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## **POLAND'S REFUGEE POLICY AND POLISH SOCIETY BETWEEN VALUES OF SURVIVAL AND SELF-EXPRESSION**

### **Abstract**

At the beginning of November 2015, the Polish government's decision to accept 6,800 refugees fleeing Syria and Eritrea created a fierce debate dividing Polish society. A poll conducted by the Polish Research Centre found that two-thirds of Poles oppose taking in refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. Thousands of protesters and counter-protesters gathered on the streets. It is difficult to draw the line dividing the pro-refugee Poles and those who are opposed to taking them in. This line does not run between political leaders and "ordinary" citizens as, in both groups, one can find a variety of attitudes. One of the major factors behind anti-migrant views is Poland's religious and ethnic homogeneity. This present state of affairs differs radically from the multinational, multicultural state of Poland as it existed up to the Second World War. Between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, while Europe was absorbed with religious turmoil, Poland was famous for religious tolerance and for being a sanctuary for many refugees escaping from persecution. Thus, have the Poles lost their spirit of tolerance and hospitality?

Key words: refugees, Islam, protest, security, values of survival, values of self-expression

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## INTRODUCTION:

## POLAND'S DEMOGRAPHIC AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Contemporary Poland possesses perhaps the most culturally homogenous society in the whole of Europe.<sup>2</sup> According to the Polish census from 2011<sup>3</sup>, 91.6% of inhabitants declared homogenous Polish ethnic-national identity and 2.17% (871 thousands) of people declared double ethnic-national identity. Only 1.44 % (554 thousands) of inhabitants declared solely non-Polish ethnic-national identity<sup>4</sup>. The largest minority nationalities and ethnic groups in Poland comprise Silesians, Kashubian, Germans, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Roma, Russians, and Lemkos<sup>5</sup>. In recent years, Poland's population has decreased due to an increase in emigration and a sharp decline in the birth rate. Altogether, the number of ethnic Poles living abroad is estimated to be around 20 million. The largest number of Poles outside of Poland can be found in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Poland's demographic landscape is homogenous not only in its ethnic aspect but regarding religion, with Poles being overwhelmingly Roman Catholic (88.4%).<sup>7</sup> The percentage of religious minorities and atheists does not exceed 12%. Religious minorities include Polish Orthodox, various Protestant denominations, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, Muslims and a few thousand atheists. Poland remains one of the most devoutly religious countries in Europe.

The above-mentioned factors make Poland one of the least diverse societies on the globe. Walter Connor reported in 1971 that among 138

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<sup>2</sup> See: N. Davies, "Poland's Multicultural Heritage", *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, 4 (1986), p. 79, also at: <http://eprints.lib.hokudai.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/2115/7953/1/KJ00000034106.pdf>, 30 April 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Polish census of 2002 (Polish: *Narodowy Spis Powszechny 2002*) was a census in Poland taken from 21 May to 8 June 2002.

<sup>4</sup> *Wyniki Narodowego Spisu Ludności i Mieszkań 2011. Podstawowe informacje o sytuacji demograficzno-społecznej ludności oraz zasobach mieszkaniowych*, Główny Urząd Statystyczny, Warszawa 2012, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> "Centers of Polish Immigration in the World – USA and Germany", at <http://culture.polishsite.us/articles/art90fr.htm>, 20 April 2016.

<sup>7</sup> According to Central Statistical Office (Polish: GUS), at [http://stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/oz\\_wyzn\\_rel\\_stow\\_nar\\_i\\_etn\\_w\\_pol\\_2006-2008.pdf](http://stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/oz_wyzn_rel_stow_nar_i_etn_w_pol_2006-2008.pdf), 30 April 2016. See also: *Concise Statistical Book of Poland*, GUS, Warszawa 2010, 19 April 2016.

countries taken into account, only 12 (i.e. 9.1%) could be considered “national”, Poland included.<sup>8</sup>

This present state of affairs – of an exclusively Polish Poland – differs radically from the multinational, multicultural state of Poland as it existed up to the Second World War.

