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A PERSONAL STORY OF CONNECTION

The Marriage of Constance and Kazimierz Markiewicz as a Means of Promoting Soft Power and Strengthening Ties Between Poland and Ireland

ARSTRACT

The article discusses the role of 'personal stories' as soft power tools in the context of national categories. It argues that the story of Constance and Kazimierz Dunin Markiewicz has great potential for fostering Polish-Irish relations. Their story, that of artistic passion, political engagement, creativity and loss, transcends stereotypes, inspires and helps to promote deeper knowledge about Poland and Ireland. While Constance Gore-Booth Markiewicz is an iconic figure in Ireland, her connection to Poland and the impact of the Polish culture on her activism, remains largely unknown. The article argues that the story of Constance and Kazimierz Dunin Markiewicz offers a unique lens for the Polish and Irish public to explore the intertwined histories of Ireland and Poland in a wider European context. Their personal story points out to broader themes of cultural exchange, national identities and social transformation in the early twentieth century.

Keywords: Constance Gore-Booth Markiewicz, Kazimierz Dunin Markiewicz, soft power, cultural diplomacy, personal story, Poland, Ireland.

With the growing importance of public opinion, particularly in democratic countries, soft power seems to be in action.¹ A fundamental principle of soft power is fostering familiarity with a country, its people, and its culture. This familiarity cultivates an understanding of the nation's unique character, encourages cultural exchange, and inspires future engagement. Awareness of a country's cultural portfolio is a significant factor in building cooperation across the academic institutions or civic organizations. It is

J.S. Nye, Soft Power. Jak osiągnąć sukces w polityce światowej, transl. by J. Zaborowski, Kraków 2007, pp. 5-7; J.S. Nye, Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics, London 2009.

a powerful motivator in economic partnerships. A positive outlook on the economy, financial and tax systems, or on the work ethic within a country, increases the likelihood of active engagement with the market.

One of the elements that may be considered an important factor in the field of international soft power are 'personal stories' or life-narratives of those whose actions and work communicate connectedness and may therefore serve as a symbolic bridge between communities, and nations. In fact, personal stories have the potential to transcend strictly defined national categories, and offer a more relatable and universal perspective in international relations. They allow for a critical insight into shared histories, mutual influences, and cross-cultural exchanges, which may not be accessed through traditional diplomatic or political channels.² Personal stories may ultimately become the shared stories on which communities and countries are able to build and move forward

One of the questions that is worth exploring in the history of Anglo-Polish, and Irish-Polish relations is what specific powerful personal stories inform these relations, resonate with the public and shape the collective memory. In its rich diplomatic history, Poland has an abundance of such stories based on the lives of individuals who have forged meaningful connections between Poles and other nations. These are stories of personal resilience, empathy and collaboration that continue to inspire, fostering a sense of shared values and common purpose beyond national boundaries: Kazimierz Pułaski and Tadeusz Kościuszko, in Poland and the United States; Maria Skłodowska-Curie, King Stanisław Leszczyński, and Prince Józef Poniatowski in France; Ignacy Domeyko in Chile; Ernest Malinowski in Peru; Józef Bem in Hungary; Benedykt Polak OSB in Mongolia; Joseph Conrad in the United Kingdom; and Wacław Seweryn Rzewuski in the Arab world. Throughout the troubled Polish history individuals from different backgrounds, have connected with members of other nations. Their fascinating life stories may therefore have profound impact in shaping perceptions, promoting dialogue, and encouraging mutual respect between the nations today.

Despite its recent significant cultural and economic growth, and increasing global presence, Poland's cultural capital remains underestimated. In fact, it may be argued that the lack of Poland's cultural visibility on the international stage is often an obstacle in fostering deeper international engagement and understanding. It limits the country's ability to fully capitalize on its potential influence in global affairs. While it is essential for Poland to strengthen and maintain efforts to raise global awareness of its cultural, economic, and historical contributions, there is no single solution in this regard. One of the ways to reach the wider public and to create genuine interest in Poland and its culture, is through powerful personal narratives which may lead to a lasting shift in perception. While highlighting the local and the familiar, they add a universal perspective and can be shared bilaterally or internationally.

