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XXIII INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF HISTORICAL SCIENCES, POZNAŃ 2020/2022 – FINAL REPORT

In this report, I would like to present basic data on the XXIII International Congress of Historical Sciences, which took place in Poznań on August 21st-27th, 2022, and share comments made from different perspectives – a member of the Organising Committee, the chairman of its Executive Department, and at the same time a Vice-President of the International Committee of Historical Sciences (hereafter CISH).

World congresses of historians have been held regularly since 1900. Since 1926, they have been organised (generally every five years) by CISH together with the host city elected by the CISH General Assembly. In the past, the congress was held in Poland only once, in 1933 in Warsaw. Poznań was entrusted with the organisation of the Congress during the XXII Congress in Jinan, China in 2015. Preparations started in the same year. The work was supervised by the Organising Committee established on November 5th, 2015 by Committee of Historical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences (hereafter referred to as CHS PAS) and the University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań (hereafter AMU). The Committee's composition has changed over the past seven years. In the last phase it consisted of 15 people. The Committee was co-chaired by the Rector of the AMU Bogumiła Kaniewska and the Chairman of the CHS PAS – Tomasz Schramm, and the members were (in alphabetical order):

Andrzej Chwalba – Vice-President of the Polish Historical Society (hereinafter PHS)

Józef Dobosz – Dean of the Faculty of History (hereafter FH) of the AMU

Ewa Domańska – FH AMU

Kazimierz Ilski – FH AMU

Robert Kostro – Polish History Museum in Warsaw

Cezary Kukło – Vice-President of CHS PAS/Vice-President of PHS



Krzysztof A. Makowski – Member of CHS PAS/FH AMU
Przemysław Matusik – Vice-Dean of FH AMU
Maciej Michalski – Vice-Dean of FH AMU
Krzysztof Mikulski – President of PHS/Vice-President of CHS PAS
Mariusz Wiśniewski – Deputy Mayor of the City of Poznań
Marek Woźniak - Marshal of the Wielkopolska Region
Marcin Wysocki – Chancellor of the AMU

The Committee entrusted the organisation of the Congress to its Executive Department. We borrowed this structure from our pre-war colleagues, because it worked perfectly then. Krzysztof A. Makowski became the Chairman of the Department, Maciej Michalski became the Secretary General, and the members were (in alphabetical order):

Katarzyna Balbuza – Vice-Dean of FH AMU
Lucyna Błażejczyk-Majka – FH AMU
Anna Chudzińska – FH AMU
Agnieszka Jakuboszczak – FH AMU
Agnieszka Jędraszek - Deputy Bursar of the AMU
Michał Kolasiński – Representative of the Marshal of the Wielkopolska Region
Bernadetta Manyś – FH AMU
Jan Mazurczak – President of the Board of the Poznan Tourism Organisation (hereafter PTO)
Cezary Mazurek – Poznań Supercomputing and Networking Center (hereafter PSNC)
Anna Młynarczyk – AMU Marketing Center
Małgorzata Praczyk – FH AMU

All activities of the Organising Committee and the Executive Department were coordinated by the Congress Bureau, headed by Karolina Filipowska. The preparation of the Congress in terms of logistics was entrusted to the Poznań International Fair (hereafter PIF).

The preparatory work ran smoothly for a long time, which was also witnessed by the members of the CISH Board during their visit to Poznań in 2018. Shortly before the Congress, however, it turned out that the preparations had to be suspended – they went into a kind of hibernation – and continued overshadowed by the pandemic, and then also by the Russian-Ukrainian war. Until the last moment, we had concerns about whether the Congress would take place, but thanks to the great determination of the organisers and the participants themselves, who showed admirable patience, we succeeded in organising it. It was not without difficulties, especially of a financial nature – I mean the need to transfer the previously granted subsidies to the next budget years. This difficult situation did not significantly affect the interest of panel organisers in the Congress. About 10 were cancelled compared to the original plans. In their place, however, the CISH Board added new panels. As for the commissions affiliated with CISH – out of 20 that planned to participate, literally a few withdrew, but also in this case new ones applied to take their place.

