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Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and Its Limitations

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Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and Its Limitations

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Diversity in Europe**

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Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe (ACCEPT PLURALISM)

ACCEPT PLURALISM is a Research Project, funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Program. The project investigates whether European societies have become more or less tolerant during the past 20 years. In particular, the project aims to clarify: (a) how is tolerance defined conceptually, (b) how it is codified in norms, institutional arrangements, public policies and social practices, (c) how tolerance can be measured (whose tolerance, who is tolerated, and what if degrees of tolerance vary with reference to different minority groups). The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium conducts original empirical research on key issues in school life and in politics that thematise different understandings and practices of tolerance. Bringing together empirical and theoretical findings, ACCEPT PLURALISM generates a State of the Art Report on Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Handbook on Ideas of Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Tolerance Indicators' Toolkit where qualitative and quantitative indicators may be used to score each country's performance on tolerating cultural diversity, and several academic publications (books, journal articles) on Tolerance, Pluralism and Cultural Diversity in Europe. The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium is formed by 18 partner institutions covering 15 EU countries. The project is hosted by the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and co-ordinated by Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou.

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Keywords	8
Introduction	9
Chapter 1. Discourses of Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Poland	10
National identity and state formation	11
Main cultural diversity challenges in Poland	15
Definitions of tolerance/acceptance in Poland	28
Tolerance as public policy.....	29
Tolerance as a value	30
Tolerance as a practice	31
Concluding Remarks	32
Chapter 2. Polish School in Need for Tolerance	34
School diversity in Poland	37
Changes in education after 1989	38
Methodology	39
Case Study1: The Ups and Downs of the Education of Roma	41
Schooling Roma in Poznań	44
Main Challenges for Teachers and School Managers	46
Conclusions	50
Cross and Religion in Polish Schools	51
Religion in Public Schools	53
Crosses/Religious Symbols in Schools	56
Conclusions	58
Concluding Remarks	60
Chapter 3. Political Tolerance in Poland: the Case of Silesian Autonomy Movement	62
Minorities in Polish society. A historical perspective	63
Methodology	70
Silesian Autonomy – the political challenge	71
The Silesians as the ‘camouflaged German option’	74
The Association of People of Silesian Nationality	75
Thematic analysis	78
Silesian identity in dispute	78
Republic vs. Nation	81
RAS & Silesians in public space.....	83
Concluding notes	84
Conclusion	86
Main findings	86
Discourses and practices of tolerance in Poland.....	86
<i>School life challenges</i>	87
<i>Silesian minority</i>	87
Theoretic implications of the studies	88
References:	93

Executive Summary

The following report analyses the issues of the tolerance, intolerance, acceptance and recognition of cultural diversity and pluralism in Poland – a linguistically, religiously and ‘culturally’ homogenous country with, by western European standards, a relatively minor immigrant population as well as very limited ethnic and cultural minority populations.

The Polish understanding of multiculturalism differs significantly from that in other European countries, as it is mainly based on historical memory, referring to the ‘golden period’ of the political life of the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania in the 16th and 17th centuries, in which various religious, ethnic and linguistic groups resided. Undertakings supporting cultural diversity in contemporary Polish society, are based mainly on the popularisation of folkloristic events and the celebration of ‘exotic’ cultural attractions (e.g. festivals of folk music and cuisine) (cf. Bieniecki 2004). Such a ‘folkloristic’ understanding of multiculturalism does not stimulate any/a serious discussion on the existing marginalisation of ethnic and religious minorities in the public space. Their statistical marginality – slowly increasing due to immigration and the ‘ethnic awakening’ of such groups as the Silesians – functions as an (subliminal) excuse for ignorance in this respect.

The report consists of three chapters and conclusion outlining the main theoretical implications of the conducted research.

Chapter 1. Tolerance and Diversity Discourses

Chapter One/The first chapter explores selected ethnic and religious minorities in Poland and the attitude of the majority of the Polish society towards immigrants. The first part focuses on the process of the formation of Polish national identity, and the main cultural diversity challenges in the last two decades, while the second part aims at outlining the general approach of Poles towards these minorities, based on two selected examples – Tatars and Roma. It also examines the common understanding of the concept of tolerance, cultural diversity, and the way that multiculturalism should be implemented in practice.

The historical Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania, which existed between 1385 and 1795. was in itself diverse linguistically, ethnically and religiously, and it also welcomed various ethnic and religious minorities. When the republic was reborn after WWI in 1928, after 123 years of partitions, religious and ethnic minorities still comprised almost one third of the population. Only after WWII, due to the Holocaust, border changes, and ‘population exchanges’ with the defeated Germany and victorious Soviet Union, the country was made practically homogenous ethnically (Poles) and religiously (Roman-Catholics). Post-war history was marked by homogenising attempts accepted by the majority of the dominant population.

The last thirty years may be divided into three periods: (the continuation of) the systematically liberalised communist rule, democratic change from 1989 until Poland's/the EU accession in May 2004, and the years following the accession, especially the period after 5 January 2005, when a new law on national, ethnic and linguistic minorities was accepted and put into practice.

In the process of the post-1989 democratic changes minorities were given the right/allowed to form associations and express their opinions. Besides the internal will to democratise the political order, integration with the EU and its institutions also pushed policy makers to accept liberal laws concerning religious freedoms, as well as ethnic and national minorities. Nevertheless, it does not mean that liberal and tolerant practices have been accepted by the society as a whole, and integrated into daily practices.

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

Political liberalisation has prompted the ‘coming out’ of minorities. Before the National Census of 2002, experts estimated that the total number of indigenous ethnic minorities in Poland amounted to between 2% and 4% of the total population. However, in the Census of 2002 only 471 500 (1.23%) of the respondents declared an ethnicity other than Polish (GUS 2002). The low numbers were interpreted as a communist heritage of the people who still feared to show their ethnic identity in a mono-ethnic state, as an attempt to reinforce a sense of marginality of all matters relating to the functioning of minorities in society shared by the majority of Poles. According to the definition introduced in the above mentioned *Act of 2005*, there are nine national minorities recognised in Poland, and in 2002 their numbers were as follows: Belarusians (48 000), Czechs (386), Lithuanians (5 846), Germans (152 897), Armenians (1 082), Russians (6 103), Slovaks (2 001), Ukrainians (30 957) and Jews (1 133). Polish law also acknowledges four ethnic minorities substantiated historically: Roma (12 855), Tatars (495), Lemkos (5 863) and Karaims (43). A special category of ‘regional languages’ was added, and one such linguistic minority is recognized, i.e. Kashubians (5 063). Other ‘non-historical’ minorities are barely mentioned as present, but they are treated as immigrants. Silesians, who are discussed below, are not recognised by the Polish state as an ethnic or national minority, while de facto, the number of declared Silesians is the highest of all minorities all the declared 1 (173 000 people). These numbers have changed by 2012 (see pp. 67-68). One should keep in mind that the methodology of collecting data has changed allowing people to declare more than one national or ethnic identity.

Immigrants in Poland constitute less than 1% of the total population (app. 380 000 people). The phenomenon of immigration is relatively new and complex for a country which, since the nineteenth century, has been sending migrants abroad rather than accepting them (the population movements between 1939 and 1949 that involved several million people living on both interwar and post-war Polish territories constitute a different migration category than the ones considered here). Also, today more Poles emigrate than foreigners settle in Poland, but the number of persons who treat Poland as a transit country has increased significantly in the last two decades. The presence of foreigners, the majority of whom come from the former Soviet Union, constitutes a new challenge, but also a complex dilemma for policymakers, and Poles in terms of their attitudes towards migrants. Three out of four immigrants choose cities for their place of residence, especially big cities and the capital. The percentage of long-term immigrants is still low, and it is rather difficult to settle in Poland, despite their being legal regulations similar to those in other EU countries. Illegal immigrants have problems with their integration in many spheres of life, including the job market, education and health system.

The Roma and Muslims were the groups chosen for this study because of their lifestyle and religion, which are visibly different from those of mainstream Polish society. The first have for ages been stereotypically perceived as social outcasts and have been discriminated against; the latter have recently re-appeared in public discourses as an ‘Islamic threat’. These cases vividly illustrate the key features of the discourse on religious and ethnic diversity and the practices designed to deal with the diversity that are slowly re-entering Poland after a fifty-year absence.

Roma are a recognised ethnic minority, which had experienced violent assimilationist policies of the communist state in the post-war period and which remains the most socially marginalised minority (group) in Poland. It persists despite attempts aimed at its integration into Polish society, especially with respect to the education of Romani children and it is trying to fight with the negative image of the group held by the dominant society (Talewicz-Kwiatkowska 2010). However, conflicts that occur in local communities where Roma live, indicate the ineffectiveness of the attempts aimed at their integration, and show that the attitude of Poles towards the Roma remains largely negative. The reasons for the ‘othering’ of the Roma are a mixture of their racial (darker skin) difference and cultural distance. They form a basis for the constant recreation of stereotypes about ‘Gypsies’, their supposed laziness, isolationism, untidiness, disorder and demanding attitude. These images, combined with

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

group endogamy which they practice, create a lack of acceptance by the majority (Nowicka 1999).

Another example of diversity challenge is the Muslim community in Poland. Muslims face discrimination on the grounds of xenophobia, which may be called 'phantom islamophobia' (Włoch 2009). In Poland, there are very few Jews and Muslims, yet they function as groups that threaten national and religious interests or the nation's integrity. Despite of their very small population (app. 30 000 people), Muslims serve as an example of a group raising high social fear and concern, endowed with a strong negative stereotype comparable to the prejudices against the Roma, and arising from assumed unbridgeable differences in religion, basic values, and lifestyle, which are also perceived as an insurmountable obstacles on the way to integration. The Muslims coming to Poland in the last three decades are contrasted with the Tatars, i.e. Muslims that have been living on Polish territories for centuries. The latter are seen as familiar because of the common cultural practices they share with Poles. Their history *illustrates the way in which the acceptance of an ethnic and/or religious minority can be attained; it is based on partial assimilation and modesty in declarations or practices, as well as 'refraining from radical otherness' in the public sphere.*

The discourse on tolerance in a modern sense of the word is relatively recent in Poland. As such, it is virtually absent from mainstream education, and seen as redundant from the point of view of the majority. One can associate its potential growth in importance for the ordinary people and policy makers only to the growing immigration levels and the expanding activism of other social minorities, such as sexual minorities, or physically challenged people. Religious, cultural, ethnic and linguistic minorities' rights in the fields of education and the cultivation of culture do not raise objections. In this respect, attitudes are tolerant and can probably be linked to the long-lasting 'folklorisation' of diversity, and be partly congruent with multiculturalist ideas. Problems appear when state or EU funding for cultural activities comes into play and when the issues of bilingualism in regions populated by minorities (e.g. towns- or street names), political representation, and commemorations of historical events in the public come into question. *Poles eagerly accept 'strangeness' and 'otherness', provided that it is practised in the private sphere or as an exotic custom, i.e. it implies activities that do not interfere with their image of the world and do not jeopardise the idea of a homogenous community and a sense of security based on cultural familiarity.*

The level of respect for the rights of minorities is improving as the legal standards are becoming increasingly congruent with both the social reality and international instruments for equality and anti-discrimination. Despite these improvements, data on insufficient state action in many areas concerning support granted to culturally distinct groups appears repeatedly, particularly in relation to immigrants. Public opinion polls indicate that the reluctance of Poles towards people of different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds residing in Poland is slowly decreasing, which can be seen/treated as one of the indicators of the growing *tolerance of cultural diversity in Poland*. This is of great importance in the face of the influx of immigrants from Asia and Africa to Eastern Europe.

Chapter 2. Tolerance in Polish Schools: Roma Children and Ethics Classes

The second chapter presents selected issues related to the practical application of the idea of tolerance to cultural diversity, as well as to worldview pluralism in Polish public schools. The chosen case studies were the education of Roma in one of the Polish cities and the controversies around organising classes on ethics as an alternative educational offer to religion classes and the presence of crosses in schoolrooms. Together they show the attitude of various actors in the education system to the slowly but steadily growing multiculturalism of the society in Poland, and to the increasing plurality of worldviews shared by various groups and individuals.

Official data indicate that there are only up to four thousand foreign students attending Polish public schools – a drop in the ocean of five million pupils (Szelewa 2010). Many children coming from minority, immigrant and foreign families still remain unregistered. The public opinion is not really

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

interested in the issue, which is perceived as *marginal and unimportant*. Only conflicts concerning the implementation of multicultural education, which surface now and again, attract media attention.

The Polish educational system has constantly been reformed and adjusted to the changing social and political situation (the collapse of communism, EU integration, global educational challenges), but little attention is paid to teaching multiculturalism, securing curricula adjusted to ethno-cultural diversity, or implementing an alternative to training in religion, i.e. classes in ethics. These shortcomings are probably part and parcel of the Polish school system's structural problems and are at least partly related to the underfunding of this sector.

The education of Roma is a permanently unresolved problem that Polish authorities cannot effectively tackle. Various efforts to increase Roma participation in education have either failed, or raised the principal objection, i.e. the ghettoization of this minority's children. The initiative undertaken in Poznań, described in the chapter on diversity challenges in school life, is an attempt to make a breakthrough that is free of bureaucratic restraints and takes local circumstances into account. With the support of local educational authorities, school headmasters, teachers and Roma minority activists, the schools ran by the 'Bahtafe Roma' Foundation have attracted quite a few Roma children. The Foundation's activities' results are much more promising than those of the centrally administered 'Programme for Roma minority'. The latter was initially tested and implemented in southern Poland where Roma compose whole communities, but proved to be inapplicable to the Poznań region, where much fewer Roma families live. Rigid educational standards combined with a policy which is unattractive to the Roma has resulted in a high level of school absenteeism among them (Głowacka-Grajper 2006).

The programmes for increasing Roma participation in education which were designed for Roma communities in southern Poland and implemented by the central authorities, have proven inadequate in regions and cities with a dispersed Roma population, such as Poznań. Simultaneously, most of the interviewed educators do not see any particular reasons to apply special methods of teaching or implement extraordinary means to encourage Roma children to attend school. The prevailing view is that equal rights and duties apply to all and that a unified policy in the national state should be executed. Only few see the necessity to adjust the educational curricula to Romani culture. However, even in such cases respect for Roma culture is not shown. The recognition of otherness is possible only when it is excluded a priori from the established mainstream with its entrenched patterns of values and attitudes. Other cultures that are present in Poland are perceived as a colourful supplement to the 'transparent' and 'normal' Polish culture. Also, some Roma associations tend to see folkloristic activity as the main objective of their existence and prefer not to interact with the educational authorities. The Bahtafe Roma Foundation, discussed below in more detail, goes beyond this pattern. Working in Poznań and its vicinity, the Foundation's activists have implemented an innovative project which is adjusted to the local circumstances. Roma students are offered classes which are adapted to their cultural needs, and are held in a school organised especially for them. However, this experiment also raises fears of the ghettoization of Romani children.

The second case addresses a complex issue of the organisation of ethics classes that are meant to be an alternative to religion classes commonly held in public schools, as well as the presence of religious symbols (crosses) in schoolrooms. As long as cultural diversity is recognised in Polish schools, although not necessarily actively supported or venerated, worldview pluralism is in fact ignored and dismissed. The undisputed domination of Roman-Catholicism and its transparent omnipresence allows educators and administrators to find easy excuses for not arranging classes in ethics. Students show passivity in this respect. Their disinterest is paired with a special sort of cunningness. Very good and excellent marks in religion help to raise the grade point average in the final certificate. They also show conformism towards their parents' expectations and cultural traditions.

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

The lack of tolerance towards worldview pluralism in Polish schools is widespread. The commonly accepted, or at least commonly followed cultural order in which Roman-Catholicism assumes a dominant position, fosters intolerance towards those who undermine it. The few individual endeavours to challenge the 'natural' presence of religious symbols in schools are quelled, and the demands of securing teaching in ethics as a substitute of religion lessons are ridiculed or simply ignored. Even the decision of the European Court in Strasbourg which was in favour of a person asking for this constitutional right, has not changed the situation (see: Sentence of the ECHR on Grzelak vs. Poland).

Although the proportion/number of people questioning the presence of religion in public education is slowly growing, there is no momentum for forming any social movement that would defend the worldview neutrality of the state. Incidents of protest can trigger public debates in which various views are articulated, but these discussions are short-lived. The defenders of the existing state of affairs immediately refer to the moral values of religious teaching and get the upper hand in these disputes. The Polish model of religiosity, which is strongly embedded in Polish culture, entails nearly universal participation in religious rites of passage (baptism, first communion, confirmation, church wedding, funeral). In order to partake in these rituals, individuals have to undergo/take up and successfully pass religious training. Thus, to a certain extent, tradition makes students attend these classes, which by political decision are held in public schools. In result, crosses hang on the walls of classrooms, a vast majority of schoolchildren participate in religious training, and the disgruntled persons stay silent.

Chapter 3. Tolerance in Political Life in Poland

The third chapter presents the case of the Silesian Autonomy Movement (*Ruch Autonomii Śląska*, hereafter RAS), its participation in political life at a regional level, and its 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 was a tool used for discrediting PO. *The Report...* accuses the ruling party of a lack of patriotism and 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 the view that 'Silesianness' (Silesian identity) is a 'camouflaged German option', i.e. connecting Silesian organisations promoting the 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', and Silesians' national existence, rights and identity. Many people in the region have apparently re-invented themselves as members of the 'Silesian nation'.

The latest Census (carried out in 2011) confirmed the fact that Poland is, at least in comparison to many other European states, ethnically *homogenous*, with over 91% of the population declaring Polish national identity (36 007 000). The most numerous minority identities are (the numbers represent the sum of those who declared a given identity as a single one, or as one of more than one): Silesian (809 000), Kashubian (212 000) and German (109 000) (GUS 2012). These results confirmed previous

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

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, and 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 are trying to manipulate both history and people. They are presented as posing a threat to a homogeneous society.

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. However, 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 the 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. Since the emergence of the regional coalition in Silesia with RAS in it, attacks on RAS and its alleged *separatist* policy, or of accusations of *treason* of vaguely understood 'Polishness' has become a common theme in regional and countrywide media.

The Silesians' case shows how the opportunities offered as a result Poland's participation in the structures of the EU 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 the 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 their 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 case study also raises the 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 discussions around RAS have been selected because of the potential power of the 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 the right-wing circles' accusations of damage incurred to the Polish state, shift the discussion from arguments about the representation of Silesians to ones about the challenging of their right to exercise regional identity.

Keywords

Poland, multiculturalism, discourses of tolerance, tolerance, intolerance, gritted teeth tolerance,

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

education of Roma children, minority rights, Silesian Autonomy Movement, RAS, Silesians, religion classes, Polish education, crosses in classrooms

Introduction

This report offers a comprehensive presentation of research on tolerance discourses and practices in Poland, which was conducted between 2010 and 2012 within the Accept Pluralism project framework. The report *Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and Its Limitations* is an overview of the case studies and the resulting theoretical implications, which raise awareness about issues such as pluralism, cultural diversity and liberal tolerance in the context of a state with a relatively short tradition of democracy and membership in the European community.

This report consists of three parts, describing particular case studies (1. *Tolerance and Cultural Diversity Discourses in Poland*, 2. *Tolerance of Diversity in Polish Schools: the Case of Roma Children and Ethics Classes*, 3. *Do Silesians Exist and Can Silesia be Autonomous? Limits of Ethno-Political Tolerance in Poland*) and a conclusion outlining the main discourses and practices of the tolerance/ intolerance of diversity in Poland (the three-fold concept of non-toleration, toleration and acceptance/recognition/admission; see: Dobbernack & Modood 2011). All chapters are based on the analysis of scientific literature, policy documents, reports and expert documents on minorities in Poland, articles in newspapers, Internet publications, and qualitative interviews conducted for the purpose of the study (Ch. 2 and 3).

The starting point for the analysis of cultural diversity in Poland and the minorities' presence in public life should be an outline of the demographic and social realities of cultural diversity in Poland – people declaring cultural, religious, linguistic or ethnic affiliation other than Polish and Roman Catholic represent a small percentage of the population. As a result, the issue of cultural diversity has only recently entered public discourses and, *eo ipso*, social consciousness. In some respects it takes a different shape from the well-established discourses known in western Europe, or countries with larger minorities in central Europe. There are hardly any 'Muslim issues'; rare controversies concerning anti-Semitism or racism provoke heated public debates, but these debates are not very common and fade away quickly/easily/are quickly forgotten. Therefore, in Poland tolerance as a discourse, practice, policy and value has only begun to take shape, and is expressed in a specific way.

Another significant difference is the tension between the national and republican visions of public space in Poland, or, in other terms, the oscillation between *ethnos* and *demos* (Szacki 2000).

The Polish Constitution is a compromise between the advocates of the ethnic and civil concepts of the nation (Brier 2006). It grants the equality of all citizens. However, the Polish nation functions as a

non-marked category in relation to which others, i.e. non-Poles are presented as a supplementary category. Contrary to most Polish scholars (cf. Łodziński 2010), we call this kind of arrangement, which introduces inequality between people, ‘constitutional nationalism’. The *titular nation and its collective rights as well as the dominant world view holders are given precedence over other citizens*. This Herderian heritage is prevalent in the whole region and Poland is not unique in this respect (cf. Buchowski 2008). By analogy we can also call this arrangement ‘constitutional monotheism’ (implicitly: ‘Christianity / Catholicism’).

Debates on the ‘otherness’ in Poland reveal that politicians perceive unified national identity as a founding stone of the Polish state/as fundamental to the Polish state fundament of the Polish state (Trapani 2009). Minorities’ claims aimed at strengthening their presence are often viewed as endangering this integrity. This implies the dismissal of many claims and a sort of soft discriminatory policy. The Preamble to the Constitution makes this attitude visible. Its message is clear: ‘we are at home’, and ‘*you are welcomed, but do not demand too much*’. Polish identity refers to the ethnic concept of a nation and cultural practices are considered Polish, provided that they can be legitimised as such. This means that the discourse on national identity is invariably based on cultural differences (Mach 2010). Having *Polish citizenship is insignificant in the identification of individuals as ‘us’, because cultural closeness decides about social inclusion*.

Chapter 1. Discourses of Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Poland

Poland is one of the less diversified societies on the globe. Walter Connor reported that in 1971 that among 138 countries taken into account only 12, i.e. 9.1 per cent could be considered ‘national’, Poland included (1994: 96). The historical Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania (14th to 18th centuries) was in itself diverse linguistically, ethnically and religiously, and it also welcomed various ethnic and religious minorities. In this respect, it was a very tolerant regime in a sea of mostly intolerant European countries (e.g., already in the 13th century Polish kings allowed Jews, who were expelled from western countries, to settle and practice their faith). One could say that at that time it represented a case of an ‘imperial regime of tolerance’ (Walzer 1999), in which various self-governed collectives were allowed to observe their religious practices, provided they did not proselytise (similarly to *millets* in the Ottoman Empire). Still, when the republic was reborn after WWI, religious and ethnic minorities comprised almost one third of the population. Only after WWII, due to the Holocaust, border changes, and ‘population exchanges’ with the defeated Germany and victorious Soviet Union, the country was made practically homogenous ethnically (Poles) and religiously (Roman-Catholics). Actually, having a homogenous population was an official aim of the communist authorities and it was exercised throughout their reign.

The last thirty years may be divided into three periods: the continuation of the systematically liberalized communist rule, democratic change after 1989 till the EU accession in May 2004, and the last five years, as soon after Poland's accession to the EU a new law on national, ethnic and linguistic minorities was accepted and put into practice. Although, the 1952 Communist constitution granted non-discrimination, ‘nationalities’ (not ‘ethnic minorities’) were barely mentioned in it (Łodziński 2010: 21). In practice, minorities could barely cultivate their traditions through the channels of state-controlled ‘cultural associations’. Ethnic issues perceived as threatening to the state interest were downplayed and hidden from the public. ‘Solidarity’ was concerned with economic and political problems and the issues of minorities were raised only incidentally. In the process of post-1989 democratic changes minorities were allowed to form associations and express their opinions. Besides the internal will to democratise the political order, integration with the EU and its institutions also pushed policy makers to accept liberal laws concerning religious freedoms as well as ethnic and

national minorities.

