benefits. They could have a financial and a non-financial character.

5.1. Financial Contribution

The Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland transferred a one-off amount of 50 zlotys from its own funds in the form of a donation to the newly established individual bank account of Mościcki's godson at the Postal Savings Bank (*Pocztowa Kasa Oszczędnościowa* – PKO).¹⁷ It happened that an additional amount (e.g., 20 zlotys) was paid to this account by one of the lower-level officials, e.g., the district *starosta*,¹⁸ where the godson and his family lived. The interest rate of savings was established at 6% per annum.¹⁹ The godson received, as a proof of his account, a personal PKO savings book (the so-called *książeczka wkładowa*) bound in red cloth (hence the alternative name: “the red book”). This book was usually physically given to the parents during the baptism ceremony or later. The savings were intended for the godson “for an independent start in life.” This amount could not be withdrawn until he reached the age of majority (18 years of age).

Inside the red book, next to the name and date of birth of the beneficiary, there was information about the benefactor, i.e., President Mościcki. There was also a solemn dedication from the Head of State which read as follows:

The Republic of Poland welcomes you, a new citizen, and wishes you that your entire life will be illuminated by the sun of happiness and success. Remember that your future depends on your work, conscientiousness and forethought, and the brightness of your life will be the awareness of fulfilling your obligations towards your family and the State.²⁰

There were also versions of a savings book with a motto signed by Mościcki, which read: “A nation in which saving has become a habit of every citizen builds its economy on the most solid foundation.”²¹

¹⁶ See “Prezydent Mościcki. Ojciec chrzestny 20-lecia międzywojennego”.

¹⁷ The Postal Savings Bank was established in 1919 and its activities were regulated, among others, by the act of May 19, 1920 on the Postal Savings Bank (Dz.U. 1920 nr 48 poz. 297).

¹⁸ This was the case, e.g., of Karol Piwowarek from Tarnowskie Góry, who was given 20 zlotys by the local *starosta*. Cf. Reczkin, “Memories of Karol Piwowarek”.

¹⁹ See “Prezydent Mościcki. Ojciec chrzestny 20-lecia międzywojennego.”

²⁰ See “STO lat śmiałych decyzji PKO Banku Polskiego”; Boruch, “Memories of Ignacy Bolesław Jagaczewski from Białystok”; Nocek, „Książeczka dla chrześniaka” 253–6.

²¹ Cf. Interpellation of MP Tomasz Arkit.

5.2. Covering Education Costs

The state was to support the parents in bearing the costs of raising and educating the child in Poland at the primary and secondary school, irrespective of profile and type of school, and at higher education (in the country and abroad).²² This state aid was to consist not only in access to free studies but also in providing scholarships. Unfortunately, the outbreak of the Second World War made it impossible for the state to meet the financial commitments guaranteed by Mościcki.

5.3. Other forms of financial aid

The State was to bear the financial costs of health care of presidential godsons until their death. Unsurprisingly, this is nowadays the main demand of the godsons from the Polish authorities.

The godsons were also to be provided with free lifetime access to rail transport throughout the country, with no mileage limit. Their siblings were entitled to reduced domestic transport fares (50%). Currently, Mościcki's godsons living in the city of Elbląg have been able to partially benefit from this form of assistance (since 2002). This is, however, the result of a resolution of the city of Elbląg.²³

5.4. Non-Material Benefits

One should not underestimate a certain type of non-pecuniary benefits resulting from the undoubted social ennoblement of the godson, his siblings, and parents. A godson was widely considered a "lucky child", which is why his friends at primary school and even teachers usually addressed such a godson by his godfather's surname, i.e., "Mościcki."²⁴ Importantly, a godson enjoyed the personal right to see his godfather (this privilege was unlimited in time).²⁵

6. Mościcki's Godsons during the Second World War

The outbreak of the Second World War on September 1, 1939, meant that the godsons program had to end after 13 years. No godson could study in high school or at the university for the money promised by the state. When the war broke out, Mościcki's oldest

²² Sternal, "Memories of Władysław Ignacy Ratajczak from Kościan"; "Siódme dziecko w rodzinie".