Now let us move on to the final figures for Congress (although not all numbers can be precisely determined). The Congress gathered 905 participants. This is the total number of participants registered – as panel organisers and speakers, guests of honour, organisers of the Congress (including volunteers) and ordinary participants. They came from 64 countries. Nearly 65% of those registered (573) attended the Congress in person, the rest took part online (321 unique participants). It is worth noting here that several registered people did not appear either in person or online.

The largest group in all categories were Poles – among the total number of registrants whose country of origin was known (782), they accounted for almost 25% (177), among stationary almost 1/3 (151, which meant 32%). Among the registered, the next place after Poles was taken by the French (68), Germans (57), Italians (53), Americans (34), Czechs and Japanese (31 each). In general, Europeans clearly dominated (600, i.e., 77%), representing as many as 32 countries. Asians from 11 countries took second place (Japanese and Chinese dominated). Representatives of both Americas came from 10 countries (74). Historians from the US dominated, but almost the same number (33) came from Latin America – the largest number from Brazil. 23 historians from Africa registered – they came from 11 countries.

Among stationary participants, Poles were followed by Germans (41), French (39), Italians (27) and Czechs (20). The representation of non-European countries was not as numerous as among the registered participants (77, i.e., 16%), less than usual came from Japan (15) and the USA (9), but more from Latin America (21). Among online participants, the next place after Poles was taken by Chinese, Italians, Americans, and Spaniards.

As for the structure and programme of the Congress, almost 100 panels (93) were held, including 3 so-called Major Themes, 20 Round Tables, 10 Joint Sessions, 23 Specialised Themes, and 2 evening sessions. Another integral part of the Congress were the 35 panels prepared by 19 international commissions affiliated with CISH, whose organisation was supervised by Katarzyna Balbuza, and in the final phase by Aneta Liwerska-Garstecka. They were held on August 25th-26th at Collegium Historicum and gathered a total of about 150 people. On Thursday, August 25th, on this occasion, the Collegium Historicum hosted a presentation of Jerzy Topolski's book entitled *Theory and Methodology of Historical Knowledge*. This event was very popular.

In total, 535 papers were presented at the Congress. To this should be added several round tables without papers, but with a loose exchange of ideas, introductions, comments, and conclusions to the proceedings. 319 papers were presented during regular sessions, 216 during sessions of affiliated commissions. The largest number of papers, more than 30, were presented during the sessions of the Commission of Historical Demography.

Many of the panels were chronologically and territorially cross-sectional. All panels incorporated non-European areas. All epochs were represented, with a slight predominance of modern and recent history; only the Middle Ages were slightly weaker than usual. Also, in terms of content, almost all fields of research

were present – a large share of the history of historiography and the methodology of history as well as historical demography, there was less traditional political history.

During the Congress in Poznań, topics present already during previous congresses were continued: site of memory, women and gender studies, public and digital history. The emphasis on the surrounding environment was very strong, much stronger than before – a departure from anthropocentrism in favour of seeking connections with the world around us (post-anthropocentric reflection): man and nature, the history of animals and people, an ecological approach to the Holocaust and genocide, and also the history of the Anthropocene and a planetary history proposed by Dipesh Chakrabarty. A clear theme was global history, including the concept of connected history approximated in Sanjay Subrahmanyam's lecture, as well as the links between history and politics. One of the Great Themes considered the problem of balancing historical knowledge, i.e., moving away from Eurocentrism understood as the West's "monopoly" on creating knowledge about the past.

