



**Do Silesians Exist and can Silesia be
Autonomous?
Limits of Ethno-Political Tolerance in Poland**

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Do Silesians Exist and Silesia be Autonomous? Limits of Ethno-Political Tolerance in Poland

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in Political Life**

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Executive Summary

The report 'Do Silesians Exist and Silesia be Autonomous? Limits of Ethno-Political Tolerance in Poland', presents the case of the Silesian Autonomy Movement (*Ruch Autonomii Śląska*, hereafter RAS), its participation in political life at a regional level, and the efforts in promoting regionalism as well as the idea of a Silesian nation. RAS is an organisation of an educational, cultural and political profile fighting for the restoration of Upper Silesia's political autonomy on the grounds of its specific borderland status and a history of autonomy granted to Silesia in the interwar period, and supporting Silesian identity-building.

This case study was inspired by controversies around Silesians and RAS caused by *The Report on the State of the Republic* published by the major right-wing party Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* – hereafter PIS). The document is a list of charges against the ruling party, *Platforma Obywatelska* (Civic Platform, hereafter PO). The right-wing rhetoric of the oppressed nation and the threat of Polish unity used in the report was a tool used for discrediting PO. *The Report...* accuses the ruling party of a lack of patriotism and of indifference to a progressing degeneration of national identity. The statement that triggered a heated country-wide debate and immediate reactions in the circles of Silesian activists (mainly RAS activists and politicians), the German minority and other minority communities is a short passage expounding a view that 'Silesianness' (Silesian identity) is a 'camouflaged German option', i.e. connecting Silesian organisations promoting autonomy and the strengthening of Silesian cultural identity with some kind of an anti-Polish ideology, without even attempting to explain this notion and casual link.

After this strictly political debate stopped, the controversies around Silesia and Silesians have brought one remarkable and unexpected outcome, i.e. a revival of interest in 'Silesianness', Silesians' national existence, rights and identity. Many people in the region have apparently re-invented themselves as members of the 'Silesian nation'.

In contrast to most other European countries, national and ethnic minorities in Poland are numerically insignificant; the result of the 2002 Census showed that, already then, Silesians were by far the largest declared minority (173 000), followed by Germans (153 000). Migrant communities are small and practically absent in political life. However, this largest declared minority group is not recognised by the state neither as a national, nor as an ethnic minority. Silesians are politically active, have their organisations and leaders, and are present in public discourses. All this makes Silesians particularly interesting in terms of the issue of the tolerance of diversity in political life.

The latest Census (carried out in 2011) confirmed the fact that Poland is, at least in comparison to many other European states, ethnically *homogenous*, and over 91% of the population declare Polish national identity (36 007 000). The most numerous minority identities are: Silesian (809 000), Kashubian (212 000) and German (109 000). These results confirmed previous ones, but the significant changes in the numbers surprised even Silesian activists. More than two decades after democratic change, it seems that the growing involvement of minority activists in the efforts to promote a minority identity and the increasing visibility of 'non-traditional' minorities' in public life have brought astounding effects.

The case of RAS, Silesians and their political and cultural status has been constantly discussed in Polish public debates since the 1990s, often in relation to contemporary political challenges. It serves as an example of post-transformational tensions between the policy and practice of national unity and the grassroots efforts of people in some regions to change the dominant cultural schemata. In the centralised Polish state, any challenge to undermine this kind of monolithic socio-political setup, which at the same time is permeated by the image of a homogenous Polish nation, any claim to recognise not only minority rights, but also the possibility to exercise them, is often interpreted as dangerous and as undermining nation-state integrity. Attempts at implementing constitutionally

granted entitlements to cultural visibility and the execution of civic rights are perceived either as unsubstantiated and unnecessary demands of an insignificant number of people, or as a result of the overambitious goals of some activists that manipulate history and people. They are presented as presenting a threat to homogeneous society.

This case study shows, on the one hand, how the opportunities offered as a result Poland's participation in the structures of the European Union (especially European support for regional movements and minority organisations) are actually used by local activists and minority organisations, and, on the other hand, how they are interpreted within the mainstream political debate. The attacks on RAS illustrate strong universalising tendencies and unifying themes present in the rhetoric of the nationalistically minded segments of the society and rightist politicians, who have used the case to weaken the ruling coalition and frequently use it as an argument against political opponents. In short, it illustrates how the issue of basic civil rights can be a hostage of political stalemate as well as how it may unveil the structural mechanisms of political life.

This report, focusing on RAS's reception and rejection, raises issue of the limits of *tolerance* in political life in Poland in the sphere of the political representation of minorities, and it shows the boundary-drawing process in the political life of the country.

The report is based on secondary sources (scientific literature on Silesia and Silesians, documents, reports and expert documents on minorities and their political participation in Poland, on articles in newspapers commenting on the 'camouflaged German option' controversy), as well as primary data (interviews) concerning the political activity of RAS. The secondary sources are to a large extent Internet sources – web sites, forums and comments. The interviews were conducted in January and February 2012. Four semi-structured, very long (2 hours each) qualitative interviews with RAS leaders and members in the two main cities of Silesia – Katowice and Opole – were conducted. In the interpretation of the materials the method of *thematic analysis* was applied.

The analysis attempts to answer the questions about the limits of ethno-political tolerance in Poland: (1) What kind of groups and claims can be tolerated in political life? (2) On what terms can these groups express their difference and fight for their civic rights? (3) And, what cannot be tolerated in public/political life in Poland? In the course of the so-called thematic analysis we identify three major themes and apply discursive means by which we try to answer these three questions.

The analysis revealed that there is a limited access of minorities to public debates and their political participation is restricted; it demonstrates a general lack of support extended to minorities in their efforts to participate in public life as equal partners (e.g., the accusation that RAS abuses preferential democratic rules designed to promote actual ethnic minorities, such as Germans). This situation can be classified as a lack of acceptance and recognition of the minorities in the political sphere. This applies both to the marginalisation of recognised minorities (there is a formal possibility of participation in political life), and the paradox of Silesians – the largest, unrecognised minority accused of the treason of Polishness.

There is a lack of tolerance at the state level and a partial tolerance at the local level towards the identity-based activity of Silesians and its political manifestations. However, the support for RAS in the region is relatively narrow, which supports our thesis from our previous studies (Buchowski and Chlewińska 2010; 2011) that Polish society conceives itself as a homogeneous ethnic entity, a unified and integral nation. Public discourse favours patriotic and national perspectives and there is no room for the equal participation of minorities in public life, or, at least, any leeway is constricted for them and it is defined by the dominant majority.

However, all this does not mean that there is no hope for change in this area. Due to their growing effectiveness, modern activity strategies applied by RAS are emulated by other political forces in the region and elsewhere. Silesians are increasingly regarded as a social force that cannot be longer ignored; for instance, RAS activists participate in the ruling coalition at the regional level and

Silesians' representatives got invited to the parliamentary committee on minorities, which indicates a change in the politicians' approach to the phenomenon of 'Silesianness'). It may happen that the Silesians will pluralise Polish political life without necessarily achieving their own goals.

Keywords

Silesia, Silesian Autonomy Movement, tolerance in political life, unrecognised minority

1. Introduction

This case study in the area of political life will cover the nation-wide discussion on the emergence and activity of *Ruch Autonomii Śląska*, the Silesian Autonomy Movement (hereafter RAS) – a regional organisation of an educational, cultural and political profile struggling for the restoration of Upper Silesia's regional autonomy based on historical grounds (being a borderland region, attempts at creating an independent polity immediately after WWI and an autonomy in the interwar period). The study presents Silesia and Silesians as part of contemporary Poland, and its socio-cultural characteristics with respect to tolerance and the participation of minorities in the democratic process. This goal will be achieved through the identification of arguments advanced by mostly nationalist politicians and activists in response to various actions and initiatives undertaken by Silesian organisations and associations *promoting regionalism* and highlighting the diversity of ethnic minority cultures.

A democratic set up of the country enables RAS to function in the political sphere and the movement *has to be tolerated* also by advocates of a centralised model of politics and a unitary concept of the nation. RAS, an officially registered organisation, has a clearly defined political aim of creating an autonomous region in the centralised state and is strongly engaged in regional politics. In 2011, it attracted so many voters in local elections that it was invited to join the coalition of ruling parties in the *Górny Śląsk*, the Upper Silesia voivodship's parliament¹. This electoral success and the coalition with the local branches of the parties currently ruling nationwide, the Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*) and the Polish Peasant Party (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*), stirred discussions about the administrative and political constitution of the Polish state, the ethnic character of the 'nation', and, last but not least, the parameters of democracy and tolerance. Arguments, opinions and discourses persistently refer to the turbulent past, but are voiced today in a profoundly different political setting – a constitutional democracy meeting all standards of the European Union.

2. The place of minorities in Polish society. A historical perspective

In ethnic terms, Poland is one of the least diversified societies in Europe. The historical Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania (14th to 18th centuries) was diversified ethnically, linguistically and religiously, and it hosted various ethnic and religious minorities on its territory. Due to its religious composition it had to acknowledge the coexistence of Catholics and the Orthodox; personal freedoms granted to nobles caused Protestantism to be practiced widely. Jews and other religious 'heretics' were allowed to settle and practice their faith, however, not to proselytise. One can say that it was a very tolerant regime surrounded by mostly intolerant European monarchies. The Commonwealth was an example of something that Michael Walzer (1997) calls 'an imperial regime of tolerance.' This historically shaped diversity was still visible in the first half of the 20th century. In the so-called Second Republic reborn after WWI, both religious and ethnic minorities comprised about one third of the society. Only after WWII, due to the extermination of Jews carried out by Germans, border changes, and the 'resettlement of populations' to and from the victorious Soviet Union and defeated Germany, Poland became virtually ethnically (Poles) and religiously (Roman-Catholics) homogeneous. The aim of creating a uniform nation was a policy exercised by the communists and

¹ Poland is divided into 16 administrative units called *województwa* (voivodships). In each voivodship there are offices of *wojewoda*, i.e. the voivodship administrator that represents the central government, and of *marszałek* (marshal), who is appointed by locally elected representatives to the local parliament called *sejmik* (the nationwide Parliament is called *Sejm*). Voivodships have their budgets, and a certain amount of power and competences that, in a complex way, are divided between *wojewoda* and *sejmik* with its *marszałek*. However, this kind of decentralisation does not change the fact that the country's basic political constitution remains centralised.

supported by the majority of the population (Buchowski and Chlewińska 2010).