²³ Resolution of the City Council of Elbląg No. XVI/823/01 of December 20, 2001, on ticket prices for the transport of persons and luggage, additional fees and order regulations applicable in means of public transport in Elbląg.

²⁴ Matusz, "Memories of Kazimierz Ignacy Pluciński"; Sternal, "Memories of Władysław Ignacy Ratajczak from Kościan".

²⁵ See Wyszyńska, "Obietnica ojca chrzestnego".

godsons were about 13 years old, i.e., they were at most at the level of education at a primary school. The occupying German and Soviet authorities did not in any way honor any of the promised powers of the Polish pre-war president. Nevertheless, there is reliable information that the savings books saved lives of many godsons and their families, or allowed them to avoid difficult life situations (e.g., search and seizure, deportation to a camp, etc.).²⁶ One of them, Władysław Ignacy Ratajczak from Kościan, recalls that “When a German saw this document in the Żabikowo camp, he stood up and saluted. We were part of a group that was sent to work in Germany. He could have sent us to a concentration camp.”²⁷ The war memories of the godsons show that sometimes German officers had some “respect” for the Polish pre-war state authorities and the documents they issued. Perhaps the reason was that an institution similar to it was known in Germany (and Prussia) at that time.

Mościcki’s godsons could not count on more lenient treatment in the territories occupied by the Soviet Union. Carrying a red book could only make the matter worse.²⁸

7. Mościcki’s Godsons in People’s Poland

The state authorities in post-war Poland adopted the model of building a socialist state with the communist party at the helm of its monopolized power. All the institutions and legal solutions of pre-war, Sanation-era Poland gave rise to a hostile or begrudging attitude.

7.1. Discrimination

The authorities of the communist Poland consciously and institutionally sought to discriminate and repress Mościcki’s godchildren not only in fact but also in law. Mościcki’s godsons were subjected to social (environmental) harassment and even discriminatory behavior by public authorities.²⁹ They were denied the right to education in better secondary and higher schools, or their choice of a school was hindered. Others lost their jobs for being Mościcki’s godson.³⁰ There were also those who did not admit that fact (even to their own wife) or did not attach much importance to it, and basically this circumstance had no major impact on their fate.³¹

Immediately after the war, attempts to withdraw savings deposited in personal savings books turned out to be unsuccessful. The authorities of the nationalized banks at that time used the excuse that post-war Poland could not satisfy the claims of its citizens

²⁶ Boruch, “Memories of Ignacy Bolesław Jagaczewski from Białystok”; Sternal, “Memories of Władysław Ignacy Ratajczak from Kościan”.

²⁷ Domżał, “Memories of Ignacy Jagaczewski from Białystok”.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Reczkin, “Memories of Ignacy Badora”.

arising before the outbreak of the war.³² After the Second World War, the Postal Savings Bank (PKO) was liquidated, like other pre-war banking institutions.³³ Payments for the PKO's pre-war liabilities were made until May 5, 1952. Therefore, from a legal point of view, the State Treasury is currently not responsible for the bank liabilities of the PKO.

It should be noted that before the formal liquidation of the PKO in 1950, a nationwide campaign was carried out to register the books and cash deposits of Mościcki's godsons. In this way, the socialist state, without any previous information about the number of godsons and the total amount of their bank accounts, was able to learn about it along with their personal data through a registration campaign.

7.2. Bolesław Bierut's Godchildren

In the mid-1940s, i.e., on the threshold of the emergence of the People's Poland, another institution of presidential godchildren was introduced, following the example of Mościcki's godsons.³⁴ According to research based on the documents of the presidential Civil Chancellery, Bolesław Bierut (1892–1956),³⁵ who was the President of Poland in the years 1947–1952, served as godfather more than 1,400 times in this period.³⁶

Bierut himself never appeared at religious celebrations. He was represented by various officials (voivodes, *starostas*, city or commune officials, or representatives of national councils).