During the Opening Ceremony, three historians (Olufunke Adebayo from Nigeria, Dipesh Chakrabarty from the USA, and Ewa Domańska from Poland) were asked a question that has been in scholarly discussions for a long time: *Quo vadis historiae?* It reflects the search for a new place for historiography in the postmodern reality, after the postmodern revolution, which strongly undermined the classical concept of truth and led to extreme subjectivisation of historical research. This undoubtedly gave rise to the need to search for a new identity for our discipline. As a result of the unstable economic and political situation, the keynotes and many other presentations were accompanied by anxiety about the fate of the world, about the fate of democracy as a political system, and about the fate of the environment.

I would like to say a few words about additional events. One of the most important was the awarding of the International CISH History Prize. It was the third edition of the award granted to historians who have distinguished themselves with their research, publications or teaching achievements and have made a significant contribution to the development of historical knowledge. Sanjay Subrahmanyam was honoured in Poznań, a graduate of the University of Delhi, currently a professor at the University of California in Los Angeles, author of many books, essays and editor of collective works on the history of India and the Indian Ocean, early modern times, especially economic history, as well as reflections on so-called Connected History.

The next important event was the poster session organised by Agnieszka Jakuboszczak. Prior to the previous Jinan Congress in 2015, the CISH-Shandong University Young Historian Award was established, funded by Shandong University. The award was intended to encourage doctoral students to participate in the International Congresses of Historical Sciences, where they could present their academic achievements. Five cash prizes were awarded. Shandong University and CISH decided to award the same Prize during the Congress in Poznań.

As a result of the selection, 27 posters were qualified. Their authors came from different countries and represented over a dozen universities. The posters were

displayed from the first day of the Congress at Collegium Minus to enable all participants of the Congress to familiarise themselves with them. On August 25th, a special session was held, which consisted of two parts: first, individual discussions with the authors of the posters, and then comments from three commentators (Gunlög Fur from Sweden, Audrey Kichelewski from France, LIU Jiafeng from China). After the session, a jury meeting was held to select the five best posters. The grand prize of \$3,500 went to LIU Chenxi of the Humboldt University in Berlin for the poster: *Racist Discourse in Former Socialist Countries: A Case Study on Mao Zedong's Declaration of Supporting African Americans' Fight Against Racial Discrimination*. The award ceremony took place during the Congress Closing Ceremony.

A completely new initiative of CISH was the organisation of the Research Forum at the Congress in Poznań, supervised by Małgorzata Praczyk. The main objective of the Forum was to enable various scientific institutions and institutions financing science to present themselves and their ongoing projects. It was supposed to create an opportunity to establish cooperation between these institutions and scholars. The Research Forum consisted of presenting their stands throughout the Congress and a special session during which they presented their offer in detail. Several institutions participated in the event. Some of them only took advantage of the opportunity to participate in the session, without setting up a stand, while others did not take part in the session. Interest in the Forum was very low, which was partly explained by the relatively high fee (2,000 euros). As a consequence, most of the participants were recruited from Polish institutions cooperating with the Congress.

The pandemic probably thwarted our plans most when it came to events accompanying the Congress, all dealt with by Anna Chudzińska. We had to cancel our planned trips outside Poznań. However, the plans for Poznań itself did not change much. A smaller number of participants only resulted in a more modest offer. Virtually all libraries, museums, and archives in Poznań declared their willingness to cooperate in the organisation of the Congress. All participants could visit them and see their collections. Of course, the offer also included sightseeing in Poznań. In this case, PTO gave us a lot of support, and they also co-financed the welcome dinner in the Concordia Restaurant and organised transport to the Collegium Historicum on the Morasko Campus.

I will now turn to financial matters. During the seven years of preparation, the overall cost of organising the Congress amounted to approximately PLN 1,450,000 (then equivalent of 300,000 euro). This fund consisted of both AMU's own funds and external funds. AMU covered 40% of all expenses, of which 86% was allocated by the Department and the Faculty of History (a total of just over PLN 500,000 over 7 years). We covered 1/3 of the costs with money allocated by government agencies. The Ministry of Education and Science awarded us the most (PLN 220,000), about PLN 200,000 came from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and PLN 60,000 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We received over PLN 190,000 from the local authorities – the Marshal's Office of the Wielkopolska Region and from the City of Poznań. Symbolic contribu-

tions – which should rather be treated as an expression of corporate solidarity – were allocated for the organisation of the Congress by the University of Warsaw and the University of Białystok. The above-mentioned total sum of expenses for the organization of the Congress should be reduced by PLN 114,000, which we are to receive from PIF after settling the congress fees.