Until 1989 minority issues barely existed due to their size and the communist authorities' strategy of 'hiding problems'. From time to time, communists used the tactics of *divide et impera* in order to achieve their own political aims. The Communist Constitution granted non-discrimination, but in practice, minorities could only nurture their traditions using state-controlled 'cultural associations'. Ethnic issues were perceived as *threatening state interests*, and, therefore, were strictly controlled and not pronounced. It seems that this mode of thinking lingers in some right-wing political circles to the present day, although its contemporary advocates refer rather to nationalistic historical traditions and thinkers. After 1989, minorities started to establish their own associations and, since then, they can benefit from the freedom of speech (Buchowski and Chlewińska 2010; Pędziwiatr 2009). Both the will to democratise the political order and EU demands pressed policy makers to accept liberal laws concerning religious freedoms as well as ethnic and national minorities' presence in the public sphere. For instance, the 1991 Treaty with Germany granted political rights to Germans who have self-organised themselves into several associations which represent hundreds of thousands citizens (estimations vary between one- and three-hundred). Election rules favourable to ethnic minorities ('ethnic' organisations' candidates do not have to meet the requirement of crossing a 5% threshold of votes nationwide in order to be elected to the parliament) and the German minority's concentration in the Opole region, have enabled them to be represented by MPs in the *Sejm*, the lower chamber of the Parliament (Kijonka 2004: 39).

The history of political changes after 1989 with regard to minorities and their participation in political life can be divided into two periods: (1) massive democratic changes (1989-2004), and (2) the EU accession in May 2004, as well as the acceptance of a new law on national, ethnic and linguistic minorities, introduced into practice in 2004/5.

Political liberalisation has encouraged minorities to become visible, but not all attempts are welcomed by significant parts of the majority society. Numbers are important in this context. Before the National Census of 2002, experts estimated that historically-settled ethnic minorities in Poland could amount to 800 000 to 1 600 000, i.e. between 2% and 4% of the general population. To the astonishment of scholars and minorities, only 471 500 (1.23%) of the population declared an ethnicity different than Polish. Interestingly, 774 855 persons (2.03%) did not declare any nationality, and 4 277 are listed under the category of 'Polish-undetermined' (GUS 2002).

Table 1: Main national and ethnic minorities in Poland and immigrant populations (2002)

Silesian	173 153	0,45 %	37 %	Minority not recognized by the state
German	152 897	0,39 %	32 %	National minority
Belarussian	48 737	0,13 %	10 %	National minority
Ukrainian	30 957	0,08 %	6,5 %	National minority
Roma	12 855	0,03 %	2,7 %	Ethnic minority
Russian	6 103	0,016 %	1,3 %	National minority
Lemko	5 863	0,015 %	1,2 %	Ethnic minority
Lithuanian	5 846	0,015 %	1,2 %	National minority
Kashubian	5 062	0,013 %	1 %	Group using regional language, not recognized by the state as a distinct minority
Slovak	2 001	0,005 %	0,4 %	National minority
Vietnamese	1 808	0,004 %	0,3 %	Migrant population
French	1 633	0,004 %	0,3 %	Migrant population
American	1 541	0,004 %	0,3 %	Migrant population
Greek	1 404	0,003 %	0,2 %	Migrant population
Italian	1 367	0,003 %	0,2 %	Migrant population
Jewish	1 133	0,002 %	0,2 %	National minority
Bulgarian	1 112	0,002 %	0,2 %	Migrant population
Armenian	1 082	0,002 %	0,2 %	National minority
Czech	831	0,002 %	0,1 %	National minority
English	800	0,002 %	0,1 %	Migrant population

Source: National Census of 2002.

The *Act on Minorities* from 2005 makes a distinction between ethnic minorities and national minorities. A *national minority* is a group: a) less numerous than the rest of the state's inhabitants; b) differentiated by language, culture or tradition and aiming to maintain the differentiation; c) possessing the consciousness of a historical national community; d) inhabiting Polish territory for at least 100 years; e) and identifying with the nation organized in a state. An *ethnic minority* shares with the national minority all of its features, except for the last criterion. This division is objected by some ethnic minorities' activists (e.g. the Polish Tatar Association and the Federation of Roma in Poland) who claim that it is discriminatory. Kazimierz Kutz, a deputy from Silesia, protested against the definition of minority groups adopted in the *Act...* during the final voting on it, but his voice could not change the outcome (Sekuła 2009: 405). As a result, Poland has adopted a rather old-fashioned definition of minority groups, based on the argument of historical presence arbitrarily defined (100 years), which causes many misunderstandings in the relations between policy makers and minority

representatives.

Three conclusions that are relevant for the current argument can be drawn from this data from 2002: (1) in comparison to most other European countries, national and ethnic minorities in Poland are *numerically insignificant*; Silesians are by far the largest declared minority, followed by Germans, and their number is more than three times larger than the third group on the list; (2) *migrant communities* are small if not *miniscule* and – it should be added already at this point – they are practically *absent in political life*; (3) the largest minority group *declared* is not recognised neither as national nor ethnic minority. Meanwhile, they are politically active, have their organisations and leaders, and they are (relatively) present in public discourses. All this makes Silesians particularly interesting in terms of the issues addressed in the comparative study on the democratic participation of minorities. As all Polish citizens, Silesians use their right to organise themselves, however, this is paradox that Silesians are *not recognised by the authorities as a minority*, which they claim they are.

2.1 Census of 2011

The institution responsible for conducting the Census in 2011 – the Central Statistical Office (*Główny Urząd Statystyczny* (hereafter GUS) – has for ‘technical’ reasons delayed the announcement of even the preliminary 2011 Census results (GUS 2012). Many demographers and sociologists immediately criticised the manner in which the data were collected and the results presented.²

The main controversy was prompted by the data on the ethno-national identification of the population. The Census confirmed the fact that Poland, in relation to most other European countries, is ethnically *homogenous* – over 91% of the people declared Polish national identity (36 007 000). The most numerous minority identities declared were: Silesian (809 000), Kashubian (212 000) and German (109 000). One should add that 1.862 million of the people asked remain ‘unspecified.’ Silesians have emerged again as the largest minority. The size of this group astounded demographers, journalists and inhabitants of Silesia equally.³

² For instance see:

http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114883,11617131,Naukowcy_skrytykowali_GUS_za_spis.html?lokalne=rzeszow

³ <http://www.dziennikzachodni.pl/artykul/537179,wielki-dzien-konca-dupowatosci-slazakow,id,t.html>

Tab. 2. Declared ethno-national identifications of population inhabiting Poland (2011)

Identification (ethnic or national)	Primary identification declared in the first question		Secondary identification (declared in the second question)	Total (primary and secondary identification)	Together with Polish identification
		Primary identification as the only one			
	In thousands				
Total	38 501	35 767	871	38 501	x
Polish	36 007	35 251	78	36 085	x
Other than Polish	632	516	793	1 388	834
Silesian	418	362	391	809	415
Kashubian	17	16	211	228	212
German	49	26	61	109	52
Ukrainian	36	26	12	48	20
Belarussian	37	31	10	47	15
Roma	12	9	4	16	6
Russian	8	5	5	13	7
American	1	1	10	11	10
Lemko	7	5	3	10	3
English	2	1	8	10	8
Not specified	1 862	x	x	1 862	x

Source: GUS 2012

How can this more-than-fourfold increase in the number of people declaring Silesian identity be explained? This upsurge cannot be justified by rapid demographic expansion of the population, because it is definitely not the case in a country with the birth rate at the level of 1.3⁴, and the data for the region in question are not significantly different. The other hypothesis is that in 2002, people were still hesitant to declare a nationality other than Polish due to their fear of intolerance inherited from the communist past, and hid their identity in a mono-ethnic state, or were manipulated by the interviewers (Robotycki 2010: 82; Warمیńska 2009: 37). This claim can be undermined by the counterargument that, now, more than two decades after democratic change many do not share these fears and they clearly understood the questions about their nationality. It seems that this increase is primarily a result of the growing involvement of minority activists in efforts to promote minority identity and the increasing visibility of these ‘non-traditional’ minorities⁵, i.e. Silesians and Kashubians (the latter living in Pomerania, nearby Gdańsk), in public life. At the same time, cultural and political organisations express grass-root feelings. These efforts create a space for formulating demands to obtain more civic rights and to strengthen the minority’s position in dealings with the state. This is particularly important in the case of Silesians, as their ethnic distinction has not been accepted. Despite this rejection, their status of a partner in the dispute on the issue had to be acknowledged. As, for instance, one of our interviewees said, the representatives of Silesian cultural organisations got an

⁴ http://www.indexmundi.com/poland/total_fertility_rate.html

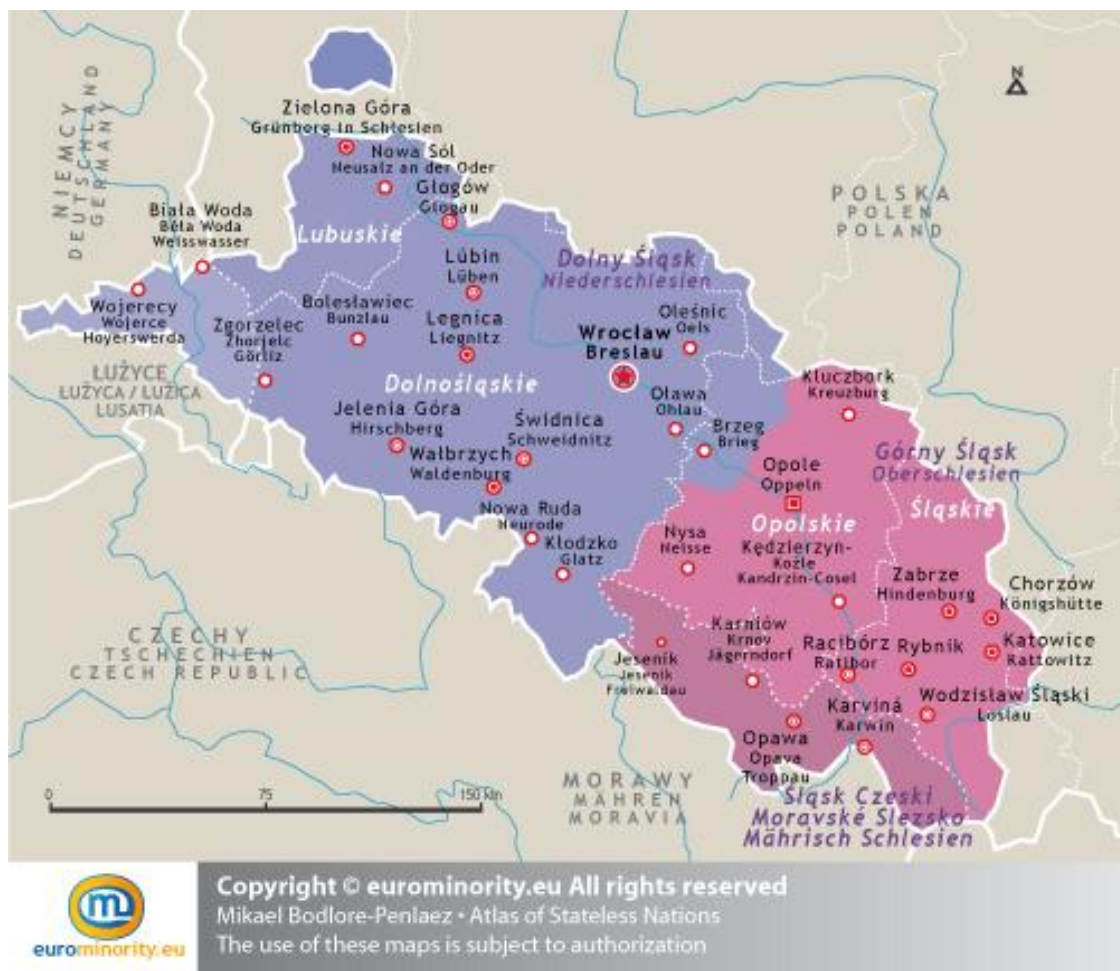
⁵ By ‘non-traditional minorities’ we understand self-declared minorities that have been not treated as such in the existing scholarly literature and are not recognised as such by the state authorities. We discuss this issue in more detail below.