The historical Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania<sup>9</sup> (16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries) was in itself diverse linguistically, ethnically and religiously, as well as welcoming various ethnic and religious minorities. It was not only the homeland of most Poles, but also the homeland of almost all Belarussians, Lithuanians and Ukrainians, of several million Germans, and of the principal Jewish community in the world.<sup>10</sup> Already in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Polish kings allowed Jews who had been expelled from western countries to settle and practice their faith.<sup>11</sup> Between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, while Europe was absorbed in religious turmoil, Poland was famous for its religious tolerance and for being a sanctuary for many refugees escaping from persecution. Moreover, the Warsaw Confederation (1573), which confirmed the religious freedom of all residents of Poland, was the first such document in Europe<sup>12</sup>. One could say that at that time the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania represented a case of an “imperial regime of tolerance”.<sup>13</sup> Norman Davies emphasises the universal character of Polish heritage which in the past was shared by many different people with many different ethnic connections.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> W. Connor, *Ethnonationalism: A Quest for Understanding*, Princeton 1994, p. 96.

<sup>9</sup> The 1569 Union of Lublin established the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, a more closely unified federal state with an elective monarchy, but which was governed largely by the nobility, through a system of local assemblies with a central parliament. It was a multinational state of vast proportions, much larger than Russia.

<sup>10</sup> C.S. Smith, “In Poland, a Jewish Revival Thrives – Minus Jews”, *New York Times*, 12 July 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/12/world/europe/12krakow.html>, 30 October 2017. Probably about 70% of the world’s European Jews, or Ashkenazi, can trace their ancestry to Poland – thanks to a 14th-century king, Casimir III, the Great, who drew Jewish settlers from across Europe with his vow to protect them as “people of the king”.

<sup>11</sup> N. Davies, “Poland’s Multicultural . . .”, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>12</sup> H.E. Dembowski, *The Union of Lublin, Polish Federalism in the Golden Age*, Boulder – New York 1982, p. 271.

<sup>13</sup> M. Walzer, *On Tolerance*, New Haven 1999.

<sup>14</sup> N. Davies, “Poland’s Multicultural . . .”, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

Furthermore, when the Second Polish Republic, also known as the Second Commonwealth of Poland was reborn after the First World War in 1918, religious and ethnic minorities comprised almost one third of the population. Only after the Second World War, due to the Holocaust, border changes, and deportations (in the two decades 1936–1956 over 20 million people inhabiting the Polish lands were subject to forced “population exchange”) did a mono-ethnic Poland emerged from the chaos. It was a re-constituted country which had new frontiers, a new social composition, as well as a new political regime. In fact, having a homogenous population was an official aim of the Communist authorities and was exercised throughout their time in power. Although the 1952 Communist constitution guaranteed non-discrimination, “nationalities” (not “ethnic minorities”) were barely mentioned in it. 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 public view.

## MULTICULTURALISM IN POLAND SEEN AS A HISTORICAL PHENOMENON

The last thirty years of Polish history may be divided into three periods: the continuation of the systematically liberalised communist rule; democratic change after 1989 up to Poland’s accession to the European Union in May 2004; and the last 12 years, as soon after Poland’s accession to the EU, new laws on national, ethnic and linguistic minorities was accepted and put into practice.

Current Polish multiculturalism is different from that of multiethnic or immigrant societies, such as the UK. Indeed, multiculturalism in contemporary Poland is seen as a historical phenomenon. For instance, although “multicultural” festivals are organised in big cities, small towns and in borderland regions, virtually most 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. However, today, “tolerance and multiculturalism” serve rather as a myth that legitimises current politics than actual administrative and political practice. Meanwhile, the country’s rising standard of living and its membership of the EU makes Poland more attractive for immigrants from

so-called “Third World countries”. This gives one an opportunity to observe the Polish people’s reactions to immigrants.

## THE POLES FACING REFUGEE CRISIS: A “TEST OF DECENCY” PASSED OR FAILED?

How has Poland responded for the calls from EU for a Europe-wide sharing of the burden of refugee crisis? Do the Poles still have their old spirit of tolerance? Is there anything left of this famous Polish hospitality?