Separately, I would like to discuss the Solidarity Fund, i.e., the funds collected to support the participation in the Congress of historians from regions hitherto poorly represented for economic reasons. Lucyna Błażejczyk-Majka was responsible for this sector. This initiative was launched before the Congress in Amsterdam in 2010 and continues to this day. In Poznań, the Solidarity Fund was created with funds from three sources: the Robert Bosch Foundation (EUR 25,000), the Foundation for Polish Science (EUR 10,000) and the Polish Academy of Sciences (PLN 40,000). The total Fund amounted to approximately PLN 200,000. It was possible to apply for travel expenses, accommodation costs in dormitories and exemption from the congress fee. In addition, after the outbreak of war in Ukraine, CISH launched a fund supporting the participation of historians from Ukraine in the amount of 10,000 Swiss francs.

The Solidarity Fund enjoyed considerable interest among potential participants, especially from Africa and Latin America. Despite perturbations in the prices of air tickets, which increased exorbitantly after the pandemic, we managed to buy tickets for everyone who applied for them and met the formal requirements. In total, it was almost 30 people. As a rule, the same persons also received free accommodation. About 80 participants were exempted from the congress fee. As for the CISH Fund for Ukrainians, there was little interest. Only four people applied and all received full support.

For the first time in history, the Congress was finally held in hybrid form. This was a big challenge for us. The whole operation was supervised by PSNC. We used the external ClickMeeting application. The assumption was that each panel was held in physical form, but each registered participant could join all sessions online.

And last but not least, volunteers, for whose recruitment and then activity during the Congress Bernardetta Manyś was responsible, later assisted by Anna Młynarczyk. Volunteers were recruited from among students and doctoral students of the AMU. Ultimately, more than 50 volunteers came forward to help. It must be emphasised that throughout the Congress (as well as before and after) they were a great help to the organisers. They were – one could say – on the front line and were a kind of showcase of the Congress. They fulfilled their role, which we have already expressed many times, excellently. They were praised every step of the way.

At the end of the report, a few words about the reception of the Congress. Immediately after 2015, it aroused interest in Poland (and not only in Poland) but certainly not exaggerated. After the Congress was postponed twice, probably due to the lengthening of the wait, this interest began to weaken. In December 2021, I gave an interview for the website of the Polish History Museum, providing extensive information about the Congress and encouraging the historical community (not only Polish) to participate. In 2022, there was no interest at the central

level, but it grew at the local level and remained strong until the end of the Congress.

It is also worth mentioning the reception of our live broadcasts on YouTube. The Opening Ceremony had over 1,500 views, the Closing Ceremony over 1,600, and the Award Ceremony over 490 views. Interestingly, these celebrations still arouse interest.

It can also be added that the hosts of the future Congress, the Israelis, were present and visible throughout the Congress, encouraging people in various ways to come to Jerusalem in three years.

CONCLUSIONS, REFLECTIONS, POSTULATES

♣ We are all aware that we need to promote congresses better, primarily by rebuilding the prestige of CISH itself. Many historians, especially of the younger generation, are not even aware of the existence of such an organisation, and thus underestimate the importance of congresses. For many of my colleagues, it is a congress like many, not the only one of its kind.

♣ We can also ask the question whether the congress should last as long as a week and whether the programme should be so extensive. Maybe we need to reduce the number of major themes (to two or even one, but with a heavy weight)? I am also not convinced that we should continue to divide panels on specialised themes, round tables, etc. Evening sessions, on the other hand, could be given a special form, so that they stand out not only because of the late time of beginning.