B. Leggett, "The Power of Storytelling," IESE, at https://blog.iese.edu/leggett/2012/09/20/573/, 19 November 2024.

The case of Poland and Ireland is particularly interesting in the light of the proposition of 'personal stories' enhancing the country's soft power potential and offering alternative frameworks for understanding the relationship between the two countries. Ireland has fostered a natural sympathy toward Poland that dates back to the nineteenth-century due to shared historical experiences of colonization, resilience in the face of oppression, and the pursuit of national sovereignty. During that period, both nations struggled to preserve their culture and identity while also striving for the restoration of statehood. The frequent nineteenth-century comparisons between the fates of Poles and the Irish have been well researched with regards to the speeches of Daniel O'Connell.³ Historians of international relations and diplomacy have also looked into the use of the 'Polish-Irish' argument employed by the Russian diplomats to deflect criticism by drawing parallels between the historical oppression of the Irish under British rule and the challenges faced by Poles in the Russian Empire. Paradoxically, this rhetorical strategy has brought the Poles and the Irish closer together, fostering mutual sympathy by invoking narratives of suffering and resilience.

More positive associations between Poland and Ireland emerge from shared experiences and cultural and historical parallels. While both countries share a history of struggle against colonialism, they are also united by their traditional connection to the Catholic faith, which played a pivotal role in preserving their national identities during times of foreign domination. Similarly, both Poland and Ireland have rich oral traditions, with storytelling, poetry, and music central to their cultural heritage. Additionally, their histories are marked by waves of emigration, with members of both nations contributing significantly to the cultural and economic landscapes of the countries they settled in.

Interestingly, these historical connections and positive associations were further reinforced at the time of Poland's accession into the EU in 2004 when Ireland opened its labour market for Poles. This decision led to a historic influx of the Polish citizens, estimated at around 300,000. In recent decades, Polish migration to Ireland has created vibrant communities that strengthen ties between the two nations, fostering cultural exchange and mutual respect.⁴ As of 2024, according to Irish statistics, Poles remain the largest diaspora group in Ireland, with approximately 120,000 members reporting Polish as the language spoken at home. Over the decades, Poles in Ireland have been perceived positively as a group that integrates well into the Irish society while maintaining its language, customs, and culture.⁵ Polish integration is often cited as a positive example by the Irish

³ See "Daniel O'Connell's Speech Given on 29 November 1837 – Source Analysis, III/2023," Polish-Irish Historical Studies UAM, at https://polish-irishhistoricalstudies.com/?s=O%27connell, 17 November 2024; H. Wereszycki, Sprawa polska w XIX wieku, at https://loustrzyki.edu.pl/przedmioty/historia/materialy_edu/teksty/h_wereszycki_sprawa_polska.pdf, 14 November 2024.

⁴ S. Egger, R. McDonagh (eds), *Polish-Irish Encounters in the Old and New Europe*, New York 2011.

Economic cooperation between Poland and Ireland peaked in the 1990s, highlighted by Irish investments in Poland, notably the Irish-owned WBK Bank (AIB Bank in Ireland). On a different note, personal ties were forged during Irish trips to Poznań for the 2012 UEFA European Football Championship.

politicians, journalists, and academics.⁶ In terms of their work ethic, Poles are increasingly seen as hardworking and highly motivated.⁷ The Polish community in Ireland has also made a notable impact in education through opening numerous Polish Saturday schools across Ireland, the introduction of Polish language as a Leaving Certificate subject, and the growing presence of Polish students and researchers in the academic sphere.⁸

In the European Union context before Brexit, Poland and Ireland often aligned on key issues, particularly on economic cooperation and advocating for the rights of smaller nations within the bloc, further cementing their bond on the international stage. The Polish-Irish ties have been also strengthened through military cooperation, including joint missions under the UN.