invitation to a meeting of the Parliamentary Commission for Minorities in early 2012 [P.D.]. This simple fact shows the awareness of the policy makers of the existence of the problem of Silesians, and it puts into question the definitions of national and ethnic minorities which so far had been accepted. It also requires the inclusion of Silesians in the political discourse.

3. Silesia

Silesia is a historical region located in Central Europe, stretching through two contemporary states: Poland and the Czech Republic. The Polish part of the province is divided into Lower and Upper Silesia, with the Opole (Oppeln) voivodship sandwiched in between them. The historical capital of Silesia was Wrocław, located in Lower Silesia, now the capital of the voivodship, populated mostly by post-war settlers from former Eastern Poland as well as people from Central Poland. Today, the name 'Silesia' is often mistakenly associated only with Upper Silesia, a heavily industrial and densely populated (4.635 million people, 12.4% of the whole country's population in 2010⁶) region of the Katowice agglomeration. This report relates specifically to the situation in *Upper Silesia* where the descendants of the interwar inhabitants comprise a significant part of the population.

Map 1. Silesia



Source: eurominority.eu

⁶ http://www.slaskie.pl/strona_n.php?jezyk=pl&grupa=3&dzi=1251196416&id_menu=284

3.1 The Silesians

Poland is by political standards a modern western-type democracy. In the preamble to the Polish constitution, which was accepted in a referendum in 1997, one encounters an ambiguous definition of a nation: 'We, the Polish Nation - all citizens of the Republic.' This formula can be understood as a compromise between an ethnic and civic perception of a nation (Zubrzycki 2001). Compared to many other Central and Eastern European constitutions, it at least acknowledges the existence of non-titular citizens and their belonging to the nation understood in the English sense of the word. The law regarding minorities, besides the above-mentioned distinction between national minorities and ethnic minorities, also introduces the category of linguistic minorities (Buchowski and Chlewińska 2010). Again, Silesians are not accorded this status, in contrast to the Kashubians. For the Polish authorities, scholars and lawmakers, Silesians are part of the Polish nation and their language comprises merely a dialect of Polish.

The unofficial presence, and at the same time, public visibility of this group creates a conundrum. Scholars ask how to explain the phenomenon of a nation that is denied its history and existence? Several emotional debates and academic conferences on the issue were held (see: Nijakowski 2004a; Pędziwiatr 2009). Lawyers also face a dilemma, and neither the Polish Supreme Court, nor the European Court in Strasbourg accorded Silesians the right to be treated as minority on the grounds of a lack of historical tradition. One has to admit that this stance contradicts the right to subjective self-identification as a decisive factor in questions of national or ethnic belonging. This creates a schizophrenic situation in which the most common subjectively-felt and officially declared national (ethnic?) identity is not objectively recognised by the state authorities. Some scholars try to solve this issue by describing Silesians as a '*postulated*' or '*claimed*' minority (Dolińska 2010).

The 2012 Census shows the complexity of the issue. From the total of 809 000 persons claiming Silesian identity, 362 000 declared it as their only nationality, 56 000 as their first identity, but along with their second nationality, and 391 000 as their second nationality. Besides showing the number of people who identify with their 'Silesianness,' it demonstrates that this is an identity in the process of birth or re-birth, which is multi-layered, with fuzzy boundaries, and, most probably, which is emerging in a particular historical situation with its given socio-political context. Years of discussions and many activists' public statements and acts have helped to consolidate it and to draw the borders differentiating it from the homogeneous and coherent Polish nation. Experts do not agree on the potential consequences of this identity building (or even nation building?). Decades of studies on issues of nationalism cannot help to predict the future. For sure, this will result in further accusations on the part of right-wing politicians claiming that Silesian activists promote separatism, as well as in nationalists' claims that this kind of activity disintegrates the nation. Interestingly, some segments of the society show respect for the achievements of Silesians in their uneven struggle against the centralized state and its bureaucracy.

The sole history of 'Silesians' is a contested issue. As Jerzy Gorzelik, the leader of RAS wrote: 'An attempt to devoid the Silesian nation of any historical legitimacy means its annihilation in the minds of most society members' (2004: 16). Silesian irredentism has its long traditions and Silesian organisations were already emerging both in Prussia and Austro-Hungary during and after the period of the Spring of Nations in the 19th century. According to these first Silesian 'independenceionists', Silesians were living in German language countries, but insisted on their Slavic cultural and linguistic roots as well as their Catholic faith. Independence was the aim of a number of activists shortly before, during and after WWI (Sekula 2009). The Silesians began campaigning intensely for recognition after 1918, when the fate of Upper Silesia, belonging to the then defeated Germany, was still unclear. During the turbulent times of post-war negotiations many sought their chance and attempted to find a place in the new political map organised according to Woodrow Wilson's principle of the self-determination of nations. *Bund der Oberschlesier* – Związek Górnolązaków (Association of Upper Silesians) claimed independence for the 'Upper Silesian Republic' (cf. Gorzelik 2004: 21). Several similar initiatives were undertaken – e.g., the organisation of the Union of Upper Silesians aimed at

the creation of a neutral Silesian state under the tutelage of the League of Nations, and prince Hans Heinrich von Pless undertook diplomatic actions directed at a similar goal (cf. Kwaśniewski 2004: 79). Certain scholars claim – which seems to be an exaggeration – that up to 2.3 million Silesians opted for independence, but the fact is that the Union of Upper Silesians put its membership at half a million. To make a long story short, the inhabitants of the region were divided into protagonists of independence, and those opting either for Poland or for Germany.

From an ethnographic perspective, Silesia comprised a trilingual, prevailingly Catholic region. German was used in secular public spaces (schools, offices, business), while Polish was the language of religion and religion related communication. In everyday situations, casual conversations and at home, Silesians usually used their own ‘dialect’ (or, one should say language?), which is Slavic, but is permeated with many German words and often structured according to German grammar. This Silesian vernacular is called *godka* by its users.

By the decision of the Versailles Treaty a referendum was carried out in result of which the supporters of Poland, dissatisfied with its results, took to arms in three consecutive Silesian Uprisings. Ultimately in 1922, Upper Silesia was divided between Germany and Poland. In the German part of Silesia, the majority voted against autonomy. In the Polish Silesia, an autonomous region was established with its own parliament, but in general, assimilationist policy was implemented by the government in Warsaw.

One may conclude that the ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural *uniqueness* of Silesia, which is typical for many borderlands, was *never fully acknowledged* neither by the German nor the Polish state. In modern history, since World War I, local inhabitants experienced often harsh policies of Polonisation or Germanisation, depending on which side of the border they lived. During WWII the whole Silesia was conquered by Hitler and subjected to oppressive Germanisation. After WWII, the newly installed Polish communist authorities embarked on the policy of de-Germanisation and re-Polonisation (Linek 2001). Millions of Germans escaped from the approaching Red Army, and later, the people classified as Germans by the Polish authorities were expelled. The so-called ‘autochthons’, whose identity was ambiguous, but who were considered redeemable to the Polish nation, could stay. In this heyday of nationalism, it may sound as a paradox that the criteria of this ‘national verification’ applied by the Polish regime were copied almost exactly from the Nazi *Volksliste* classification (Kulczycki 2001) – of course *a rebours*.

3.2. A minority or a regional group?

The ideology of ‘national unity’ and assimilationist policy towards Silesians after WWII, combined with the settlement of both settlers from the interwar Polish eastern territories in the second half of the 1940s, and later newcomers attracted to the industrialised and linguistically de-germanised Upper Silesia region, had change population’s balance in the region. Additionally, the realisation of the disparity in the living standards between Western Germany and communist Poland led to the migration of almost six hundred thousand people to the Federal Republic in the period(s)? of migration policy liberalisation on the grounds that they themselves or their parents were former German citizens (Stola 2005). Continuing economic disproportions also caused another 250 thousand people to apply for German passports between 1990 and 2002, although most of them did not abandon Poland. Many, however, took up seasonal jobs in Germany or in other European countries.

In the 1990s, a group of activists from Upper Silesia, declared that they are members of the ‘Silesian nation’. In the recent past ‘autochthons’ from Upper Silesia could not so easily claim German as inhabitants of Opole/Oppeln region, since in the interwar period it was Polish territory. Silesians do not fit the binary and officially recognised nationalist scheme. The case of Silesians can be studied anthropologically *in vivo* as a case of a nation *in statu nascendi*, and in political terms, as an example of an existent, but officially unrecognised minority. Their situation contrasts with that of the neighbouring *German minority*, which has always been recognised, even by the Communists, and was granted full minority privileges after 1991

Perhaps this kind of exclusion of the Upper Silesians from the ‘German Volk’ and equivocal feelings about identity have caused the revival of the ideas of Silesian uniqueness and of a Silesian nation. Feelings of exploitation by central authorities (the region is rich in coal and is highly industrialised), a sense of cultural deprivation lasting for decades (the local vernacular was suppressed and – as many other dialects – scorned as ‘crude’ at schools), the neglect of the right to self-government combined with a renewed memory of pre-war autonomy, self-rule aspirations, and a nostalgia for the glorious past have contributed to the rise of a new identity anchored in historic traditions.