Bierut's godchild could be the seventh child in the family, regardless of its sex. In practice, however, his godchildren were most often boys. The godson quite often took the name after his godfather (Bolesław). Godchild's parents had to be married Polish citizens who have an impeccable reputation and specific (i.e., socialist) political views. However, in the public perception, Bierut's godchild did not have the same status (or social respect) compared to Mościcki's godson before the Second World War. Financially, he could count on a layette. Newborns and infants usually received diapers, sleeping bags, jackets, shirts and bonnets, while the older children were given material for clothes. Additionally, since January 1, 1948, each of Bierut's godchildren received a savings book from the Postal Savings Bank (PKO) with a cash contribution in the amount of 10,000 zlotys. The idea behind this was to popularize the habit of saving among the citizens.

³² Sternal, "Memories of Władysław Ignacy Ratajczak from Kościan".

³³ The decree of October 25, 1948, on banking reform (consolidated text: Dz.U. 1951 nr 36 poz. 279).

³⁴ Dudek, "Wszyscy chrześniacy Bolesława Bieruta"; "Memories of Kazimierz Ordyniak"; "Memories of Bolesław Kubasik from Wapno".

³⁵ Bolesław Bierut (born in 1892, died on 12.03.1956 in Moscow) was a communist activist, a supporter of Stalinism in Poland, the president of the Homeland National Council (1944–1947), and the President of Poland (1947–1952). He also served as the first secretary of the Polish Workers' Party (1948) and the Polish United Workers' Party (1948–1952).

³⁶ Dudek, "Wszyscy chrześniacy Bolesława Bieruta". These findings are based on archival primary sources, namely documents of Civil Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland (1945–1952) from the Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw (Archiwum Akt Nowych), no. 984 (note regarding the godsons of the President of the Republic of Poland by the head of the Secret Chancellery and Archives, Warsaw, June 15, 1978, p. 1), and no. 985 (register of godsons of the President of the Republic of Poland 1945–1947, pp. 1–129).

The institution of Bierut's godchildren should be viewed through the prism of propaganda of the successes and interests of the new political formation (communists), which took over the reins of power in post-war Poland and built a totalitarian socialist system.

8. The Situation of Mościcki's Godsons in Post-Communist Poland

As a result of political and social changes in Poland in the early 1990s, there were general conditions for finding Mościcki's godsons who were still alive and for integrating them into the community. Initially, Kazimierz Ignacy Pluciński, among others, was particularly active.³⁷ Advertisements were placed on television, radio and in the press,³⁸ letters were written, telephone calls were made, personal visits were made to the place of residence or work, etc. It was then possible to establish that at least 354 of Mościcki's godchildren lived in the country or abroad.³⁹ The vast majority of them lived in Poland, but there was also information about Polish emigrants in the USA, Canada, Germany, and post-Soviet countries (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia), and others.

The lives and professional careers of Mościcki's godsons were different. They became lawyers, scientists and professors (in Poland and abroad), doctors, schoolteachers, officers of the Polish People's Army, artists and actors, Roman Catholic clergy, local government officials and activists. There was even a certain member of PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party) Committee who managed to hide the fact that he was Mościcki's godson.⁴⁰

8.1. National Association of Godchildren of the President of the Second Polish Republic, Ignacy Mościcki

The first nationwide meeting of Mościcki's godchildren took place in the city of Gorzów Wielkopolski in 1991. In the same year, the National Association of Godsons of the President of the Second Polish Republic, Ignacy Mościcki (hereinafter referred to as the Association), was established, with its headquarters in Gorzów Wielkopolski. After changes to the statute (and re-registering on October 15, 2001), the seat of the Association's authorities was relocated to Kolbuszowa (Subcarpathian Voivodeship), at 2 Prusa Street.⁴¹

³⁷ Matusz, "Memories of Kazimierz Ignacy Pluciński".

³⁸ Adolf, "Jestem chrześniakiem prezydenta Mościckiego", 26–7.

³⁹ See Malcher-Nowak, "Mit szczęśliwej siódemki".