Despite these efforts and historic progress in bilateral relations, Poland's recognition and understanding in Ireland remains relatively low. Post-Brexit, as London ceased to be Ireland's natural ally within the EU, it is crucial to ensure that, alongside Brussels, Paris, and Berlin, Warsaw also gains recognition among Ireland's elites. As the capital of the largest country in Central Europe—one of the most dynamic regions within the EU—and the largest state on the EU's eastern border, Warsaw deserves a place in Irish imagination. The key challenge therefore lies in encouraging the Irish to discover Poland, broaden their understanding of the country, and deepen their knowledge of Central Europe as a whole. A 'personal story' that offers a fascinating angle into Polish and Irish history and serves as an inspiration in furthering Polish-Irish ties is the story of Constance and Kazimierz Markiewicz.

In Ireland, Constance Markievicz is a cultural symbol. From fridge magnets to monuments and schools named after her, she remains a truly inspirational figure across the Irish political and cultural divides. In Dublin alone, there are two monuments dedicated to Constance: a bust at the main entrance to St Stephen's Green, and a full-figure statue in the Docklands area which has now turned into a global business hub. Additionally, a large portrait of Constance is displayed in the Dáil Éireann – the Irish Parliament and in the neighbouring National Gallery of Ireland. Her legacy permeates the Irish culture, with photographs, portraits, murals, and quotes from Constance Markievicz visible all across the country.

At the same time, not many Irish people associate the surname Markievicz with Poland. For decades, the life and work of Constance's husband, Kazimierz Dunin Markiewicz, has been forgotten in Ireland despite the fact that he was at the heart of the Irish society at the turn of the century, opening an artist's studio, producing theatre plays and initiating cultural associations which exist to the present day. Interestingly, it was Kazimierz who painted the magnificent portraits of his wife now in the Dáil and the

W. Kloc-Nowak, M. Lesińska, D. Pszczółkowska, Polacy w Irlandii. Transnarodowe społeczności w dobie migracji poakcesyjnych, Warszawa 2023.

⁷ J. Płachecki (ed.), *Polska emigracja w Irlandii w XX i na początku XXI wieku*, Dublin–Żyrardów 2012.

On university level, Trinity College Dublin launched Polish Studies and School of History, University College Cork has awarded best dissertations on Poland and Polish history. Academic collaboration is fostered by initiatives like the Una Europa project which, for example, enables partnerships between University College Dublin and Jagiellonian University.

National Gallery of Ireland. His other painting commemorating the 1905 oath-taking of the Illustrious Order of St Patrick is displayed in St. Patrick's Hall, Dublin Castle.

For many years, the Irish have drawn inspiration from and learned about Constance, often without even recognizing her far-reaching connections to Poland. On the other hand, Poles often remained unaware of Constance, though most would admit that the surname Markievicz was likely Polish. Fortunately, this dynamic is shifting, thanks in large part to the research of Patrick Quigley, an Irish historian and civil servant who authored a trilogy on the Markiewicz family, the efforts of the members of the Polish House in Dublin, the Irish-Polish Association, and the Embassy of the Republic of Poland. What is fascinating in the Markiewicz couple's personal story is that it chronologically aligns with the decline of imperial dominance in Europe, the rise of freedom movements among colonized nations, and a broader European panorama stretching from Ireland, through Paris and Warsaw, to Ukraine—then part of the Russian Empire at the turn of the century.

Constance was born on July 4, 1868, in London and was raised in her family's estate in Lissadell, County Sligo, in the northwest of Ireland. While coming from an affluent Anglo-Irish Protestant family of the Gore-Booth, she sided with the fighters for the Irish independence. She is remembered as the first woman elected to the British Parliament and the first woman in the world, except the women in the Bolshevik regime, to serve as a government minister. Last but not least, she took arms and fought in the Easter Rising of 1916. Constance met Kazimierz Józef Dunin Markiewicz during her time as a fine arts student in Paris in 1898.

Kazimierz was born on 15 March 1874 in Denhoffówka, his parents were Piotr Markiewicz, and Maria Chrząszczewska. He first studied law in Kyiv and took drawing classes at the school of the famous Ukrainian artist Mykola Ivanovych Murashko. In 1895, he moved to Paris, where he studied at the École des Beaux-Arts. During this time, he began exhibiting and selling his paintings, including at the Salon des Indépendants and the World Fairs in Paris. His first wife, Jadwiga Neyman, gave birth to two sons: Stanisław (Staśko) and Ryszard. ¹⁰ Unfortunately, Jadwiga and their son Ryszard died in 1899 in Ukraine.