In late 1989, the Upper Silesian Association was pushing for regional self-rule, and already in January 1990, the Silesian Autonomy Movement was established. The latter has become a major spokesman for the eastern Silesian population and it won two seats in the Parliament in the 1991 elections to *Sejm* (Kwaśniewski 2004: 81-82), a success that could not be repeated in the following elections due to the implementation of the law on the five per-cent threshold in 1993. Since Silesians are not recognised as a minority, the special voting law for minorities bypassing the threshold requirements, does not apply to them. This raised accusations that RAS, and later ZLNS (see below) activists, are seeking a special minority status in order to make political (parliamentary) careers.

On December 11th 1996, RAS activists created Związek Ludności Narodowości Śląskiej (ZLNS), the Union of People of Silesian Nationality. It was registered by the lower court, but after an appeal by the voivodship’s leader (*wojewoda*), it was denied registration in the high court. The court justified the decision by referring to the definition that can be found in any popular encyclopaedia: ‘a nation is an enduring community of people that emerged thanks to a common historical past based on a shared culture, language, territory and economic life that can be read in the national consciousness of its members’. At the same time, an ethnic group should have a specific language, culture, perceive itself as different from other groups, and have its own name; the national minority to which one wants to belong has to exist *objectively*. An individual cannot decide about belonging to a nation subjectively. The Supreme Court shared this opinion and added that ‘national minority’ is a legal term, although it is *not defined in the Polish law, nor in international conventions* (Sekuła 2009). An individual can choose a nation, but he or she *cannot* lead to the *creation* of a new nation. Although in common public opinion the Silesian ethnicity *does exist*, it is not a national group and has not asked to be treated as such. Therefore, it cannot be granted the electoral privileges accorded to other minorities (Kwaśniewski 2004: 83-84). Moreover, the ‘legal recognition of the Silesian minority would endanger the rights of other groups, such as, the Mazurs, Kashubians and Carpathian mountaineers who, in spite of their ethnic and cultural distinction, are not recognised as national minorities’ (Łodziński 2012: 143).

ZLNS brought the case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The Court argued that it is not in its competence to decide whether Silesians comprise a nation or not, and to give a definition of it, but it admitted that such a recognition would imply a dispensation from the five per-cent limit in parliamentary elections. It argued that individuals should limit their rights in order to protect the ‘country’s stability’. Poland did not violate the European Convention. A following appeal to the Grand Chamber of the European Tribunal in Strasbourg was finally dismissed in February 2004. It stated that Polish authorities had not denied the existence of Silesians, and that Silesians can pursue their goals without being a legally recognised minority (Kwaśniewski 2004: 85-86).

In result, RAS redefined itself as an association of ‘people who [merely] *declare* their Silesian nationality’ (our emphasis), while ZLNS continued its struggle for registration. In 2004 it applied to the court for registration again, but it was denied to them in 2007. Meanwhile Silesians, referring to the 2002 Census results, also appealed to the parliamentary commission, which at that time was working on the law on ethnic and national minorities, to recognise them, if not as a national minority, then as an ethnic minority. Despite their presence (see above a confirmation by one of our interviewees), the appeals went unheard. According to the Commission, the ‘prominent scholars’ consulted, mainly ethnologists and sociologists, were of the opinion that Silesians have a distinct *social* identity, but that they sustain different national identities, i.e. Polish, Czech and German. A plea

to recognise the Silesian language also cannot be acknowledged by the Commission, since linguists consider it to be a dialect of Polish. The fact that fifty six thousand people declared in 2002 that they spoke Silesian at home did not help; but Silesian can be heard in local broadcasting (e.g. TV Silesia), on the internet, in rap songs, and it can be read in many media reports. The denial of recognition as a minority group in Poland also means the lack of governmental subsidies for the protection of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural practices.

In political life, RAS tried not only to mobilise and unite all those who identify as Silesians, but also to collaborate with the German minority that is quite numerous in the Opole voivodship. These attempts were mostly unsuccessful due to the competition between the two groups in the political arena and the historical rivalry between German, Polish and Silesian options among the local population. As indicated above, the relationships have always been dynamic, and the well-established and recognised Germans are afraid of losing supporters at the expense of Silesians. These are fully substantiated fears, because as statistics show, the number of declared Germans in Poland has fallen from 153 000 to 102 000 between 2002 and 2012. It may have happened that some persons emigrated, but most probably, many who became aware that they can opt for Silesian nationality chose it instead of the German one.

4. Methodology of the study

The empirical part of this report is based on secondary sources (scientific literature on Silesia and Silesians, documents, reports and expert documents on minorities and their political participation in Poland, and articles in newspapers commenting on the ‘camouflaged German option’ controversy), as well as primary data (interviews) concerning the political activity of Ruch Autonomii Śląska. The secondary sources are to a large extent Internet sources – web sites, forums and comments. RAS’s activity is to a large extent centred on the Internet. There are virtually no printed versions of the organisation’s charter and statement, no flyers or manifestos. Actually, broad access to the Internet in Silesia has enabled the development of RAS, which would be otherwise difficult due to the lack of external funding (the organisation is funded by membership fees: 5 zlotys per month, i.e. 1,20 euro only). As chairman of the Katowice Circle stated:

‘We minimize the amount of paper. One thing is that we have a modest office [in Katowice], the other thing is that the electronic versions of documents create order’ [M. K.].

The interviews were conducted in January and February 2012. Four semi-structured, very long (2 hours each) qualitative interviews with RAS leaders and members in the two main cities of Silesia – Katowice and Opole – were conducted. They were recorded and transcribed. In the body of the report, citations from the interviews end with the initials of our interlocutors. The interview guides and the list of interviews can be found in Annex I of this report. The interviewees participated in the interviews very willingly, and they are accustomed to journalists’ and researchers’ interest in RAS’s activities. Since ZLNS has been registered, activists from Opole spent a lot of time giving interviews and taking part in meetings and discussions with sociologists and political scientists from different regions. No doubt, Silesians attract interest of both the local and national media. They use the media’s and scholars’ interest as a () means of communicating their ideas. Because many activities of the organisation are based on the Internet (web sites, Facebook), contact with the leaders and members was not difficult, except for Jerzy Gorzelik⁷ – still the President of RAS, and now also a board member of the Silesian Province governance. Interviewees showed a desire to give the most comprehensive report on the objectives and activities of their organisation.

The amount of data satisfactory for this research analysis was reached quite quickly as it turned out that the same people had been interviewed on the issue of ‘Silesians’ by both scholars and journalists

⁷ http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerzy_Gorzelik

and they proved to be very outspoken and articulate on the issue. Conference organisers and the editors of scientific volumes about the cultural and political aspects of the Silesians constitute a small group of people, and they are in part actively engaged in reframing the image of Silesia and Silesians in Poland. After analysing scholarly literature on the subject, it appeared that individuals circulate between organisations or take initiative in to create new institutions (e.g., RAS members left the local branch in Opole and formed SONS – *Stowarzyszenie Osób Narodowości Śląskiej*, the Association of People of Silesian Nationality). In most academic publications, one can find interviews with the same persons, repeating the same information. There are several ‘on duty’ activists, always ready to talk about their region and their identity. The leader of *Law and Justice*, Jarosław Kaczyński, is understandably unreachable and several local party members did not want to talk about the, in their opinion outdated, events concerning the Silesian issue.

The interviewees were surprised by the anonymity ensured by the interviewer, i.e. Katarzyna Chlewińska, because they are often interrogated by journalists under their own names and, actually, they look forward to publicity. Virtually all of them identify with the efforts aimed at creating a Silesian autonomy and see themselves as true Silesians engaged in building a new identity and strengthening the movement. This attitude is radically different from that of the educator we interviewed before (Buchowski and Chlewińska 2011:12). It demonstrates the specificity of this organisation, whose members are young, uncompromising people that are not afraid to advocate ideas opposing the mainstream public discourse.

In the interpretation of the materials we applied the method of *thematic analysis*. We have looked for meanings and concepts emerging in the discussion on specific issues. Common ideas and statements from the interviews, press articles, policy documents, internet forums and academic works have been integrated and identified into a limited number of themes that are of our interest and that are helpful in understanding our interlocutors’ attitudes towards tolerance, diversity and pluralism in the Polish political life.

5. Silesian Autonomy – the political challenge

The case of RAS, Silesians and their political and cultural status has been constantly recurring in Polish public debates since the 1990s, often in relation to contemporary political challenges. It serves as an example of post-transformational *tensions* between the *policy* and *practice* of national unity and the grassroots efforts of people in some regions to change the dominant cultural schemata. In the centralised Polish state, any challenge to undermine this kind of monolithic socio-political set up which is permeated by the image of a homogenous Polish nation, and any claims to recognise not only minority rights, but also the possibility to practice them in public life, are often interpreted as dangerous and as undermining integrity. Attempts at implementing constitutionally granted entitlements to cultural visibility and the execution of civic rights are perceived either as unsubstantiated and unnecessary demands of an insignificant number of people, or as a result of the overambitious goals of some activists that manipulate history and people. They present a threat to homogeneous society. Even liberally-minded politicians share this paradigm of an integral and united polity.

This state of affairs can be, to a certain extent, justified by the 20th century history of a society devastated by two wars and several waves of ethnic cleansings, but the rigidity of this discourse and practice is striking. In the last local elections held in 2010, RAS, the unofficial political representative of the Silesian ‘minority’, managed to win 8.49% of votes and three out of 48 seats in the local parliament. *Sejmik*’s arithmetic enabled it to become a partner in the ruling coalition in the Upper Silesia voivodship. These political events have stirred a hectic debate. A spectacular part of it was a report prepared by the major rightist oppositional party in the country, Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, hereafter PiS). It is discussed below. ‘The report on the state of the State’ prepared by PiS claims that Silesians are a ‘camouflaged German option’, i.e. it connects Silesian organizations

promoting the autonomy of the region and the strengthening of Silesian cultural identity with some kind of an anti-Polish ideology, without even attempting to explain this notion and casual link. Nonetheless, since the emergence of the regional coalition in Silesia with RAS in it, this opinion represents a radical version of more moderate attacks on RAS and its alleged *separatist* policy, or of accusations of *treason* of vaguely understood 'Polishness'.

The discussions around RAS have been selected, because we want to expose the potential power of negative emotions and reactions that they evoke towards the Silesian minority and its associations in Poland. As indicated, these bodies fight for more than mere recognition of the fundamental rights guaranteed by law. The denial of such identity, and right-wing circles' accusations of damage incurred to the Polish state, shifts the discussion from arguments about the representation of Silesians to ones about the challenging of their right to exercise regional identity.