The Polish government policy towards this challenge changed significantly during 2015 due to a change of government. Poland’s former Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz called the crisis a “test of decency” for Poland after it had been helped by richer countries in previous years.<sup>15</sup> Although, she said this time the number of refugees would be far fewer than the 80,000 refugees from Chechnya which Poland took in during the 1990s. Indeed, in September 2015, the pro-EU polish government led by Kopacz’s Civic Platform (PO) agreed to accept 7,000 refugees fleeing Syria and Eritrea. However, these declared numbers decreased rapidly two months later, when the right-wing Law and Justice party won the parliamentary election.<sup>16</sup> Poland’s new government that was sworn on 16 November 2015 immediately took a hard line on the migrant crisis. In January 2016, the new Polish Prime Minister, Beata Szydło, told a press conference: “We would like to make use of the right to choose which groups of refugees are to be sent to Poland.”<sup>17</sup> She has referred to the EU refugee quota deal as “blackmail” and declared that Polish government cannot accept giving in to political correctness by accepting quotas that are being imposed on Poland. Instead, the Polish Prime Minister has declared the priority for her is the security of Polish citizens and has announced that up to 400 refugees will

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<sup>15</sup> P. Skolimowski, “Poland Faces ‘Blackmail’ on Migrants, Probable Premier Says”, at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-09-16/poland-faces-blackmail-on-migrants-probable-next-premier-says>, 1 May 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Founded 14 years ago.

<sup>17</sup> “Poland to accept no more than 400 refugees this year”, Radio Poland, at: <http://www.thenews.pl/1/9/Artykul/236276,Poland-to-accept-no-more-than-400-refugees-this-year#sthash.d7sJF34d.dpuf>, 1 May 2016.

be relocated to Poland in 2016 as part of the previous government's commitment.<sup>18</sup> This new government policy was also influenced by the terrorist attack in Paris on 13 November 2015. In response to such attacks, the current Polish Minister for European Affairs, Konrad Szymański, said that Poland cannot accept migrants relocated under a European Union quota system without security guarantees.<sup>19</sup>

The new Polish government policy on the migrant crisis reflects the priorities of a national-conservative and eurosceptic government focused on domestic politics and interests and willing to defend them in Brussels. The Law and Justice leader, former Polish Prime Minister (2006–2007) and conservative politician Jarosław Kaczyński, said his party favoured allocating money to support refugee camps and warned that migrants would end up imposing their way of life on Poles. He responded to EU demands by saying: "Do you really want us to become guests in our own home? Poles don't want it and neither does Law and Justice."<sup>20</sup> In Kaczyński's opinion, Chancellor Angela Merkel's welcoming attitude to refugees had turned Germany into a magnet for economic migrants.<sup>21</sup> The conservative politician also warned that refugees from the Middle East could bring dangerous diseases and parasites to Poland, stating as following:

There are already signs of emergence of diseases that are highly dangerous and have not been seen in Europe for a long time: cholera on the Greek islands, dysentery in Vienna . . . Also, there are some differences related to geography, various parasites, protozoa that are common and are not dangerous in the bodies of these people, (but) may be dangerous here. Which doesn't mean there is a need to discriminate against anyone, but you need to check.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> "Poland demands EU security guarantees if it is to host refugees", at <http://lodz-post.com/polishnews/poland-demands-eu-security-guarantees-if-it-is-to-host-refugees/>, 26 April 2016. This way Poland joined a quartet of EU members Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia that have defied Brussels' plan to redistribute the inflow of asylum seekers from the Middle East and North Africa among members of the union. Security concerns are high among the reasons touted by these countries.

<sup>20</sup> P. Skolimowski, "Poland Faces . . .", *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> "Polish opposition warns refugees could spread infectious diseases", reported by M. Gocłowski, A. Barteczko and A. Koper, edited by T. Heneghan, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-poland-idUSKCN0S918B20151015>, 1 May 2016.