⁴⁰ Brzęczek, "Memories of the late Ignacy Kochel from Panki".

⁴¹ District Court in Rzeszów, 12th Commercial Department of the National Court Register (file no. RZ.XII NS–REJ.KRS/8630/05/152). On June 3, 2000, the amended statute of the Association was adopted, and then changed on August 9, 2005. See National Association of Godsons of the President of the Second Republic of Poland, Ignacy Mościcki website. <https://spis.ngo.pl/199302–krajowe–stowarzyszenie–chrzesniakow–prezydenta–ii–rzeczypospolitej–polskiej–ignacego–moscickiego> (accessed: 14.06.2024).

There are several local branches of the Association in Poland, which demonstrate varying levels of activity. The tradition of annual meetings of Mościcki's godsons and their families has been established. These meetings contributed not only to the consolidation of the community, establishing and maintaining social contacts, but also to more tangible achievements such as compiling biographies of living and deceased godsons and their families, and collecting information about still living godsons in the country and abroad. There are attempts to provide material support, especially for those who live in the post-Soviet republics.⁴² One of the greatest successes was bringing the ashes of Mościcki and his second wife Maria to Poland from Switzerland in 1993.⁴³

Unfortunately, the greatest bitterness among the members is caused by the state policy concerning savings deposits.

8.2. The Problem of Savings Deposits

The presidential cash contributions amounted to 50 zlotys and carried an interest rate of 6% per annum. Any further contributions were subject to the same rules. Pre-war deposits placed in the Postal Savings Bank (PKO) were secured with gold kept in a Swiss bank.

According to the Association of Greater Poland Family of Godsons of the President of the Second Polish Republic, Professor Ignacy Mościcki, pre-war cash contributions can currently amount to approximately several thousand USD.⁴⁴ There are, of course, much higher (approximately PLN 500,000) and lower estimates (several thousand zlotys).⁴⁵ Mościcki's godchildren and their families are trying to interest various state institutions in Poland and abroad in the matter of unsatisfied financial claims. They believe that this is an honorary debt on the part of President Mościcki, which should be returned to them. So far, their attempts have proven unsuccessful.

Already in the 1990s, the godsons tried to interest both the highest state authorities in Poland and local authorities with their claims. For this purpose, they addressed letters to the Presidents (Lech Wałęsa, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, Lech Kaczyński, Bronisław Komorowski and Andrzej Duda),⁴⁶ the Marshals of both Houses of Parliament (the Sejm and the Senate), Prime Ministers (especially Hanna Suchocka), Ministers of Finance, the Ombudsman, the Government Plenipotentiary for the Family Matters, the Monetary Policy Council, the PKO bank, individual MPs and senators, local government activists, etc. On September 29, 2009, there was even a meeting of a delegation of Mościcki's Godsons (i.e., representatives of the Association) with the President Lech Kaczyński. Further requests for this type of legal regulation appeared in the summer of 2015, shortly after Andrzej Duda won the presidential elections. They were renewed especially in 2020 at re-election.

⁴² Boruch, "Memories of Ignacy Bolesław Jagaczewski from Białystok".

⁴³ The initiative in this regard was formally taken by the President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Wałęsa, and the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Józef Glemp.

⁴⁴ Kolarczyk, "Chrześciana prezydenta Mościckiego".

⁴⁵ Węcek, "Memories of Franciszek Denisiuk"; Węcek, "Rodziny 900 chrześniaków".

⁴⁶ Reczkin, "Memories of Karol Piwowarek".

