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From political settlement to the self-identification with the Polish nation.

History of the Jewish community of the city of Lviv from 1873 till 1914

(abstract).

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Modernization processes in Eastern Galicia concerned not only the multiplicity of changes in the traditional social order, but also the development of the Polish, Ukrainian and Jewish nationalism. In the Austrian Empire, Jews could make use of at least three cultures at once: first, their own – the Yiddish-speaking culture, second, the culture of the people with whom they lived (Polish, Ukrainian, or Czech), as well as the third, the general (Austro-German) culture of the empire. However, nationalism set a more stringent framework for political and cultural self-identification of an individual.

Political and cultural activities of such Jewish associations as “Shomer Israel” (Guardian of Israel) and “Zjednoczenie” provide a researcher with an invaluable possibility to trace all the historical processes that have been mentioned above. Thus beginning in 1873, when the first direct elections to the parliament of Vienna took place, the “Shomer Israel” association, which was Austria’s first Jewish political organization that clearly positioned itself as a separate political force and whose choice of coalition partners was exclusively guided by political calculations, was gradually beginning to turn into a pro-Polish force and became completely polonised in less than four years. Polonisation meant not just loyalty to the Polish nation, but also the formation of a new identity, with the Jews starting to identify themselves with the Poles both culturally and nationally, preserving only their religious identity. The activities of the Academic Association “Zjednoczenie” were among the greatest expressions of a new Jewish identity, since they were aimed at educating pupils of the Jewish schools and grammar schools (in German: “Gymnasium”) as Polish nationalists. As a result, among the Jewish population of the city of Lviv the initial perception of Poles as political partners or opponents gradually transformed into the self-identification with the Polish nation and culture.

These processes illustrate one of the possibilities of forming a national, cultural and political identity among the Jewish population of Galicia within the development of the nationalistic ideology in the given region.