

Polish citizenship for Pol-Ams?

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Our Warsaw Correspondent

WARSAW—Now that Poland is no longer a communist country or Soviet satellite behind the Iron Curtain, it appears a growing number of Polish Americans are becoming interested in or at least curious about Polish citizenship. Some are interested in dual citizenship for patriotic or family reasons. “If I’m a proud Polish American, then why shouldn’t my citizenship status reflect both elements of my identity?” might be one way of expressing such sentiments. There might also be highly personal reasons: “My late dad, a postwar DP, always dreamed of returning to Poland with his family but did not live to see Poland regain its freedom in 1989. My getting Polish citizenship would have made him very happy.”

Others are guided by more practical concerns. That could involve buying real estate in Poland, receiving a property inheritance or reclaiming land that once belonged to their ancestors. Others hope to retire in Poland, where a Social Security check goes farther than in America, although only a permanent residence card, not Polish citizenship, is required. But for those Pol-Ams interested in setting up a business or making investments not only in Poland, but throughout the 27-country European Union, being a Polish citizen does make all the difference. It enables a person to travel freely from country to country and stay or live in any of them as long as he/she likes without worrying about visas.

Although Poland’s real-estate market is gradually cooling down somewhat, in recent years it was among Europe’s hottest and annual returns of 100 percent or more were not uncommon. Pol-Ams having Polish citizenship and some spare capital to invest were able to make a real “killing” in land and condo sales.

It took Polish-born Tom Surmiak of Frisco, Texas, only about five months to get a Polish passport. He had come to the US in 1981 and became an American citizen in 1988. He never lost his Polish citizenship and decided to apply for a Polish passport after Poland joined the European Union. “When I travel to Europe on business several times a year, I avoid standing in line for non-European Union passport control and with my Polish passport save 10 minutes or more each time,” Surmiak explained.

Any foreigner, regardless of nationality, may apply for Polish citizenship, but having Polish ancestral roots is an added advantage that can speed up the process. In fact, some Pol-Ams are already Polish citizens without knowing it, even if they were born in the US, Canada, Bolivia or Timbuctoo. Under Polish law, having one parent or grandparent or two Polish-born great-grandparents who had at one time had held Polish citizenship and never formally renounced it makes one a Polish citizen. In such cases, the person needs only apply for confirmation of their Polish citizenship. However the ancestor must have been born after 1918, because Poles born prior to then were officially citizens of Russia, Prussia or Austria.

Normally, five years of residency in Poland is required to get Polish citizenship, but that period can be shortened to three years by marrying a Polish national (citizen). However there are exceptions. Poland’s citizenship law states: “In particularly justified cases, citizenship may be granted to a foreigner even if he has not fulfilled the above requirements.” That applies to both a foreigner living in Poland less than the required five or (in the case of one married to a Pole) three years, as well as one living abroad.

The law does not spell out those “particularly justified cases”, but a few years ago Emmanuel Olisadebe, a Nigerian-born Black, received fast-track citizenship so he could play on Poland’s. And in 2005, Michael Schudrich, a New York Jew, got Polish citizenship a year after being appointed Chief Rabbi of Poland. It is obvious that an internationally renowned cultural personality, inventor or multi-

millionaire investor can expect preferential treatment when applying for citizenship. On the other hand, Polish officials maintain that every application, not only the VIP ones, is treated individually, since so many different factors may enter into the picture.

One Pol-Am who has successfully navigated all the red tape (and applying for citizenship does entail gathering documents and considerable paperwork!) is John Blacha of Waterford, Michigan, and Rajbrot, Poland—a town near the southern city of Tarnów. The son of post-World War II DPs, he is married to a native Pole and that seems to have expedited his application process. The warned the impatient that they should expect the entire process to take one to two years to complete.

The bureaucratic hassle has vexed Peter Ostrowski of Palm Beach, Florida, who has been teaching English in Warsaw. He has paid numerous visits to the immigration office in Warsaw’s Długa Street (at the edge of Old Town), but each time he is told his application has yet to be processed yet and simply must wait his turn. Ostrowski first submitted his application in spring 2007.

David Piekarczyk and his wife Joan had planned to retire in Poland for some time, and arrived in the western city of Poznań in August 2007 on the basis of a permanent residence card. The Piekarczyks both enjoy traveling and are happy that Poland is an easy drive to many of the places in Europe they hope to visit. Dave has been hunting up long-lost relations and wants to draw up his family tree. He is considering applying for Polish citizenship which he feels will make it easier to buy real estate and transact other business. A blow-by-blow account of the Piekarczyks’ odyssey is found on their blog: <http://david-polanddavid.blogspot.com>.