Polish *multiculturalism* is different from that of multiethnic or immigrant societies, such as Switzerland or the UK. Although lip service is paid to multicultural traditions, it is seen as a historical phenomenon. For instance, 'multicultural' festivals are organised in big cities, small towns and in borderland regions (cf. Bieniecki 2004), but virtually all of them refer to past 'multiethnic' or religiously diversified life. Multiculturalism is also mentioned in the media and some official statements. *Tolerance* is evoked as an old Polish historical tradition. Today, 'tolerance and multiculturalism' serve rather as a myth that legitimises current politics than actual administrative and political practice. But this ethnic homogenisation of the society makes issues of the acceptance of, and tolerance toward 'others' even more urgent, e.g. with respect to how, in such an ethnically uniform society, ethnic and religious minorities perceived as marginal are treated. Simultaneously, the growing standard of living and membership in the EU makes Poland more attractive for immigrants from the so called third countries. This gives an opportunity to observe reactions to these 'growing social problems', as they are often bluntly described, and to interpret them in terms of 'a culture of tolerance'.

This chapter on the one hand gives basic data about the national, ethnic and religious minorities in Poland in a historical perspective, as well as basic information about increasing migration. On the other hand, it describes some legal regulations regarding ethnic and religious minorities. These rules meet European Union and other international standards, but also bear traces of a local political thought which reflects the state of mind of the political elites, usually legitimized by historical and cultural circumstances.

National identity and state formation

The Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania (15th-18th centuries) was a noble's democracy. The nobility (*szlachta*) had many privileges similar to modern democracies. The political system entailed, among others, free election of the king by all nobles wishing to participate; sessions of the parliament, *Sejm*, held at least every other year; *pacta conventa*, agreements bargained with the king-elect; the right of insurrection against a king who violated liberties; *liberum veto*, a right of the local councils' *sejmiks*' representatives to oppose any new law accepted; and *confederation* – the right to organise rebellion through a collective political purpose.

The system granted a federative character of the Commonwealth with a great autonomy of the regions and political rights to *szlachta* that comprised 10% of the population. (In 1831 in France only 1% of the population had voting rights, and in 1867 in the United Kingdom – 3%.) All *szlachta* had equal rights, could not be arrested without court sentence, etc. The Commonwealth was called *paradiso hereticorum*. Already in 1264, the General Charter of Jewish Liberties guaranteed safety, personal liberties, freedom of religion, trade and travel to Jews in Poland, exclusive jurisdiction over Jewish matters to Jewish judges, and it also instituted a special court for settling conflicts between Jews and Christians.

This act encouraged Jews to settle in Polin, a historical homeland of three quarters of today's world Jewry. Another act is known as the Warsaw Confederation, in which delegates of various denominations guaranteed tolerance and reciprocal cooperation. It confirmed that people of various ethnic backgrounds (Poles, Lithuanians, Ruthenians, Germans, Tatars, Vlachs, Scots, Dutch, etc.) and ethnic denominations (Roman-Catholic, Jewish, various Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, Greco-Catholic [Uniates] and Muslim) lived together.

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

This law expressed the noble's will to avoid religious conflicts such as the Thirty Years War in Europe. In result, the country's peaceful religious life was something exceptional. The Commonwealth became a place where even extreme religious groups like the Mennonites, Moravians and Arians found refuge (cf. Davies 1982, I). These historical traditions are evoked in discourses on tolerance today. For some, this supposedly makes Poland a naturally tolerant country.

The nobility described itself as a 'nation' that was 'racially' different from burghers, Jews and peasants (cf. Hertz 1988). Nevertheless, this noble's notion of nation gave rise to its more modern concept. According to Andrzej Walicki (1994), before the three consequent partitions of the country in 1772, 1793 and 1795, the Commonwealth's society was on the way to a civic form of nationalism, similar to the French model. Enlightenment intellectuals explicitly advocated Polish citizenship, regardless of language, religion or class origin. The 'polonisation' of elites was also a spontaneous process that lasted for centuries. It is best illustrated by the first words of the national Polish epos from the beginning of the 19th century, *Pan Thaddues*, written in Polish by Adam Mickiewicz (himself born to a petite noble family, but whose mother came from a converted Jewish family, in Nowogródek, then Lithuania, now Belarus): "Lithuania, my homeland..."

The interruption of state existence, the rise of ethnic nationalism in (Central) Europe, and the nationalising policies of Prussia and Russia all caused the transformation of Polish nationalism from civic to ethnic. In the second part of the 19th century the issue of class composition of a nation understood in terms of ethnicity became urgent, especially that peasants did not always sympathise with the subsequent noble's uprisings. The task of intellectuals was to get the peasantry involved in the national cause (cf. Stauter-Halstead 2001), nation being defined ethnically. This is why the concept of a state of three major autonomous groups (Poles, Ukrainians and Belarussians) advocated by fighter for sovereignty, Marshall Józef Piłsudski, failed and the nationalist idea of Roman Dmowski took an upper hand after WWI.

After regaining independence in 1918 the country was designed as a democratic republic in which all citizens were equal under law, independently of religious, class or ethnic affiliation. The Wilsonian plan of building a nation state securing minority rights was accepted, but not really implemented. In the interwar nationalist milieu, Polish authorities carried out a nationalizing policy. The Nazi Germany invasion on September 1, 1939, motivated by racial-nationalist concepts, exacerbated chauvinistic feelings also in the oppressed populations. Post-WWII communist authorities embraced nationalist ideology and opted for an ethnically homogenous state-model. In the former German territories, which were a partial compensation for the territorial loss to the Soviet Union, Germans were expelled and Poles replaced them. After the Potsdam agreement, 3.2 million Germans were driven out of the new Polish territories (Sakson 2010: 11).

Processes of de-germanisation and re-polonisation were carried out in the second half of the 1940s (Kulczycki 2001; Linek 2001). According to some estimations, ca. 2 million 'autochthons' were 'rehabilitated and 'incarcerated' in Poland (Kamusella 2003: 18). Ukrainian military resistance in south-eastern Poland (1945-47) was suppressed and led to the eviction of ca. 100 000 Ukrainians and Lemkos (an ethnic minority, mostly Orthodox) from regions on the border with Ukraine and Slovakia, and their dispersion across Poland, especially in the former German territories (cf. Hann 1996).

The model of a monolithic ethnic state was supported by Poles who experienced German persecutions and were convinced that ethno-religious uniformity secures peace. In the 1947 referendum (even though carried out in the atmosphere of fear), virtually all political forces, (Kersten 1989: 462) opted for the acquisition of German lands. As Krystyna Kersten summarizes: "War, by sharpening and

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

drawing out national divisions, shaped a specifically Polish national consciousness. In a situation of danger, the nation emerged as a dominant category and major subject of actions... [N]ational divisions and distinctions that partly resulted from self-identification, but mostly imposed from the outside, above all by Germans, instead of disappearing after the war, had been strengthened” (1993: 11).

The consolidation of power by the communists enabled them to launch a formally tolerant policy towards nearly non-existent national minorities; this course of action, despite fluctuating periods of tightening and loosening of the policy¹, was exercised for the next four decades. Ethnic and religious minorities were recognised and had their cultural associations. However, the state presented itself as an ideological, social and cultural monolith. Individual freedoms were granted in the constitution passed in 1952, but minorities could barely cultivate their traditions through the channels of cultural associations controlled by the state.

State sponsored and organised ‘multiculturalism’ can be described as ‘folklorist’. Any serious ethnic issues, perceived as threatening to the state’s interest, e.g. the existence of the German minority and the waves of migration to Western Germany (1945-8, 1956, 1970s, 1980s), were concealed, and problems were only incidentally made known to the public – usually when a group was blamed by propaganda for some wrongdoings.

In this period of ‘normalisation’ authorities started to ‘solve’ the Gypsy issue. A paternalistic and assimilationist decree from 1952 as well as an oppressive policy between 1960 and 1964 obliged them to stop nomadism and to have a job (unemployment was not tolerated under communism and the jobless were called “blue birds”). The Roma had to convert from an unproductive ‘waste’ to a ‘productive force’ (Mirga 1998: 125-140; Bartosz 1994). This regulation found full support of the population, who considered the Roma people parasites.

In 1968, the communists launched an anti-Semitic campaign. 300 000 Jews had survived the Holocaust, and many of them left Poland later, especially frightened by the pogrom in Kielce in 1946 (Nowak-Małolepsza 2010: 215). Internal Party struggles, anti-Israeli politics of the Soviet Union and students’ protests incited the anti-Zionist campaign and the cleansing of Jews from top ranks in the state apparatus and higher education. This operation was based on anti-Semitic sentiments and it received partial support of the population. It drove ca. fifteen thousand Polish Jews and their in-laws out of the country, many of them top intellectuals (cf. Eisler 2006). Today, no more than 10 000 Jews live in Poland.

The ‘Solidarity’ movement of 1980-81 was concerned above all with the liberalisation of the system and economic issues (the first goal was partly fulfilled by the radio broadcasting of a Catholic Sunday Mass was in fact the only promise in the agreement between the protesting workers and the authorities from August 1980 that the communist kept after crushing the movement till the end of their rule in 1989) and the question of minority rights was not really raised by it (Szczepański 2008). Poland entered the 1990s as a country homogenised ethnically and religiously with minority issues barely existent due to their size and the communists’ tactics of sweeping most problems under the carpet and playing the ethnic card only in order to stir hatred that served their own political purposes. Minorities were hardly perceptible in everyday life.

¹ Sławomir Łodziński distinguishes five such periods: 1) verification of nationalities (1945-47); 2) gradual recognition of some minorities (1948-55); 3) emigration of Germans and improvement of relations between the State and minorities (1956-1968); 4) anti-Semitic campaign in 1968 followed by the policy of ‘moral-political unity of the Polish nation’ (1968-1980); 5) period of intensified minorities’ activity initiated by ‘Solidarity’ and relaxation of the authorities’ attitude towards them (2010: 18-20).

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

In the process of democratic change they were allowed to form associations and express their opinions. The 1991 Treaty with Germany gave political rights to Germans who have self-organised in various associations, membership in which had risen to hundreds of thousands (it is estimated between one to three hundred thousand). Moreover, this minority, thanks to a special election law, has since then had representatives in the parliament. Besides, the will to democratise the political order after decades of authoritarianism as well as the integration of the country with EU institutions has encouraged the acceptance of liberal laws concerning the freedoms of religious and ethnic minorities.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church had emerged from the communist era as a chaperon of the nation's interest. Persecuted in the 1950s and 1960s, it assumed the role of the nation's representative before the authorities in the 1970s and 1980s. The Church facilitated the Round Table talks in 1989 which led to the first semi-free elections, which in turn sparked the democratisation of Eastern Europe. Empowered, the episcopate bargained for privileges. Today, for instance, the state supports religious education in public schools for those who wish to attend – in practice, due to social pressure, virtually all. The Church has also become a beneficiary of property restitution which was not granted to most other groups. It also engaged in discussions about the new constitution of the state. The Basic Law accepted in 1997 aptly epitomises the legal order of the state and a nuanced nature of the 'Polish state of the mind' pertinent for tolerance.

The preamble to the Constitution also states the following:

Having regard for the existence and future of our Homeland,
Which recovered, in 1989, the possibility of a sovereign and democratic determination of its fate,
We, the Polish Nation – all citizens of the Republic,
Both those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, good and beauty,
As well as those not sharing such faith but respecting those universal values as arising from other sources,
Equal in rights and obligations towards the common good – Poland...

The Constitution is a compromise between the advocates of the ethnic and the civil concepts of the nation (Zubrzycki 2001; Brier 2006). In that sense, we are back at a discussion between the 'French' and 'German' models. The last sentence cited grants the equality of all citizens. However, the Polish nation and believers in god function as a non-marked category in relation to which others, i.e. non-Poles and non-believers, are presented as a supplementary category. After Robert Hayden (2001: 15), and contrary to most Polish scholars (cf. Łodziński 2010: 27), we call this kind of arrangement which introduces inequality between people 'constitutional nationalism'. The titular nation and its collective rights as well as dominant world view holders are given precedence over other citizens. This Herderian heritage is prevalent in the whole region and Poland is not unique in this respect (cf. Buchowski 2008: 32-35). By analogy we can also call this arrangement 'constitutional monotheism' (implicitly: 'Christianity / Catholicism').

The special treatment of Poles living abroad, which is secured by the so-called 'Polish card', similar to the Hungarian one, proves how significant *ius sanguinis* remains. Recently, a public initiative aimed at the facilitation of the 'repatriation' of Poles from the former Soviet Union and signed by 215 thousands persons, was submitted to the parliament². The existing constitutional solution should be

² <http://www.repatriacja.org.pl/>

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

seen as an expression of a nationalistically-minded population that had to meet the liberal standards of European democracies.

Integration with the EU has intensified two contradictory discourses: 1) Europe as a chance for modernisation and pluralisation of the nation, and 2) European integration as a threat to the national and moral integrity of the nation.

All discussions about tolerance in contemporary Poland seem to revolve around the issue of who is the real host and who is the tolerated minority or migrant in the country of the Polish nation, and the slogan Poland for Poles, used by extremist nationalists is not that unpopular.

Main cultural diversity challenges in Poland

As mentioned above, interwar Poland was a multiethnic state. According to the 1931 census, in a total population of 32.107 million people, 69% were ethnic Poles, 14% were Ukrainians, 9% were Jews, 5% were Belarussians, 2% were Germans, and 1% were other ethnic minorities (Tartars, Karaims, Russians, etc.) (Tomaszewski 1985: 50). The country was also divided religiously: Roman Catholics – 64.8%, Greek-Catholics (Uniates) – 10.5%, Orthodox – 11.8%, Protestants – 2.6%, Jews – 9.8% and others – 0.5%. In result of the processes described above, the public embraced the policy of a national state exercised by the communist authority. In result, in the 2002 census, out of 38 230 88 people, 36 983 720 declared Polish nationality (96.74%).

After 1989, the Polish democratic government recognised the distinct ethnic and cultural groups. The state protects individual citizens independently of their national identification which is a matter of personal choice (Łodziński 2005: 160-168). The current Constitution has several articles which are relevant to ethnic and national minorities: (1) article 13 is a commitment to political pluralism, and forbids parties that endorse race or national hatred; (2) article 32 bans any form of discrimination and declares the equality of any individual before the law; (3) article 35 affirms the right of members of national minorities to preserve and develop their culture, traditions, religion and language, and to found institutions to realise this right; (4) article 53 guarantees the freedom of religion to all and allows religion to be taught in schools provided that the freedom of religion of others is not endangered; (5) article 25 affirms the equality of churches and religious organisations (Fleming 2002: 534-535). However, 'tolerance' as an idea cannot be found in the basic law (Pawelkowski 2009: 199).

Political liberalisation has prompted the 'coming out' of minorities. Before the National Census of 2002, experts estimated the total number of indigenous ethnic minorities in Poland between 800 000 and 1 600 000, i.e. between 2 and 4% of the total population. To the bewilderment of the scholars and minority activists, the Census showed that only 471 500 (1.23%) of respondents declared an ethnicity other than Polish. The low numbers are interpreted as a heritage of the reluctance of people to show their ethnic identity in the mono-ethnic state (cf. Cordell & Dybczyński 2005: 80-82) or as manipulations of interviewers who refused listing nationalities other than Polish (cf. Dolińska 2010: 350-52). Moreover, 774 855 persons (2.03%) did not declare any nationality, and 4 277 are listed under the category of 'Polish-undetermined', polska-nieustalona (GUS 2002).

The Act on Minorities which was accepted in 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 consciousness of historical national community; d) inhabiting Polish

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

territory for at least 100 years; e) identifying with the nation organized in a state. An ethnic minority shares with the national minority all of its features, except for the identification with a nation different than Polish and possessing its own state. This division raises disgruntlement and the Polish Tatar Association and Federation of Roma in Poland perceive it as deprivation.

According to this definition, there are nine national minorities recognised in Poland (numbers in brackets show population declared in the 2002 Census): Belarussians (48 000), Czechs (386), Lithuanians (5 846), Germans (152 897), Armenians (1 082), Russians (6 103), Slovaks (2 001), Ukrainians (30 957) and Jews (1 133). Polish law, therefore, acknowledges four ethnic minorities substantiated historically: Roma (12 855), Tatars (495), Lemkos (5 863) and Karaims (43) (GUS 2002). It should be added that according to the law regulating these issues, a special category of 'regional languages' was added and two such linguistic minorities are recognized, i.e. Kashubians (5 063) and Silesians (173 153).

In scholarly works the last two are sometimes treated as 'postulated' or 'claimed' minorities. In the 1990s, a group of activists declared the existence of a 'Silesian nation'. It has not been recognised by Polish authorities and the Polish Supreme court as well as the European Court in Strasbourg denied the group the right to 'existence', the lack of a national historical tradition being the main objection. One has to admit that it denies the principle of self-identification as a decisive factor in questions of national or ethnic belonging. The public was shocked when, despite official denial, over 170 thousand persons declared that they are Silesians, more than any other minority. It creates a conundrum for scholars on how to explain such phenomenon of a nation without history, and various historically grounded interpretations have been given (cf. Dolińska 2010: 343-44). However, it also creates a schizophrenic situation in which the biggest subjectively chosen national identity is not objectively recognised by the state.

The case of the Silesians serves as an example of an existent, but unrecognised minority. It contrasts with the 'neighbouring' and historically related national minority of Germans, who have always been recognised, even by Communists, and immediately granted some privileges after 1991. No doubt, a powerful state standing behind them helped the latter to get rights. Still, the Movement for Silesia's Autonomy is tolerated, and thanks to electoral success in the local elections this year it joined the ruling coalition in the local parliament. It is deemed by central authorities as a threat for the state integrity.³

Altogether, people have declared 72 various national or ethnic identities. Besides the ones listed above, let us mention only those comprising more than one thousand members: Vietnamese (1 808), French (1 633), American (1 541), Greek (1404), Italian (1 367), and Bulgarian (1 112) (GUS 2002).

This is 'merely' statistical data from 2002 and since then the situation has changed. The difference in status between citizens and 'not-citizens' may be confusing, especially the differentiation between residents and migrants. Some 'historical groups, such as the post-1948 expellees from the domestic-war-torn Greece are not considered a national minority. Armenians are classified as a national minority while they perceive themselves as an ethnic one (Łodziński 2006: 305) The numbers for minorities and minority activists given by some scholars can be two to ten times bigger than those found in the Census.

³ Polish President's adviser Tomasz Nałęcz expressed this view in his interview in *Polska The Times* on 9 December 2010 (see; 'Tomasz Nałęcz: Koalicja PO z RAŚ jest niebezpieczna' http://www.polskatimes.pl/opinie/343551,tomasz-nalecz-koalicja-po-z-ras-jest-niebezpieczna,id,t.html#material_1

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

Immigrants

Officially there are relatively few migrants coming to Poland each year:

International migration for permanent residence (GUS 2010: 129):

2001-2005.....	39 119
2005.....	9 364
2008.....	15 275
2009.....	17 424

However, both immigration to Poland and the emigration of Poles abroad have become common phenomena. The Central Statistical Office estimates that immigrants in Poland constitute less than one percent of the total population of inhabitants of Poland (i.e. app. 380,000 people). In a country report on Poland in the electronic journal "Focus Migration" one can read the following: "It is extremely difficult to quantify Poland's foreign population as there is hardly any official data concerning the 'stocks', in other words, the total number of foreigners in Poland". One of the few sources is the 2002 census, which estimates the number of foreigners living in Poland at just 49,221 people. This would correspond to just 0.1% of the total population. According to the census, the most widely represented nationalities in 2002 were Ukrainians (9,881; 20%), Russians (4,325; 8.8%), Germans (3,711; 7.5%), Belarusians (2,852; 5.8%), and Vietnamese (2,093; 4.3%). Overall, citizens of southeast European countries and the states of the former Soviet Union (excluding the Baltic countries) accounted for at least 44% of the foreign population in Poland... In general, however, independent experts consider the census numbers, as well as the government population statistics for foreigners, to be too low.

By contrast, the International Migration Report 2006 produced by the UN Population Division estimates the number of foreigners living in Poland to be 703,000 (2005), corresponding to 1.8% of the total population. Despite the low numbers, the issue of immigrants is relatively new and complex problem in Poland. Since the early nineties of the twentieth century Poland which has been a traditional 'migrant sending' country for few generations, became a destination and transit country. The presence of foreigners, majority of whom come from the former Soviet Union, constitutes a new challenge, but also a complex dilemma for Polish policy and Poles' attitudes towards migration (Alscher 2008: 3-4; cf. Also Fihel 2008: 33-51). This diagnosis, based on various studies on migrants in Poland seems to be adequate and we share it.

In view of the relative homogeneity of the Polish society, new migration poses a challenge. Besides the settling of newcomers from the 'East' and transit migrants (Iglicka 2001), Poland is undergoing an inflow of refugees from Chechnya, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Also, an increasing number of EU citizens are settling in Poland. However, the percentage of permanent immigrants is still low. Foreigners mostly choose big cities for their place of residence, especially the capital. Illegal migrants have problems with their integration in many spheres of life, including the job market, education and health (cf. Bloch and Goździak 2010).

Religious minorities

Statistics show that almost 37 million people in Poland have been baptized in the Roman-Catholic Church. Other denominations are small and barely visible in the public space. A Treaty (Concordate) with the Vatican was quickly signed after the fall of communism and the Catholic Church enjoys many privileges. Already in 1989, the parliament "accepted a bill thanks to which the Church was

granted back confiscated rural lands” (Buchowski 2009: 71). A reprivatisation bill for individuals has not been passed.

Next to the State, the Catholic Church is the largest property owner in the country, with up to 200 thousand hectares in its hands. Public discourses are permeated with religious authorities' opinions. The presence of crosses in public places like hospitals, schools and Parliament is obviously unquestionable. Abortion law is one of the strictest in Europe. Disputes over moral issues (e.g. in vitro) and the presence of religion in the public sphere have no end. Smaller ‘brothers in faith’ are treated paternalistically. A conflict between Catholics and Greco-Catholics over the issue of who should own the major basilica, a former cathedral of the Uniates, in Przemyśl, in south-eastern Poland illustrates the case in point. Despite the appeal of Pope John Paul II, it was taken over by the Catholics who changed its style from ‘eastern’, with a cupola, to ‘western-like’, with a spiral tower (Hann 1998; 2001; 2006: 184-187). Religious classes in public schools are treated as given, but are secured basically only for Catholic students; alternative classes in ethics, granted by law are taught only in 2.5% of schools. Meanwhile, the society shows many characteristics of western-like secularisation – concubines are common, the proportion of children born out of wedlock is systematically increasing (ca. 15%), and the divorce rate is high (30%) (cf. Buchowski 2010).

In order to show the challenges of multiculturalism in Poland over the past 30 years, we have to choose from several cases that illustrate the point. Anti-Semitism, which is present in Polish folk culture (cf. Cała 2005), in daily life and politics (Krzemiński 1993; 2001) could be the case in point, but today “in Poland, there is no ‘Jewish question.’ There is a problem of anti-Semitism, the persistence of which bears out accepted wisdom: anti-Semitism is a problem of anti-Semites” (Borodziej 2001: 67).

Ambiguous attitudes towards the German minority have its roots in 19th century nationalism and the politics of Germanisation that took a genocide form during WWII. It was constantly utilised by communist authorities in raising fears and animosities (Madajczyk 1998). Post-1989 politics can also, from time to time, evoke ghosts (Kurcz 1997), as is expressed in the access negotiations with the EU, the possibility of purchasing land in the Polish western territories (cf. Buchowski 2010a: 334). However, these topics are exploited in the literature and are currently not hotly discussed public issues. We have decided to study two groups – the Roma and Muslims. The first has been perceived as stereotypical social outcasts and discriminated for ages; the second has re-appeared in social consciousness under a new guise of an Islamic threat, which is abstract in the Polish context. We think that these cases will allow us to identify the key features of the discourse on cultural diversity and the practices designed to cope with the diversity that has re-appeared in Poland after fifty years of absence.