The problem of the claims of godsons was the subject of numerous parliamentary and senatorial inquiries before the Polish Sejm and Senate (deputy interpellations, petitions and statements). Initially, they aimed at determining whether there were legal provisions allowing for the return of pre-war revalued savings deposits to their, interest included. For instance, on April 3, 2003, at the 37th session of the Senate, senator Anna Kurska sent on behalf of Mościcki's godsons a question ("a statement") to the then Minister of Finance Grzegorz Kołodko.⁴⁷ In response (June 5, 2003), the Ministry explained that there is no legal basis for this type of claim, because "[...] any claims of citizens against the banking system existing in Poland before the Second World War cannot currently be effectively pursued." Moreover, "[...] there is no legal regulation that would provide the basis for the payment and valorization of contributions placed in PKO books in respect of President Mościcki's donation [...]."⁴⁸

The unchanging position of the Polish government towards the claims of Mościcki's godsons was expressed in the letter of the Ministry of Finance which was a response to interpellation of the MP Artur Górski. We learn from it that:

Currently, claims arising from contributions in question have become time-barred pursuant to Article 118 of the Civil Code and therefore it is no longer possible to return any funds in this respect [...]. [T]he monetary claims of President Ignacy Mościcki's godsons against the State Treasury have no legal basis.⁴⁹

The Association conducted court proceedings in the years 2004–2006 on behalf of the Mościcki's godsons "for the payment by the State Treasury of the above-mentioned amounts ceded by the godsons to this association in order to recover them in court, appropriately revalued," and for compensation for their "depreciation by the governments of the Polish People's Republic." The District Court in Rzeszów dismissed this claim on January 10, 2005. According to the Court, the claim was time-barred because "the deadline for making deposits in the Postal Savings Bank books expired on May 5, 1953."⁵⁰ Mościcki's godsons unsuccessfully appealed to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg for help in returning revalued savings deposits from Poland.

The Association's authorities, as well as individual godsons and their family members, see a chance to satisfy their claims in the planned but not yet adopted reprivatization act.⁵¹

Nevertheless, this legal and social problem has not yet been resolved to the satisfaction of Mościcki's godsons and their families, and from time to time resurfaces with varying intensity.

⁴⁷ Stenographic record of the 37. Sitting of the Senate of the Republic of Poland (April 2–3, 2003), 110.

⁴⁸ Cf. Matusz, "Memories of Kazimierz Ignacy Pluciński".

⁴⁹ The content of this interpellation can be found on the website of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland. See: Response of the Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Finance (Wojciech Kowalczyk) of February 18, 2013; Interpellation of MP Artur Górski.

⁵⁰ Judgment of the District Court in Rzeszów (1st Civil Cases Department) of January 10, 2005 (no. I C 830/04). The Court of Appeal in Rzeszów also dismissed the plaintiff's appeal on September 8, 2005 (no. I ACa 350/05). The Supreme Court refused to accept the plaintiff's cassation appeal on January 31, 2006 (no. I CSK 2/06).

⁵¹ Strauchmann, "Chrześcianiacy prezydenta Mościckiego".

9. The Comparative Perspective: Presidential Godchildren in Germany

In Germany, the institution of patronage has a long and rich history. One can mention the so-called honorary patronage, or paternity (*Ehrenpatenschaft*), and baptismal patronage, or paternity (*Taufpatenschaft*).⁵²

German law and historical tradition oblige the President of the Federal Republic of Germany to be the honorary godfather of every seventh child born into a German family. The parents submit an appropriate application for honorary patronage to the President's office, where the application is checked in formal and material terms. There must be at least seven living children in the family, regardless of sex. All children must come from the same father and mother. A candidate for a godchild must be German within the meaning of Article 116(1) of the Basic Law of May 23, 1949.⁵³ Honorary baptism is granted only once per family.

The President of the Republic does not personally participate in the church baptism ceremony. Proof of patronage is an appropriate certificate signed by the president, which is delivered to parents by a representative of the city or commune. Such honorary baptism of the president is accompanied by the obligation of the German State Treasury to pay the parents a one-time "baby bonus" in the amount of EUR 500. The federal president does not assume any further obligations towards the godchild or his family by the fact of honorary baptism.⁵⁴ Through honorary baptism, the German president strengthens the social prestige of large families and symbolically expresses the special obligation of the state towards such families.