This case shows, on the one hand, how the opportunities offered by Poland's participation in the structures of the European Union (especially European support for regional movements and minority organisations) are actually used by local activists and minority organisations, and, on the other hand, how they are interpreted within the mainstream political debate. The attacks on RAS illustrate strong universalising tendencies and unifying themes present in the rhetoric of the nationalistically minded segments of the society and rightist politicians, who have used the case to weaken the ruling coalition and often use it as an argument against political opponents. In short, it illustrates how the issue of basic civil rights can be a hostage of political stalemate as well as how it may unveil the structural mechanisms of political life.

5.1 *Relevance of the case study*

The proposed case study of RAS's reception and rejection raises issues of what can or cannot be *tolerated* in political life in Poland in the sphere of the political representation of minorities and it shows the boundary-drawing process in the political life of the country.

The proposed study covers part b) and c) of the cluster 'Norms and practices of political participation' and gives a wider view on the possible cases in the *non-tolerated – tolerated – accepted* forms of political engagement of different minority organisations in mainstream politics in the country.

We will focus on the last decade, as it brought the emergence of minority organisations in Poland, with special attention given to the year 2011, when the last direct attacks on the political representatives of Silesians took place. We will also sketch the necessary historical background in order to illustrate the wider context of toleration/non-toleration towards minorities in Poland and the socio-historical status of Silesia/Silesians.

5.2 *Setting the Scene*

As just mentioned, the decisive incentive for this report is The Report on the State of the Republic⁸, published by the major right-wing party, PiS. This formation is led by Jarosław Kaczyński – former Prime Minister and twin brother of the late Polish president Lech Kaczyński, who died in a plane crash near Smolensk in April 2010. The 116-page document is a list of charges against the ruling party, *Platforma Obywatelska* (Civic Platform, hereafter PO) and its leader, Prime Minister Donald Tusk. The right-wing rhetoric of the oppressed nation and the threat of Polish identity used in the report was a tool used for discrediting PO.

The report has no single author, it represents PiS's platform, in which various aspects of the state's

⁸ <http://www.pis.org.pl/main.php>

functioning are addressed (economy, political conflicts, integration with the European Union, education), but it also puts an emphasis on the state of the art of Polish national identity.

In line with PiS's usual arguments, 'The Report' also accuses the ruling party of a lack of patriotism and of indifference to a progressing degeneration of national identity. These kind of charges appear repeatedly from the beginning of the rule of the government led by PO, especially against its Prime Minister. PiS presents Donald Tusk as a threat to national unity, emphasising his Kashubian origin (see: Nijakowski 2009), or even the fact that his father was conscripted to the Wehrmacht during WWII.⁹

The reactions to this report were quite predictable – the supporters of the right-wing ideas praised the accuracy of the analysis, while the supporters of the ruling party depicted 'The Report...' as the opposition's futile bitterness and always predictable radicalism. Several comments disparaging the report appeared. One of the PO leaders, Rafał Grupański, stated:

*'It is hard to call this kind of material a report on the state of the state, because even a cursory overview shows that it is rather a report on the mental state of the report's authors, who are not satisfied with the fact that they do not wield power, and who generally express dissatisfaction with everything in every area of life'*¹⁰.

Considering the realities of the Polish political life, one can see this publication as a part of a long-lasting competition between two parties, which regained its momentum before the Fall elections in 2011. However, the report expresses many people's attitude towards minorities. We accept the view that 'the limits to the politically possible are set in language: concepts in politics can only stand for that which the discourse makes possible. Members of a polity are not free – nor they are able – to create personal meanings they attach to the political realm. They necessarily draw on the template provided in the discourse' (Kovács 2003: 298). But at the same time 'narratives [reflect] the social world as well as construct it' (Klumbyte 2003: 280). In the latter sense, the controversies regarding Silesians have had one remarkable and unexpected outcome – they revived interest in Silesians, their existence, rights and identity. They have re-invented them and they created new members of the 'Silesian nation'.

6. The Silesians as the 'camouflaged German option'

In the chapter of 'The Report' entitled 'Timid Polish Nation' (*Wstydlivy Naród Polski*) (p. 34-36) the authors claim that the ruling party has an ambivalent attitude towards the Nation and that it acts to its disadvantage:

'There are many reasons to conclude that the issue of the Nation is not raised in the programs and key statements of the Civic Platform, although there are some statements about Poles and Poland's position. On the other hand, in its message, the Platform strongly emphasises the importance of regionalisms, a particular example being the ostentatious emphasising of Kashubian descent by Donald Tusk. Recently, contrary to the judgement of the Supreme Court in 2007, the Silesian nationality was included in the Census. The Supreme Court rightly concluded that, historically speaking, there is no Silesian nation. One might add that Silesianness [śląskość] that rejects Polish nationality, is simply a way to distance oneself from Polishness and, presumably, simply to adopt the camouflaged German option.' (p. 34-35)

The quoted section of 'The Report' raised an immediate reaction of the Silesian activists, the German

⁹ In October 2011, parliamentary elections were held - Law and Justice lost to the Civic Platform. One of the results was the secession of a more far-right formation called 'Solidary Poland'.

¹⁰ <http://www.fakt.pl/PO-o-raporcie-PiS-Sprawa-dla-psychoanalizy,artykuly,100111,1.html>

minority and other communities outraged by these statements¹¹.

PiS's leader asserted at a press conference¹² that when in power (2005-2007) his party did nothing against the Silesians' or Kashubians' right to self-identification, as some suggested. While it is true – so Kaczyński – that ‘we consider the assertion that there exists a Silesian nation camouflaged as a German option,’ at the same time, PiS accepts and appreciates Silesianness and Kashubianness *as a part of Polishness*. Adam Hofman, spokesman of PiS, also explained the stance of his party so that no one had any doubts about the meaning of the challenged statement:

‘To explain it fully: we have nothing against Silesians. Silesianness is Polishness. We meant the kind of Silesianness that questions Polish national identity and rejects Polishness, as does Mr. Gorzelik who wants to create a Silesian state. We have nothing against self-government, we have nothing against pride in your region, we are against separatisms.’

However, these elucidations did not convince Silesians (especially RAS members, but also the inhabitants of Silesia actively engaged in the autonomy movement), or the members of the German minority living in Silesia. Bernard Gajda, leader of the German minority in Poland, wrote an open letter on behalf of the Association of German Social-Cultural Associations in Poland:

‘The official statement of Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of one of the largest political parties in Poland, openly slandered hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens of German nationality and origin. This wording suggests that Germans are worse citizens of Poland, and that Germanness disqualifies anybody from being a good citizen’¹³.

One of the reactions to the discussion on the character of Silesian identity was the filing of an offence to the Prosecutor's Office in Warsaw. A group of PO members from Silesia together with members of the German minority association led by Gajda asked the persecutor to decide whether the report's authors committed a crime by scorning and offending Silesians and Germans. This question was definitely not considered in the frame of *respect* (see: Dobbernack and Modood 2011: 32), or the *recognition* of minority groups and their identity. Instead, it was analysed mainly in terms of freedom of speech and the use of offensive words.

In May 2011, the Prosecutor of the Warsaw-Ochota district, after screening the referred case, refused to launch an investigation of these reports. The refusal was justified with the argument that the phrase ‘disguised German option’ used by PiS in ‘The Report...’ is *not discriminatory* and does not constitute a public insult towards an ethnic group or nationality¹⁴.

Jerzy Gorzelik, RAS's President, replied to PiS¹⁵. He referred to the charges posed by Adam Hofman as:

‘absurd, the result of the political class's general ignorance of Silesian affairs . Upper Silesia has for long been inhabited by people who identify themselves as Silesians and, simultaneously, some of them consider themselves to be Poles, and others see themselves as Germans, and still others identify only with the Silesian identity, and this is no reason to enter on a war path. It is an reference that people like me – those who declared Silesian identity in the 2002 Census 9 years ago – are insincere because they do not have the courage to admit they are Germans. If I was a German, I would declare it right away, because there is nothing wrong

¹¹ Originally, this phrase was formulated differently: ‘One might add that Silesianness is simply a way to distance oneself from Polish nationality and, presumably, simply to adopt a disguised German option’, but at the request of PiS activists from Silesia and Kashubia it had been extended and rephrased.

¹² <http://www.tvn24.pl/0,1698280,0,1,pis-poprawia-wnbspraporcie-kwestie-slaska,wiadomosc.html>

¹³ http://wyborcza.pl/1,75478,9383324,Polscy_Niemcy__Jaroslaw_Kaczynski_nas_szkaluje.html

¹⁴ <http://www.dziennikzachodni.pl/artykul/406401,po-sie-poddalo-zakamufLOWana-opcja-niemiecka-bez-odwolania,id,t.html>; http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114873,9396676,_ZakamufLOWana_opcja_niemiecka__Bedzie_kolejne_doniesienie.html?order=najstarsze&v=1&obxx=9396676

¹⁵ http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114873,9377498,Rzecznik_PiS_o_slaskosci__Nie_jestesmy_idiotami.html

in being a German or a Czech. Such an attitude towards the citizens of the Polish Republic is unacceptable and based on frail premises.'

Silesians (not just RAS members) also used less conventional methods in defence of their cause – they created websites with cutting, sharp comments on the words of the of PiS leader and filled Internet forums with rather ruthless and unrefined statements. The Internet was swarmed with mocking comments and paraphrases¹⁶.

In July 2011, Jarosław Kaczyński visited Katowice in the then running election campaign. RAS members used this opportunity to remind Silesians of the report published in Spring and of the debate that followed. A group of activists waited for Kaczyński with T-shirts expressing their attitude towards his visit – some prints said 'undercover German' or 'non Polonus Silesius', and on some a short glossary of words in the Silesian language appeared. They failed, however, to give Kaczyński the gifts they had prepared and they declared to send them by post to Warsaw, together with the book *Ghosts of War*, by a former regional counsellor, an indigenous Silesian, Alojzy Lyska. It is about the WW II and the fate of his father, drafted to the Wehrmacht¹⁷.

The issue of the 'camouflaged German option' engaged the press for several weeks and then slowly faded away. The problem of Silesian identity was cited again in late 2011, when the Association of People of Silesian Nationality (*Stowarzyszenie Osób Narodowości Śląskiej: SONS*) was registered.

6.1. The Association of People of Silesian Nationality

The registration of the Association of People of Silesian Nationality (hereafter SONS) was a watershed event from the perspective of Silesian identity activists. All previous attempts at creating an organisation promoting 'Silesianness' were unsuccessful. In 1998, the Supreme Court refused to register the Union of People of Silesian Nationality (ZLNS), declaring that Silesian nationality does not exist. The Association of Persons Declaring Silesian Nationality also had not been registered (the Supreme Court refused its registration in 2007),¹⁸ although its leaders referred to the census carried out in 2002, in which – as it is shown above in table 1 – Silesian nationality was declared by almost 180 thousand people.