Constance Gore-Booth and Kazimierz Markiewicz fell deeply in love and were married in 1900. In 1901, the newlywed couple spent several months at the Markiewicz family estate in Żywotówka, near Kyiv in Ukraine. It is from this period, that we have a series of photographs taken by Constance of the residents of the estate as well as members of the local ethnic and religious groups: Ukrainians, Poles, and Jews. Patrick Quigley, the biographer of the Markiewicz family, has convincingly argued that Constance's time among the Poles in Żywotówka and her explorations of the area, were critical to her evolving national ideas and growing resentment towards any form of colonial

P. Quigley, The Polish Irishman: The Life and Times of Count Casimir Markievicz, Dublin 2012; P. Quigley, Sisters against the Empire: Countess Constance Markievicz and Eva Gore-Booth, 1916-1917, Dublin 2016.

P. Quigley, Stasko Markiewicz: Between Ireland and Poland, Dublin 2022.

oppression.¹¹ What was arguably empowering for the young Constance was the financial and intellectual independence of the women around her in Żywotówka, who run the estate and participated in the resistance, actively supporting uprisings and the independence movement. This attitude is echoed in Constance's famous quote nowadays is displayed in public places in Ireland: *Dress suitably in short skirts and strong boots, leave your jewels and gold wands in the bank, and buy a revolver*. Historians trace a connection between this recommendation and the Polish tradition of women donating personal jewellery and money to insurgents. According to Quigley, Polish independence ideals greatly influenced Constance, fostering her deep aversion to tyranny and empires—especially the Russian Empire—and shaping her belief in the role of women in public life and the struggle for freedom.¹²

After the memorable trip to Ukraine, the couple settled in Dublin in 1903, and Kazimierz, who enjoyed the world of bohemian culture in places like Kraków and Paris, along with his wife, eagerly integrated into the Irish cultural life. Because Kazimierz, who indeed came from a noble family, bearing the Łabędź coat of arms, presented himself as a count — Count Markiewicz — Constance, too, came to be regarded as Countess. Besides her passionate involvement in Dublin's cultural scene, Constance became increasingly interested in politics. As Ireland was struggling for self-determination, Constance Markiewicz became an active participant in the political life of her adopted homeland, deeply inspired by the country's growing desire for independence. Her transition from an artist and socialite to a committed political figure marked the beginning of a significant chapter in her life, one that would intertwine with both the Irish and Polish struggles for freedom.¹³

After moving to Ireland, the Markiewicz family first settled in Lissadell, Constance's family estate in County Sligo where their only daughter, Maeve Alys, was born. The couple later moved to Dublin, where Kazimierz quickly became a prominent figure in the city's cultural life. He painted, wrote and produced plays, designed theatre sets and performed on stage with his wife. Kazimierz collaborated with the leading figures of the Irish cultural scene, including W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and George William A.E. Russell who were associated with the Abbey Theatre. His artistic work cemented his place in Dublin's cultural circles. 15

P. Quigley, The Markievicz Saga: A Story of Ireland, Poland & Ukraine, Dublin 2023.

P. Quigley, Sisters against the Empire...

A. Murphy, "Countess Constance Markievicz, Irish Freedom Fighter and Revolutionary," Europeana, 17 March 2020, at https://www.europeana.eu/en/stories/countess-constance-markievicz-irishfreedom-fighter-and-revolutionary, 12 November 2024.

¹⁴ Kazimierz's best known play, The Memory of the Dead, was performed at the Abbey Theatre in 1910. The play was set during the Irish Rebellion of 1798 and was a voice in Ireland's struggle for independence against the British rule. He also formed his own the Independent Dramatic Company dedicated to new Irish drama.

Kazimierz was a founding member of the United Arts Club, established in 1907. Located at 3 Fitzwilliam Street Upper, the club still houses his paintings and caricatures from its early days, which feature Kazimierz's imposing figure among the club members.

