Michał Buchowski and Katarzyna Chlewińska

Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań

Introduction

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% 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 o 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 liberalised 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 report 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 legitimised 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', *sejmik*s' representatives to oppose any new law accepted; and *confederation* – the right to organise rebellion through a collective political purpose.

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.

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 nationalising policy. The Nazi Germany invasion on 1 September 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).

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 summarises: "War, by sharpening and 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 policy[1], 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.

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 sup-

[1]. Sławomir Łodziński distinguishes five such periods: 1) verification of nationalities (1945-470; 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).

port 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.

 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.

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

Minorities in the post-1989 period

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 dominant majority 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). Political liberalisation has not prompted the spectacular '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 (2.03% remained undetermined). 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).

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 territory for at least 100 years; e) identifying with the nation organised 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 recognised, 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.

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 (1,404), 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.

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., approximately 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%). 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).

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 baptised 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 rarely questioned. 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).

Case studies

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, 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 Muslims[2] 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 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 Poland[3]. 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 socioeconomic distinctions, e.g. between town and countryside dwellers and ones related to tribe/caste/class (cf. Mirga, 1998: 116-117). This heterogeneity impedes attempts at establishing a strategy for life improvement and cooperation in this community. As mentioned above, in the 2005 Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language, Roma are recognised as an ethnic minority, as they have resided in Poland for more than a century (Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, 2010: 114).

Changes in the course of history

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 movement[4] 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

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

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

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

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. A State Council resolution from 1960 forced nomadic groups (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). Ideas of multiculturalism and tolerance were alien to communists. This resulted in various 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 organisations which struggle for the preservation of Roma cultural identity and the 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, 1999: 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.

Education of Romani children – a means of overcoming isolation?

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 made[5] to eliminate illiteracy among Roma and to create opportunities for the younger generations. However, the cultural specificity of Roma was not

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

properly diagnosed, which resulted in inefficiencies in the educational programs[6] introduced.

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 education[7], 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 mean 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' (Majewicz, 1999: 128).

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, and[8] 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 children[9], 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 task[10].

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 on: 1) the abolition of separate Roma classes in schools[11]; 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 language[12] (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

6. See Ministry's of Internal Affairs and Administration report on Pilot Programme: http://www.mswia. gov.pl/portal/pl/185/2982/Tresc_Programu.html

7. Ministry's of Internal Affairs and Administration data downloaded at: http://www.mswia.gov.pl/portal/pl/185/2982/Tresc_Programu.html

8. 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)

9. 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).

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

11. 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

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

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,[13] 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 damage[14]. The issue was addressed by the ombudsman and local mediators brokered the talks between the parties.

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.

Polish Muslims and Muslims 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.'

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

14. http://wyborcza. pl/1,75478,8176184,Pozwolcie_ nam_skonczyc_z_Romami.html

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

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 Lithuania[15] from the 14th century. From the battle of Grunwald (1410) 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.

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 (Warmińska, 1997: 233). Their presence has been accepted for the last six centuries.

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

15. This area comprises parts of present day Lithuania, Belarus and Poland.

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 (cf. Chazibijewicz, 2010). They continue contracting marriages with Christians, and some have stopped practicing Islam (Warmińska, 1997: 234).

Current status

Between the 14th and 18th centuries there were ap. 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 (Warmińska, 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 (ibid: 244).

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)[16], 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 (Warmińska, 2009: 37).

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.

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

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' protests[17]), even though most of them treat Poland as a transit country to the old EU states (Włoch, 2009: 61).

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 recognised by the state[18], and other Muslim organisations function as other NGOs. Muslim schools are non-existent, but educational authorities permit the use 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[19]

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 Trail[20] 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 people. 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 government[21], 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.

17. The latest protest was organised 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: http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1342,title,Uchodzcy-opuscili-juz-pociag-zatrzymany-w-Zgorzelcu,wid,11780551,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=1af02

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

19. Due to the recent nature of the issues raised, this part will be based mainly on media reports.

20. http://www.mzr.pl/pl/info.php?id=3

21. 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).

The centre will serve not only religious, but also educational purposes, as well the purpose of popularising 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 protest[22], 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 provisions[23], 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'[24], 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.

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 boasted[25]. The negative attitude towards Muslims, mostly Arabs, of those questioned in opinion polls, (CBOS, 2010: 4), ensues from cultural and racial difference. Cultural

22. http://warszawa.gazeta.pl/warszawa/1,34882,7708462,Protestowali_przeciw_budowie_meczetu_na_Ochocie.html
23. See: http://www.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/konst/polski/2.htm
24. http://meczet-ochota.pl/
25. During celebrations of the year of immigration and multiculturalism, Polish authorities proposed to show miniscule Polish Tartar communities living on the border with Belarus as an example of harmonious cohabitation (Weinar, 2008: 14).

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 civilisations and they present Islam as a religion of terrorists[26] (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).

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.

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 re-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

26. '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.

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 (Warmińska, 2009: 37).

The census of 2002 has facilitated the acceptance of the Law on National and Ethnic Minorities and 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 criticise 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 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 Poland[27].

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).

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 jeopardise 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,

27. 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.

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).

Concluding this part one can say that there is no visible discrimination against culturally/ethnically and religiously different communities in Poland, but there are certainly instances of behaviour and opinions conducted in public which require a proper response, taking into account respect for the civic rights of all people.

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 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.

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Abbreviations

CBOS – Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej

GUS – Główny Urząd Statystyczny

ECRI – European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance

ERRC – European Roma Rights Centre