Selecting these groups was, on the one hand motivated by their dissimilarity, which might be perceived as more radical than in the case of less culturally and/or religiously detached groups. Also, Poles show strong attitudes towards these groups. In the research on social distance and hostility of Poles towards foreign ethnic groups, Roma and Muslims⁴ are disliked most (CBOS 2007: 2-3; Nowicka 1997: 60-63). In a number of polls carried out in the last fifteen years, Roma, and since 2001 Arabs, have been the least accepted minorities. More than fifty per-cent of the people asked dislike them.

Recently, reluctance towards Roma has decreased to 15% – a significant change from the three

⁴ Tatars (see below) are treated as a colourful ethnographic group and not taken into account in studies on acceptance of diversity.

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

quarters in the mid-1990s. Aversion to Arabs is unchangeably high, and increases in the periods of media debates on terrorist attacks (CBOS 2007: 5; CBOS 2010: 4).

Roma in Poland

The estimates provided in 2002 by the local authorities, based on information submitted by local government units, imply that there are 20 000 Roma in Poland⁵. Roma NGOs give numbers ranging between 20 and 30 thousand. Roma are divided along caste-like lines as well as territorial lines, which today can be related to the competition in running projects realised by Roma activists. They are also divided according to socio-economic distinctions, e.g. between town and countryside dwellers and ones related to tribe/caste/class (cf. Mirga 1998: 116-117).

In the 2005 Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language, Roma are recognized as an ethnic minority, as they have resided in Poland for more than a century (Talewicz-Kwiatkowska 2010: 114). They are a heterogeneous and internally divided minority, which impedes attempts at establishing a strategy for life improvement and cooperation in this community.

Roma started arriving on Polish lands in the 14th century; by the 16th century, concerns with their isolation, nomadic life and economic activity began to grow and the first legislations restricting their freedom of movement⁶ and expelling them had been issued. The policy of 'oppressive tolerance' lasted for centuries. During WWII, Roma became victims of drastic Nazi exterminations, being placed in ghettos and sent to concentration camps. For instance, there existed a special *Zigeunerlager* in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Altogether, about 500 000 Roma lost their lives in *Porrajmos*, the Roma Holocaust in Europe. Its memory has not been cultivated for decades, and only in recent years, the Romani elites have started to try to restore it and use it in building a common identity.

After WWII, Roma's status was extremely low. The majority were illiterate, and they did not receive state benefits and allowances. They were forcefully assimilated (see above). A State Council resolution from 1960 forced nomadic groups (and in the 1950s still half of Roma led a nomadic life) to settle and work in the industry or agriculture. The lack of understanding of cultural otherness by the patronising authorities motivated by assimilationist ideology, permeated by ingrained prejudices against Gypsies, was striking (Puckett 2005: 622). Multiculturalism and tolerance were alien to communists. This resulted in multiple repressions and police surveillance, as well as the exacerbation of social stereotypes concerning Roma (Mirga 1998). Simultaneously, forced settlement resulted in a gradual shift from traditional activities, which was not accompanied by replacing them with new forms of earning the living. This contributed to a significant deterioration in the economic situation of the Roma community, which in many cases remains unchanged until today (Talewicz-Kwiatkowska 2010: 118).

Since 1989, improvements in the social status of Roma have been more a result of international pressure having its origin in the need for alignment with European standards, than the efforts of successive Polish governments (Puckett 2005: 625). It began changing at the end of the 1990s, when a growing number of violent incidents against Roma together with the high costs of post-socialist transition led the Romani people to establish their own representation. This enabled the formation of non-governmental organizations which struggle for the preservation of Roma cultural identity and the

⁵ Ministry's of Internal Affairs and Administration: http://www.mswia.gov.pl/portal/pl/185/2982/Tresc_Programu.html (viewed on 30.09.2010)

⁶ First Polish edict of this nature was passed in 1558 (Talewicz-Kwiatkowska 2010: 116).

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

use of governmental funding, and participation in European and state programs supporting the minority.

One of the reasons for the 'othering' of Roma in Poland is their racial (darker skin) and cultural difference. They form a basis for creating stereotypes about 'Gypsies': laziness, isolationism, unpleasant smell, untidiness, disorder, demanding attitude, hooliganism, etc. (Nowicka 1997: 207-212). These images are combined with differences in customs and group endogamy, both in terms of kinship and socialising. Together these perceptions ensue in the lack of acceptance (Nowicka 1999a: 9). Difficulties in cooperation between Roma and the authorities are based on a poor understanding of group specificity and cultural distinctiveness (language taboo, compliance with group rules, and absolute loyalty to of the family) on the one hand, and the reluctance of the Roma to meet requirements of the dominant society, on the other.

One of the reasons for the persisting low socio-economic status and the social exclusion of Roma in Poland is the lack of cooperation between the *Bergitka* Roma and the *Polish* Roma. The main issue in this inner-group conflict relates to the alleged lack of ritual purity of the *Bergitka* Roma. Relatively long-lasting settlement in the Carpathian region made this group relatively more assimilated to the surrounding communities. Still, even there, the divisions are still striking (Nowicka1997). Pilot programs of school education for children and transformed strategies of social work were addressed solely to Roma in this region and due to a lack of communication, hardly transposed to other groups.

Education of Romani children

The situation of Roma in the era of political and economic transformation in the early 1990's made it clear to leaders that education is a prerequisite for full participation in the socio-economic world. The slowly developing Roma elites realised that poor education is the major reason for the low status of Roma. In the mid-1990's efforts were made⁷ to eliminate illiteracy among Roma and to create opportunities for the younger generations. However, the cultural specificity of Roma was not properly diagnosed, which resulted in inefficiencies in the educational programs⁸ introduced.

In addition to internal divisions of Roma in Poland based on ideological grounds, a key factor in disabling the social functioning of this group is the related low percentage of educated people, which obviously reduces Roma participation in society, especially in view of the fact that modern economy requires skilled professionals (Majewicz 1999: 128).

According to some estimations (the 2002 Census did not provide adequate data on Roma; experts hope that the National Census of 2011 will provide more reliable data), only 70% of Roma children participate in formal education⁹, and there is widespread illiteracy among the elders. In some local communities hardly any children attend schools regularly, because they are engaged in their families' economic activities, including periods of travelling, which means school absence. The fact is that 'truancy from school by Gypsy children, which was an ongoing problem for decades, was not only tolerated but often encouraged, and was eventually accepted by the authorities: the resistance to attendance was on the part of both children and their parents' (*ibidem*).

⁷ Catholic priest Stanisław Opocki introduced classes for Roma children in Nowy Sącz region in 1993 (Majewicz 1999: 128).

⁸ See Ministry's of Internal Affairs and Administration report on Pilot Programme:

http://www.mswia.gov.pl/portal/pl/185/2982/Tresc_Programu.html

⁹ Ministry's of Internal Affairs and Administration data downloaded at:

http://www.mswia.gov.pl/portal/pl/185/2982/Tresc_Programu.html

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

Another issue connected to educational problems is the practice of the ritual of kidnapping girls between 13 and 16 years of age for marital purposes, which is one of the reasons why Roma send girls to school unwillingly. Also, disrespect to *Romanipen* rules (e.g. restrictions concerning the dress code) shown by teachers and headmasters, present an obstacle in overcoming difficulties in Roma education (see: GW 2010/ 210). Negative attitudes of other children towards Roma pupils are also of great significance¹⁰.

The above problems are secondary in relation to the main obstacle, i.e. cultural rules underlying the use of non-Roma language. This calls into question the effectiveness of education regarding the Roma in general, since there are at least two reasons for Roma to reject the educational offer: (1) Polish is a foreign language to most of Romani children which causes learning difficulties at the very beginning of school, and¹¹ (2) integrational classes are unattractive or even deterrent to some Roma parents because of the high expectations with respect to the integration of children coming from various cultural backgrounds. Thus, the solution would be to create a motivational program for the Roma communities, which would raise awareness in the field of the educational needs of children¹², which permanently alter the deep resentment to social inclusion (Różycka 2009: 29). So far, government agents responsible for the preparation of educational programs for Roma are unable to cope with this task¹³.

Despite difficulties, some affirmative changes ought to be mentioned. One of them is the introduction of Roma education assistants into schools, together with hiring assistant teachers who should help parents, children and teachers to coordinate education in the community. The educational assistant comes from the Roma community, knows the local dialect and has at least primary education. S/he is usually a member of the local community and, thus, has a good knowledge of the families' situation. Practice shows, however, that this initiative raises a lot of accusations and grievances on both sides. In one of the provinces in Silesia, all 16 permanent posts created for Roma education assistants in schools stirred up conflicts between schools' authorities and the Roma leaders who questioned the merits of such decisions. Roma communities prefer receiving increased allowances from the state over the long-term benefits of education. On the other hand, Polish teachers protested against favouring minority members¹⁴ over ethnic Poles (education assistants receive a salary similar to that of Polish teachers who need to have a higher education and constantly improve their qualifications).

Pro-Roma activists also speak about the reluctance of local governments to make the required effort to diagnose the situation of Polish-Romani conflicts in the area and to seek effective solutions (Różycka 2009: 27).

The situation in Romani education in Poland outlined above results in constant EU recommendations, published repeatedly since the end of 1990's. Their main points focus

¹⁰ According to the CBOS survey of 2002, 30% of school children asked whom do not they wish to share the bench with responded that a Romani child would be least welcome. Only homosexuals and mentally ill were perceived as less desirable (Talewicz-Kwiatkowska 2010: 124).

¹¹ Teaching Roma in Romani language is a recommendation for the Polish Government made by the EU, but there have been no claims from the community in question (ECRI 2010: 19; see also: http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,5912003,Szkola_bez_segregacji__szkola_bez_Romow_.html)

¹² Polish law provides means against parents who discourage their children's education, but it is usually not enforced by authorities in the case of Roma (ECRI 2010: 19).

¹³ Which is a part of a wider problem of poor cooperation between policy makers and researchers specialising in studying minorities in Poland.

¹⁴ This argument about favouring Roma to Poles appears in situations of conflict between the Poles and Roma due to the belief about the great riches of the Roma gained illegally channels.

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

on: 1) the abolition of separate Roma classes in schools¹⁵; 2) making efforts to persuade Roma parents about the advantages of education for their children; 3) preparing the possibilities of pre-schooling for Roma children in order to overcome the difficulties related to the lack of the knowledge of the Polish language¹⁶ (ECRI 2010: 18-20). Although some improvements have been made, there is still an unsatisfactory level of Roma children's engagement in school education and the state's attention to ensuring basic minority rights.

In addition to educational issues which require a strong reaction of the state in dialogue with the Roma community, there is the problem of Roma unemployment, and, in fact, an increasingly widening gap between the demands of the labour market and the opportunities for Roma to actively participate in it. Data from Romani NGOs indicate that they are unable to keep jobs for extended periods of time and face discrimination based on their ethnic distinctions from both employers and co-workers. These two issues are strongly co-related and must be addressed simultaneously if any improvement in Roma's situation is to be made (Puckett 2005: 628).

Violent incidents

In the early 1990s, Roma were often the target of attacks carried out by racist groups (individuals or groups of individuals and households were raided by young sympathisers of neo-Nazism). In addition, a recurrent problem was the slowness of the police and the courts in solving matters of this type of violence and the denial of justice for Romani victims of crimes motivated racially, as well as cases of police abuse (ERRC 2002: 6-8). Including numerous cases of discrimination related to access to housing, medical care and social welfare, the situation of Roma in Poland has raised many concerns,¹⁷ as Roma started receiving greater attention because of 'the notion that the treatment of minorities is an extremely important indicator of democracy' (Puckett 2005: 622).

Minor attacks occur spontaneously, bigger *pogroms* are usually sparked by some acts of Roma which are perceived as unacceptable. Such a situation occurred in Mława in 1991, when 200 people had been attacking Roma buildings for two days, inflicting destruction in their possessions, and destroying twenty houses. Authorities introduced a curfew. Most Roma managed to escape the city before the riots erupted (ERRC 2002: 1931-1932; Majewicz 1999: 132). Fortunately there were no fatalities. *Ex post facto* analysis has shown the importance of both ethnic and non-ethnic factors in this event (Giza-Poleszczuk and Poleszczuk 2001: 234-44). The court classified the perpetrators' acts as crimes committed on ethnic grounds. Similar incidents, although of a smaller scale, occur from time to time in some Romani settlements.

The most recent event occurred in Limanowa in July 2010. A mob of over a hundred people armed with stones and bottles of petrol attacked a Roma family living in a block of flats, shouting 'let us finish with Roma'. Authorities responded by calling special police units from Cracow; after a few hours, the crowd scattered causing no damage¹⁸. The issue was addressed by the ombudsman and local mediators brokered the talks between the parties.

¹⁵ Ministry's of Education data indicate that in the face of creating integration classes for Roma children, over 50% of the pupils did not show up at school. The Ministry has not prepared any strategies addressed to the parents because they cannot find professionals able to advise them (http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,5912003,Szkola_bez_segregacji__szkola_bez_Romow_.html).

¹⁶ Which seems very unrealistic in the face of shortage of places in pre-school facilities in Poland.

¹⁷ The UN International Committee in the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (1997) and US State Department (2000) are two examples (Puckett 2005: 622).

¹⁸ http://wyborcza.pl/1,75478,8176184,Pozwolicie_nam_skonczyc_z_Romami.html

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

Instances of violence against members of Romani communities, anti-Roma graffiti, and newspaper articles, all confirm the presence of a negative stereotype of Roma in Poland. Despite educational and developmental programs and a growing scholarly interest in Roma, they remain the group with the lowest status among the cultural and ethnic minorities in Poland.

'Muslim problem' in Poland

In a Catholic and homogeneous country like Poland, significant cultural distinction comparable to the one represented by Roma, which might be classified as 'racial-cum-cultural', is relatively rare. Muslims who live in Poland, and whose distinctiveness is based, first of all, on religious difference, comprise another group. The followers of Islam in Poland may be divided into three, not entirely congruent groups:

(1) Tatar Poles who have been living in Poland for several centuries; (2) immigrants from Arab countries who came to Poland in the 1970's mainly as students – they often contracted mixed marriages with Poles and have permanent residence permissions; and (3) new Muslim immigrants, such as (a) refugees from Bosnia (Marciniak 2004), (b) political asylum seekers from Chechnya and some other Muslim countries like Pakistan or Afghanistan. In our analysis, we have divided them simply into 'historical' Muslim community and 'newcomers.'

Polish Tatars are Muslims, but are at the same time treated as a familiar component of the Polish cultural landscape and, in some ways, a legacy of Poland's multicultural past. New Muslim immigrants have started coming to Poland in the 1970's – they are relatively few, although more numerous than Tartars. This group is constantly growing, especially because of incoming students and professionals from Arab countries. The number of all Muslims living in Poland does not exceed 30 000 people (Włoch 2009: 60).

The situation of these two groups is totally different and the analysis of their status and perception serves as an indicator of accepted patterns for assimilation and forbearance towards strangers and otherness in Polish society. It should enable us to assess the potential of tolerance for immigrants coming to Poland.

Tatars

Tatars are part of a Turkic ethnic group numbering 10 million in the late 20th century, most of whom live in Russia (app. 5 500 000 people). Turkey, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan – each have Tatar populations greater than 30 000.

Polish Tatars, called the *Lipka* Tatars (the Turkish name of Lithuania, which they originally inhabited), are descendants of Muslim settlers in the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania¹⁹ from the 14th century. From the battle of Grunwald onwards, the Tatar light cavalry regiments took part in military campaigns of the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania and benefited from their military service by receiving titles and land. Their rights to personal and religious freedom had practically never been questioned. Many integrated into Polish gentry or local communities in the north-eastern part of the Commonwealth by intergroup marriages. Tatars assimilated as they gradually lost their language and began to use Polish and Belarusian instead. They accepted local habits and cultural features of the surrounding Christian and Slavic population. Polygamy became a virtually banned practice, vodka, which is prohibited by the Koran has become an acceptable product; and religious manuscripts started to be written in a mixed idiom of Polish, Belarusian and Russian.

¹⁹ This area comprises present day Lithuania, Belarus and Poland.

Religion was an integral part of their identity and many clung to it invariantly. Over time, modified Islam was preserved as the only real distinctive factor of Tatars and the core of their ethnic and/or cultural identity. At the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, anti-Islamic expressions were virtually non-existent in Poland (Włoch 2009: 59) and Tatars had generally not experienced major forms of discrimination because of their religious difference (Warمیńska 1997: 233). Their presence has been accepted for the last six centuries.

The name 'Polish Tatars' was popularised in the interwar period, when the resurrected Polish state was redefining the inter-ethnic relations within the new boundaries. Before 1914, Tatars lived mainly in the Lithuanian part of the Commonwealth and were called 'Lithuanian Tatars'. After WWI, forced migrations affected also the Tatars and they crystallised their ethnic identity under the auspices of the Polish State. The new name was accepted as synonymous with the ethnic group. The community strengthened internal ties and its visibility in the new context. The Muslim Religious Association (founded in 1925) and the Association of Cultural and Educational Tatars of Poland were established with the aim to consolidate Islam believers.

In the interwar period, Tatar culture was thriving, they had a right to pastoral care in the army, religious education was developed, they were fully recognised by the authorities and perceived as faithful and devoted members of the new Republic. Tatars even redirected money collected by the community for the initial purpose of building a mosque in Warsaw to the National Defence Fund before WWII (Włoch 2009: 59).

WWII profoundly changed their situation. Numerous settlements and mosques are now located beyond the eastern Polish border. In 1945, returnee-Tatars settled in the newly acquired Polish western territories. It led to several local conflicts over their religious (and ethnic) distinction. The socialist nation's ideology excluded difference. In result, part of the community returned to its places of origin in the 1960's. Many moved closer to the old Tatar settlements near Białystok, in the north-east of Poland, i.e. the Podlasie region, where they live to this day.

Cultural and religious life did not flourish as vigorously as before WWI. Tatar intellectuals were killed or they migrated to the West. Contact with the outside Muslim world was almost impossible. Assimilation, which lasted for ages, made the community almost invisible. Today, Tatars live mostly in big cities, and they have merged with the Polish society. They continue contracting marriages with Christians, and some have stopped practicing Islam (Warمیńska 1997: 234).

Between the 14th and 18th centuries there were app. 4 000 Tatars living in the Commonwealth. In the interwar period 5 500 Tatars inhabited the new Republic. After WWII, the estimated Tatar population oscillated around 3 000 people. Thus, they constitute a very small proportion of a country with more than 38 million citizens.

Tatars participate in Polish culture, but at the same time reproduce their ethnic distinctiveness on the basis of religion. As mentioned, they are recognised as an ethnic minority. Polish Tatars speak Polish, have a deep sense of belonging to their Polish homeland, and do not identify themselves with any other country. This differentiates them from some other minorities in Poland, which often identify themselves with neighbouring or distant states, which is interpreted by some Poles as an anti-Polish attitude (Warمیńska 1997: 243). One can say that the Tatar identity in Poland is engendered by their religious identity, a mythical attachment to the historical community of origin and multiple elements shared with Polish culture. Despite apparent contradictions between Islam and the image of Polish culture, as impregnated by Catholic Christianity, the identity of the Polish Tatars combines these two

threads (Warمیńska 1997: 244).

One can also read that due to the lack of their own theological schools, ignorance of the Arabic language, and location far from the centres of Muslim culture and liturgical life, Polish Tatars have merely superficial knowledge of Islam, which contains many elements which are foreign to them. However, as some scholars claim, this may give a local character to their beliefs, but does not contradict the main tenets of Islam (Droździkowska 2006: 97).

After 1989, in the upsurge of ethnic movements and the re-emerging of minority communities of all kinds, Tatars began efforts to rebuild and revive their ethnic identity. The revival resulted in the creation of periodic cultural and educational events (festivals, workshops and summer schools)²⁰, the establishment of Tatar press and other media that are meant to reinforce awareness of Tatar presence in the Polish cultural landscape, the dissemination of knowledge about the community's distinctiveness, and help in rebuilding inter-group identity, which was partly lost in the course of history (Warمیńska 2009: 37).

In the National Census of 2002, less than five hundred people declared Tatar nationality, six times less than it is estimated. It indirectly shows that Tatars, a totem of the exotic past and the *mythical* Polish tolerance of diversity, proved to be almost completely assimilated (Warمیńska 209: 36). This is probably why they are so easily accepted as 'us', or, as Gerd Bauman would claim, 'encompassed' as a part of 'us' (2006: 25-27). They serve as a proof of the centuries-old Polish tolerance and as an evidence, used by politicians, that in the last decades the country has not had problems with ethnic, cultural and religious diversity – provided that the others 'behave' and are peaceful and tamed.

Non-Tatar Muslims

Apart from Tatars, the population of Polish Muslims comprises people of Arab extraction who arrived in Poland in the 1970's and 1980's as students, and later as professionals, such as businessmen, engineers or diplomats, as well as refugees and asylum seekers from the Caucasus and Central Asia. Recently, more Muslims have arrived in Poland, some of them entrepreneurs or well-paid employees. Nonetheless, these new Muslims do not comprise a significant minority. As the estimates show, their population may reach 30 000 people, which is 0.1% of the Polish society.

The arriving Muslims do not have easy relations with the Tatars. They blame the Tatars for polluting Islam with alien elements and deny their tradition. Competition can be observed as young new Muslims established the Muslim League in Poland, the Association of Muslim Students, and Muslim Brothers Association, all of which are composed of young devotees of Islam, including a small group of converts from Catholicism (Włoch 2009: 60). Educated Muslims disapprove of the folklore present in Tatar tradition and claim that 'Tatars often have little in common with more recent groups of Islam such as Arabs or converts, who are sometimes particularly radical' (Włoch 2009: 62). Inner boundaries among Muslim groups are becoming visible.

Recently, Chechens have become one of the most important Muslim groups in Poland. Many from the about 5 000 refugees who came to Poland after the first war in Chechnya have lived for a long time in twenty refugee camps, comprising a majority of refugee status applicants nationwide. However, the status is granted unwillingly, (which raises the applicants' protests²¹), even though most of them treat

²⁰ Polish policy towards minorities still has a tendency to folklorise cultural and ethnic difference (Warمیńska 2009: 37).

²¹ The latest protest was organized by a group of 200 Chechen and Georgian refugees who were trying to get to Strasburg to file a complaint against Polish authorities because of the negligence in the process of refugee status application, see:

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

Poland as a transit country to the old EU states (Włoch 2009: 61).

Supervised by the Office of Refugees and living in camps, the Chechens appear in public discourse only during protests against Polish procedures and the poor quality of aid for refugees. They tend to be absent in debates about diversity, especially those concerning Muslims' presence in the society. The attitude towards them is ambiguous. On the one hand, they are perceived as victims of Russian oppression, and on the other, as radical Muslims that might cause problems. However, when the case of a woman, who in her attempt to cross the Polish border in the Carpathian mountains lost her three children and saved only one son, was made public, Poles reacted immediately and showed her sympathy and gave her help. She was even offered permanent housing by an individual family.

All in all, Muslims are not an object of any particular attention of the public, authorities or the media, with some rare exceptions (see below). One can call the attitude towards them an 'indifferent tolerance.' Their religious associations are recognized by the state²², and other Muslim organisations function as other NGOs. Muslim schools are non-existent, but educational authorities permit the use of classrooms in public schools during the weekend for religious education. So far, there have been no conflicts related to the dress of Muslim women in schools or in any other context (Włoch 2009: 60).

Warsaw mosque

Today there are five Muslim mosques in Poland. Two of them, situated in Kruszyniany and Bohoniki, are small wooden buildings of historic value, built between the 17th and 18th centuries in north-eastern Poland for Tatars inhabiting nearby villages. They do not raise any controversy and have become tourist attractions on the Tatar Trail²³ in the Podlasie region. There is also a brick mosque in Gdańsk, built in 1989, and a meeting place and prayer room in Poznań, which since 2006 also houses the Association of Muslim Students.