Together, Constance and Kazimierz were key figures in both the Irish cultural elite and the political movement of their time, shaping the cultural and political landscapes of early twentieth-century Ireland. The couple's influence on Ireland's artistic heritage and its journey to independence continues to be a vital part of the nation's identity. A chapter in Constance's life that continues to define her status in Ireland, is the Easter Rising of 1916 which broke out on April 23.16 After the failure of the uprising, which lasted for several days, Constance was imprisoned and sentenced to death along with other rebellion leaders. Her sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, largely due to her gender. Released in 1917 following a British amnesty, she remained steadfast in her political engagement. While in prison, she ran for a seat in the 1918 elections, when women could stand for office for the first time, becoming the first woman elected to the British Parliament. However, she did not take her seat, as the Irish Dáil Éireann had already been established, signaling Ireland's push for independence. After the Irish Declaration of Independence and the formation of Éamon de Valera's government, Constance was appointed Minister for Labour in 1919, becoming the first woman in the world to hold a cabinet position in a national government. Her appointment marked a significant milestone, establishing her as a political leader and a role model for women in politics.

The Markiewicz couple was separated by the outbreak of World War I. Kazimierz was drafted into the Russian Imperial Army and was soon severely wounded. He worked in Moscow as a translator afterwards, and returned to what was independent Poland by then in 1918, during the Bolshevik Revolution. By 1919, Kazimierz had settled in Warsaw, where he worked as a legal advisor at the U.S. Consulate and was active as a part-time dramatist and playwright.

In the meantime, in 1921, following the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, political divisions emerged in Ireland, leading to the creation of the Irish Free State and triggering a civil war. Constance Markievicz opposed the treaty and became actively involved in anti-government activities. She was arrested by the Irish authorities and spent a month in prison. After her release, she served as a member of the Dáil for the Fianna Fáil party and continued her efforts in organizing scouting programs and providing charitable work for the poor.

While their lives took different paths in later years, Kazimierz visited Constance in prison and continued to support her politically. He visited her for the last time in Dublin before her death and painted a famous portrait of the bedridden Constance. Markievicz died in Dublin on July 15, 1927, and her funeral was attended by over 100,000 people including state officials, Kazimierz and his son Staśko whom Constance had adopted. Kazimierz died nearly five years later, on December 2, 1932, in the Saint Spirit Hospital in Warsaw, bringing an end to the extraordinary life of a couple whose legacies remain intertwined in both Irish and Polish history.

Constance served as the deputy commander of the defence of St. Stephen's Green, a key location in central Dublin, a role commemorated by her bust in the park today.

¹⁷ J. McGowan, Constance Markievicz: The People's Countess, Mullaghmore 2003.

The lives of Constance and Kazimierz Markiewicz are deeply intertwined with the European culture, historical processes, and a moment in history which became a defining moment for the Irish and Polish nations, as well as all the nations living between Dublin and Kyiv. And yet while Constance's role in Ireland's fight for independence, her commitment to social causes, and her groundbreaking roles in government define her as one of Ireland's most iconic and pioneering figures, Kazimierz's artistic influence and the impact of his circle on Constance remain largely unknown, with much of their collaborative influence on her political and cultural views left underexplored.

Kazimierz, an active member of the Kraków bohemian circles and a friend of Boy-Żeleński and Makuszyński, brought his Parisian and Krakowian inspirations to Dublin, becoming a key figure—though now largely forgotten—in the city's artistic life. His paintings, housed in both private and public collections in Ireland and Poland, speak volumes about his artistic passion and the shared fate of the nations at the turn of the century. They not only showcase Kazimierz's talent but also offer a visual connection to the historical and cultural ties between Ireland and Poland, providing a deeper understanding of the shared experiences of these nations.

Interestingly, a new fascinating chapter in the story of Constance's life has been written recently, as Patrick Quigley, along with Jarosław Płachecki from the Polish House in Dublin, discovered her applications for Polish citizenship and a Polish passport in 1921 prior to her trip to the United States to promote the Irish cause. On one hand, the new documents testify to Constance's unwillingness to undertake her transatlantic mission as a British subject. On the other hand, it demonstrates that the restoration of Poland's sovereignty was quickly followed by the reconstruction of its diplomatic service. Constance's case underlines the significant role that institutions of a sovereign state play in shaping political actions and decisions. Her decision to seek Polish citizenship reflects her deepening ties to Poland's struggle for independence and her willingness to align her actions with a nation free from imperial control. As the newest chapter in Constance and Kazimierz's story is being written, it is a narrative that the Irish and Polish people would deeply appreciate, as it highlights their shared history, values, and the enduring bond between the two nations.