Honorary patronage (honorary paternity) in Germany in modern times was known already in the period of the Second Empire (1871–1918) and in the Kingdom of Prussia even earlier (1701–1918). The monarchs honored the parents of every seventh son in the family, regardless of whether he survived. This custom was abandoned with the end of the Great War. Honorary baptism was renewed in the Weimar Republic in 1926 during the presidency of Paul von Hindenburg in a slightly modified formula. Namely, the President of the Republic became the honorary godfather of every seventh (or subsequent) child in the family, regardless of their sex and whether it survived. These criteria were tightened in 1936, from which year forward Adolf Hitler, being the Führer and Chancellor, could become the honorary godfather only of the seventh son (or ninth child) in a family of German citizens of pure Aryan blood.

In 1928, such an institution appeared in Prussia as well, with the Prussian Prime Minister becoming the honorary godfather of every twelfth child in the family (since 1930 – every tenth), regardless of the sex and whether it survived. The Prime Minister provided a one-time financial gift of RM 30.

⁵² Stegemann, "Ehrenpatenschaften".

⁵³ "Unless otherwise provided by a law, a German within the meaning of this Basic Law is a person who possesses German citizenship or who has been admitted to the territory of the German Reich within the boundaries of 31 December 1937 as a refugee or expellee of German ethnic origin or as the spouse or descendant of such person." Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany of May 23, 1949, article 116(1).

⁵⁴ "Bundespräsident Steinmeier".

Theodor Heuss returned to the tradition of honorary baptism of the head of state (*Ehrenpatenschaft des Bundespräsidenten*) after his election to the office of President of the Federal Republic of Germany on September 12, 1949.⁵⁵ Since 1949, twelve successive presidents have assumed honorary patronage of over 83,000 children.

Honorary baptismal paternity carried out by heads of state (monarchs and presidents) and prime ministers was known in the past and is currently also known in other European and non-European countries.⁵⁶

10. Summary

Professor Ignacy Mościcki (1867–1946), as the President of Poland, in June 1926 publicly announced the first program in independent Poland to support the state's pro-family policy. In 1926, a similar program was reactivated in Germany as well. The difference was that there the President of the Weimar Republic became the godfather of every seventh child in the family, regardless of their sex, whereas the Polish President was supposed to be the godfather of every seventh son in a family, which should be Polish, Roman Catholic and which had no criminal record. It was a private statement by the President, which, however, had financial consequences for the presidential chancellery and the state budget. Neither Mościcki nor the parliament has issued any legal act in this regard. This program was successfully implemented for 13 years (1926–1939) until the outbreak of the Second World War. During this time, Mościcki became honorary godfather of 911 boys.

The selection of candidates for a godson was thorough and time-consuming. The Catholic baptism of such a boy took place in the parish where his parents lived. In practice, Mościcki himself rarely personally participated in the baptism ceremony of his godson. The President was usually represented on site by an authorized official of his chancellery or a local dignitary. Such a baptism was a significant local event. Mościcki's godsons received a savings book from the Postal Savings Bank (PKO) with a contribution of 50 zlotys.

During the Second World War, the program was abandoned. The socialist authorities in post-war Poland discredited the program. It was not until after the political and legal changes in Poland, in 1991, that Mościcki's godsons founded the nationwide association. Currently, its main goal is to consolidate the community, provide mutual assistance to impoverished godchildren and their families, cultivate the memory of the honorary godfather and, above all, pursue claims against the state as regards revalued savings contributions. The godchildren have repeatedly tried to interest the Polish highest and local authorities in their affairs. They unsuccessfully sent letters to subsequent presidents, speakers of both houses of parliament, etc. In the years 2004–2006 they also tried to pursue their financial

⁵⁵ In 1977 in the German Democratic Republic, the institution of honorary patronage was established as well. It applied every fifth and subsequent child in the family. The duty was undertaken by each chairman of the collegial head of state, i.e. the State Council. See "Patenschaft".

⁵⁶ See "Zona celebrytka"; Kobeszko, "Gruziński patriarchy".

claims through court proceedings, but with no success. The claims were dismissed as time barred. They can be only considered as a “debt of honor” incurred by the pre-war President of the Republic of Poland.

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