Kaczyński's comments were heavily criticised by some of his political opponents. Janusz Palikot, a leader of the left-wing party Your Move, slammed Kaczynski's statement as racist and fascist. Palikot notified the public prosecutor of an offence of incitement to ethnic or racial hatred, in violation of Polish law.<sup>23</sup> Kaczynski's statement was also criticised in social media as offensive.

The new Polish Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski – a known eurosceptic – suggested that Syrian refugees could be trained and armed to form a military force that could be sent to fight ISIS and liberate Syria. Waszczykowski suggested refugees from the country were not as desperate as they were sometimes portrayed, according to the AFP news agency stating:

Tens of thousands of young Syrian men disembark from their rubber dinghies with an iPad in hand and instead of asking for drink or food, they ask where they can charge their cellphones. They can go to fight to liberate their country with our help.<sup>24</sup>

It is most probable that the politician had been drawing on the experience of Polish refugees during the Second World War, who formed the Polish Armed Forces in the West and Polish Armed Forces in the East to fight with the Allies and the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany. These formations operated from the United Kingdom and included fighter plane squadrons in the Battle of Britain and shock troops who fought in Italy. Waszczykowski said he wants to avoid a situation where Polish soldiers will be sent to fight in Syria while hundreds of the Syrians will drink their coffee in the cafes of Berlin.<sup>25</sup> According to the Polish Foreign Minister, the main

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<sup>23</sup> N. Ojewska, "Poland's modest refugee policy proves controversial", at <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/11/poland-modest-refugee-policy-proves-controversial-151101102513587.html>, 1 May 2016.

<sup>24</sup> J. Stone, "Syrian refugees should be trained into an army to fight ISIS", at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/syrian-refugees-should-be-trained-into-an-army-to-fight-isis-polands-foreign-minister-says-a6736776.html>, 1 May 2016.

<sup>25</sup> F. Drury, "Poland's new Right-wing government suggests sending Syrians BACK to 'liberate' their country as a means of tackling migrant crisis", *Mail Online*, 17 November 2015, at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3321945/An-ARMY-refugees-ISIS-Poland-s-new-Right-wing-government-suggests-sending-Syrians-liberate-country-means-tackling-migrant-crisis.html>, 1 May 2016.

issue is integration. In his opinion the Arab communities will demand from Europe to respect the way they are used to living:

Only a few people will integrate. We are just afraid that we will have to deal with the same problems related to Muslim existence that some European countries have been facing during the last few years.<sup>26</sup>

### “TODAY THE IMMIGRANTS, TOMORROW THE TERRORIST!” PURE HATE OR FLEETING BACKLASH?

Rafał Kostrzyski, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) spokesperson in Poland, told *Al Jazeera* that Polish politicians' xenophobic statements related to the refugee crisis have been another factor stirring up resistance among the general public. The perspective of the arrival of tens of thousands of asylum seekers in recent months has sparked widespread alarm among Poles. The issue has divided society and led to a fierce anti-migrant backlash.

A poll recently conducted by the Polish Research Centre found that 63% of Polish citizens oppose taking in refugees from the Middle East and North Africa<sup>27</sup>, while 53% oppose taking any refugees.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, to the question: *Do you think that taking in the refugees from the Middle East and North Africa could increase the danger of terrorist attacks?* 80% of Poles questioned responded “yes”. However, Polish people are twice less sceptical about accepting immigrants from Ukraine (61% displayed a welcoming approach to Ukrainians). In addition, 37% of Poles agreed that Poland could give temporary shelter to asylum seekers, while only 4% would allow them to settle down in Poland (regardless the origin of the immigrants).

The above results of this poll were reflected in demonstrations that took place in September 2015 in many Polish cities. Thousands of people engaged on each side of the debate over government policy toward the refugees. Warsaw has been one of the fiercest opponents of EU attempts

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<sup>26</sup> N. Ojewska, “Poland’s modest . . .”, *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> In 2015.