Similarly to Upper Silesia, Silesians from Opole established an association for people who feel neither Poles nor Germans, but who want to preserve and cultivate their Silesian identity. The Association aims at preserving and cultivating Silesian culture and abstains from politics, although many of its founders are also members of the Opole Branch of RAS.

At the end of March 2011, the founding documents were filed in a court in Opole. Silesians claimed that the registration of the association would mean the recognition of Silesian nationality in Poland, which was their goal, as they did not want to be suspended in a social vacuum. However, the Court dismissed the application and ordered the removal of any references to () Silesian nationality, arguing that 'the Silesian ethnic group is not a separate nation or a minority, and therefore it is not acceptable to determine oneself as a member of a Silesian nation.'¹⁹

The founders appealed the decision in June 2011. They stressed that although there is no definition of a Silesian nation in the Polish law, there is a definition of nationality included in the Law on the Census of 2011. It says that nationality is a national or ethnic affinity, i.e. 'a *declarative, individual feature of every person*, based on a subjective feeling, and expressing an emotional, (or) cultural (or

¹⁶ http://spieprzajdziadu.com/muzeum/index.php?title=Zakamuflowana_opcja_niemiecka

¹⁷

¹⁸ http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114873,9882103,Kaczynskiego_na_Slasku_wita_zakamuflowana_opcja_niemiec_ka_.html

¹⁹ http://opole.gazeta.pl/opole/1,35114,10884274,Stowarzyszenie_Osob_Narodowosci_Slaskiej_zarejestrowane_.html

¹⁹ See: Charter of SONS.

one related to the origin of the parents) connection to a particular nation or ethnic community' (Methodological manual for the 2011 Census: 55). On December 21st, the court decided to register SONS. Therefore, it has been officially recognised that nationality and ethnicity are not just a matter of roots, but also a matter of individual choice. The Opole court could not ignore the new provision in the charter of the association, under which SONS declares that it will not register as an election committee or compete in any elections²⁰.

The statutory purposes of the Association include²¹: '1. Fostering and anchoring the common consciousness of Silesians; 2. Revival of Silesian culture; 3. Promotion of knowledge about Silesia; 4. Shaping and developing young people's active citizenship in Silesia, formation of a sense of full engagement in and responsibility for their homeland; 5. Participation in the modern? integration of all population groups living in Silesia; 6. Sustaining cultural contacts between Silesians, no matter where they live, helping those willing to return from emigration; 7. Promotion and creation of a positive image of Silesia and Silesians; 8. Caring for the preservation of the material and spiritual heritage of Silesia'.

On January 10th, the Opole court received an appeal concerning the registration of SONS. The prosecutor appealed against the order in full, because – as argued in the appeal – the court issued a decision to register the association, although the charter of SONS violates the general principles of law and the values expressed by the whole system of law, and in particular Article 2 of the Law on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language²². The Prosecutor argued: 'The literature emphasises that the charter does not comply with the law, not only when it violates a particular standard, but also when it is in contradiction with certain general principles of law or values expressed by the legal system. For example, according to the Supreme Court, the charter is inconsistent with the law if it tries to create a non-existent national minority'²³.

The Founding Committee of the Association learned of the appeal from the local media.

They gained access to the grounds of the appeal through personal contacts with journalists. By law, the Association still exists and has the right to act in accordance with its statutory objectives. As one of the leaders states:

'We still haven't received any official documents from the prosecutor or the court. We know that it [the registration of the Association] was contested by the local media. We got information from the court that SONS is functioning rightfully, we have just listed a new board. We also got the necessary legal confirmations from the various institutions, such as, the Statistical Office, or the Revenue, so we formally continue to operate. But we are still waiting, we know that something is happening – the prosecution filed an appeal. It has come back to the court of first instance, and we know that the judge has already written a justification, but we have not received it, I saw only fragments of it in a newspaper article.(...)

There have been various calls by local politicians that the people who have the right to appeal [against SONS registration] should do so – the Governor of Opole has the right, but he didn't use it – and it turned out that the local prosecutor also has the right. So there has been a swift reaction of politicians but the prosecutor hasn't filed his appeal until the last possible day.

Probably they are waiting for the justification of the registration of SONS, as the judge did not

²⁰ <http://www.polityka.pl/kraj/opinie/1522995,1,stowarzyszenie-zarejestrowane-ale-to-nie-koniec.read>

²¹ <http://slonzoki.org/>

²²

http://msw.gov.pl/portal/pl/178/2958/Ustawa_o_mniejszosciach_narodowych_i_etnicznych_oraz_o_jezyku_regionalnym.html

²³

http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114883,10951900,Prokuratura_nie_godzi_sie_na_rejestracje_Stowarzyszenia.html?lokalne=pozn

have to justify it before a request for an appeal was filed. I also know [from an informal source] that a radical association asked for participation in the trial, an organization called the Opole Association of National Remembrance, but apparently they were rejected. I also know it from the media only. But they still have 7 days to appeal, they may become a party in the trial – as they are a patriotic organization fighting for Polish independence, and we [Silesians] are seen as a threat to it.’ [P.D.]

The SONS²⁴ is functioning well, new applications and cultural projects are being constantly delivered. Its members organise excursions to memorials significant to Silesia and the regional tradition, and they organize projects that aim at language preservation and want to strengthen the awareness of the Silesian tradition. Every press release regarding the organisation attracts the attention of other media and researchers studying identity and society. The activists are waiting for the judgment of the court with ease and are prepared for further appeals. They are fully convinced that their reasons are justified and they are determined to promote Silesian identity.

Some SONS members are also activists of RAS in the Opole voivodship. According to the interviewed leader of SONS [P.D.], in the beginning, half of the Association's members had this double affiliation, however, many other are applying and, today, members of RAS constitute less than one-fifth of SONS's members. The Association has gained more members who are not interested in politics and who ‘merely’ want to promote and strengthen regional identity and culture. This does not prevent SONS opponents from equating it with RAS and creating its separatist image. Thus, organisation is also accused of separatism and anti-Polish activities. SONS's case illustrates that even a group promoting a historically shaped cultural distinctiveness and wishing to preserve the cultural heritage of the region, a group striving for its *recognition*, can be seen as endangering the state and the nation.

7. Thematic analysis

In the course of thematic analysis of the collected material and academic literature, we have identified three themes in order to answer the questions of the limits of ethno-political tolerance in Poland:

1. what kind of groups and claims can be tolerated in political life?
2. on what terms can the groups express their difference and fight for their rights?
3. what is not tolerated in public/political life in Poland?

Themes:

- (1) The question of Silesian identity as a dominant factor in relations between the ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ – the well-established notions of ‘Silesian harm’ and the ‘internal colonisation’ of Silesia within the Polish state vs. the renewed discourse of the Great Silesia and its socio-economic potential.
- (2) Nation vs. Republic – a ‘black-and-white’ perception of cultural differences with the rhetoric of the endangered nation coming from the mainstream media and rightist political circles, which are competing with republican points of view and the rhetoric of ‘Europe of regions’, which are growing in popularity. This topic is combined with the theme of the ‘threat of the independence of the Polish state’ and the stereotype of a German threat.
- (3) The problem of the political representation of minorities and their absence in the mainstream media – the marginalisation of minorities (in media, public education, the lack of their public visibility). Consequently, any debate on the question of the identity of minorities is usually very emotional and rarely refers to arguments based on research and expertise. The debate on

²⁴ <http://slonzoki.org/>

Silesians involves many activists of the group which, combined with the minimal level of knowledge about this group, heats discussions (Pędziwiatr 2009).

7.1. *Silesian identity in dispute – ‘Silesian harm’ or ‘The Great Silesia’?*

Silesia is considered by pro-Silesian activists to be a multi-cultural land, whose borderland character has shaped the identity of the people differently than it in other parts of Poland. In this view, Silesia is a space permeated by German, Polish and Czech culture; all of them have been influencing the region to a different degree for centuries. Bilingualism and multiculturalism have shaped the specific identity of Silesia's inhabitants, which rests on a strong identification with the place of birth and living (in German *Heimat*). In the periods of political tensions between Poles and Germans, identification with the local motherland functioned as the best viable and psychologically safe alternative (Glensk, Szewczyk and Marek 2002: 83).

In effect, according to some sociologists, the core elements of the Silesian identity consist of a sense of distance from the successive ‘dominators’, a commitment to family and the protection of family ties, as well as the use of the local vernacular. Studies conducted in Silesia show that most Silesians identify themselves, first of all, in relation to the cities and the region they live in, while other persons living in Silesia, but identifying themselves as Poles, most frequently refer to such terms as the state and nation (Bokszański 2005: 95).

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Silesia was the region perceived by Poles as an advanced German zone and by the Germans – as a culturally retarded and inferior region, because it was associated with Poland. Therefore, when Silesia was annexed wholly to the Polish state after WWII, the Silesians were – as discussed in part 2.1 – subjected to Polonisation. This policy was similar to that from the period of partitions – when western regions experienced Germanisation, and the eastern part of Silesia was subjected to Russification.

Since WWII, Silesians and their culture were subjected to the above-mentioned and painful Polonisation, the feeling of being *dominated* emerged again and intensified. In an anthropological sense, this image is not only a stereotype, but it also determines the perception the social world (Wódz and Wódz 1999: 152).

Significant in this context is the syndrome of ‘Silesian harm’. It is a belief, widespread especially among the older generation of Silesians that the indigenous population was subjected to various kinds of harassment and violence on the part of the successive invaders and provincial governors, especially since the end of WWI. Painful memories include the passage of the Red Army through Silesia during WWII, the harmful and brutal de-Germanisation and re-Polonisation after the war (including the deportation of Silesians to former Nazi concentration camps on the Polish territory²⁵), and a number of repressions experienced by local people under the communist rule in the People's Republic, such as, imprisonment, persecution and even murder (Gerlich 2010: 228-229).

The belief that the region and its inhabitants fell victim to various invaders is often combined with indirect expectations that this harm should be compensated by the Polish state. According to this conviction, the resources of the region have been corrupted, the culture passed down from generation to generation damaged and condescended, and the creative potential of the land and people totally destroyed.