The fifth object is the meeting place of the Warsaw Muslims, located – as is the case of Poznań – in a private villa, adapted for this purpose in 1993. However, it is too small for the growing Warsaw community, which is now larger than 10 000 persons. The election of a new mufti, Tomasz Miśkiewicz, educated in Saudi Arabia, lent a new impetus to the issue of the construction of a mosque in Warsaw. The Muslim Religious Association is negotiating the return of a parcel confiscated by the communist government²⁴, where they want to build a larger mosque. The Warsaw municipal architect objected the mosque's project, proposing a building that would commemorate the long tradition of Muslim, i.e. Tatar presence in Poland. Since then, no progress has been made in this respect (Włoch 2009: 60).

In 2001, the Muslim League in Poland, led by Samira Ismail, was formed; it also attracts mostly immigrants from Arab countries (Stefaniuk 2010: 180). One of the organisation's main aims is to build a Muslim Community Centre in Warsaw. It will comprise a mosque, library and meeting space. The centre will serve not only religious, but also educational purposes, as well the purpose of popularising

(Contd.)

<http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1342,title,Uchodzcy-opuscili-juz-pociag-zatrzymany-w-Zgorzelcu,wid,11780551,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=1af02>

²² Poland was the second country in Europe to officially recognise Islam when it approved Muslim Religious association in 1936 (Włoch 2009: 60).

²³ <http://www.mzr.pl/pl/info.php?id=3>

²⁴ In 1934, in recognition of their services during WWI, Muslims received from the government a square in the centre of Warsaw) where they planned to build a mosque accommodating 400 believers, and a new religious and cultural centre for all Polish Muslims. Organisers failed to collect enough money, mainly because Muslim population in Poland was mostly poor at that time, and the initiative was interrupted by the WWII (*Polityka* 2010: 82).

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

Islamic culture among Poles. Moreover, it will be used by Muslim charities, women and children, and other Muslim groups. It will also serve as a place for holding exhibitions. Contacts with the media should help build bridges between the Arab-Muslims and Poles. Now, the construction is underway and it is expected to be completed in late autumn of 2010. The project is feasible thanks to the financial support from a Saudi sponsor. It became known because of the protests accompanying its completion.

The protest against the building of the mosque was organised by the Association of the Future of Europe. In March 2010, a demonstration was held at the mosque building site. Protesters claimed that the Muslim League in Poland represents a radical wing of Islam. Referring to the fact that the Saudi Arabian project sponsor is a follower of Wahhabi Islam (in Poland Sunni Islam is dominant), the association fears it may create a centre of radicalism and terrorism. The protest²⁵, attended by less than fifty people, was accompanied by a counter manifestation of an association protesting against intolerance towards religious, ethnic and cultural diversity.

In the spirit of constitutional provisions²⁶, the Common Council of Catholics and Muslims supports the mosque initiative in Warsaw. Since the protest, press comments and opinions of both the opponents and supporters of the mosque in Warsaw, the brunt of public discussion moved to the Internet. A website 'Mosque-ochota.pl'²⁷, where citizens express their opinions, has been established by a right-wing Warsaw councillor. What dominates in the comments, are concerns about the presence of followers of radical Islam in Poland, associated primarily with the terrorist attacks, and indiscriminate, superficial opinions on the values promoted by Islam.

Poznań minaret

A similar reaction, illustrating the attitude of Poles towards the symbolic aspects of the Muslim presence in Poland, was sparked by the project of Joanna Rajkowska²⁸. She proposed an artistic installation that would make an old chimney in the city centre look like a Muslim minaret. The project was meant to raise discussion about Polish attitudes towards cultural distinction and was to be part of the Malta Theatre Festival, a huge annual cultural event that alludes to multiculturalism²⁹. The project sparked a heated discussion that resulted in rejecting the idea by the city authorities. The Association of Polish Architects in Poznań did not recommend the proposal³⁰ on the grounds that it would constitute a culturally alien object. Although approved by Muslims as a symbolic item, the Association claimed that it would offend Muslims as it would be improperly located between the Jewish synagogue (which has been used as a swimming pool since WWII!) and a church building.

Internet forums were filled with disputes³¹ and protest letters were sent to local authorities. Rajkowska was accused of promoting Islam, religious provocation and wasting public funds. The arguments concerning the spreading of the idea of radical Islam that pose a threat to the interest and values of the Polish, inherently Christian society, were as common as in the discussion about the construction of the mosque in Warsaw. Instead of a minaret, the city council has committed itself to supporting an educational project (lead by an anthropologist from Warsaw)³² for high school students

²⁵ http://warszawa.gazet.pl/warszawa/1,34882,7708462,Protestowali_przeciw_budowie_meczetu_na_Ochocie.html

²⁶ See: <http://www.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/konst/polski/2.htm>

²⁷ <http://meczet-ochota.pl/>

²⁸ <http://www.rajkowska.com/pl/minaret.php>

²⁹ http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,8098807,Wychowanie_do_minaretu.html

³⁰ http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,6772198,Awantura_o_minaret_w_Poznaniu.html

³¹ http://www.europa21.pl/wiadomosc/11862-Apel_Przeciw_minaretowi_w_Poznaniu

³² It is planned to be implemented in September 2011.

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

in Poznań, with classes on cultural differences and relativism, perhaps with special attention paid to Muslims.

Islamophobia without Muslims

The arrival of Muslims from Arab countries raised concerns about ‘our Muslims’, i.e. Polish Tatars that are in danger of being influenced by radical Islamists or, at best, will deviate from their traditions facilitating coexistence with Poles. These comments indicate a generalised reluctance of most Poles to aliens and to ‘incomprehensible’ cultural practices, which are, in fact, known only through stereotypical images co-created by the sensation-greedy media. No special desire to learn more about ‘otherness’ and no sincere need for dialogue with ‘the Others’ can be observed. Beyond academic circles, debates about multiculturalism are practically absent. However, increasing migration and claims of Muslims in the country, together with foreign news about the ‘war on terror’, the involvement of Polish troops in military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as cultural conflicts in Europe (e.g. over dress codes and minarets), cause this issue to be occasionally discussed – see both the Warsaw and Poznań cases (Weinar 2008: 14).

A comparison of the situation of the different groups of Muslims living in Poland and of the different attitudes towards them shows that the Polish discourse on diversity and tolerance focuses on racial and cultural differences, and, in this particular context, on religious matters only as a secondary issue. The example of the Tatars shows that their confession does not make them ‘alien’ and they are fully accepted, even boasted³³. The negative attitude towards Muslims, mostly Arabs, of those questioned in opinion polls, (CBOS, 2010: 4), ensues from cultural and racial difference. Cultural distance is strengthened by western-centric islamophobia incited by the events of September 11.

Polish Muslims do not engage in spectacular political activities and avoid comments on current political events. Their distinction is above all demonstrated on religious grounds. Only exceptionally do Muslim leaders make statements addressing heated issues, such as terrorist attacks or the kidnapping of Polish citizens in the Middle East. Despite this low key presence, they have faced xenophobic reactions. In these apex moments, Poles seem to implicitly share Huntington’s media-propagated thesis on the clash of civilizations and they present Islam as a religion of terrorists³⁴ (Stefaniuk 2010: 183-185).

Muslims face discrimination on the grounds of xenophobia, which may be called ‘phantom Islamophobia’ (Włoch 2009: 65) - a negative attitude towards the community, which, unlike in Western Europe, is not based on conflicts resulting from eye-striking and ‘unacceptable’ dissimilarities in cultural practices. This Islamophobia probably derives from the same source in which anti-Semitism is rooted. In Poland, both Jews and Muslims/Arabs barely exist and function as ‘imagined communities’ that threaten national and religious interests (Zgliszczyński 2008: 7; Robotycki 2010: 103).

Definitions of tolerance/acceptance in Poland

First, the basic assumptions of discourse on tolerance should be explained, especially that it tends to be departed from cultural reality and everyday practice.

³³ During celebrations of the year of immigration and multiculturalism, Polish authorities proposed to show miniscule Polish Tatar communities living on the border with Belarus as an example of harmonious cohabitation (Weinar 2008: 14).

³⁴ ‘Islamic terrorism’ was directly addressed by Polish security agents only in 2004, when Yemeni imam was expelled on the grounds of his alleged contacts with terrorists. (see: <http://poland.indymedia.org/pl/2004/06/7065.shtml>)

There is a deep-rooted conviction of the Polish public, instilled in peoples' minds already in elementary schools, and partly shared by academic experts, that the Nobles Republic, up until the partitions took place, was a multicultural, tolerant country, allowing for a peaceful coexistence of many diverse cultural groups (see part 3). This argument justifies the claim, repeated by politicians and journalists, that contemporary Poles are tolerant and keen on multiculturalism in their very nature, and that the Polish nation welcomes diversity (Tokarczyk 1979: 10). No serious study critically analysing the possible intellectual links between the concept of a multi-ethnic historical Polish state and today's state of mind and practices of Poles can be found. Moreover, demands to restore and nurture the *traditional Mythical* Polish tolerance, which were advanced after 1989, ignore a huge change in collective consciousness that occurred during the years of the partitions (e.g. the emergence of competing nationalisms), interwar nationalist politics, war radicalisation of nationalist sentiments, and more than 50 years of *Realpolitik* of the Communist authorities that skilfully utilised ethnic stereotypes (Robotycki 2010: 80).

Tolerance as public policy

Reluctance towards minorities demonstrated under communism, also influenced the attitudes of Poles, who constitute a decisive majority in the society, in the redefinition of mutual relations during the process of accession to European structures. The National Census of 2002 indicates a huge gap between the estimated size of minorities and the actual declaration in the polls. These results raised questions about census methodology and quality. Minority leaders complained that people did not understand the questions about their identity. Besides, we are dealing here with social mimicry, which occurs when members of minority groups hide their distinct identity fearing intolerance (Robotycki 2010: 82). This is interpreted as a direct consequence of the homogenising and assimilationist policy of the authoritarian regime before 1989 (Warمیńska 2009: 37).

Parliamentary debates on difference

In 1989, a new chapter in the state policy towards national minorities was opened. The new authorities declared the will to break with the communist assimilationist policy (Łodziński 2005: 124) and grant every citizen civic rights secured by international conventions. They also wanted to change Pole's attitudes to minorities and redefine state – minority relations, aiming both at their integration and active participation in public life.

Parliamentary debates on the 'otherness' in Poland reveal that politicians perceive unified national identity as a fundament of the Polish state (Trapani 2009: 91). This unquestioned value must be protected by all means, and flaws on the monolith can undermine this unity. Minorities' claims aimed at strengthening their presence, are often viewed as endangering this integrity. This implies the dismissal of many claims and a sort of soft discriminatory policy. The Preamble to the Constitution, which is cited in Part 2, makes this attitude visible. Its message is clear: 'we are at home', and 'you are welcomed, but do not demand too much'.

Polish identity refers to the ethnic concept of a nation and cultural practices are considered Polish, provided that they can be legitimised as such. This means that the discourse on national identity is invariably based on cultural differences (Mach 2010: 248). Having Polish citizenship is insignificant in the identification of individuals as 'us', because cultural closeness decides about social inclusion.

The census of 2002 has facilitated the acceptance of the Law on National and Ethnic Minorities and

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

the Regional Language, finally adopted only in 2005, partly due to the EU accession (Robotycki 2010: 82). Its main drawback is that the definition of minorities refers to the historical terminology from the period of the Commonwealth (see part 2). It prioritises historical roots and traditions of minorities and discriminates groups with a relatively short history of settlement in Poland. Thus Greeks, for instance, who came to Poland as political refugees after 1948 and still comprise a group larger than several other officially recognised national groups, do not have minority status (Pudło 1995; 1997). State legislation is not always efficiently implemented at the local level, and raises conflicts over the allocation of public funds. Apparently, official statements clash with popular images and social awareness of minorities' presence and rights.

Minority activists criticize the Law on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language because during the fifteen years of the process of negotiations, they did not feel they were treated like partners in a dialogue, but paternalistically (Łodziński 2005). They accuse authorities of merely fulfilling legal requirements of the EU and not meeting the actual need of minorities (Robotycki 2010: 83). Minority leaders pragmatically accept this law, but are pessimistic about its daily functioning, also in terms of obtaining financial support. All indicate a discrepancy between public discourse and social practices as well as between the legal set up and law implementation.

Tolerance as a value

In most cases, tolerance as a value is addressed in terms of the above-mentioned assumption of a historically shaped Polish propensity to peaceful coexistence with culturally distinct groups. References to the 'golden age of tolerance' of the Nobles' Republic (see part 2; also: Berenger 2002; Tazbir 1973) are not accompanied by studies on a contemporary understanding of tolerance. Quite often, tolerance is discussed in general terms, and as being applicable elsewhere (cf. Posern-Zieliński 2004; Borowiak and Szarota 2004). It can be also presented as a postulate, a desired value necessary for changing social life. Political and media discourses are rather simplistic, probably due to the numeric insignificance of minorities in this homogenised population. Everyday interactions with minorities are not common and the assimilationist policy of the (post-)communist state has also affected the perception of the issue as socially unimportant.

Discourse on tolerance as a value focuses on the theoretical aspects of tolerance and its significance in the history in Europe since antiquity. These speculative considerations refer chiefly to the Enlightenment thinkers. They focus on philosophical writings and their possible applications in social life. Many of them are permeated with ideas put forward by religiously inspired authors or religious authorities (Legutko 1997; Borkowski 2002; Patalon 2008), and have virtually no connection to contemporary social life in Poland³⁵.

Particularly before 2005, debates on multiculturalism barely existed. They reproduced the myth of peaceful coexistence and were mainly descriptive, as there was no particular need for debating multicultural policies: 1) national minorities were seen as miniscule and generally assimilated; 2) new minorities were not numerous and migrants treated Poland as a transit country; 3) the questions of belonging and citizenship were unjustified for those convinced of a national homogeneity. Neither the authorities nor the general public showed interest in problems related to increasing levels of cultural diversity (Weinar 2008: 3-5).

³⁵ Discourse on tolerance seems to be the most lively in the area of sexual minorities and non-believers rights. Focus on ethnic and religious minorities in the project excludes discussion on issues most pertinent to tolerance in Poland.

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

The discourse on tolerance in a modern sense of the word, i.e. as a concept applicable in social policy, is relatively recent in Poland. As such, it is absent in mainstream education, and seen as redundant from the point of view of the majority. One can associate its potential growth of importance for the ordinary people and for policy makers only in relation to the growing immigration and expanding activism of other social minorities, such as sexual minorities or physically challenged people. The increasing number of migrants arriving to Poland, according to some experts, simply asks for tolerance towards ethnic and religious minorities in the public domain (Patalon 2008; Czerniejewska 2005).

In the 1990s, cultural diversity was again presented by nationalistically minded scholars as a threat to the coherent Polish identity. Multicultural ideas were seen as alien concepts, trendy but unnecessary and inapplicable locally (Lenik 1994: 48). Similar fears can be found in right-wing discourses. They also ridicule 'political correctness' and resist 'indiscriminate tolerance' to any type of cultural distinction. Right-wing discourses are criticised by leftist and liberal intellectuals. Thus, public discourses on tolerance often take a bipolar shape: on the one hand, minority activists, young left-wing activists and liberal intellectuals speak and work for a secular, multicultural and diverse society, and on the other hand, right-wing thinkers, nationalist activists and conservative clerical circles fight for national and religious integrity and warn against alien cultural imports.

Minority rights in the fields of education and the cultivation of culture, for instance the organising of cultural events or preserving traditional crafts, do not raise objections. In this respect attitudes are fully tolerant and can probably be connected to the long-lasting 'folklorisation' of diversity present already in the Peoples Republic, and congruent, at least at the surface, with multiculturalist ideas. Actual problems appear when: (a) state or EU funding for cultural activities is considered; (b) appropriate legislation granting provisions for property confiscated by the state after WWII is considered; (c) issues of bilingualism in regions populated by minorities (e.g. street names), political representation and commemorations of historical events in the public are considered. Tensions arise between policy makers at all administrative levels and minority members and representatives (Łodziński 2005: 221-223). Poles eagerly accept 'strangeness' and 'otherness', provided that it is practiced in the private sphere or as an exotic custom, i.e. it implies activities that do not interfere with their image of the world and do not jeopardize the idea of a homogenous community and a sense of security based on cultural familiarity.

Tolerance as a practice

Reports of international organisations monitoring the level of respect for the rights of minorities show that the situation of minority groups in Poland is improving, and that racial or ethnic offences are rather 'soft'. Legal standards are increasingly congruent with both the social reality and international instruments for equality and anti-discrimination. Despite these improvements, data on insufficient state action in many areas concerning support granted to culturally distinct groups appear repeatedly, particularly in relation to immigrants (the education of children belonging to minority groups; prolonged periods of document issuance, difficulties in conducting business and acquiring rights to social assistance).

Poland still lacks in-depth studies on the problem of racial discrimination and ethnically or culturally motivated crimes. It is difficult even to define the scale of the phenomenon and to specify its manifestations, which is crucial in creating programs and strategies to combat them. There is also a visible lack of organisations providing support for victims of such practices. This is an area to which attention has not been paid until recently, but it will be increasingly present in Poland, if only because of the increased inflow of foreigners to the country (Klaus and Wencel 2009: 43).

Polish law is now better adapted to the EU requirements, but there are still many unregulated issues. The only exception is the Labour Code, in which appropriate regulations can be found. However, there are many practical problems with its enforcement. In some spheres there are no government regulations established, such as the protection of health, or the very question of the lack of access to assets and services offered publicly (Bloch and Goździak 2010).

Poland still has not created appropriate anti-discrimination bodies. Although several institutions working in this area have been appointed (e.g. the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment, in the appropriate department in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ombudsman, the Panel on Racism and Xenophobia the Ministry of Interior), none of them (separately or together) meet the requirements derived from EU regulations³⁶ (Klaus and Wencel 2009: 44).

Concluding Remarks

Public opinion polls indicate that the reluctance of Poles towards people of different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds residing in Poland is slowly decreasing, which can be treated as one of the premises indicating that the tolerance of cultural diversity in Poland is growing (CBOS 2010: 9). This is of great importance in the face of the influx of immigrants, from Asia to Eastern Europe, among others.

There is an interconnection between openness to ‘others’ and the financial status in the Polish socio-cultural conditions – along with the improvement in material status, decreases the tendency to intolerant and xenophobic attitudes, and, therefore, there is a good chance that Poland will increase the level of acceptance of difference, if economic performance of the country will prosper and thus contribute to a decline in the rates of poverty and unemployment (Jasińska-Kania 2009: 56).

Polish rationale of the cultural diversity debate, residual as it is, has many nationalist, xenophobic, and homogenising features (Trapani 2009: 93). However, thanks to liberal, anarchist, feminist and non-governmental circles, new elements and forces appear, which predicts constant improvements in the situation of minority groups in Poland, in spite of the slow development of the process.

The contemporary debate on tolerance in Poland refers constantly to the mythical tolerance of the Nobles’ Republic, resulting in little social conscience on the real problems of minority groups and in a reluctance to revise traditional views. This situation is reinforced by the relatively low numbers of minority and immigrant populations, together with a still overriding importance of the ethnic and cultural component in the common representation of the nation/community.

Increasing pluralisation of the Polish society, including increasing visibility of the so-called social minority groups (people with disabilities, sexual minorities, etc.) and their struggle to gain equal access to universal rights and a place in the public space, is increasingly influential in the revival of the debate around the acceptance of diversity and the redefining of notions of the homogeneity of the Polish state. Significant achievements in this process are initiated by non-governmental organisations representing minority groups because the authorities have no special interest in intensifying the dialogue with minority groups, focusing on the introduction and implementation of European

³⁶ The main criticisms of these institutions relate to the lack of assistance in the formulation of complaints concerning culturally motivated violence as well as lack of independent research and expertise in the field of discrimination and xenophobia.

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

directives and trying to align with international standards, rather than recognising the minorities' actual problems and situation. Nascent debate about tolerance and acceptance should be a grassroots attempt to involve minority groups in a dialogue with the state.

As the number of culturally distinct citizens within the Polish society increases, it can be expected that changes in attitudes towards every-day contact with different cultural practices will evolve, thus changes in educational programs and public education campaigns are necessary in order to alter the social disposition towards cultural diversity of the majority of Poles.

Chapter 2. Polish School in Need for Tolerance

In line with global trends and European guidelines, Polish education in the last two decades has become not only a subject of thorough and comprehensive reforms (many of which turned out to be unsuccessful versions of the old reformative ideas), but also of extensive studies. Most of the latter were inspired by the idea of monitoring the education system in order to enhance its efficiency. They were also a result of the comparison of achievements of Polish students with their peers from other countries conducted at the beginning of the New Millennium.

For several years after the systemic transformation, a strong and far-reaching myth prevailed in the Polish self-image, which claimed a superiority of the Polish educational system over similar systems in Western Europe and the United States³⁷. This myth was painfully verified in the process of growing Polish involvement in international research and education networks, the most prominent example being the PISA report³⁸, which was carried out in the group of 15-year-olds, and was based on an evaluation of the effectiveness of the education system. In the study carried out in the year 2000, Polish students ranked at the tail end, ahead only of Greece and Portugal (Białecki and Haman 2010: 8), which caused a big shock among educational authorities and led to an avalanche of ideas about radical reforms of teaching methods.

Additionally, along the need for rising efficiency and competitiveness of the educational system in Poland, increasingly more attention is being paid to the monitoring of how the core values – such as, multiculturalism – are being promoted in the framework of the schooling system. The practice of multiculturalism is far from ideal not only because of the relatively low rate of children of non-Polish origin in the structures of public education, but also because state solutions to the challenges of cultural diversity are minimal. This relatively bleak situation is deepened by persisting difficulties in the cooperation between the central ministries and local educational authorities.

Following Michael Waltzer, who utilises a distinction between tolerance as an attitude and tolerance as a practice, the Polish school can be characterised as operating in two different, and not always overlapping realities. In what follows, we will try to present this discrepancy. It has to be admitted that several improvements have been made in this respect. The new core curriculum has been in force since 2008. It was preceded by several years of educational changes introduced by successive governments. Unfortunately, this was a rather chaotic process commented on by one of the headmasters in the following way: ‘please do not say anything about the reforms – we [teachers and headmasters] don't do anything else, but adjust from one reform to the other’ [MG]. Both the curriculum and all additional guidelines and publications supporting school teachers and managers strongly emphasise the need for promoting the ideas of multiculturalism and tolerance towards diversity. Calls for implementing diversity in education policies appear from all sides with a relatively great frequency.

³⁷ In the period between 1990 and 2005 Poland experienced a nearly 5-fold increase in the number of university level students (from about over 400 thousand to just under 2 million), combined with more than a four-fold increase of the number of universities and colleges in 1990-2008 (from 112 to 456). Educational desires and the significant increase in educational opportunities have caused problems in keeping standards in the quality of education (EAOEA 2010: 21).

³⁸ OECD/PISA, a Programme for International Student Assessment Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development is an initiative aimed at ensuring, through periodic surveys, the analysis of the effectiveness of educational systems in European countries, OECD countries and non-members. In 2000, 32 countries (28 OECD and four non-members) took part in the program, while in 2003, already 41 countries participated in this comparative study (30 OECD and 11 non-members).

This is a visible change from the previous regulations of the Ministry of National Education (hereafter also MEN)³⁹. Before 2008, the need for the promotion of these ideas was not expressed directly and appeared rather as a general necessity for teaching dignity and respect for other people in the school life. Since Polish accession to the European Union (2004), closer attention has been paid to developing specific multicultural guidelines for teachers at all levels of the educational ladder. It has not been, however, accompanied by securing new teaching tools and proper training for educators, which would assist them in implementing novel tasks in the field of multicultural education.

Moreover, like many practices in other areas of social and political life, 'crisis intervention' is a routine modus operandi in the area of education in Poland. Instead of planning long-term policies for the benefit of all actors involved, the authorities react hastily when strong conflicts or new disturbing phenomena are revealed. For instance, classes about Jewish culture usually are offered only when pupils have been caught using anti-Semitic expressions; and a lecture on Roma culture is organised only when children from this minority are bullied in the school. As one of the interviewees said: *'If there are Romani children in the class, this topic is discussed. If not, then we talk about human values in general'* [EN].

