

*Gente Ruthenus, nazione Polonus – history of the expression*

The origin of the expression *Gente Ruthenus, nazione Polonus* has traditionally been associated with Stanisław Orzechowski, a Renaissance writer on political and religious matters. In contemporary literature the expression is used to evoke the multi-national heritage of the First Rzeczpospolita and simultaneously to stress its spirit of tolerance and harmonious coexistence of Poles and Ukrainians. It is self-evident that with the birth of nationalism and emergence of the modern Ukrainian nation the expression became part of history. It would appear, therefore, that it has nothing in common with either territorial identity or contemporary issues. It turns out however that the phrase has also been used in a somewhat different meaning. The early-Renaissance writer Paweł Rusin of Krosno, was by no means a Ruthenian by birth but a descendant of German settlers who had made the Ruthenian province of the Polish Kingdom their home. The eminent historian of the 16th century Frank Sysyn claims that the expression *Gente Ruthenus, nazione Polonus* is a product of the 19th-century Polish nation building. Indeed, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries the expression is much in evidence. Prominent Poles and patriots of the Ukrainian lands, such as Stempowski or *gente Polonus, nazione Ruthenus* Wacław Lipiński aka Vjatcheslav Lypynski, were no strangers to such perception of identity. Nevertheless in the Second Rzeczpospolita the expression became a tool of fighting the Ukrainian nationalist movement. Ukrainian nationalists in turn rejected such conception of identity. Today the formulation is used, depending on one's political and philosophical orientation, either to evoke the good traditions of the First Rzeczpospolita or as an argument exposing the relatively recent and artificial origin of Ukrainian national identity.