<sup>28</sup> “Stosunek do uchodźców w kontekście kryzysu imigracyjnego w Europie”, CBOS, “Komunikat z Badań”, no. 122 (2015), at [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2015/K\\_122\\_15.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2015/K_122_15.PDF), 1 May 2016.



to force members to accept their share of 120,000 refugees – a bill that was pushed through the European parliament. Around 10,000 right-wing protesters clutching the national flag assembled on the streets in the Polish capital, chanting slogans including “Today refugees, tomorrow terrorists!” and “Poland, free of Islam!” Although police in riot gear watched over the crowds as some lit flares, there were no reports of violence. While it was one of the biggest demonstrations in the history of Poland, there were just a few reports about it in the mainstream European media.

The language deployed at anti-refugee demonstrations in Poland reflects some distinctively Polish points of reference. On 12 September 2015, at a football match in the city of Wrocław, supporters of the local team unfurled a banner declaring “We want the repatriate, not the immigrant.” Popularised by right-wing groups such as the Pan-Polish Youth, the slogan combined a rhetorical welcome to so-called “repatriates” (Polish: *repatrianci*) – residents of current-day Ukraine or Central Asian republics who could claim Polish descent – with a rejection of “immigrants”.<sup>29</sup> The second group is identified as unassimilable foreigners, who had been primarily characterised as “Africans” in earlier demonstrations but who now figured as agents of “Islamization”. This attitude to the refugee crisis is also supported by some leading Polish politicians, with Jarosław Kaczyński also stating that the Polish government should focus on bringing back people of Polish origin from former Soviet republics.<sup>30</sup>

The creation of an exclusively “Polish Poland” had been the long-standing dream of the radical right-wing of pre-war politics. This was vision of the old National Democratic movement co-founded in 1897 by Polish politician and statesman, Roman Dmowski. National Democracy was active from the period of the foreign partitions of Poland until 1947.<sup>31</sup> Dmowski believed that only a Polish-speaking Roman Catholic could be a good Pole. His thinking marginalised other minorities, and he was vocally anti-Semitic.<sup>32</sup> He remains the prototype of Polish right-wing nationalism and

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<sup>29</sup> J. Noch, “Nie chcemy imigranta – chcemy repatrianta!”, at <http://natemat.pl/71409,tysiace-polakow-popiera-akcje-nie-chcemy-imigranta-chcemy-repatrianta-dlaczego-nie-chcemy-splacic-dlugu-wdzieczności>, 2 May 2016.

<sup>30</sup> M. Wąsik, “Nie dla imigrantów, tak dla repatriantów”, at <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/266019-nie-dla-imigrantow-tak-dla-repatriantow>, 2 May 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Polish: *Narodowa Demokracja*, also known from its abbreviation *ND* as *Endecja*.

<sup>32</sup> R. Michael, P. Rosen, *Dictionary of Antisemitism: From the Earliest Times to the Present*, Lanham, MD 2007, p. 70.

has been called “the father of Polish nationalism”.<sup>33</sup> This nationalist vision, which can be summed up in the slogans of “One Nation, One Faith, One Republic, One Culture”, was conceived at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As mentioned earlier, it had not always been like this: the old Polish proto-nationalism of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, based on a Polish-Lithuanian identity, was multiethnic and multireligious. The nationalist ideology developed soon after the Partitions was initially free of “ethnic nationalism” of any kind. It was a Romantic movement for the restoration of a sovereign Polish state. The birth of modern nationalism under foreign rule coincided with the Polish November Uprising of 1830 and the subsequent Spring of Nations. Modern Polish nationalism which rejected cultural assimilation was the consequence of Polish statelessness, as the Polish nationality was suppressed by the authorities of countries which had annexed the territory of the former Commonwealth (Russia, Prussia, and Austria).