Thus, state educational policy is mostly geared towards the local authorities' actions and responsibility, i.e. in fact no general policy is applied (Czerniejewska 2008: 55). Despite the adoption of all EU legal recommendations in the field of education and protection of minority rights, a discrepancy between European provisions and their actual application is a salient characteristic of the educational system in Poland.

The Ministry of National Education invites schools to cooperate with NGOs which are prepared for and can initiate the promotion of multiculturalism (inter alia, through co-organised extracurricular activities in schools), as well as positive attitudes of students and their families towards cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. These commendations are neither mandatory nor universal. They take place mainly in the so-called 'good schools'⁴⁰ and often function as attractive or decorative appendages to the schools' curricula, rather than comprise a permanent feature in teaching programs or general educational policy. The majority of teachers and their superiors does not see a need for this type of education, mostly because of the small number of migrant children and children representing national, ethnic, or religious minorities. As an employee of the Provincial Board of Education (Wojewódzkie Kuratorium Oświaty) in Poznań, the capital of the Greater Poland (Wielkopolska) region (voivodship)⁴¹ stated:

'Many more initiatives of this kind [aimed at promoting multiculturalism and monitoring schools in this respect] are carried out in regions where such problems exist. Warsaw puts a strong emphasis on the integration of refugees, because they have facilities there. We do not have them [refugees], so there is no problem, the phenomenon does not exist' [WCH].

This statement renders the prevailing approach of most local and state officials: If there are no

³⁹ The name of the Ministry is indicative of the way education of children and young people in Poland is understood. In Polish it is 'Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej'. The term 'naród' (from which 'narodowej' is derived) translates into English as 'nation', which here is understood in an 'ethnic,' not 'civic' sense.

⁴⁰ The concept applies to school facilities in better neighbourhoods, which are attended by children from wealthy families, and which are usually ranked highly in the rankings of the pupils' achievements in the city or region.

⁴¹ Poland is a centralist state divided into 16 administrative regions traditionally called 'voivodships'. Many of them have a long and distinctive provincial history. Poznań (ca. 560 thousands dwellers) is the capital of the Greater Poland voivodship (Wielkopolska).

alarming events or actual conflicts, there is no reason to speculate about abstract problems.

In 2008, within the framework of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, MEN promoted multiculturalism in schools. Since then, Multicultural Days, School Festivals of Culture and Diversity, and similar initiatives have taken place, but in most cases they turned out to be one-time events. An employee⁴² of the Provincial Board of Education in Poznań was somewhat embarrassed when she could not find a report on the activities undertaken within the framework of this programme. During the interview she said that:

'there was a report on multiculturalism, I guess, but in the meantime the Ministry of Education reformed us, so I cannot don't know where it is at the moment' [JCH].

This statement aptly expresses a predominant stance of the local educational authorities towards the importance of cultural pluralism and the events promoting multiculturalism.

Press reports and direct conversations with teachers, pupils and their parents indicate that the introduction of tolerance and respect in school life and their enforcement in daily interactions does not look particularly optimistic. While local officials and employees of the Board of Education declare that they are not aware of any actual physical violence based on intolerance towards ethnic or racial others [JCH, PP], cases of racist or anti-Semitic insults are common at all school levels. One can read about them in media releases or hear about them from the students.

Tolerance towards intolerant behaviour and language in a given institution depends to a large extent on the school's executive management's attitude and sensitivity. The headmaster's personal perception of the issue can shape the everyday practices in a given school. One of the teachers expressed this clearly: *'the headmaster always has the last word'*[AG]. This explains why local educational officials frequently mentioned the autonomous decisions of schools' authorities that have to be made in cases of conflict or difficult situations related to interethnic relations⁴³.

A tolerant or sensitive attitude toward multicultural ethics is not the priority in educational curricula. Schools are ranked according to their teaching efficiency. The teaching agenda is still anchored in an old 'memorising' style of knowledge acquisition. Tests are heavily based on this type of accumulated wisdom. In other words, the main criterion for the effectiveness of education is the number of points in the final exam, and – only additionally – the so called 'assessment of conduct' (*ocena z zachowania*). The latter in fact reflects the level of students' adaptation to explicit or unwritten rules of behaviour in a given school, but does not refer his or her general manners, social life skills and opinions about social relations. Teachers are aware of this discrepancy and acknowledge that the students' demeanour and attitude towards social issues, including tolerance towards 'otherness', in particular ethnic and religious others, should be given more value in the educational process and in the evaluation of

⁴² The cited employee of the Board is a person designated to deal with multicultural issues in schools in Wielkopolska, who at the end of the interview critically stated that the Board has no people with a sociological background who could competently approach these issues, and mentioned that her assignment to this area in the Board was completely random.

⁴³ The authority of headmasters and their large impact on the overall character of a given school has been clearly manifested on various occasions in the course of the research. Usually, teachers and officials suggested that only meeting with the headmaster of the school will produce valid information, and not – what would seem more obvious – teachers having non-Polish pupils in the class, or experiencing difficulties in teaching foreign students. The headmaster is the 'face' of the school and ensures that the information about events in the school is appropriate (politically correct) when given to external parties.

individuals. One of the tutors in the International School of Poznań⁴⁴ said that *'in the Polish school, contents of textbooks are in the first place - what the child should know is crucial. It is not entirely clear, what kind of students we want to have [at the end of each stage of education]'* [AT]. This statement suggests that the students' attitudes and behaviours towards cultural diversity are not a real concern for the public education officers.

The current ethnic and religious situation in Poland, i.e., by European standards a very low rate of students coming from minorities and immigrant communities in relation to the Polish majority, can serve as an 'excuse' for this situation. However, this argument totally misses the point. Teaching tolerance toward otherness and the education about multiculturalism has a much wider aim and meaning in contemporary Europe and world than just being a tool for solving local conflicts or addressing problems existing here and now. All in all, it seems that with respect to the promotion of multiculturalism and advocacy of pluralism, the Polish educational authorities and ordinary teachers can be reproached for their passivity and disinterest rather than negligence.

School diversity in Poland

In order to see the issues discussed in a wider context, let us give some numbers relevant to multiculturalism in Polish schools.

To determine the number of foreign students (i.e., non-Polish citizens) in schools is not an easy task (see Table 2 below). It is also virtually impossible to determine the number of students who are members of national, ethnic and religious minorities holding Polish citizenship, simply because schools do not keep records on nationality/ethnicity and the religious affiliation of students. As all Polish citizens, they have a right to free public education. In addition, the strong link between the school system of civil registration⁴⁵ (concerning not only school students, but all inhabitants of the country) and the formal demand of residence registration (*meldunek*) can lead to absurd: if the school has no information regarding the registration of residence of a given pupil coming from a minority group, the child does not exist for this school. This fact is extremely important in the context of the so-called compulsory schooling rule⁴⁶, i.e. the legal obligation imposed on parents that every Polish citizen has the duty to send their children to school (not necessarily public school). This educational duty also extends to immigrants. However, in practice it quite often happens that the rule does not apply to certain minorities, particularly the Roma, who often do not register their residence. Because of this administrative blind spot, which sometimes leads to the situation where children do not appear in school records, headmasters cannot take any legal action to enrol these children into the education system (in a given school district).

⁴⁴ International School of Poznań is a member of the Bachelor International Organization, an institution with a mission statement emphasising the comprehensive development of openness and communication skills. In comparison to the core curriculum of Polish public schools, its philosophy of teaching may be called 'progressive', or even revolutionary, as it promotes good attitudes, and not only knowledge. Half of the students are Poles whose parents pay for international education, and the other half are foreigners whose parents prefer international education for their offspring to the regular Polish one.

⁴⁵ In 2005, the Education Information System (SIO) was introduced. This is a platform created to collect and store public education data. It is being constantly reconstructed in order to adjust to changing legislation, including the latest law on personal data (the last change was made on 12 May 2011, which resulted in another suspension of the SIO for an unspecified period of time).

⁴⁶ The Education Act explicitly states the obligation of school education. This law applies to all children aged between 7 and 18 years, living in the Republic of Poland, and therefore also the children of refugees or asylum seekers – in other words, all children residing on the territory of the country, regardless of their legal status. This makes primary and secondary school education universally compulsory.

Table 1. Schools and students (state and private schools) (EAOEA 2010: 52)

Type of school	Number of pupils (in thousands)		Number of schools	
	1999/2000	2008/2009	1999/2000	2009/2010
Primary School	3958,0	2294,4	17743	14067
Gymnasium	615,3	1381,4	6121	7204
Secondary School	864,0	688,0	2156	2451
Vocational School	1552,3	880,0	8066	5206
Additional secondary School	205,5	344,1	2328	3369

The Central Statistical Office (GUS – acronym of *Główny Urząd Statystyczny*) determines the number of foreigners in Polish schools. According to GUS, the total number of immigrant students currently oscillates around 4000; they barely comprise () 0.06% of the total student population below university level. There are also only 775 foreign teachers employed in the Polish educational system (Szelewa 2010: 25), a fringe in the army of six hundred thousand schoolteachers.

Another difficulty in the precise identification of ethnic belonging of foreigner children attending schools in Poland stems from the fact that the headmasters, who are responsible for the gathering of this kind of data, specify only whether a child comes from a member state of the EU or from a third party country. Current MEN regulations do not provide for the acquisition of more detailed data in this respect.

Table 2. Number of foreign students in Polish schools (Szelewa2010) [in thousands]

Type of school	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005	2005/2006
Primary School	2,6	2,1	3	2,8	2,6
Gymnasium	0,5	0,7	0,8	0,7	0,6
Secondary School (<i>Liceum</i>)	0,6	0,7	0,8	1,1	0,8

Changes in education after 1989

Post-1989 structural changes in the education system began to be introduced relatively late in Poland, together with the reform of the healthcare and social welfare systems in the late 1990s. The main changes concerned the organization of education (e.g., allowing for the establishment of non-public schools, enhancing the role of local authorities and parents in the functioning of the school), the content of already partly modified textbooks and curricula, and last but not least, the values promoted in schools. An important part of these reforms, implemented already at the very beginning of the 1990s, was the possibility of teaching religious classes in public schools⁴⁷. This regulation has caused several re-emerging controversies revolving around the issue of a secular constitution of the state that were amplified/ by the slowly but steadily growing secularisation of Polish society.

⁴⁷ Religious classes in public schools were banned by the communist authorities only in 1961. Religious education classes, which were widely attended between 1961 and 1990, took place in classrooms arranged by the Church parishes.

In the 1990s, the state began to delegate the responsibility of managing schools and kindergartens to local governments, which has proven to be very beneficial to the educational facilities and schools' functioning. The local authorities have proven to be more effective managers than the state which is detached from local affairs. The process was accompanied by a significant change in the way of thinking about the funding of education. The state-granted resources are correlated to the number of students participating in the system; local authorities can, if they can only afford it, allocate their own resources for educational purposes.

Soon after this structural transition, in the period before the Polish accession to the EU (May 2004), the educational system faced further challenges prompted by the necessity of its adaptation to EU requirements. The main changes were related to the modernisation and computerisation of schools, the need to raise teachers' competence (e.g., continuous vocational training), the introduction of external examinations, and the reform of the structure of the schooling system. Secondary education was split into junior level gymnasiums and senior level lyceums. In result, children attend elementary schools (6 grades), gymnasiums (3 grades) and lyceums (3 grades). In the transition from one stage to the other, final exams are taken. By successfully passing the secondary school (lyceum) final examinations final examinations, called matura, (German Abitur), one can enter university level education.

Actually, due to the change of government in the autumn of 2001 and the changes in education policy associated with it, the reform of 1999 had not been fully implemented. This was especially true for structural changes and alterations in curricula at the secondary school level. In particular, it was the inconsistencies between education in junior (gymnasium) and senior high school (lyceums) that constituted the main reasons for implementing another reform program in 2009 (EAOEA 2010: 20-23).

Because of several political changes and the diverse visions of the way education should look like related to them, the 'Polish school' is endlessly looking for a more coherent policy. This instability (mitigated by the fact that the currently ruling coalition has a chance to win the upcoming elections this year), combined with the formal and practical challenges of an increasingly visible cultural diversity of the society, gives a picture of a chaotic and constantly transforming area, as the case studies chosen for the purpose of this research will further illustrate.

Methodology

This chapter is based on the analysis of scientific literature, documents circulated by MEN and the Ministry of Interior and Administration, reports and expert documents on minorities' education in Poland, articles in newspapers, and qualitative interviews conducted for the purpose of this study. The latter were conducted between February and May 2011 with employees of educational institutions, teachers, headmasters and NGO activists engaged in the efforts aimed at improving the education and integration of the Roma minority in Poznań and Swarzędz⁴⁸ (case study 1), as well as with people involved in the disputes about the presence of religious symbols in school buildings and in public education (case study 2). Interviews were preceded by several weeks of preparations which often focused on identifying people willing to take part in such interviews and meetings. We have to say that the subject of interrogations evoked a lot of unease among the people inquired to the degree that they were sometimes suspicious about the purpose of our research.

⁴⁸ An economically vibrant town with more than 30 thousand inhabitants, a part of the Poznań agglomeration.

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

We also used a snowballing method in the process of interviewing in both case studies. Each interview lasted at least 60 minutes (on average app. 80 minutes), was recorded and transcribed. In the body of the chapter, citations from the interviews end with the initials of the interlocutors.

During the interviews conducted, many questions were asked about the use of the material. The interviewees also expressed their concerns about the possibility of quoting them and, above all, about disclosing their names. In several cases, the interlocutors asked for turning the recorder off, because they thought that some contents may prove problematic and threaten their jobs.

The structure of the interviews is given in Annex II, however, we have to emphasise here that we have conducted semi-structured interviews, treating the guidelines merely as a helpful tool for keeping the basic scheme of the interview. Spontaneous comments of the respondents were particularly desired as the views on the topics addressed during interviews are often rooted in stereotypes. Simultaneously, questions about the situation of national minorities and the attitude toward religion proved to be quite embarrassing for many informants. In any case, we made all possible effort not to impose answers.

Some basic socio-demographic data about the informants, such as ethnicity or nationality, gender and workplace, are given in the list of interviews in Annex I below. In total, 16 interviews were conducted with employees of the Educational Board (*Kuratorium Oświaty*), the Department of Education of the Municipality of Poznań, teachers, principals, the head of a Romani NGO, a lawyer who works in the field of human rights, and one high school student.

Persuading the representatives of educational institutions to participate in the interviews was also a relatively difficult task. These institutions usually designate a person responsible for communication with the media and other outside parties. Therefore, it is difficult to obtain a greater spectrum of opinions held by the people working in them. Interviewees were mostly women, which reflects their numerical dominance in the Polish education system.

Interviews were conducted by one person, usually in the workplace of the informant. Only in one case it was conducted in a café, since the interlocutor did not want to talk at her workplace. She was afraid of being accused by her superiors of spreading unauthorised information about sensitive issues to someone from the outside.

In the first case study, we accepted the principle that interviews should be conducted with the representatives of the educational authorities as well as with the teachers involved in a bottom-up process of reforming and improving the education of Roma children in Poznań and its vicinity. We made this decision for several reasons. On the one hand, it is practically impossible to find Roma families willing to participate in an interview. The same applies to Roma children in public schools. It has to be said that their commandment of Polish is inadequate, particularly in the lower grades. On the other hand, experts and politicians at the (inter-)national level, whom we wanted to interview, were extremely elusive. Also, most of them are not very competent in their area of responsibility. Unfamiliar with the issues related to multiculturalism, an issue virtually absent in public discourses, they felt unprepared for a meaningful discussion about Roma education in Poland and refused to give an interview. (Some were ready to talk about the events organised by the European Union – such as the ‘Multicultural Year 2008’.)

From reading the scientific literature in the field of education (Głowacka-Grajper 2006; Kwadrans 2007, 2008; Sułkowska-Kądziołka 2007; Weigl and Formanowicz 2007), one can get the impression that the Program for the Roma community (see below), despite its flaws, has given some good results and has improved the quality of education of this minority. However, opinions of volunteers and NGO

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

workers are hardly heard and rarely taken into account in official documents and recommendations for schools and teachers. Local ideas and practices are not promulgated by the Educational Board in other regions. As a matter of fact, cross-regional meetings and trainings are not on the agenda of this institution.

As for the second case study, i.e. classes on ethics and religious symbols (crucifixes) in schools, it has to be stressed that this is an issue barely present in Polish scholarly literature. It is usually raised by lawyers deliberating the similarities of legal systems in Europe (e.g., a book on this topic is being prepared by one of the interviewees, an employee of Poznań Human Rights Centre). It seems that this problem is in a certain way denied because it is also very rarely a subject of concern in the everyday life of students and their parents. It sometimes concerns intellectuals and is from time to time addressed by the media. The supporters of a purely secular model of education are a minority in the public debate, while advocates of religious education and the presence of religious symbols in school premises do not see a point in starting the debate again. Newspaper articles, as well as documents on ethics classes issued by the MEN or by local educational authorities are prompted by rare conflicts about the issue.

In our interpretation of materials we applied the method of qualitative discourse analysis. We have looked for meanings and concepts emerging in the discussion on specific issues. Common ideas and statements have been integrated into themes that are of our interest and that are helpful in understanding the attitudes of our interlocutors to tolerance, diversity and pluralism in school life.

Our case studies were selected for two major reasons: their importance to the education system as a whole, and their significance for the issues of tolerance and multiculturalism. While in Poland multiculturalism is not hotly debated (most probably due to the miniscule proportion of migrants and minorities), we think that the case studies discussed here address some questions that are indicative of the currently on-going as well as future debate on this topic. Seemingly, the two topics are not closely related, but they touch upon the crucial challenges for 'Polish multiculturalism'. On the one hand, the problems of Roma children education demonstrate the character of general, often implicit assumptions underlying the practices observable in the state education system in relation to immigrants/foreigners and minorities. On the other hand, there is a question of the dominant role of Roman-Catholicism in Polish society, which is correlated to the presence of this religion in public spaces and the strong position of the Roman-Catholic Church in politics. This situation spawns debates about the relations between the nominally secular state and the Church, and leads to postulates of revising these relations in many domains of life, also in education and daily practices in schools.

At the same time, two additional criteria were a factor in our selection of case studies: the severity of the problem, i.e. a desire to focus on those aspects of education which cause long-lasting unsolved problems; and, the relevance of attitudes towards and practices linked to diversity and tolerance in Poland, which are mostly hidden to the public. We think that these two cases provide glaring examples of the ineptitude of policy makers and education officials in this field, and they expose their ignorance towards basic principles of a liberal society in Europe.

Case Study1: The Ups and Downs of the Education of Roma

The Roma's nomadic lifestyle is a well-identified, culturally rooted excuse for their offspring low level of school attendance. As a matter of fact, some practices of the nomadic lifestyle have not completely disappeared. Despite the fact that Roma were banned to travel in their caravans almost five

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

decades ago, many of them in most parts of Poland⁴⁹, including western provinces, are forced to move within the country and beyond it in order to earn a living, simply because they are still unable to find regular employment.

As just mentioned, some 'experts' explain the disinterest of Roma in education by their 'nomadic' lifestyle which is embedded in their culture. Moreover, cultural patterns allowing 14-year-old girls to marry and give up on education, are another common and easy justification for the low rates of educated Roma. It is also said that Roma fear to lose their identity, which reinforces their reluctance towards state education. In result, school is imagined as a punitive institution that threatens the sustainability of the group and the preservation of its heritage (Głowacka-Grajper 2006: 47).

Many Roma face unemployment caused by industrial restructuring and the collapse of state enterprises. Indeed, in the communist past, Roma found employment in industrial plants in many regions. Nowadays, the majority of Roma in Poland live in relatively bad conditions, have no or very limited access to social services and health care, which is, at least partly related to their illiteracy, especially among adults. The latter, in combination with a disregard shown towards education by Roma themselves, impede the so-called 'social advancement' (Czerniejewska 2008: 151).

All these factors constitute a seemingly consistent explanation of the yet unresolved problem of the creation of an efficient education system for the Roma minority in Poland, especially in the regions with a high dispersion rate of members of this group, which is also the case in Wielkopolska. Library research on the subject and the interviews conducted in the framework of the ACCEPT Project lead to similar conclusions. However, one may ask if this image is not an outcome of a strongly entrenched belief that because of their unbridgeable cultural distinction, it is impossible to work out an effective educational strategy for the Roma minority in Poland.

The issue of the education of Roma children appears as a problem not only for the Polish state, but also for NGOs and Roma leaders. At the beginning of the 1990s there was an idea to create separate 'Roma classes'. This idea was actually implemented with the help of teachers from local communities in which Roma live. Classes were established on the assumption of a short-term utility: teaching helpers should serve as an aid in the early stages of school education for the Roma children who had difficulties with the Polish language caused by the fact that Romani was used at home, as well as the fact that they lacked any pre-school preparation. By 1998, nearly 30 classes attended by 430 pupils were set up, mainly in the southern and north-eastern parts of the country, where there are areas of higher Roma concentration. However, this initiative was stopped due to the growing protests of Roma community leaders who perceived this solution as leading to the 'ghettoization' of their group, at least in the domain of education (Czerniejewska 2008: 155; Kwadrans 2008: 232-238).

In result, state and local authorities abandoned the idea criticised by Roma activists and searched for less controversial and more systemic solutions. The most popular ones are the attempts to include Roma schoolchildren into the existing system of general public education. Such practices should lead to the promotion of integration through education and other domains of life. Ideally, it should also mean that authorities, bureaucrats, public servants and social workers start to perceive Roma as citizens equal to all others.

As mentioned, currently at the state level, the education of the Roma is covered by the general 'Program for the Roma community in Poland' (see: Zawicki 2010: 121), which is financed, supervised

⁴⁹ They are divided into four main groups – Lowari, Kalderashi, Polska Roma and Bergitka Roma.

and coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior and Administration. (It is noteworthy that most minority-related issues are handled by the Ministry also responsible for public security). It is declared that the Program should improve Roma children's achievements in education by reducing the practice of skipping classes and reducing cultural and mental barriers.

The implementation of this project started in the mid-1990s. Actually, it was initiated by grass-root activists from the Małopolska voivodship (Smaller Poland) in southern Poland, a region where Roma can be found in numbers larger than average for the country, and where they are often concentrated in local township communities. In the next step of the project, these small-scale educational activities were formalised in the form of a more coordinated program under the auspices of the central government (Kwadrań 2007: 242). The Pilot program in Małopolska alone, realised in the years 2001–2003, proved a common opinion among the teachers working with Roma students – opinion that they lack a basic knowledge of Polish, and should be given the initial education and socialisation provided by pre-school education in the so-called 'zero-classes'.⁵⁰ No wonder that in the recommendations based on this Pilot programme experience, it was stated that it is particularly important to facilitate access of Roma children to kindergarten education in order to prepare them for further education.

At this point one important conclusion referring to a significant shift in educational policy can be made. As we have seen, initially the idea of teaching children in special Roma classes prevailed. It was based on the assumptions that they comprise an isolated group that is culturally homogeneous and that their social and cultural difference prevents integration into mainstream society. Later, due to criticism and the failure of the policy itself, this idea was replaced by another one, based on the principle of integration in commonly attended classes. In classrooms, teachers were aided by Roma assistants – specialists trained for this task and ready to act in a multicultural environment. A special emphasis was put on the necessity of bridging socio-cultural differences existing between Roma children and their peers at the initial, pre-school stage of education, which was to enable these minority students to catch up with others (See: *Sprawozdanie z realizacji...* 2010, 2009, 2008 [Reports on the implementation of the 'Program for the Roma community in Poland' in 2010, 2009, 2008]).

Roma assistants – Roma community members – provide comprehensive support for Roma students in dealing with the school environment, help to build a positive image of the school and the benefits of education for Roma children, ensure emotional support for Roma pupils, advise teachers and educators in identifying the needs and problems of individual students, and mediate in situations of conflict. The introduction of Roma assistants improved the efficiency of schools in the education of Romani children and made all students more familiar with multiculturalism as a phenomenon. Similar practices, based on the experience with the Roma, have been currently introduced in the education of refugee children, e.g., Chechens. However, it is still questionable if today one can really speak of a coherent state educational policy in this respect.

