

Polish Chair at Columbia University

■ A faculty for Polish studies will be launched next year at Columbia University in New York City after fundraisers reached a target of \$3 million needed to finance the project, the Foundation for Polish Science (FNP) announced March 25.

After an academic is chosen in an international competition to head the faculty, the Polish Chair will conduct research work and provide classes in social and political sciences and the humanities linked to Poland. It will award master's and Ph.D. degrees. Its founders want the faculty to become an important center of knowledge about Poland in the United States.

The idea to set up a Polish chair at Columbia University was initiated by the Kościuszko Foundation, which co-finances Polish studies at a dozen or so American universities. Columbia University already has Czech, Serbian, Slovak, Ukrainian and Hungarian faculties, which were established in response to an increased interest in the culture and history of Central and Eastern European countries after the fall of communism in Europe in the late 1980s.

In 2003, the Kościuszko Foundation asked the Foundation for Polish Science to join forces to establish a faculty for Polish studies

at the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs. An agreement with the university was signed two years later and a fundraising campaign for the endowment got under way. The campaign was coordinated by the Polish consulate in New York City, represented by consul Ewa Ger, who is widely considered to be the key driving force behind the project.

"This has been an unprecedented project in the 90 years since our consulate was set up," said Krzysztof Kasprzyk, Polish consul general in New York City. He added that the success of the project showed that the American tradition of philanthropic help for academic institutions had found its way to Poland.

"We are celebrating a Polish success," said Polish foreign minister Radosław Sikorski. He added that a key role in the fundraising campaign had been played by the "patriotic and civic instincts of the business community" which resulted in "a public-private partnership in the best meaning of the phrase."

Ludwik Sobolewski, president of the Warsaw Stock Exchange, said the business community supported the idea of setting up a Polish faculty at Columbia University because "business as a whole will benefit

if the country raises its profile internationally." According to Sobolewski, Poland's investment appeal depends not only on economic regulations and a business-friendly atmosphere, but also on general knowledge of the region, its history, traditions, culture and tourist opportunities.

The Foundation for Polish Science plans to work to establish similar faculties at a number of universities in Western Europe in the coming years, starting with Germany and Britain, the foundation's vice-president Prof. Włodzimierz Bolecki said.

Many Polish companies and business organizations have helped raise funds for the Polish faculty at Columbia University. The list of donors includes the Warsaw Stock Exchange, the National Depository for Securities (KDPW SA), Enca SA, Polska Grupa Energetyczna SA, Bogdan Fisher Silesia Capital Fund, Special Economic Zones in Katowice, Warmia-Mazuria, Pomerania and Kostrzyn-Słubice, the Małopolska Agency for Regional Development (MARR SA), the Foundation for Capital Market Education, and the Foundation for Polish Science. On the American side, the main benefactors are the Polish and Slavic Federal Credit Union in New York City and the Association of Polish Army Veterans in the United States.

Witold Żygulski