As recalled by one of the interviewees:

‘To a certain point in time I was brought up in the belief that I am a Pole. I am a Pole. No one in my family was a member of the German minority, even though we have German passports. It is, what I call, an unnecessary inevitability. Because I never used it. (...) My parents first taught

²⁵ http://wyborcza.pl/1,75478,11213017,W_Polsce_byly_obozy_koncentracyjne__Trwa_spor.html

us to speak Polish. As they saw that we know how to speak Polish and we do not have a problem with the language (we efficiently use the official code that has been adopted here in Poland) they started speaking Silesian to us – this way we wouldn't take on this particular accent. I have no accent when I speak Polish. Sometimes when I meet other Silesians and I do not say where I am from, they are surprised that I am a Silesian, although they did not hear the accent.' [W.G.]

Consequently, the turbulent history has enhanced a specific attitude to others in the population inhabiting Upper Silesia and to their place in the social space. The 'Catechism of Silesian truths', presented by an expert on Silesian affairs, based on biographical interviews with native Silesians, states the following: '1. Remember that you are a Silesian. 2. Do not boast of the fact that you are a Silesian. 3. Take good care of Silesian traditions, religion and language. 4. Watch out for others (non-Silesians). 5. Do what you do, but do not overreach. 6. (...) 7. Speak only as much as needed. 8. Always be careful of what you are doing. 9. (...) 10. Do not speak well of the Germans, their culture, civilization and achievements. 11. Do not deny you are a Silesian. 12. (...) 13. When somebody speaks well of Silesians/Silesia and the Silesian land, be alert. 14. Adjust to every situation, you should not be criticized or mocked because of your Silesian origin. 15. Remember, you have to endure many humiliations, like our ancestors, because the most important thing is the survival of our tradition (Gerlich 2010: 94).

On the other hand, Silesians are considered by outsiders, and consider themselves to be a people extremely tolerant towards others, open and welcoming to visitors. The stereotypical Silesian characteristics include such notions as, passion for order, dutifulness, discipline, organisational skills, and a pragmatic attitude, which are contrasted with the romantic and irrational Poles. Silesians have no respect for daredevils (Glensk et al. 2002: 102). This puts them in opposition to the settlers from other regions in Poland and causes tensions. It even sparks some conflicts in contemporary Silesia. One can add that such distancing towards the now internal Others shows features described as orientalism (Said 1998). Closeness to the West, historic relations to Germany, cultural traits interpreted as 'civilised' traditions justify feelings of cultural superiority to the parts of the population that have their roots in the former Russian partition or in the poverty-stricken Austrian Galicia.

It seems that this internal Orientalism is now superseding the 'harm syndrome'. The image of traditional Silesia's suffering is losing its power. The younger generation refers to a different period of Silesian history than the time of injustice and violence in the twentieth century. They prefer to reach to the glorious past of the rich, technologically advanced and distinctive region of Silesia in the nineteenth century.

In short, RAS's growing popularity, visible in the support for RAS's candidates in local elections, lies, among other reasons, in this reference to the Silesian 'Golden Age' (Gerlich 2010: 299).

As the leader of the RAS Circle in Katowice said:

'RAS was established in 1990 or 1991, so when I was in the first years of primary school (...) it was still on the wave of optimism after the fall of the communist regime. It took some years to modernise RAS enough to attract younger people. When Jerzy Gorzelik began to serve as president of the association, he was the spiritus movens of RAS, a man with charisma. As an academic, he had contact with young people and, in fact, he created a generational upheaval in RAS. From what I know from the stories, in the 1990s RAS was a group of older people, supporting the traditional Silesian identification, a conservative option which did not appeal to young people, or at least to me. This traditional Silesian identity was based on a sense of injustice. Today, RAS is completely different.' [M.K.]

Both of the above topics strengthen the sense of the uniqueness of Silesia and the exceptional nature of Silesians in relation to Poland and Poles. Regardless of which of the two themes is emphasised – harm and internal colonialism, or the great history and the rich resources of Silesia with Silesians as a unique group of people endowed with extraordinary potential [see: interview with W. G.] – Silesia is

always described in opposition to the Polish aggressor or Polish backwardness. This approach to the relationship between the distinct periphery and the dominant centre implicitly assumes conflict and imbalance, which are fuelled by successive minor slights of the central government towards the Silesians, such as – for instance – the non-participation of central authorities' leaders in celebrations of Silesian Uprisings anniversaries (Kijonka 2004). Silesia is thus denied by the central authorities and, therefore, its traditions are not fully accepted by the Polish state or integrated into the national memory and myths. It is tolerated when it fits the mainstream homogenising rhetoric and fulfils the will of the 'invaders'.

Despite official declarations about the endorsement of regionalism announced by all political factions, this contradiction between words and practice is striking.

7.2. Republic vs. Nation - what is radical about RAS?

What, then, brings together Silesian identity, RAS and its reception (i.e. the lack of acceptance by central authorities and by many ethnic Poles), and the right-wing Law and Justice? The common denominator of these three phenomena is their reference to the *nature of Polishness*.

The complex history of Silesia and its cultural heritage, and the 'core' identity of Silesians do not fit the dominant homogenising and centralistic images of the nation and the state. Silesian activists, especially, but not only, those from SONS and RAS, who aim to solidify cultural particularity and regional identity, which is different from both German and Polish traditions, are confronted with a 'black-and-white', unifying perception of the integral Polish nation.

A binary view of the social world homogenises the cultural, social and ethnic map; it also displays a tendency to categorise groups which are different from the majority, as an imagined, but politically real whole which constitutes a threat. It raises fears of those that have the potential of gaining political power and playing a role in the political arena. The idea of a unified nation, combined with the image of the omnipresent threats to its integrity, is often stimulated by the right-wing parties. Such a conceptual and political circle creates conflicts whenever a minority group demands its rights and becomes involved in politics or social affairs in a way that is different from that specified by the majority. Only those groups are tolerated, which remain silent or invisible and do not question the vision of a homogeneous cultural-political body, i.e. an integral polity and nation. In this perspective, RAS's claims threaten *the principal idea of a national community in Poland*.

This dominant idea of society is strengthened by the chase for the sensational news and accelerated by public education – official school curricula represent the national narration and are full of patriotic rhetoric. They do not reflect the growing multiculturalism and mostly ignore non-Polish perspectives on history and culture (Buchowski and Chlewińska 2011). In result, republican ideas are seen as detrimental to the cultivation of patriotism and the respect of the nation.

The active members of RAS are subject to right-wing politicians' aggressive attacks; the latter also limit the acceptance of liberal ideas and push moderate politicians to make more radical statements. In other words, nationalistically-minded politicians define the discourse and set the limits of tolerance for otherness. For them, a 'true' Pole, a very often used notion, is: a Polish national who is Roman-Catholic and uniformly traditional. (One should keep in mind that we describe popular images and we are fully aware of how multivocal these notions are.). As a RAS leader states:

'We use the law to express unpopular views and, of course, we get a scolding. RAS is the target of verbal attacks, and Jerzy Gorzelik draws most of the aggression. If you have ideas outside the mainstream politics in Poland, you still pay the price. You need to have thick skin. (...) I'm going to make a small confession: it took me some time to grow to the point where I was able to exist in the media as M.K., a member of RAS. It wasn't easy to become recognizable [M.K. is the president of the branch in Katowice]. Operating in the public space as a RAS member can result in generalised aggression – not only from 'Law and Justice's' or 'Solidary Poland's'

activists. There are some people who are not interested in politics at all, but have an anti-German attitude. They associate RAS with some form of Germanness, which is nonsense.' [M.K.]

One of the interviewees pointed out another area which is influenced by the nationwide media – Poles abroad, who often crave for their homeland, read the news and are swayed by the mainstream discourse about Polish integrity:

'My other uncle, living in Sweden, came across some news on SONS on the internet, on the 'Rzeczpospolita' web site, which is known for supporting a radical right-wing world-view – my uncle was scared by an unfavourable opinion about the association. He wrote an email in which he condemned my activity in SONS, he believed that our ancestors – Polish patriots – are 'rolling over in their graves' when looking at my actions. He asked me, if we wanted to establish a new state in Silesia. It is thus not surprising for me that people reading newspapers, with no knowledge of the Silesian reality, interpret it this way. They read the article, get frightened and then (just) react. Newspapers write that we are sponsored by Angela Merkel in order to create the next German province. I've written 15 pages in order to explain him step by step who we are'. [W.G.]

The media reinforce the negative, black-and-white picture of these minority organisations. They prey on and thrive on local conflicts. In order to attract readers, journalists radicalise the issue, give a simplified and screwed picture of the minorities' requests, and blur the significance of cultural differences. The case of Silesians and RAS shows that the public debate on cultural diversity resembles a squabble rather than a public debate.

A categorical and simplifying media coverage suits many regional politicians' views and RAS and SONS are seen by them as a threat:

'SONS is seen as another group that wants to exist politically. [There is] competition in the market. (...) Because suddenly there is something [an organization] that Silesians needed for a long time and politicians are well aware that Silesians were waiting for it, so the fear is that if we organize ourselves and begin to form a compact group, there may arise a political force that somehow curtails the electorate. And the second thing is the traditional Polish vs. German political division in the Opole Province. (...) There used to be a clear division in this province – The German minority and the rest. During political campaigns, debates usually focused either on the monuments or bilingual names. Economics, and other matters were absent. And suddenly this relative balance was shattered. I think politicians got scared that easy victories in elections are over, because Silesians appeared on the political scene and they are not easily qualified in the German-Polish division. I think it is one of the reasons of these sharp responses to what is going on.' [P.D.]

The debate is also animated by prejudices against and competition with the German minority, which is considered the most powerful and the most well-organised.

'Law and Justice's statement on Silesians was overblown by the media. Its concern was RAS's activity, because it is seen as a German-sponsored and inspired organisation, thus it is evil. Just read the internet forums of Polish Silesia or the Sovereignty Defense League. (...) It was generally favourable to us, Silesians. Silesians were mobilised by it, they felt their identity. Over the years the choice was: either you are a German, or a Pole. Now it is changing.' [W.G.]

The hostility towards RAS can overshadow the most conspicuous political divisions. In the Katowice district, there is a coalition of PiS with its traditional archenemy, the Democratic Left Alliance, which is still considered a post-communist party. Its aim is to oppose, at least according to our interlocutor M.K., RAS.