Also, the policy towards the Roma proved to be only a partial success. Shortly after the turn of the century, it appeared that such a policy did not in fact result in a greater inclusion of the Roma as a group into the majority society. The number of children benefiting from the public school offer systematically decreased. This problem became especially severe in regions with few Roma families, while the situation was somewhat better in the areas of their bigger concentration. Elders in Roma communities, often illiterate, have not been able to benefit from any form of assistance. In order to see the picture in a proper perspective, one should keep in mind that in a given context, a lot has always

⁵⁰ Currently, 'class zero' preparatory education can take place both in schools and kindergartens.

depended on the attitude of the Roma parents and community leaders on the one hand, and the local communities' majorities' good will to improve the living conditions of Roma people on the other.

All in all, the governmental programs and the initiatives of foundations and associations implemented with the goal of creating effective tools for Roma integration in the mainstream education system left all stakeholders with the feeling of unfulfilled promises (Paszko and Czysz 2010: 75). With this in mind, we can start the analysis of the above mentioned case study, i.e. to scrutinise the response of Poznań's school communities and authorities to the challenge of establishing an effective tool for the improvement of the education of Roma and their children.

Schooling Roma in Poznań

In Poznań, as in most cities and provinces of western Poland, the number of Roma is difficult to determine because of their mobility. Census data from 2002 refer to 1086 Roma living in Wielkopolska (more than 3.3 million in total), while in the city of Poznań (ca. 570 thousand inhabitants), only 155 Roma are listed (Chrabąszcz and Gałęcki 2010: 37-38). Anna Markowska is a very prominent Roma leader in the city and she is president of the successful 'Bahtale Roma' Foundation⁵¹ (which in Romani means 'Happy Roma'). According to her, the picture is even more confusing. She thinks that there are circa 100 thousand Roma in Poland, and more than a hundred big families about whom the authorities have no knowledge at all in the heart of Poznań alone.⁵² She emphasises that:

'it's true that there are not many Roma people here [in Poznań], but it doesn't mean that the problem does not exist. In Poznań there are over a hundred families,. The social welfare officers complain that too many Roma ask for assistance, and at the same time the authorities claim that the problem does not exist' [AM].

Chrabąszcz and Gałęcki (2010) also emphasise that the dispersion of the Roma in western parts of the country is a myth, since it is a general feature of the whole group in Poland. This scattered and unstable pattern of settlement might be the major reason for significant differences and inconsistencies in the official estimates of the number of Roma in Poland. Indeed, statistics show that there are about 12 thousand Roma in the country, while Roma organisations claim that their number reaches 20 or even 40 thousand.⁵³ However, despite all these demographic uncertainties, the fact is that in Małopolska there are villages with Bergitka Roma who have settled there for generations, a phenomenon unknown in Wielkopolska. Therefore, attempts to transpose experiences directly from there have proven problematic in Poznań.

Local authorities, which in principle support Roma organisations, see Bahtale Roma's⁵⁴ undertakings

⁵¹ <http://www.bahtale-roma.pl/index.php>

⁵² A review of the data is impossible at this point. However, the officials strongly argue that these blown up numbers are a part of Roma organizations' 'propaganda'.

⁵³ This discrepancy in the number of minority members given by officials and by minority activists is a common pattern in Europe, particularly in Central Europe. However, the difference in numbers claimed is especially striking in the case of Roma.

⁵⁴ Another significant organisation in the vicinity of Poznań is the association of 'Polish Roma'. Their activities focus more on (1) media releases, (2) the participation of its activists in events combating stereotypes about Roma and other minority groups, (3) the promotion of tolerance, and (4) active participation in groups engaged in the cause of minorities and their rights. Several attempts to meet the leader of this organization failed, so it is impossible to confront the strategies of these two Roma NGOs. The headmistress of a school in Swarzędz, where this organization has its office, said that their

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

in the field of education positively. The Foundation itself decided not to cooperate with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration within the framework of its above mentioned Program for Roma, since they perceive the bureaucrats' stand as rigid, disregarding local conditions and inflexible in the very domain of educational matters. Bahtałe Roma has been trying to implement an alternative educational program, based on the experience in schools run by the Foundation. Anna Markowska stated:

'We do not work with the Ministry of Administration, and the Ministry of Education understands better that we cannot do everything at once, we are not able to move every Roma to one district. So we are doing it by ourselves, and it is worth doing' [AM].

The Foundation is currently managing, in cooperation with and the help of various public school headmasters and local educational authorities in Poznań, late afternoon schools open to all persons who have Polish citizenship and who were not able to complete their education, or prefer extraordinary forms of education.

Every Roma who wants to move from the public school to one of those supervised by the Foundation gets permission from the Board of Education. Since local educational authorities are currently more flexible towards Roma and their education, they eagerly support virtually all non-governmental initiatives in this field. This attitude is no doubt related to the shortages of other governmental programs, especially the one discussed above.

Usually, headmasters, referring to the principle of equal treatment of individuals independently of their ethnic background, deny the promotion of Roma students to higher grades on the basis of their excessive absenteeism. There is no room for more flexibility. In this context, the local Board of Education gladly issues permission to transfer students to the afternoon school run by the Foundation. Thanks to this arrangement, teaching results statistics in regular schools are not spoiled. Moreover, the stakeholders are not forced to be differently tolerant to various students, to support individuals by all means nor at any expense. Simultaneously, the unwritten rule is that in the schools run by the Foundation, a flexible attitude towards school attendance is commonly known, but what is equally commonly recognised is that what really counts (there) is the quality of the material prepared for classes. This means that with some intellectual effort and lower respect for discipline, Roma students have the opportunity to finish a school operated by the Foundation.

The Bahtałe Roma Foundation school experience leads to the following conclusion: Despite formal guidelines to promote the integration of Roma within the general educational system, it is better for all parties involved not to force Roma children to participate in the state sponsored integration programs. Regular schools are not ready for a proper implementation of the centrally advocated policy because of the lack of material resources and willingness to create a space for exercising cultural diversity.

A relative success of the Primary and Secondary Music Schools run by the Foundation encourages it to make plans for a further expansion of the curricula by including in it the general subjects taught in all schools⁵⁵. Thanks to this, they could be transformed into regular public schools with additional

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activities boil down to the regular organisation of the Roma Culture Festival. All her attempts to start a discussion about the encouragement and facilitation of Swarzędz's Roma children in public schooling have been left unheard.

⁵⁵ The Foundation is in charge of the following schools (they were open one after the other since 2006) :

1. Primary School for Adults (opened in 2009)– the program consist of a a one-year course designed to complement the education of those who did not completed the first stages of education. It is open to ever Polish citizen, and free of charge, but Poles are minority in it; it is attended mainly by Roma adults whose number varies between 55 and 100.

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

classes in music. The Board of Education has some plans to apply the elaborated by Foundation schooling model in other o Wielkopolska's towns.

Practices in these schools represent an attempt to break the deadlock involving, on the one hand, a failure of universal education mechanisms in confrontation with the challenges related to the education of Roma, especially those who live in dispersion and, on the other hand, the lack of awareness that Roma should be integrated into the education system in a flexible and sensitive way. The activists involved in the particular project discussed here (and, as mentioned earlier, this is a joint initiative of open-minded headmasters, teachers who are not afraid to advocate tolerance in a multicultural social environment, members of the Foundation and the municipal and provincial authorities) are conscious of the difficulties involved in their undertaking, but they perceive it as a promising pragmatic solution that has many advantages in the view of the failure of other programs.

As for the authorities, their support can be interpreted as a response to the growing awareness of the lack of flexible social and educational policies in an increasingly multicultural Poznań. Accommodating multicultural challenges is an official responsibility of those authorities. It is thus fair to say that a reciprocal change in the perception of the relationship between local communities and local government does actually take place. These are admittedly only the first steps, but the desire to create alternative scenarios for socially relevant issues is comforting in this so far ethno-culturally homogenous country.

In the next sections we are going to investigate the material gathered during the interviews and we will attempt to point to the main challenges and projected scenarios for the grass-roots education of the Roma minority.

Main Challenges for Teachers and School Managers

The challenges emerging in the education of Roma can be divided into several major categories. The first includes everything that is associated with cultural difference. It is considered by teachers and administrators to be the main cause of 'problems' in public schools and in the schools mentioned above, i.e. those less formal and granting a greater tolerance towards different behaviours.

The issues related to what one teacher called 'the normal behaviour', i.e. the presence in class on a regular basis, and the conduct of children whose 'codes' were learned at the beginning of the first grade, seem to be the most often referred obstacles. Teachers frequently cite stories from everyday school life in support of their belief that the Roma must be taught some basic 'good manners', because only then can real education start:

'One day a student came to class without a pen. I gave him one a few days earlier. He didn't take it with him and had nothing to write with. Well, this is his problem. I'm trying to teach them that when you get something, you have to take care of it. The standards are to be maintained, e.g. that the phone is switched off during the lesson. They need to learn these things' [KL].

Another teacher is more pointed when he states:

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2. Evening Gymnasium for Adults.
3. Evening High School for Adults.
4. Complementary High School for those who have partly completed secondary education. Primary and Secondary Music School – the Foundation plans to expand their offer and include obligatory curricula subjects into their curricula, and transform them into public schools with special music education.

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

'These are the barriers that can interfere to some degree. This year, a Roma student came to the middle school exam and I asked him politely to take off his jacket, but he refused. However caustic it may seem, one may say that they need to be dressed in order to be safe at the time when they want to flee... Some things are in the cultural system, we cannot change this culture, even if it is not polite to write an exam in a jacket. He didn't take it off. If I had forced it on him, he would have left the room. His father, who is a little bit more enlightened than others, although he did not finish any school, sent the son to school, because otherwise he would have run away' [PB].

This passage reveals yet another element of the student – teacher relationship: it is easy to see a *patronising* vocabulary and a pre-established assumption of cultural superiority.

Another teacher pointed to the discomfort established in the class by Romani students using their language, assuming that the domination of one (Polish) *language* is not only correct, but also *undisputed*:

'When they start talking about something in Romani language, and a Pole stands next to them, he gets confused. We had to demand that it not be done and it doesn't always work quite so well' [KL].

From the teachers' point of view, 'standards' and 'order' are the key words used in the description of Romani students' deficits:

*'[The sources of the problem are] mainly the disparities in knowledge and the mastering of certain skills that are necessary in school. They [Roma students] have skills that allow them to function fully in their communities, but they have problems with analysing, synthesising, reading comprehension, etc. We use the method of trial and error here, because we do not have regular textbooks. But pupils are eager. There is also some/a small problem with attendance, their regularity differs from our **standards**' [KL].*

*'I had to teach them how to keep **order**, throwing cigarettes and waste paper into the trash. But after all, I have the same problems with youngsters, they also need to learn it' [KL].*

Another significant obstacle in shaping proper relations between Roma students and the school are the internal *norms of Romani culture* that are the most frequently cited reason for Roma's maladjustment to the universal educational system.

'I think that the main problem is that the school interferes with the family model. They marry quickly, take a wife, have kids. One of our pupils, Marek, who finished primary school, already had a wife and a child. And it is disrupting, because when there is a child, you have to take care of it – and they don't come back to school. This factor is more important than the alleged intolerant acts towards Roma that sometimes happen in schools' [EN].

This opinion expressed by the school headmaster in Swarzędz who had only one Roma child attending her classes indicates a strong tendency to attribute the problems arising during schooling to the characteristics of *Romani culture*. This type of interpretation of the existing difficulties excludes the examination of other possible factors involved, i.e. those related to the structural determinants of the educational system. The attitude of a large part of the officials and public school employees can be expressed as follows: *'the reasons for [the setbacks] must be sought in isolation, in the cultural closure [of the Roma]' [EN].*

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

Generalisations seem to be the main rationale of the experienced *otherness*:

'Mainly because we are dealing with a different culture, we need to be very careful not to offend the student, because the Romani culture is not identical with the Polish culture. There are other requirements... these people are very close with their family, whole families come to class, also families with young children. I need to show a great deal of patience' [MG].

'I watched this student, Natalia, and I noticed that in the 6th grade history class these cultural differences in education started to appear. They [Roma] look at things differently. For us, some things are important, while this girl was living in a different reality, in the Romani world. She was constantly saying: "our customs this, our tradition that' [EN].

Some teachers openly admit that one of the factors adversely affecting the relations between Poles and the Roma are the *prejudices* transmitted to successive generations in all social strata:

'I think that the situation in schools would be improved if the stereotype of Roma in the common consciousness was changed for the better. It might not be so visible with children, but ... (...) When Gypsies come to the store, everyone holds their wallets and bags close to their body, me too.'[EN]

One can get the impression that in response the Roma ignore the attempts at disciplining them through the education of their children. Maybe this behaviour can be interpreted as a deliberate sabotage of assimilating them into dominant society, a kind of cultural resistance.

The low effectiveness of the education of Roma is, inter alia, attributed to the fact that the institutions represented by both officers and headmasters do not enforce the law of compulsory education. Deputy Director of the one of Secondary Schools, stressed the need of a strict execution of this law:

'We [Poles], as a society, we do not learn from the mistakes of others. In Slovakia, the state has adopted one good, important rule – there is no mercy, when it comes to the duty of parents to send their children to school, they must comply to the rule. We have this situation in the case of Roma – if you say that they may be absent in some classes or you don't react to high absence rates, the effect is that Roma children in Poland abandon school and everyone will be is happy with this' [PB].

A similar view is shared by the employee of the City Department of Education (*Wydział Oświaty Urzędu Miasta*):

'mandatory education should be imposed. This should not be tolerated, why? [not complying to this duty should be punished]. If I do nothing, I give silent acquiescence' [EP].

The claims to treat Roma from the common, *dominant civic perspective* are put forward together with opinions that there exist vast differences between 'them' and 'us', which are also recognised as another reason for Roma's educational maladjustment. The following statement clearly expresses this perception:

'They have no religion, only a catalogue of ethnic rules, they have this council that considers all internal matters, they are locked up so much' [PB].

*'Roma **are not** like this – they come to class and do not treat the school as a place with certain rules and canons: they eat during teaching, talk, walk around like ten-year-olds, they can mobilise*

themselves [i.e., focus their attention] for 10-15 minutes only' [PB].

One of the distinct topics is also the clear need for changes in the curriculum, and the methods of evaluation and classification of Romani students. Teachers and headmasters share the opinion that it is not possible to achieve results with the current *rigid rules* that define educational success:

*'A 29-year-old Polish woman approached me once, she started her adult life quite early (...) and she hadn't finished the last semester of the primary school [in the pre-reformed system of 8-grade primary school]. She was working in a company, was a **normal person** living in a **civilised** way. She was interested in starting secondary education. Her request to the Board of Education was rejected, officials informed her of the necessity to finish 6th grade of a primary school, then 3 years of junior high school [gymnasium] and after all that, her secondary education [lyceum] dream could be fulfilled. (...) This system has no gaps, but someone should have the right to decide on a different form of determining the stage of education one is currently at, otherwise we face absurd situations' [PB].*

As mentioned earlier, local education officers have changed their philosophy of dealing with Roma students in the course of time and try to ease the obstacles that are in the way to obtaining the best possible education results by Roma children. 'In the case of Roma children, the Board tells us to turn a blind eye to the lack of evidence of earlier stages of education' [EN]. With the officers' blessing, teachers and headmasters have prepared the ground for greater flexibility in response to the specificity of Romani children's education, which gradually increases the number of pupils completing some level of education. They have used the goodwill of the authorities in an attempt to increase these statistics, and it is a proof that something can be done in this respect.

'I stick to the rules, but not very stiffly. If in a school for adults Roma... come and present their skills ... if you refine them, work at home. I'm not very strict with the level of absenteeism' [MG].

Nevertheless, these absenteeism numbers and teaching results are still disappointing and in fact demonstrate a partial failure of the education system⁵⁶.

Apart from all these culturally-based dimensions invoked by the interviewees, in order to describe their encounter with another culture we have to mention one more issue, the one reappearing in many conversations and hovering over all the attempts to create a new quality of education.

From time to time, teachers and headmasters mention the financial aspect of the Foundation's educational initiative, namely the fact that the Foundation encourages Roma in their educational efforts in a rather unconventional way – by granting them scholarship for each day spent at school. One of the teachers clearly states that Roma adults attend the evening school only because of the financial benefits:

'Their attitude towards the Foundation is fully demanding. It is not a secret that the Foundation must "wheel-and-deal" to encourage them to go to school. In the Primary School for Adults, most people know that this is a purely financial incentive. Of course, the Foundation may have problems with that, but the question is whether the officials understand this complex interrelationship' [PB].

⁵⁶ Assuming that more than 100 Roma families reside in Poznań [AM], which amounts to at least 400-500 people, the fact that the Board of Education database consists of 38 students enrolled in public primary schools [JCH] and the number of students in secondary schools run by the 'Bahtale Roma' Foundation is between 20 to 30 [PB], is a rather unsatisfactory outcome of the efforts described within the framework of this chapter.

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

The Foundation's president states openly:

'And we help those who attend our school. We apply for scholarships, 50 PLN per person per one day spent in school, and it allows the family to deal with schooling for a day. So there must be some material support, without it the Roma will not manage'[AM].

She emphasises it quite distinctly: 'Financial support is extremely important. As long as it does not exist... the schooling will not be effective' [AM].

If we consider not only these strongly voiced opinions of some officials concerning the Roma attitude toward financial support for schooling, but also their demands in other areas, i.e. claims concerning the method of teaching and assessment of Romani children in public schools [JCH], it appears that the education of Roma is a multi-faceted issue. Whereas different social forces are intermingling here, it still remains without a plan for the future.

Conclusions

The above-presented case of a grassroots organisation promoting education of Roma in schools raises a few questions. First, it seems that, what regards the education of Roma, there is a certain level of bureaucratic schizophrenia among both local and central authorities. On the one hand, the authorities support the Roma minority (when financing educational programs and their evaluation), but on the other, there are limited results of governmental initiatives. Could it be the lack of will that causes the long-lasting neglect in the field of the education of the Roma? There is no decisive activity directed at creating a well-functioning alternative to the current practices. And the authorities seem to believe it is the minorities' duty to match the majority culture. Roma have to know their responsibilities if they want to live in peace. Some efforts are made not to provoke accusations of intolerance and discrimination in the education system, but there is no really programme designed to change the inefficient education system. It seems that grass-root initiatives, similar to the one of the Bahtafe Roma Foundation, are most promising, since they take into account local context and needs.

Looking at the issue of Roma education from the perspective of the three-fold concept of Accept (Tolerance – Acceptance – Respect), those responsible for education make a good use of the concept of tolerance, but they would not use it to meet the others' needs. The universal state education requirements apply to everyone; this is the only message which the officials seem to send to the representatives of the Roma community. The officials clearly hinted that they see no other possibility of cooperation than the enforcement of universally applicable rules to all children, regardless of their origin or nationality. This is usually followed by a statement that changing these rules occasionally may happen only by good will of particular officials and teachers, and that this should not actually take place at all. These strategies of coping with 'the Roma problem' are accompanied by vigorous declarations of tolerance as a 'natural' feature of every Pole, especially of teachers. Therefore, it is not the question whether acceptance or respect is the next level. Officials believe that it is not their duty to pay respect to Roma's culture and practices, but the Roma who should accept the reality of the education system in Poland and respect the majority's assumptions.

Oddly enough, the fact that Roma are usually Roman-Catholics speaks in their favour from the perspective of civil servants and teachers. It gives officials hope that Roma will eventually 'civilise'! The ideal is the assimilation model rather than striving for mutual respect for differences. This is consistent with the interviewees' conviction that only 'Polishness' legitimates and determinates the

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

rules, and that it defines the so-called normality. The model of a national culture reinforces the desire for homogenization.

As for the group of activists, i.e. the people devoted to real improvement in the educational situation of the Roma in Poznań, there is a remarkable similarity of discourses used to legitimise the activities in favour of the Roma community. They also use arguments about the necessity to civilise them and to impose or restore normalcy, teaching them a proper range of reactions and behaviours. One can say that this group aims at the acceptance of diversity rather than merely tolerating it. It also has more experience in direct contact with the members of the Roma community. They are therefore more likely to express their awareness of the need to change the general attitude towards the Roma and sometimes even support their right to remain culturally distinct. However, the tone which prevails in the analysed discourse is patronising. No argument for respecting the cultural difference of Roma appears in the state-based educational process. Even the activists running the Romani organisation would rather improve better use of? the existing system than introduce new rules of the dialogue between the majority society and the Roma. The initiatives presented in this part of the chapter which are aimed at creating and supporting public schools co-managed by the Roma, can cause a return to the tradition of segregation. Having an alternative school as recommended by the elders, Roma pupils and students will not be interested in the inclusion into mainstream education.

There is improvement in the education of Roma children, and there is a need of good will from the Romani activists and community elders, as well as city officials and ordinary teachers. It also requires the educational institutions' employees and school headmasters to develop local strategies for coping with high school absenteeism of the Roma children, as well as to prevent the wasting of funds and implementation of ineffective or inefficient plans and programs. The key issue seems to be the cooperation on the level of municipal institutions and policy makers, as well as among volunteers and NGO activists, for the preparation, implementation and evolution of the most effective solutions and new ideas of local education professionals.

Cross and Religion in Polish Schools

The second case study chosen to illustrate the discourses on tolerance in the Polish school system relates to the issues of ethics and the presence of crucifixes in the classrooms.

We have decided to combine these two cases because separately they do not cover all the aspects we would like to refer to in our discussions on the cultural diversity in schools. Juxtaposing these discourses should give a better understanding of the debate on the possible oppositions to the existing ideological and cultural hegemony of the Roman-Catholic Church in the Polish public sphere. At the same time, it is a good starting point for the discussion on the relationship between state and religion, and the ways it affects the education system.

Classes in ethics and crosses in classrooms are relatively new concerns of the public debate. They are related to the invisible hegemony of the Roman-Catholic-based worldview and the strong influence that the Church has had on the state politics after 1989 (as well as the Church's role in Polish history, especially in the previous communist decades) [cf. Weigel 1992]. Research and scholarly publications on how the Church influences the mainstream discourses in Poland are still relatively few, and information on the calls for ideological pluralism appear occasionally and are considered rather bizarre

excesses (e.g., the ones in schools are ascribed to rebellious young people⁵⁷).

Originally, we planned to describe the conflict around the possibilities of classes in ethics in Ostrów Wielkopolski, a city in southern Wielkopolska, as it was one of the most widely commented events regarding pluralism in public schools. Unfortunately, it turned out to have little impact on the debate, despite the fact that the case was brought to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg.

The detailed stand taken by the Provincial Board of Education on this matter will be presented later, but it should be mentioned that this case was perceived by the local educational authorities as a local conflict between the parents and the school's headmaster. In result, no conclusions had been drawn from the decision of the ECHR. Poland did not lodge a complaint appeal when the final verdict was rendered. The whole affair, from the first intervention of the parents in the Board of Education till the final verdict, took over 8 years⁵⁸. Czesław Grzelak, an entrepreneur from Wielkopolska and declared agnostic, together with his wife decided to fight for their son's right to participate in ethics lessons. The parents had been sending letters to all sorts of offices and councils, including the National Ministry of Education (MEN) and the Ombudsman, but they had been constantly dismissed. Finally, with the assistance of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, they reached the ECH. As a result, their son Mateusz did not participate neither in ethics nor in religion classes until he completed secondary school.

The parents won the trial, however they had not received the demanded compensation of 150 thousand zlotys (see: Sentence of the ECHR on Grzelak vs. Poland [ethics at school]⁵⁹) and the matter died out very quickly. This was the prime reason why we have decided to connect the issues of ethics with the contestation of religious symbols in order to sketch a more detailed picture of the diversity/pluralism debate in Polish schools.

A spokesperson for the Provincial Board of Education stated that:

'According to the government, (...) Mateusz often provoked his colleagues by mocking religious symbols and students participating in religion classes. The class teacher informed parents about the behaviour of their son, but they did not react.'

This is the whole course of events, given in detail.

'The headmaster of the school contacted the Department of Education in Poznań in order to verify the possibility of organizing such an inter-group class. Because this was impossible due to the low number of interested students and parents, the school suggested that he do some other things in the common room or library' [ES].