Personal stories resonate, and an understanding of Constance Markievicz's role among the Irish can be widened in the light of the legacy of Kazimierz Markiewicz. The couple's story opens new venues for thought, creativity and cooperation. Today, it resonates with and inspires three nations: Ireland, Poland and Ukraine. As the hitherto unknown documents and Constance's Ukrainian photographs went on show in 2024 at the historic Polish House in Dublin, they were a powerful reminder of the right of

A. Rzegocki, "Kazimierz and Constance — A Tale of Two Markieviczs," The Irish Times, 31 March 2024, at https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/an-irish-diary/2024/03/31/kazimierz-and-constance-a-tale-of-two-markieviczs/, 10 November 2024. See also: "Upamiętnienie Kazimierza Markiewicza," gov.pl, 20 April 2024, at https://www.gov.pl/web/irlandia/upamietnienie-kazimierza-markiewicza, 10 November 2024.

nations and the importance of their shared struggles for independence and identity. These are deeply artistic images of people and landscape that capture the essence of their subjects and evoke profound emotional and intellectual responses. The photographs come from the private collection of Markiewicz's descendants, the Malkiewicz family in Krakow and the Libicki family in Poznań who unfailingly respond to the power of Constance and Kazimierz's personal story. The opening of the exhibition at the Polish House in Dublin, attended by the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland as well as by the Ambassador of Ukraine, gained a new prominence in the context of the on-going Russian war against Ukraine. Today, the story of the Markiewiczes helps to better understand the history of Central and Eastern Europe, shedding light on the imperial traditions of Russia and the complex relationships between the region's nations during times of domination and struggle for independence.

In the context of the present-day political situation, the 2025 Polish EU presidency offers an excellent opportunity to further promote Polish-Irish ties, particularly through the 'personal story' of the Markiewicz family. One of the key events on the Irish scene during the presidency will be an exhibition of Kazimierz Markiewicz's paintings in Dublin Castle.

Placing the Markiewiczes story on a broader European cultural and political map helps to understand the decline of the imperial era, the evolution of national identities, and the dynamic changes that reshaped the map of Europe in the twentieth century. It helps to bring to light the political processes which affected the entire continent, albeit in different ways in different regions. Today, the story of Constance and Kazimierz Markiewicz serves as a poignant reminder of the struggles of Ukraine and Poland, the two nations among many, that have faced centuries of aggressive Russian imperialism. Their story is a testament to the enduring legacy of their fight for independence and the deep connections that link nations across Europe.

Although 'personal stories' cannot replace the broader soft power approach and diplomacy, they remain an important avenue for fostering cultural understanding and strengthening international relations. The strength of real human connections can and should translate into strengthening ties between nations and states. Greater appreciation of Constance Markiewicz's work among the Polish, and the knowledge of the Irish about the work of Kazimierz Markiewicz, may be inspirational in a broader sense, in reminding of the traditions of freedom and independence, creativity friendship that brings people and nations together. This shared cultural history can deepen the bonds between our nations, ensuring a lasting and mutually enriching relationship.

The marriage of Constance and Kazimierz Markiewicz serves as a poignant reminder of how personal relationships can transcend borders and promote a deeper understanding between nations. In an era where Poland and Ireland were both fighting for sovereignty and identity, their union symbolized hope, resilience, and the power of

The exhibition comes with a book in Polish and English: P. Quigley, J. Płachecki (eds), Constance Markievicz: Polish Connections and Images of Ukraine in the Years 1902-1903, Dublin 2024; P. Quigley, J. Płachecki (eds), Konstancja Markiewicz. Związki z Polską i fotografie Ukrainy z lat 1902-1903, Dublin 2024.

cultural connection. Today, their story continues to inspire, reminding us of the enduring strength found in unity and shared aspirations.

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