♣ The double postponement of the Congress made it clear that the panel selection procedure starts a bit too early and therefore takes too long. In addition, already at the time of submitting the application, the organisers of the panels should be expected to present their structure, and perhaps also the speakers participating in them. The final programme should be set about half a year before a congress.

♣ Regarding affiliated commissions, I suggest redefining the relationship with them. First of all, it is necessary to define the rules for their participation in congresses, because some of them try to organise something like a congress within a congress and organise a dozen panels. The full integration of the commissions with the congress is not favoured by a kind of “ghettoisation” by accumulating their deliberations in the last two days of the congress, sometimes – as in Poznań – in a separate place. For the benefit of all, this tradition should be abandoned.

♣ By the way, I do not think the printed version of the programme makes sense today. It just causes unnecessary confusion. With numerous changes and corrections submitted by the panel organisers until the last moment, the printed version quickly became outdated. The current programme was only available online.

♣ I think the poster session should go on. However, I would suggest that, given the situation in China, we reconsider our further relationship with Shandong University. There is a chance to establish, for example, a parallel CISH Award

for Young Historians (perhaps together with the International Association of History Students). I also suggest co-opting a representative of doctoral students to the jury as an observer in future regulations.

♣ The idea of the Research Forum should also be reconsidered. First of all, the question of who this initiative should be addressed to should be answered. Maybe we should lower the fees or invite only selected foundations and institutes? It seems that the formula of traditional exhibitions of history books has also been exhausted.

♣ Regarding financial issues, I would like to emphasise that the main problem raised behind the scenes was congress fees – the most frequently reported requests concerned the reduction of fees for online participation. There were also demands, mainly from the young participants, that it would be possible to participate in the congress only on selected days, for a lower fee – it would be a kind of one-day ticket.

♣ A few words about Polish participation in the Congress and the condition of Polish historiography. I mentioned above that Poles dominated in all categories of participation, but relatively our presence at the Congress was not impressive. In Warsaw in 1933, there were over 400 Polish historians, who constituted over 40% of all participants. In Poznań – with a similar total number of participants – there were not even half of this group and Poles accounted for only 25%. Five Polish historians organised or co-organised general panels and four commission panels. There were 30 speakers from Poland (6%), while in 1933 there were almost 90, with a smaller number of papers. I think it reflects the current condition of Polish historiography. I do not hesitate to say that in the interwar period Polish historiography was among the ten best historiographies in the world. Also after World War II Polish historiography was among the world leaders, mainly in terms of socio-economic history and historical demography. The symbol of this high position was Aleksander Gieysztor, for 20 years a member of the CISH Board, in the years 1980–1985 as president. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, however, the crisis began to grow. The main reasons for this include the systematic de-professionalisation of research and the politicisation of history caused by the postmodern revolution, which resulted in a decline in the prestige of historians. This was accompanied by a decrease in the presence of Polish historians in the world, including a decrease in participation in congresses.

♣ Due to the fact that – as I believe – a hybrid form of congresses is inevitable in the future, it must be emphasised that the technical condition of the network infrastructure of the buildings where the Congress was held turned out to be the biggest problem for us – it was too modest for such a large event. Based on our experience, I would suggest limiting remote participation in the congress to speakers only, online access for all participants creates too many problems, especially for panel organisers who would have to control all participants. As a consequence, there were cases of participation in panels of people who were not registered.

Did Congress live up to expectations? I think, and it is not just my opinion, the general answer is yes. Of course, our earlier expectations were higher (I mean primarily the number of participants), but in the circumstances it was a great achievement that the Congress was held at all, that we managed to keep the congress' flame alive for two years. Well, it was – I think – a Congress to the best of our abilities. All opinions that have reached me, from Poland and many other countries, from historians of various generations and various fields of historiography, are positive. Of course, there were also critical voices, but they concerned individual events (primarily the quality of the Internet connection and communication in Morasko), not fundamental issues. In any case, I think that the organisers should feel satisfied.