In her view, the family did not act entirely fairly towards the teachers and the headmaster of the school. But the official stand is that anyone can investigate their claims concerning educational rights before the court, including Strasbourg.

⁵⁷ One of the teachers cited the following story: 'After the appeal of the European Court regarding the case of crosses in Italy, TV reporters were travelling to schools, looking for various freaks. The TVN television station's evening news announced that even the atheist teacher is a supporter of crucifixes. My own statement had been completely changed and used improperly' [KM].

⁵⁸ GW 2010-06-15 [Strasbourg: Polska dyskryminuje uczniów, którzy nie chcą chodzić na religię http://wyborcza.pl/1,75478,8015624,Strasbourg_Polska_dyskryminuje_uczniow_ktorzy_nie.html]

⁵⁹ For a short summary of the sentence see: <http://www.non-discrimination.net/content/media/PL-14-ECHR%20judgment%20Grzelak%20v.%20Poland.pdf>

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

'The parents used their right to protest, the case came to light and the sentence made it clear to many school headmasters as well as leading authorities that such an obligation exists. Local authorities have to find a teacher and spend money and this is now strongly emphasised' [ES].

When asked for a diagnosis of such problems, the spokeswoman pointed to the structural changes in Polish schools as a major source of conflict and as information which is sensational to the press.

'Problems like this one used to be solved within a multistage structure – starting from the teacher, then the headmaster, then external inspector. Now, there is no such supervision and therefore, those parents who cannot reach an agreement with the teacher make a complaint directly to the Board's inspector. Most parents simultaneously also write to members of local government and to the local press. This is a typical attempt to resolve conflicts that can be found in the contemporary Polish school' [ES].

The question of ethics classes, their organization, scope of the curriculum and their incidence in Poland is another example of the existing discrepancies between the official stance of the education authorities (local Boards of Education, Ministry of Education and Municipal Departments of Education) and the discriminatory practices in schools. However, the primary case in our study is the introduction of religion as a subject taught in primary schools after the political transition of 1989.

Religion in Public Schools

The introduction of religious classes into schools was carried out in 1990 as the result of an agreement between the newly re-established democratic state represented by the Minister of Education and the representatives of the ecclesiastical authorities [KM]. Some commentators draw attention to the pressure exerted on the government by the Roman-Catholic Church, resulting from the clergy's desire to immediately restore the state of art from before 1961 (see footnote 11) (in this respect)? and to make religion a part of official life and education. Thus, religion was officially assigned a special cultural meaning and social importance. The government reluctantly agreed to the request and schools opened to religion classes under the instructions of the Minister of National Education of 30 VIII 1990.

Many people questioned both the fact of reintroducing religion and the way it was done, and they kept trying to prove that the move was illegal. However, in 1991 the Constitutional Court dismissed the Ombudsman's – Ewa Łętowska's, complaint and ruled that the law had not been violated. Interestingly, no contradictions with the regulations concerning the functioning of education at that time were found, although, the 'Law on the development of the education system' from 1961 was still in force. Religious teaching defenders also managed to prove that these classes were not introduced to the school as an institution, but only to school buildings.

On 14th April 1992, Minister of National Education issued a regulation on the conditions and manner of teaching religion in public schools and kindergartens. The next Ombudsman found that this regulation also violated many democratic rules, in particular the constitutional principle of the secular character of the state, however, a complaint to the Constitutional Court was also dismissed. Religious education in schools was finally authorised by the new Polish Constitution adopted on 2nd April 1997⁶⁰. Article 53 § 4 states that 'the religion of a church or religious association with regulated legal status can be taught in schools, but the freedom of conscience and the religion of others shall not be

⁶⁰ *Dziennik Ustaw*, 16th July 1997, No. 78 pos. 483.

infringed'⁶¹.

In the case of minors, the decision about attending religious classes is taken by their parents, and after reaching 18 years of age, it lies with the students themselves. Formally, the submission of a declaration of attendance is required to attend these classes. In fact, schools very often enforce the practice of negative statement, which is required of students who do not want to attend these lessons. Regulations specify that the statement can be expressed in the simplest form and does not need to be renewed in subsequent years, but may be changed. Therefore, there are no obstacles to changing the declaration during the school year or after becoming a major⁶².

During the course of religion or ethics classes, the school has the duty to provide care and educational activities for students who do not attend any of the courses, which is also a possibility that is becoming an increasingly popular alternative. Usually the duty is fulfilled by an obligation to spend this time in the library or it is not implemented at all, so usually students are allowed to do what they want, which is an illegal practice.

The school should organise courses in ethics if no less than 7 students declare their willingness to participate in them. If this requirement is not met, courses should be organised for inter-class or inter-school groups. The rules for the submission of statements of attendance in it are the same as in the case of religion. Interestingly enough, religious classes are held as mandatory 2 teaching hours per week, while the number of teaching hours of ethics classes can be limited to one by the headmaster's decision:

'We have 4 students willing to attend ethics classes, and it is the average in every school. I think they start about 7.10 early in the morning, one and a half hours a week. This was the only time satisfactory for everyone, it's their decision' [AG].

Apart from the inconveniences concerning time and place, there can be different reasons for the students' lack of interest in religion/ethics lessons:

'I think that it [resignation from both religion and ethics] results from calculations of time economy. They have so many classes every day and lots of extracurricular activities. And some do not attend religious teaching because it gives them an extra free hour. Religion class was meant to be at the beginning or end of the school day, but it is rarely the case. (...) There is no pressure exerted by parents, because very few parents are convinced of the usefulness and validity of ethics lessons for their kids' [AG].

The Provincial Board's employee states very clearly that there are numerous ambiguities surrounding the organization of ethics classes:

*'As for the Ostrów Wielkopolski case, if there was an alleged lack of ethics classes, than it is the city council's responsibility. The regulations regarding the organization of classes on religion and ethics are so framed that in order to organise such a group, at least 7 participants are required. And there is also a demand that **parents must submit a written document**, so that the school could organise these*

⁶¹ At first glance, it seems that the word 'can' leaves an open space for a final decision with respect to the presence of religion in schools. However, according to constitutionalists, this interpretation is incorrect, and the cited part should be understood as describing the non-obligatory nature of the subject. This makes the withdrawal of religion from schools possible only if the constitution is respectively amended.

⁶²The interviews indicate that resignation from religious classes after receiving the sacrament of Confirmation is a common practice among growing numbers of students. The sacrament is a prerequisite for receiving a church wedding in the future [AS].

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

classes. It is, so to speak, an exploitation of parents' ignorance. If parents do not know that they have to write an application, the class will not be organised. The school must be officially approached. If you have a larger group at a given school, such activities should be organised. If there are not many children wanting to participate or if parents are successfully discouraged to write an application, it solves the problem from the point of the view of the school' [JCH].

'Some kind of interschool groups [for ethics lessons] were planned, but I do not know how they functioned. The problem is of organizational nature: location, hours of instruction, distance. I suspect that some parents refrain from attempts to organise ethics classes for their children for this reason' [JCH].

From one of the high school's⁶³ teacher's perspective, the matter is not controversial, it rather indicates a lack of interest in additional classes shown by students:

'85% of our students attend religious classes. We have offered them the possibility of carrying out such/lepiej participating in such activities [classes in ethics], but no one came forward. The student has a choice: either religion or ethics, or nothing at all. And some students benefit from this choice. We have had here 3 students of other faiths, but they had religious instruction in their churches. However, this is certainly a problem that asks for an effective solution. I cannot tell you why no one reports the willingness to attend classes in ethics. Parents were informed. We are open to the organization of such activities. Of course, depending on the number of students, it would have adequate form. But the fact is that more and more students resign from lessons in religion' [KL].

This interviewee made a critical reference to the introduction of religion into schools, which indicates growing attempts to reconsider the sense of this culturally 'obvious' rule prevailing in schooling:

'When religion was introduced to schools, it became one of the elements of the curriculum and it had lost its uniqueness. In the catechetical room [separate rooms in the parish for teaching religion], it could have not been appreciated, but it was embedded in a local social environment. And I see that an increasing number of students is discouraged from attending religious classes: they don't resign but rather they do not sign in in the first place. Youngsters are more aware of their right of not doing it' [KL].

The difficulties related to the organisation of classes in ethics incited attempts to develop a new perspective on the issue, but they lasted very shortly:

'One MP proposed that ethics courses could be taught via the Internet (e-learning), but it also raised various opinions. The defenders of the equality in educational opportunities claim that if we want to teach ethics by e-learning, the same should apply to religious lessons. Only then everyone would be equal' [ES].

On the final certificate, grades from religion or ethics (or information of non-participation in any of these classes, the so called dash) appear next to the mark on 'assessment of conduct'. The grades applied are the same as those in all other subjects. The regulation prohibits making public any information specifying the denomination. However, when it appears on the school certificate in Poland (perhaps with the exception of small areas in the east of the country where classes taught by Orthodox

⁶³ This high school in Poznań, of which KL is headmaster, is considered to have a Catholic spirit, but it is also quite 'progressive'. Young people have the opportunity to study in classes with a multicultural profile, but at the same time the school organises marches to commemorate events of strongly patriotic and religious character.

teachers/priests are also held), one can be sure that it is a grade in the Roman-Catholic education. It has to be said that marks in religion and ethics classes do not influence the student's promotion to the next grade. The situation gets more complicated when it comes to counting averages in teaching results. The law does not regulate this matter, but an amendment issued by the Minister of National Education⁶⁴ regarding the rules of issuing certificates, diplomas and other school related documents, provides that religion is not a compulsory subject and should not affect the average ratings of a student. However, this rule has recently been changed – and nowadays, if a student is given a score lower than 'five'⁶⁵, it is often associated with her/his resignation from those classes:

'Lessons in religious education are assessed and count in the calculation of average ratings. Grades [in religion classes] are rarely lower than a 5. I personally fight for a 6 because it looks cute. Our evaluation looks like this: we have an exercise book with generally nothing in it. It's a paranoia, we are almost adults and our assessment depends on an empty exercise book and a crossword puzzle' [AS].

On the one hand, the European Court of Human Rights confirmed that children *have the right* to attend classes in ethics. At the same time, statistics and common experience show that neither children nor parents are really interested in them. On the other hand, the Court's decision has not changed much in the approach of various authorities to the structure of the organization of these classes and did not result in a wider debate on the problem. A similar remark applies both to the issue of teaching religion in schools and to the presence of religious symbols in schools' (public) premises.

'I think that the matter of classes in ethics has been resolved. We haven't had any reports showing that there is a problem. But recently, there has been a wave of press articles regarding the 'cross in the school'. And it is rather a question of the relationship between students, the headmaster, and the Student Council. There are two possibilities, and one of them is to have separate classrooms for religious teaching with a cross in it. But in many schools there is no special room for this. If students report any concerns or problems, some innovative solution would be recommended. I know that in some schools a priest would bring the cross with him to the room where religious class was held' [ES].

Crosses/Religious Symbols in Schools

The educational regulations allow for placing crosses in classrooms. Symbols of other than Christian religions are never mentioned in them. The law also permits the recitation of prayers before and after school, which 'should be an expression of the common aspirations of students as well as the tact of teachers and educators'⁶⁶. To a large extent, a new impulse for the discussion on the presence of religious symbols in public spaces was given by the verdict on the 'Lautsi vs. Italy' case, which precisely addressed the issue of the presence of crosses in public schools:

'The problem is so complex because the cross hanging in a school is a sign that supports the Catholic⁶⁷ religion, but at the same time the lack of a cross may be interpreted as a sign of an atheistic

⁶⁴ *Dziennik Ustaw*, 31st January 2000, No. 6, pos. 73.

⁶⁵ In the Polish system grades are ordered from lowest to highest, i.e. 1 is failure, while 5 is very good. Exceptionally excellent (6) can be issued.

⁶⁶ It should be emphasised that the student cannot be forced to recite it which is guaranteed by the Constitution (Article 53 § 6).

⁶⁷ In speech practice 'Catholic' in Poland by default means 'Roman-Catholic' Church or denomination. In the citation given, we follow this practice.

*school. Thus, a lack of a cross can also be a sign. This argument was used by an American lawyer, an orthodox Jew Joseph Weiler, who defended the Italian government in the Lautsi vs. Italy trial, the legal case concerning crosses in Italian schools. He argued that the absence of a sign is not neutral. But how to neutralise space then? By hanging all possible emblems and signs? **I think that Poland does not have this problem.** What happened in Italy was problematic, because there is a statement by the minister that **ordered hanging crucifixes**'[RW].*

Besides this international incentive, a local stimulus also occurred. The interviewee refers to the events induced by the catastrophe of the presidential plane which took place in April 2010 in Smolensk, Russia. This tragedy ensued unexpectedly in the so-called 'war over the cross', and actually increased the negative attitude of the majority of citizens towards close ties between the State and the Catholic Church in Poland:

*'In my opinion, the issue of the cross on Krakowskie Przedmieście⁶⁸ was a breakthrough, it was really something. **It had a very big impact**, and people who had been **hesitating**, **decided to abandon classes in religion afterwards.**' [KL]*

The cultural significance of the cross as a symbol of the struggle with the communist regime is a factor that cannot be underestimated (cf. Mach 1993; Kubik 1994), also when one discusses education. In the first decade after the political transition it was a widely accepted part of the public space. More contemporary debates, however, highlighted the need to discuss the cultural basis of certain attitudes and to redefine them:

'In contemporary Poland this message [a cross in the public space] is not necessarily only religious, it also has another sense, as it was a symbol of the struggle against communism. Twenty years ago, the attempts to restore the presence of these symbols for many people were a declaration of freedom. We want the cross, we want to have it, as once we were not allowed to. So our Polish experience also has this dimension'[RW].

Without a doubt, the matter of crosses in school classrooms raises more intense emotions than classes in ethics. In response to the events in other European countries, high school students of senior classes in larger cities (such as Warszawa, Kraków, Poznań, Wrocław) tried to provoke a debate on the meaning of a traditional worldview in their schools. It resulted mainly in bits and pieces of information in the evening news. However, these events stirred quite heated discussions on religious tolerance and state – Church relations, especially in the Polish school. As one of the interviewed teachers stated:

*'When Gypsies are considered, the dividing line between 'us' and 'them' is very clear. The problem of religion is more complex. On the one hand, we [Poles] **see ourselves as tolerant**, but we also see ourselves as 100% Catholics, and when those who are not Catholics want to remove the cross, an outcry arises. Before it gets to the management [headmaster], the initiators of such actions are already restrained by their colleagues. And it all happens in schools like ours [considered to be one of the best high schools in Poznan]'* [AG].

⁶⁸ There is no room for a detailed description of the case of the cross in front of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw. The statement 'cross from Krakowskie Przedmieście' refers to several months of demonstrations and conflicts between the supporters and opponents of placing a cross commemorating the plane crash victims in which the President and several other top state functionaries died. In public debates, these events have been raised to the rank of an open war between orthodox Roman-Catholics and a more-secular minded part of the society. The whole 'battle' triggered a debate on the position of the Roman-Catholic Church in Poland. For an anthropological interpretation of the event see: Murawski 2011.

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

Long before the public debate on the cross, a history teacher in one of the high schools in Poznań decided to take off the cross from the wall in his classroom, because he wanted to be an advocate of a secular education. At the end, he failed to do so – the headmaster asked him to make a compromise with her and to stop the expected protests. He recounts:

*'Then the **headmaster said**: but you know, the press will go crazy if you remove the cross, **you know how it is**. She proposed a solution, to which I agreed, sort of a compromise, although I think it was too far-reaching, but let's say that a compromise solution was adopted – various religious symbols were to be hung in my classroom. One of them was the Catholic cross, plain, without anything, the one used in the Protestant world, and the typical Orthodox cross with additional beams. And they **all hang side by side**.'* [KM]

'It ended with the headmaster's decision; according to the rules she has the right to decide whether the cross stays in the school or not. We [teachers-activists] learned that it is all up to the management of the school. The headmaster always has the final word. And at our school these matters [crosses on walls] are not discussed. It ended with hanging three crosses on the wall: Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. When TV-reporters come to school, this is the room which is shown to them. Who would think of such an outcome? It is a symbol of the impossibility of change, definitely not a symbol of tolerance' [AG].

Conclusions

The case of classes in ethics is a complex issue. On the one hand, we are dealing with a very small number of students who attend or would like to attend these classes country-wide. This makes this subject marginal in a 'statistical sense'. On the other hand, it is precisely this small number of students participating in these lessons that makes this problem significant from the standpoint of the rudiments of universal education. In any case, the public debates reiterating from time to time on this topic show that the problem remains both burning and unresolved.

The situation in which most students attend classes in religion, as school statistics clearly show, somehow supports the attitude of those who consider it 'obvious' in an almost religiously homogenous society. However, a closer analysis of the rules and realities of conducting religious education allows for different interpretations. It can be argued that religion taught in schools is a relic of the first years following 1989, when the Roman-Catholic Church's position was justified by a broad social agreement. Within several years, the public opinion changed significantly, but this has not resulted in changes in the system of public education. Religious education takes place in public (and religious) schools. Simultaneously, in most cases the possibility to attend classes in ethics is fictitious. Critics of the idea of teaching ethics treat the efforts to secure such an option for students as unnecessary. From time to time, policymakers try to mend the problem; in some cases they say, it would make sense to commend the teaching of ethics to priests or religious teachers. It would be a cheap and simple solution that would nevertheless settle anxieties. Teaching ethics even in this way might serve as a token of the place supposedly accorded to liberal and pluralist ideas in Polish culture.

One of the informants [KM] told us a small but meaningful anecdote. He has a habit of showing his students a film about an Islamic school in one of the villages in north-east Poland which is inhabited by Polish Tatars. The documentary is presented within a framework of a series of classes about Islam in the history course. The documentary displays traditions cultivated by Tatars and also shows pictures shot during religious classes held on the weekends. He said that it always shocks him that no single

student pays attention to the fact that there is a cross hanging on the wall in a classroom full of children learning Islam (classes are held in a local school building). It seems quite telling and it demonstrates what ideological and religious pluralism in Polish public schools looks like in practice. There may be various interpretations of this indifference or lack of perception. First, both majority and minority students take it for granted that crosses hang in public schools in Poland. Second, and related to the first, is that this cross is simply transparent and does not bother Muslim teachers and students in the class. Third, being aware of the sensitivity of the problem, Muslim teachers are afraid of raising the controversy by putting down the cross and are 'happy' that they can carry out their own education in a public school.

The presence of crucifixes in public schools, which for most people is transparent due to the conviction of a homogeneous ethno-religious composition of Poland, was not in fact discussed long after the political turn of 1989. Social changes, combined with the legislative recommendations of the European Union resulted in discussions on the presence of the Roman-Catholic Church in public life and of Christian symbols in public space. Several claims for re-secularization have been made. This is a complex debate between a rather small group of conscious citizens supporting the lay character of the state who try to convince religious authorities and religious 'fundamentalists', and who are supported implicitly by the silent majority and grassroots who simply 'do not care'. The students' dispassionate attitude towards religious education and crosses on walls in their school buildings mirrors to a certain extent the character of Polish ritualistic religiosity that is habitually practiced and embedded in national tradition. For those who support the current state of the art, the hegemonic status of Roman-Catholicism fully justifies its obvious presence in public education and space. Opponents are unable to make significant changes, because the attempts to implement the ideals of liberal tolerance and the actual pluralism of views and practices are discarded on the basis of this very ethno-religious domination and arguments that 'we' have to defend our right to entertain freedom of religious practices and cannot allow to be terrorised by the minority. In more radical cases, fundamentalists claim that the supporters of exaggerated tolerance endanger the nations integrity.

Nobody really asks students about their actual needs and what they want. Even the parents that are critical of the existing status quo, for the sake of peace and tranquility, do not contest it and do not strive for the implementation of more liberal principles. In result, this kind of deadlock persists and it is only occasionally interrupted by some events that attract media attention and stir some debate on the place of religion in European countries (like the Lautsi vs. Italy case or the Grzelaks suiting Poland in the European Court in Strasbourg).

From the perspective offered by the three-fold concept accepted in the Accept Pluralism project (let us remind it: Tolerance – Acceptance – Respect), the conclusions have to be different than in the case of Roma education presented above. It is noticeable that the problem of religious education and religious symbols has been so far raised only with respect to students at the level of Lyceum (senior high school), and very rarely at the level of Gymnasium (junior high school). A question of tolerance, acceptance, or respect for worldviews other than the dominant one at the secondary level of education, seems to prove that for the majority, the problem either does not exist, or this domination is recognised as a 'natural' part of life. However, individual cases, such as the Grzelak one, had some influence on the education system as a whole. Several school principals/headmasters realised that there are parents that insist that their rights which are guaranteed by the law have to be respected. Still, in general, Polish schools practice an unspoken intolerance towards those who reject the perpetuation of the established and 'obvious' order. Only after the sentence had been passed in the Grzelak vs. Poland case, schools started to show a more tolerant attitude towards parents opposing the obviousness of the religious education and in some cases, have made some efforts to create options alternative to religious classes/create alternatives to religious classes. Nevertheless, most persons responsible for education

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

rarely show acceptance or respect for this kind of demands and various individuals still find it difficult to fulfill their desire to attend classes in ethics.

As for the crucifixes in classrooms, general intolerance towards those demanding their removal prevails. Opponents of the status quo define their appeals as a fight for the neutrality of public space and the secular character of the state. (Of course, one – following Joseph Weiler – can consider a blank wall in the classroom, in which a cross has hung for decades, a denial of neutrality.) However, in this reality neither acceptance nor respect for the active supporters of religious neutrality in public spaces granted in the constitution, is exercised; we would even say that in many cases, intolerance towards such demands is openly shown.

From another perspective, there seems to be no good solution to the impasse with regard to securing classes on ethics and the presence of crucifixes and other religious symbols in schools. A viable negotiation process should start with a debate between the Educational Boards and other officials, priests, teachers, parents and students, on the need for religion and ethics classes in schools, their form, content and status in the whole curriculum, as well as on the presence of religious symbols in the school premises. The next step in changing the situation in favor of more tolerant and pluralistic practices would be to work out a consensus on the expectations of all actors involved in the organization of these classes, both educators and recipients, and the way these agreed points could be implemented. A creation of space for such a debate held in a mutually tolerant and respectful atmosphere would be the first and necessary step towards the acceptance of pluralism in schools in Poland. Unfortunately, at this point in time this optimistic scenario seems rather unfeasible. In some schools such steps have been undertaken, but the meetings often ended up in verbal attacks on the initiators of these "iconoclastic" discussions.

Concluding Remarks

The two case studies have been selected in order to shed light on the issue of tolerance and multiculturalism in Polish schools. Teaching Roma, particularly Roma children, as well as the issue of classes in ethics as an alternative to classes in religion, and the legitimacy of the presence of religious symbols at schools, from time to time spur public debates, which help to understand the attitude of educators to ethno-cultural and worldview pluralism.

The application of the Three-Fold Concept used in the 'Accept Project' to the material gathered allows the following interpretation: the model of minimal tolerance prevails. It is based in the myth of the Polish inherent and historically grounded tolerance. The cultural differences of other groups are recognised, but at the same time they are tolerated merely to a token degree – they can be practised at home and celebrated during festivities (a phenomenon that we call 'a tolerance for folkloristic pluralism'). There is no room for integrating the minorities' cultural practices or views nor for the implementation of all educational rights in public life. In this respect, Polish practices fall short of the norms as they are defined in plural and liberal states. According to schoolteachers and school authorities, educational policy ought to be unified, and the integral cultural core values should be conveyed to all students irrespectively of their ethnic and cultural background. This situation appears as 'obvious', inherent, taken for granted, and not subject to special considerations. Many interlocutors are 'culturally blind' to the issues of pluralism and tolerance and unaware of the ways they are conceptualised in other 'western democracies'. Instinctively, the majority of Polish educators support and eagerly implement an assimilationist policy. A similarly 'totalising' attitude is traceable in stances taken toward worldview tolerance: the supremacy of the dominant Roman-Catholicism and of Christian symbols is accepted and disputed only by few. Since Christianity is a tradition shared by

nearly all, so to say statistically justified, religious teaching can or even should be held at school.