The long-term program of RAS can be summarised as follows:

'It is the desire to change the functioning of the Polish state, through greater empowerment of the regions, and the regional and local authorities, not only in Silesia, but it is a postulate which we would like to extend to other regions.(...)In order to make such changes, amendments in the Constitution are necessary. It requires a general, nationwide civic consensus. Therefore, in the next few years we aim to create a new party of regions (not to be confused with the Party of Regions created by Andrzej Lepper - I do not know if it still exists). This party would be a federation of regional parties in Poland. In this regard, we count on, for example, the Union of Wielkopolska [Great Poland or Poznań]. (...) I noticed that in other parts of Poland organisations that are inspired by us are formed. Podlasie has the Movement for Podlasie Autonomy, the Masurian Autonomy Movement²⁶. For us, the most important thing is the increase of political support and the local reception of RAS in Silesia. In the past, it was associated with local folklore, provocative actions of some kind, and the Fifth Column. Now it is different.' [M.K.]

The main source of conflict incited by RAS's activists and their increasing success and popularity is the attempt to redefine the notion of *nation*, an endeavour to shift its meaning from *ethnic* to *civic*, from *ethnos* to *demos* (Szacki 2000: 280-285).

One of the interviewees expresses it boldly:

'Therefore, it is stated in our constitution, every citizen in Poland has Polish nationality. And in the context of citizenship, we are Polish citizens. But our identity – this is something different. For me, it is similar to the Spanish example – the Spanish Constitution says that a civic nation consists of regional nations. This is an awesome solution. A federal model, respecting ethnic or regional groups with regional identity. This is a very well-weighted approach to nationality. The Polish constitution would have to be reformulated to establish a new federal state.' [W.G.]²⁷

7.3. The Silesian Autonomy Movement & Silesians in public space

According to the specificity of the Polish political scene presented above, the arrangement of local political forces results in a paradoxical marginalisation of RAS and SONS in the media – the organisations are a contentious issue engaging the majority of politicians and some citizens, but as RAS is not a significant political force nationwide and has no representation in Parliament, it is rather *being discussed than discusses with others*:

'The problem is, even if it looks nice, the members of RAS are young. This means that their spare time begins after 6 p.m., when we all finish work. It looks good, but it creates logistical problems. But we are trying to be visible, to appear in various debates as participants. However, more often we [the Silesians and RAS members] appear as a subject of the discussion, because, for example, political parties and leaders in the Parliament speak about us without our presence. (...) There is a weekly Sunday political broadcast on the Opole Radio where only the representatives of parliamentary parties can actively participate. We are never invited to this broadcast although Silesians or RAS are their main topic [of discussion] every other Sunday. So, much is said about us without us.(...) We are trying to change this situation. We do not protest, rather we comment on it – recently, we issued a statement postulating the organisation of debates with our participation. All Poles debate about Silesian nationality, but hardly ever people identifying themselves as Silesians are involved in the debate. There are

²⁶ <http://gazetaolsztynska.pl/69294,Powstal-Ruch-Autonomii-Mazur.html>

²⁷ Actually, and as mentioned above, in the preamble to the Polish Constitution, an ambiguous and compromising statement was accepted: 'We, the Polish Nation - all citizens of the Republic.'

some interesting concepts discussed, but without us. We proposed to organise a debate between scientists on the Silesian identity because there are some scholars in Warsaw, Cracow and Wrocław who have investigated the subject, and I would prefer that we talked to them rather than fight with the joint right-wing option [Law and Justice and Solidary Poland] flipping their radical interpretations and ideas about us.' [P.D.]

This marginalisation involves two levels of discussion: 1. it blocks other viewpoints in the discussion by excluding the counterarguments of those interested; 2. it exemplifies the fact that in Polish politics, those undermining the existing political order and its nationalist background (cultural hegemony) are estranged. Participants and ordinary people are concerned with political conflicts within the existing conceptual framework and they principally reject any attempts at its redefinition. RAS is a perfect object of attack for rightist supporters, but cannot appear as a real partner in discussions. Such a hostile attitude strengthens self-identification within the existing dominant order:

'The problem is this: either we have weak representatives and weak politicians, or people do not want fundamental conversations. (...) People want easy recipes.' [M.K.]

As mentioned earlier, there were attempts at a scientific reflection on the identity of Silesians and the future of RAS's aspirations, but they always triggered emotional debates, which as yet have no meaningful conclusions. The 2012 Census was the Silesians' success, though it may change the situation and force politicians and sociologists/political scientists to reconsider the issue of Silesia and Silesians.

And finally, an anecdote which illustrates the struggles of Silesians (both their methods and motivations) with the established cultural and political order.

'Last Saturday we had another happening. President Komorowski, at the opening of the spring season in the Music Academy, tossed a bon mot 'let's bury Brynica in our minds'a – Brynica is a border river between Silesia and Małopolska [Cracovia], and before WWI, it was a border between the Prussian and Russian partitions. So we decided that it was a great opportunity to organise a happening. We [the Katowice Circle of RAS] called up the guys, took the truck with debris, shovels, and organised a 'sobotnik'[a Russian term for 'voluntary work for the community on Saturdays, practiced in the communist times] – burying Brynica. Of course, we didn't actually throw the debris into the river, but it was a funny event. But Komorowski's bon mot has a curious undertone: let's bury all differences, let's all be the same [i.e. Poles, the nation].' [M.K.]

8. Conclusions

- Local elections in Silesia and wrangling in the region cause nationwide interest and a sense of an endangerment of the nation. Seen even from this point of view, such fears are unjustified, because RAS is a marginal political organisation with still little political power in Silesia. Its chances for growth in size and power are limited since 'indigenous' Silesians, or those ready to self-identify as Silesians, comprise a minority in the region. The issue of discussion over RAS and the controversies around its members' opinions signal unresolved tensions that arise in mutual relations between central authorities and local movements or even governments. The view, expressed by some politicians, that Silesians should accept general political principles and remain invisible in the public, confirm Silesians' expectations of compensation for their suffering and the restoration of the importance of their region. 'Silesian harm' and the feeling of threat coming from the Polish state – the coloniser – is not absent. Some respondents in this study and elsewhere (see: Sekuła 2009: 407) show concerns associated with the use and presentation of their opinions expressed during the interviews.

- The hardships in Silesia after WWII has not been acknowledged. It deepens the feeling of being disregarded and of a lack of respect. This contributes to the discourse of conflict between the 'gentlemen from Warsaw' and 'Silesian people.' No doubt, it negatively affects the mutual understanding and cooperation between the regional activists and central authorities.
- Due to their effectiveness, modern activity strategies applied by RAS and SONS are emulated by other political forces in the region. It may happen that the Silesians will pluralise Polish political life without necessarily achieving their own goals.
- Limiting access of minorities to public debates and restricting their political participation demonstrates a general lack of support (i.e., non-acceptance and non-recognition) of the minorities' efforts to participate in public life as equal partners (e.g., the accusation that RAS abuses preferential democratic rules designed to promote actual ethnic minorities, like the Germans).
- The situation of Silesians differs from that of the 'recognised minorities', such as, Germans or Roma. However, this argument is only partially valid, since, in fact, these official minorities also play a negligible role in political life, and they remain marginal players despite their legal recognition. The process of the formation of these minorities' organisations and the modes of their participation in the public life are subjected to negotiation, but the importance of these issues for the dominant society is limited.
- So far, there is a lack of tolerance at the state level and a partial tolerance at the local level towards the identity-based activity of Silesians and its political manifestations. But support for RAS in the region is narrow, which backs up our thesis from our previous studies (Buchowski and Chlewińska 2010; 2011), that Polish society conceives itself as a homogeneous ethnic entity, a unified and integral nation. Public discourse favours patriotic and national perspectives and there is no room for the equal participation of minorities in public life, or, at least, any leeway is constricted for them and it is defined by the dominant majority.
- Gerd Baumann (2004) distinguishes three grammars of identity. One of them is 'the grammar of encompassment', in which 'the putatively subordinate category is adopted, subsumed or co-opted into the identity (...) and owned by those who do encompassing. Encompassing is thus always hierarchical' (Baumann 2004: 26). It seems that the case of Silesians represents this kind of logic. Although they want to emancipate, they are told that they are Poles. Perhaps, it is the function of the logic of integral nationalism that strives to encompass all diversities and to subsume them to the dominant group.
- In this context the notion hierarchical pluralism also comes to mind. As Agnieszka Pasięka, who studied the religious hierarchical order in a local community in Southern Poland defines it, it is 'a configuration of social relations which allows plurality while at the same time establishing one (ethnic/religious) group as dominant and norm-defining. In other words (...), [it is] a situation in which declared equality serves to mask factual inequality' (Pasięka 2012: 25). The Polish majority not only puts itself in this position of defining the standards, but it also fiercely defends any attempts at redefining the existing power relations and hierarchy. They are closely related to the dominant cultural scheme (sort of Pierre Bourdieu's doxa) in which the majority defines the understanding of tolerance and sets the norms for what is tolerance, and last but not least, what can be tolerated.

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Anex I

List of interviewees

Interviews were recorded and transcribed in Polish.

[P.D.] – male, SONS board member, a longtime RAS activist (currently works only in SONS), runs a website selling merchandise related to Silesia, often present in the columns of newspapers and in the media [January 2012]

[W.G.] – male, young member of SONS in Opole, member of a family engaged in promoting Silesian culture [January 2012]

[M.K.] – male, chairman of RAS circle in Katowice, declared Silesian, legal education, present in the media – he is also a spokesperson of RAS in Katowice [February 2012]

[M. Kl.] – male, member of RAS circle in Katowice, declared Silesian, active participant of RAS initiatives, IT specialist [February 2012]

Anex II

Interview-guide for semi-structured interviews (list of issues)

Part A (general information)

1. Personal information – name, occupation, specificity of the connection to RAS, SONS or any other Silesian organisation, role in the organisation.
2. Personal identification.
3. Family history.
4. Motivation of organisational activity.
5. Previous experience in organisations promoting Silesian identity.
6. Personal experiences of contacts members of other organisations and minorities (mainly Germans).

7. General opinion on the situation of Silesia/Silesians in Poland.
8. General opinion about political system and Silesians' place in it.

Part B

1. General opinion about state policies on minorities.
2. Opinion on state policies and attitudes towards the Silesians and their organisations.
3. Main challenges faced by Silesians' organisations in political life.
4. Examples of good/bad practices in cooperation with local/national governments.
5. Memorable episodes, events related to work in the organisation.
6. Memorable episodes, events related to the 'camouflaged German option' controversy.
7. Main challenges in cooperation with local officials.
8. Main concerns related to the future of Silesia, Silesians and organisations promoting Silesian culture and presence in political life.
9. Diagnosis of the most pressing problems in political life in Poland.
10. Proposals of solutions to the most severe problems.
11. General opinion on tolerance towards minorities in Poland.
12. General opinion on tolerance towards Silesians and their place in Polish political/legal system.
13. Personal meaning of the term 'tolerance' and opinion on the limits of tolerance towards minorities/Silesians in Poland.