Anyone interested in more information on Polish citizenship and/or permanent residence in Poland should contact their nearest Polish General Consulate:

Consular Division, Polish Embassy
2224 Wyoming Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20008-3992
phone: (202) 234-3800;
www.polandembassy.org
e-mail: polconsul.dc@verizon.net

Consulate General of Poland
233 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10016
phone: (646) 237-2100
fax :: (646) 237-2105
www.polandconsulateny.com
e-mail :: kgrpny@aol.com

Consulate General of Poland
820 N. Orleans Street, suite 335
Chicago, Illinois 60610
phone: (312) 337-8166
fax: (312) 337-7841
www.polishconsulatechicago.org
e-mail: polcon@polishconsulatechicago.org

Consulate General of Poland
12400 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 555
Los Angeles, California 90025
phone: (310) 442-8500
fax: (310) 442-8515
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Strybel - Fear in Poland from 6

pogrom after the war.

The Kielce killings occurred after someone began spreading the false rumor that eight-year-old Henio (Henryk) Błaszczyk had been kidnapped by Jews for his Christian blood to make matzos with. To this day it is unknown whether Henio’s father, an alcoholic shoemaker and communist police informer, had coached the boy and, if so, at whose behest.

Word of the alleged Jewish abduction of a Catholic boy spread like wildfire, and soon a sizable crowd had assembled outside a building housing the Jewish Relief Committee. At one point a shot rang out (to this day no-one knows who fired it) and more shooting would follow. According to a Communist Party report cited by Gross, “the police and military were not disciplined. Instead of quelling the disturbance, they mingled with and succumbed to the influence of the crowd. Policemen, together with the military were the first to enter the

building. Policemen pulled Jewish victims from the building and handed them over to the crowd outside.” When it was all over, 40 Jews and two Poles were dead, 17 of them of gunshot wounds, the rest from blows to the head.

The main thesis of Gross’ book runs as follows: “Anti-Semitism, as a general phenomenon in Christian Europe, was an integral part of Polish Catholicism in the first half of the 20th century... The participation of Catholic Poles in the persecution and murder of their Jewish fellow-citizens was a phenomenon widespread throughout the entire country.”

The Polish-born sociologist tries to back up such sweeping generalizations by selectively compiling examples that demonize the Polish people. One Polish historian has noted that the book contains hundreds of statements and generalizations vilifying Poland and Poles, but only four negative remarks about Jews. Gross’ generalization alleging that Jews “had been victimized by their Polish neighbors for centuries” rings false in view of the fact that at one time four-fifths of world Jewry lived in the sprawling Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. They settled there because it provided a more hospitable environment than the countries from which they had fled. Polish kings and princes granted Jews special privileges such as trading rights and judicial autonomy, and it was on Polish territory that Jews developed their most vibrant and flourishing religious and cultural heritage.

Naturally there had to be some friction which nearly always occurs when two completely different cultures come into contact. But the wrongs and the resentment they generated worked both ways. At various times, Jews and Poles were both victims and victimizers. The pogroms of Jews in Russian-occupied 19th-century Poland have been widely publicized, but why is so little known about the Jews who turned Polish 19th-century freedom-fighters insurrectionists over to the Russian occupation forces? Jewish innkeepers were known to give peasants drinks on credit to get them hooked, and Jewish bankers granted generous loans on usurious terms to Polish noblemen and then claimed their property for non-payment.

In 1918, many Polish Jews were unhappy about Poland’s regained independence, preferring to live in a Russian- or German-ruled state, and welcomed the Bolshevik hordes invading Poland in 1920. During the inter-war period, Jews were seen as monopolizing the legal and medical professions as well as the entertainment industry and using unscrupulous practices to drive many an ethnic Pole out of business. And the illegal, pre-World War II Communist Party of Poland was largely led by Jewish subversives in the service of Stalin.

The Jedwabne pogrom occurred after nearly two years of Soviet occupation (1939-1941) during which many Jews were willing soviet collaborators who openly persecuted their Polish neighbors. Self-style Jewish-led “workers’ militias” opened fire on Polish soldiers and fingered Polish patriots to the NKVD. In post-war Soviet-occupied Poland Jews were disproportionately overrepresented in the communist secret police who imprisoned, tortured and killed Poles whose only crime was want their country to be free.

Considerable evidence suggest the Kielce incident had been a Soviet-orchestrated provocation to take the heat off the Warsaw regime which had been criticized in the Free World for its rigged referendum four days earlier. But Gross conveniently glosses over or ignores anything that reveals widespread Jewish collaboration with the Soviets. Instead he prefers to pander to existing Jewish-held stereotypes including the allegation that Poles are intrinsically evil, while Jews are always victims, never villains.

But there is an indisputable logic in his approach. The Jewish-American reading public and pro-Semitic liberal intellectuals constitute a far more lucrative market than Polonia. It was therefore a far better career move on Gross’ part to first publish “Fear” in America” and follow it up with the Polish version. The latter will surely antagonize Poles and strain Polish-Jewish relations, although the profits it produces will undoubtedly be far more modest. □

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