In the case of schooling for the Roma minority, both officials and teachers support the model of a unified education. It is legitimised by the 'civilizational mission', in this case modelled on the 19th century intelligentsia's attempt to civilise the masses of unenlightened peasants in a partitioned country. The possibility of adjusting school curricula to the Roma peoples' culture or expectations is not mentioned at all. Including some knowledge about their culture in these curricula, or making allusions that their cultural values or lifestyle are worth popularising, is a completely alien idea. Roma's cultural features and habits are treated as an obstacle in the way to a successful education. The thought that Romani culture contains valuable elements, or has enriching potential for existing norms is inconceivable. Roma are distinct and distant, which implies a notion of cultural racism. No partnership can be seen in the writing and publishing of special textbooks for Roma, and little partnership can be seen in the reforming of existing curricula to make them square to Roma's cultural images and needs. They should simply assimilate to the dominant culture (Leitkultur), which is normal and obvious. Roma's failures are caused by their cultural habits, which shows that cultural determinism is a popular view among educators. The most successful programs are developed at the local level by young volunteers, advocates of tolerance, and those vividly interested in Romani culture. As the case in Swarzędz shows, getting financial support for local undertakings is not the main problem⁶⁹. The persisting stereotypes about Roma and the images of a unified educational policy in a dominantly Polish state are the main obstacles.

Therefore, there is no acceptance for the Roma cultural distinction in the Polish educational system. The Bahtałe Roma Foundation's efforts to increase Roma children's (and adults') participation in education are partly successful, but again, they can also lead to the ghettoization of children. The Foundation's schools, though officially open to all interested – and financed from public funds – in practice attract Roma students. In this way, a segregation of children actually takes place. One of our interviewees has paid attention to this problem, and warned against the further expansion of this kind of an educational model: 'in the end we'll face the situation when they won't come to normal schools' [EP], especially that they meet mostly their kin in the Foundation's schools; one should also not forget that the financial gratification for attendance involved can obscure the educational drive of students. One has to admit that the functioning of this school is a result of the cooperation between the major stakeholders, i.e. bureaucrats, teachers, headmasters and Roma activists (although not all take part in it and the Roma organisation in Swarzędz is against the Bahtałe Roma initiative⁷⁰), and represents a novelty in the field of multiculturalism, but it is hard to call them spectacular; between fifty to a hundred students attend the Foundation's schools at all levels of education. Its educational assumptions and methods do not diverge significantly from the existing standards. One can summarise the whole issue by saying that the education of Roma in Poland is caught between a Scylla of ineffectiveness and a Charybdis of segregation. The ideas implemented in Swarzędz represent a move in a good direction, but do not assure full success.

The case of classes in ethics and the presence of religious symbols in public schools funded by a nominally secular state illustrates the intricate relations between the Roman-Catholic Church and the Polish State. It hardly fits the Tolerance – Acceptance – Respect model. The case rather shows a reversal of this model, i.e. a common intolerance towards those few who voice their protest against the

⁶⁹ As president the Bahtałe Roma Foundation, Anna Markowska admits that funds devoted to the education and other social and cultural purposes of Roma are considerably high, especially that there are not that many Roma in Poland. The main shortcoming in the field of education is the lack of a coherent strategy that would take into consideration the local demographic patterns and economic possibilities.

⁷⁰ As mentioned, the many attempts to interview the Roma Association in Wielkopolska were unsuccessful. This organisation criticises the Bahtałe Roma initiative, which is based in Poznań, for facilitating segregation.

violation of the principle of secularism in public life. Most teachers and educational authorities perceive them as provocateurs who disturb the existing consensus. The latter is justified by a hegemonic cultural order in which the domination of Catholicism is presumed. This popularity of religion among the population is rarely disputed and also justifies the lack of real interest in organising classes in ethics, which are an equivalent for religious classes. The major group of actors in the education system, i.e. pupils, represent a similar attitude – they show disinterest and simply accept the status quo.

Chapter 3. Political Tolerance in Poland: the Case of Silesian Autonomy Movement

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 parliament⁷¹. 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' ,

⁷¹ 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.

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.

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 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; Pędzwiatr 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

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

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 3. 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.

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

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.

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.⁷²

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.⁷³

Table 4. Declared ethno-national identifications of population inhabiting Poland (2011)

Identification (ethnic or national)	Primary identification		Secondary identification (declared in the second question)	Total (primary and secondary identification)	Together with Polish identification
	declared in the first question	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

⁷²For instance see:

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

⁷³ <http://www.dziennikzachodni.pl/artykul/537179,wielki-dzien-konca-dupowatosci-slazakow,id,t.html>

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

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 1.3⁷⁴, 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’ minorities⁷⁵, 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 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.

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 2010⁷⁶) region of the Katowice agglomeration. This chapter relates specifically to the situation in *Upper Silesia* where the descendants of the interwar inhabitants comprise a significant part of the population.

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

⁷⁴ http://www.indexmundi.com/poland/total_fertility_rate.html

⁷⁵ 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.

⁷⁶ http://www.slaskie.pl/strona_n.php?jezyk=pl&grupa=3&dzi=1251196416&id_menu=284

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; Pędzwiatr 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 (Sekuła 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 Górnślązaków (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).

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

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*.

Status of the 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/OppeIn 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 ZNLS 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.

Methodology

The empirical part of this chapter 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 chapter, citations from the interviews end with the initials of our interlocutors. 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 Gorzelik⁷⁷ – 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 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.

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

⁷⁷ http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerzy_Gorzelik

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

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.

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.

Setting the Scene

As just mentioned, the decisive incentive for this case study is The Report on the State of the Republic⁷⁸, 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 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.⁷⁹

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 Grupiński, 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'*⁸⁰.

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'.

⁷⁸ <http://www.pis.org.pl/main.php>

⁷⁹ 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'.

⁸⁰ <http://www.fakt.pl/PO-o-raporcie-PiS-Sprawa-dla-psychoanalitka,artykuly,100111,1.html>

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 minority and other communities outraged by these statements⁸¹.

PiS's leader asserted at a press conference⁸² 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'*⁸³.

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

⁸¹ 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.

⁸² <http://www.tvn24.pl/0,1698280,0,1,pis-poprawia-wnbspraporcie-kwestie-slaska,wiadomosc.html>

⁸³ http://wyborcza.pl/1,75478,9383324,Polscy_Niemcy_Jaroslaw_Kaczynski_nas_szkaluje.html

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

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 nationality⁸⁴.

Jerzy Gorzelik, RAS's President, replied to PiS⁸⁵. 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 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 paraphrases⁸⁶.

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 Wehrmacht⁸⁷.

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.

The Association of People of Silesian Nationality

The registration of the Association of People of Silesian Nationality (hereafter SONS) was a

⁸⁴ <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_doniesie_nie.html?order=najstarsze&v=1&obxx=9396676

⁸⁵ http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114873,9377498,Rzecznik_PiS_o_slaskosci__Nie_jestesmy_idiotami.html

⁸⁶ http://spieprzajdziadu.com/muzeum/index.php?title=ZakamufLOWANA_opcja_niemiecka

⁸⁷ http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114873,9882103,Kaczynskiego_na_Slasku_wita__zakamufLOWANA_opcja_niemiecka_.html

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),⁸⁸ 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.'⁸⁹

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 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 elections⁹⁰.

The statutory purposes of the Association include⁹¹: '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

⁸⁸ http://opole.gazeta.pl/opole/1,35114,10884274,Stowarzyszenie_Osob_Narodowosci_Slaskiej_zarejestrowane_.html

⁸⁹ See: Charter of SONS.

⁹⁰ <http://www.polityka.pl/kraj/opinie/1522995,1,stowarzyszenie-zarejestrowane-ale-to-nie-koniec.read>

⁹¹ <http://slonzoki.org/>

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language⁹². 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’⁹³.

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 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 SONS⁹⁴ 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

⁹²http://msw.gov.pl/portal/pl/178/2958/Ustawa_o_mniejszosciach_narodowych_i_etnicznych_oraz_o_jezyku_regionalnym.html

⁹³http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114883,10951900,Prokuratura_nie_godzi_sie_na_rejestracje_Stowarzyszenia.html?lokale=poznan

⁹⁴<http://slonzoki.org/>

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.

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:

- what kind of groups and claims can be tolerated in political life?
- on what terms can the groups express their difference and fight for their rights?
- 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 Silesians involves many activists of the group which, combined with the minimal level of knowledge about this group, heats discussions (Pędziwiatr 2009).

Silesian identity in dispute

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, Szweczyk 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).

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

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 territory⁹⁵), 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 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

⁹⁵ http://wyborcza.pl/1,75478,11213017,W_Polsce_byly_obozy_koncentracyjne__Trwa_spor.html

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

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.

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

Republic vs. Nation

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:

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

'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

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

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 Movement⁹⁶. 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.]⁹⁷

RAS & 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 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

⁹⁶ <http://gazetaolsztynska.pl/69294,Powstal-Ruch-Autonomii-Mazur.html>

⁹⁷ 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.’

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

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.]

Concluding notes

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

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

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.

Conclusion

Main findings

Discourses and practices of tolerance in Poland

There is a deep-rooted conviction of the Polish public, instilled in peoples' minds and partly shared by academic experts, that the Nobles Republic, up until the partitions took place, was a multicultural, tolerant country allowing for a peaceful coexistence of many diverse cultural groups. This argument justifies the claim, repeated by politicians and journalists, that contemporary Poles are tolerant and keen on multiculturalism in their very nature, and that the Polish nation welcomes diversity (Robotycki 2010). No serious study critically analysing the possible intellectual links between the concept of a multi-ethnic historical Polish state and today's state of mind and the practices of Poles can be found. Moreover, demands to restore and nurture the *traditional Mythical* Polish tolerance, which were advanced after 1989, ignore a huge change in the collective consciousness that has occurred over time.

The reluctance towards minorities demonstrated under communism also influenced the attitudes of Poles, who constitute a decisive majority in the society, in the redefinition of mutual relations during the process of accession to European structures. The National Census of 2002 indicates a huge gap between the estimated size of the minorities and the actual declaration in the polls. This is interpreted as a direct consequence of the homogenising and assimilationist policy of the authoritarian regime before 1989 (Warمیńska 2009).

Minority activists criticise the *Law on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language* because during the fifteen years of negotiations, they felt like they were treated paternalistically, and not like partners in a dialogue (Łodziński 2005). They accuse authorities of merely fulfilling the legal requirements of the EU and not meeting the actual needs of minorities (Robotycki 2010). Minority leaders pragmatically accept this law, but are pessimistic about its daily functioning, also in terms of obtaining financial support. All indicate *a discrepancy between the public discourse and social practices, as well as between the legal set up and law implementation.*

Tolerance in public discourse in Poland is addressed in terms of the assumption of a historically shaped Polish propensity for peaceful coexistence with culturally distinct groups. Quite often, tolerance is discussed in general terms, and as being applicable elsewhere (Posern-Zieliński 2004; Borowiak and Szarota 2004). It can also be presented/seen as a postulate, a desired value necessary for changing social life. Political and media discourses are rather simplistic, probably due to the numeric insignificance of minorities in this homogenised population. Everyday interactions with minorities are not common and the assimilationist policy of the post-communist state has also affected the perception of the issue as socially unimportant.

The discourse on tolerance in a modern sense of the word, i.e. as a concept applicable in social policy, is relatively recent in Poland. Particularly before 2005, debates on multiculturalism barely existed. As such, it is absent in mainstream education, and seen as redundant from the point of view of the majority. One can associate its potential growth in importance for the ordinary people and for policy makers only in relation to the growing immigration and expanding activism of other social minorities, such as sexual minorities or physically challenged people. The increasing number of migrants arriving

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

to Poland, according to some experts, simply asks for tolerance towards ethnic and religious minorities in the public domain (Patalon 2008).

Minority rights in the fields of education and the cultivation of culture, for instance, the organising of cultural events or preserving traditional crafts, do not raise objections. In this respect attitudes are fully tolerant and can probably be connected to the long-lasting 'folklorisation' of diversity present already in the Peoples Republic, and are congruent with multiculturalist ideas. Actual problems appear when: (a) state or EU funding for cultural activities is considered; (b) appropriate legislation granting provisions for property confiscated by the state after WWII is considered; (c) issues of bilingualism in regions populated by minorities (e.g. street names), political representation and commemorations of historical events in public are considered. Tensions arise between policy makers at all administrative levels, minority members, and representatives (Łodziński 2005: 221-223). *Poles eagerly accept 'strangeness' and 'otherness', provided that it is practised in the private sphere or as an 'exotic' custom*, i.e. it implies activities that do not interfere with their image of the world and do not jeopardise the idea of a homogeneous community and a sense of security based on *cultural familiarity*.

School life challenges

The analysis of the chosen case studies of school life in Poland revealed that a *façade tolerance* is practised in the Polish educational system. It is grounded in a historical discourse of its obvious presence in Polish tradition. However, in reality most teachers and their supervisors are hardly aware of what the contemporary liberal meaning of tolerance in the educational system is. Cultural otherness is, again, accepted as an exotic adornment of life that, from time to time, can be staged to the public, or even mentioned in a classroom. The existing miniscule minorities prove the assumption of 'Polish tolerance,' exercised in the past, but also still found in the present .

A similar point can be made about the attitude towards the secular character of the state and its institutions, especially schools, as well as towards worldview pluralism. Students that are willing to practice tradition and are conformist attend classes in religion that are conveniently taught in school buildings and are integrated into the weekly class schedule. Because most citizens are baptised Catholics, the arguments against religious instruction in public schools are preposterous for its supporters. Advocates on both sides of the intellectual and/or political barricade are entrenched in their views and are unable to accept the opponents' arguments, but they have to tolerate each other out of necessity and in the name of (the Polish) democratic tradition. What counts is not the principle of tolerance/acceptance/respect, but the capability to make them decent followers of prescribed social habits. In result, the position of the hegemonic denomination remains practically unchallenged.

Silesian minority

The issue of the 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. Some respondents in this study and elsewhere (see also: Sekuła 2009) show concerns associated with the use and presentation of their opinions expressed during the interviews.

Limiting the minorities access 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 analysis of the Silesians' place in political life revealed that the minorities have limited access 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/for instance, 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 the Silesians – the largest, unrecognised minority accused of 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 (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 changes in this area. Due to their growing effectiveness, modern activity strategies applied by RAS are emulated by other political forces in the region. Silesians are increasingly regarded as a social force that can no longer be 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 Silesians will pluralise Polish political life without necessarily achieving their own goals.

Theoretic implications of the studies

Discourses and practices of tolerance

Public opinion polls indicate that the reluctance of Poles towards people of different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds residing in Poland is slowly decreasing, which can be treated as one of the premises indicating that the tolerance of cultural diversity in Poland is growing (CBOS 2010). There is an interconnection between openness to 'others' and the financial status in the Polish socio-cultural conditions – along with the improvement in material status, the tendency to intolerant and xenophobic attitudes decreases, and, therefore, *there is a good chance that Poland will increase the level of acceptance of difference*, provided that the economic performance of the country will prosper and thus contribute to a decline in the rates of poverty and unemployment (Jasińska-Kania 2009: 56).

The Polish rationale of the cultural diversity debate has many nationalist, xenophobic, and homogenising features (Trapani 2009). However, thanks to liberal, anarchist, feminist and non-governmental circles, new elements and forces appear, which predicts constant improvements in the situation of minority groups in Poland, in spite of the slow development of the process. *Levels of tolerance towards cultural difference are constantly increasing* although the process is gradual and subject to obstacles of economic, political, and cultural nature.

As for practices of acceptance and toleration in public life, the reports of international organisations monitoring the level of respect for the rights of minorities show that the situation of minority groups in

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

Poland is *improving*, and that racial or ethnic offences are rather 'soft'. Legal standards are increasingly congruent with both the social reality and international instruments for equality and anti-discrimination. Despite these improvements, data on *insufficient state action* in many areas concerning support granted to culturally distinct groups appear repeatedly, particularly in relation to immigrants (Bloch, Goździak 2010; Fihel 2008).

Polish law is adapted to the EU requirements, but there are still many unregulated issues (e.g. healthcare for immigrants, state support for minority actions and their representation in the public sphere, education of immigrants in the public school system). The only exception is the Labour Code, in which appropriate regulations can be found. However, there are many practical problems with its enforcement. In some spheres there are no government regulations established, such as the protection of health, or the very question of the lack of access to assets and services offered publicly (Bloch and Goździak 2010).

Poland still has not created appropriate anti-discrimination bodies. Although several institutions working in this area have been appointed (e.g. the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment, in the appropriate department in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ombudsman, the Panel on Racism and Xenophobia in the Ministry of Interior), none of them (separately or together) meet the requirements derived from EU regulations (Klaus and Wencel 2009).

The Increasing pluralisation of the Polish society, including the increasing visibility of the so-called social minority groups (people with disabilities, sexual minorities, etc.), and their struggle to gain equal access to universal rights and a place in the public space are increasingly influential in the revival of the debate around the acceptance of diversity and the redefining of notions of the homogeneity of the Polish population. Significant achievements in this process are initiated by non-governmental organisations representing minority groups because the authorities have no special interest in intensifying the dialogue with minority groups, focusing on the introduction and implementation of European directives and trying to align with international standards, rather than recognising the minorities' actual problems and situation.

As the number of culturally distinct citizens within the Polish society increases, it can be expected that changes in the attitudes towards every-day contact with different cultural practices will evolve, thus changes in educational programs and public education campaigns are necessary in order to alter the social disposition towards cultural diversity of the majority of Poles.

School life

The application of the Accept theoretic framework to the material gathered in the study of school life allows the following interpretation: the model of *minimal tolerance* prevails. It is based on/has its roots in the myth of the Polish, historically grounded tolerance. The cultural differences of other groups are recognised, but at the same time, they are tolerated merely to a token degree – they can be practised at home and celebrated during festivities (a phenomenon that we call 'a tolerance for folkloristic pluralism' – see Buchowski, Chlewińska 2010). There is no room for integrating the minorities' cultural practices or views nor for the implementation of all educational rights in public life. *In this respect, Polish practices fall short of the norms as they are defined in plural and liberal states.* According to school teachers and school authorities, educational policy ought to be unified, and the integral cultural core values should be conveyed to all students irrespectively of their ethnic and cultural background. This situation appears as 'obvious', taken for granted, and not subject to special considerations. Many interlocutors are 'culturally blind' to the issues of pluralism and tolerance and unaware of the ways they are conceptualised in other 'western democracies'. Instinctively, the majority of Polish educators support and eagerly implement an *assimilationist* policy. A similarly

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

'totalising' attitude is traceable in stances taken toward worldview tolerance: the *supremacy* of the dominant Roman-Catholicism and of Christian symbols is accepted and disputed only by few. Since Christianity is a tradition shared by nearly all, so to say statistically justified, religious teaching can or even should be held at school.

In the case of schooling for the Roma minority, both officials and teachers support the model of *a unified education*. It is legitimised by the 'civilizational mission', in this case modelled on the 19th century intelligentsia's attempt to civilise the masses of unenlightened peasants in a partitioned country. The possibility of adjusting school curricula to the Roma peoples' culture or expectations is not mentioned at all. Including some knowledge about their culture in these curricula, or making allusions that their cultural values or lifestyle are worth popularising, is a completely alien idea. Roma's cultural features and habits are treated as an obstacle in the way to a successful education. The thought that Romani culture contains valuable elements, or has enriching potential for existing norms is inconceivable. Roma are distinct and distant, which implies a notion of cultural racism. No partnership can be seen in the writing and publishing of special textbooks for Roma, and little partnership can be seen in the reforming of existing curricula to make them square to Roma's cultural images and needs. They should simply assimilate to the dominant culture (*Leitkultur*), which is *normal* and obvious. Roma's failures are caused by their cultural habits, which shows that cultural determinism is a popular view among educators. The most successful programs are developed at the local level by young volunteers, advocates of tolerance, and those vividly interested in Romani culture. The persisting stereotypes about Roma and the images of a unified educational policy in a dominantly Polish state are the main obstacles. The education of Roma in Poland is caught between a Scylla of ineffectiveness and a Charybdis of segregation.

Looking at the issue of Roma education, those responsible for education make a good use of the concept of tolerance, but they would not use it to meet the others' needs. The strategies of coping with 'the Roma problem' in education are accompanied by vigorous declarations of tolerance as a 'natural' feature of every Pole, especially of teachers. Officials believe that it is not their duty to pay respect to Roma's culture and practices, but the Roma who should accept the reality of the education system in Poland and respect the majority's assumptions. The attitude towards Roma students represents the case of '*gritted teeth tolerance*' (Dobbernack, Moddod 2011).

The case of classes in ethics and the presence of religious symbols in public schools illustrates the intricate relations between the Roman-Catholic Church and the Polish State. It hardly fits the Accept theoretic stance. The case rather shows a reversal of this model, i.e. a common intolerance towards those few who voice their protest against the violation of the principle of secularism in public life. Most teachers and educational authorities perceive them as provocateurs who disturb the existing consensus. The latter is justified by a hegemonic cultural order in which the domination of Catholicism is presumed. This popularity of religion among the population is rarely disputed and also justifies the lack of real interest in organising classes in ethics, which are an equivalent for religious classes. The major group of actors in the education system, i.e. pupils, represent a similar attitude – they show disinterest and simply accept the status quo.

As for the crucifixes in classrooms, general intolerance towards those demanding their removal prevails. Opponents of the status quo define their appeals as a fight for the neutrality of public space and the secular character of the state. However, in this reality neither acceptance nor respect for the active supporters of religious neutrality in public spaces granted in the constitution, is exercised; *intolerance* towards such demands is openly shown.

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

All in all, one can say that the Polish school is *merely tolerant* to cultural distinctiveness and *intolerant* toward persons questioning the domination of Catholicism and its right to occupy an assumedly secular public space.

Political sphere

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. Public discourse favours patriotic and national perspectives and there is no room for equal participation of minorities in public life. Limiting the 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.

When analysing Silesians' case, the notion *hierarchical pluralism* also comes to mind. As Agnieszka Pasięka 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). The Polish majority not only puts itself in this standard defining position, but it also fiercely defends any attempts at redefining the existing power relations and hierarchy. They are closely related to the dominant cultural scheme 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.

Table 5. Discourses and practices of tolerance in Poland

	Institutional/legal framework	Practices	Public discourses
Education of Roma children	Tolerance	Minimal tolerance/greeted teeth tolerance/intolerance	Declarative tolerance/ façade tolerance combined with demand for unified cultural standards
Religious pluralism in schools (religious symbols)	Minimal tolerance	Intolerance	Intolerance
Political participation and recognition of minorities (Silesians)	Tolerance	Intolerance at the state level, partial tolerance on the local level	From conditional tolerance to intolerance

The analysed case studies (education of Roma children, presence of religious symbols in schools, Silesians) show that the theoretical framework of the Accept project does not fully cover Polish cultural and political reality. This is caused by the fact that the model of tolerance developed within the project derives from the notion of *liberal tolerance* (Dobbernack, Modood 2011) and has republican roots, while Polish public discourse is in many respects permeated with ideas rooted in an ethnic understanding of a nation that has the right to occupy a given territory in which 'Others' and newcomers can reside, but have to adapt to the norms, standards, values and practices of the 'hosts'. . Therefore, it can be concluded that, from this perspective, Poland is a country showing a significant degree of intolerance, if tolerance is understood in liberal terms. This kind of intolerance often

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and its Limitations

transforms into 'gritted teeth tolerance' with regard to the presence of culturally distinct persons and groups in the public sphere. We were unable to identify examples of attitudes, policies or discourses which would imply a need for acceptance or recognition in the relations between the majority and the minorities. Single changes, starting mainly at a grassroots level, do not always influence state policy, the practices of the dominant majority, or mainstream discourses.

Our analysis suggests, therefore, the need to reformulate the concept of (liberal) tolerance because it has only limited utility in states like Poland, which only recently were liberated from the domination of the communist regime, and where social and political life is organised according to national discourse. This does not mean, however, that this is a permanent and invariable state of affairs – the pluralisation and strengthening of civil society are clearly gaining momentum and allow optimism for the future.

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