What is ironic, however, is that this right-wing, nationalist fantasy was put into effect not by the National Democrats, who by 1945 had passed into the museum of Polish history, but by the Soviet Union and by Stalin’s Polish Communist minions.<sup>34</sup> Since the fall of communism, several political parties have sought to re-establish some National Democrat traditions, with their adherents preferring to call themselves the “national movement”.<sup>35</sup>

## POLAND’S EVOLVING MIGRATION ROLE AND ATTITUDE

For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Poland was country which sent out both refugees and immigrants. During the Second World War, 3 million Poles ended up beyond Poland’s borders. After the war, faced with a poor economy and a Communist regime, more than 1 million Polish migrants left for greater prosperity in Western Europe and the United States. Like many Eastern Bloc countries in the post-war period, the Polish government maintained

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<sup>33</sup> J. Páll Árnason, N. Doyle, *Domains and Divisions of European History*, Liverpool 2010, p. 93.

<sup>34</sup> N. Davies, “Poland’s Multicultural . . .”, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>35</sup> The most significant party that declared itself a successor to the National Democrats is the *League of Polish Families*.

an isolationist approach to migration policy, strictly controlling both emigration and immigration. In the 1990s, these policies began to change. As Poland sought to align itself with Western Europe, the government created an asylum regime in line with international standards and the 1951 Convention on Refugees. Individuals from the former Soviet Union, Somalia, Afghanistan, and other countries began to seek asylum in Poland, and the government adopted an especially generous stance towards Bosnians and Chechens.<sup>36</sup> The biggest change in Poland's migration profile came with Polish accession to the European Union in 2004, along with the freedom of mobility that such membership entailed. Within two years of accession, more than 264,000 Poles had been approved for work applications in the United Kingdom alone. As of 2015, an estimated 1.3 million to 2 million Poles had taken up residence in other EU member states.

Perhaps due to the high levels of emigration from Poland to other EU countries, the Polish public typically held very high opinions of migration throughout the 2000s. Data from the European Social Survey between 2002 and 2012 show that Poles consistently held some of the most pro-immigration views in Europe, expressing similar views towards refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>37</sup> In the 2014 European Social Survey, 63.4% of Poles agreed or strongly agreed that their government "should be generous judging applications for refugee status" – a more positive response than voiced by Swedes (60.3%) and Germans (38.8%). Poland also showed a relatively tolerant attitude towards immigrants. The World Values Survey, conducted in Poland in 2012, found that Poles were not particularly averse to having immigrants or people of different races as neighbours.<sup>38</sup> However, asked specifically about Muslims, the Polish response was not always as welcoming. In the 2014 European Social Survey, 34.3% of Poles said that no Muslims should be allowed to come to Poland. This attitude stands in stark contrast to the relatively tolerant views on diversity, and may stem from the historically strong religious component of Poland's national identity. However, the issue of immigration should not solely be defined through religion.

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<sup>36</sup> B. Bachman, "Diminishing Solidarity: Polish Attitudes toward the European Migration and Refugee Crisis", June 2016, at <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/diminishing-solidarity-polish-attitudes-toward-european-migration-and-refugee-crisis>, 2 March 2017.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/>, 1 March 2017.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>, 1 March 2017.

## “OUR MUSLIMS” VERSUS “ALIEN MUSLIMS”, OR WHAT REALLY MATTERS: RELIGION OR RACE?

There are then two major reasons behind Polish anti-migrant views. The first is the specific character of modern Polish nationalism. The second is the increasing number of terrorist attacks in Europe associated with Muslims and Islam. The followers of Islam in Poland may be divided into three groups:

1) Tatar Poles (or Polish Tatars) who have been living in Poland for six centuries

2) immigrants from Arab countries who came to Poland in the 1970s, mainly as students – they often contracted mixed marriages with Poles and have permanent residence permits

3) new Muslim immigrants, such as refugees from Bosnia or political asylum seekers from Chechnya and some other Muslim countries, such as Pakistan or Afghanistan.<sup>39</sup>

In my paper, I will divide them simply into a “historical” Muslim community (Tatar Poles) and “newcomers” (the other two groups mentioned above). New Muslim immigrants in Poland are more numerous than Tatars. This group is constantly growing, especially because of incoming students and professionals from Arab countries. However, the number of all Muslims living in Poland does not exceed 30,000 people.<sup>40</sup> The situation of these two groups is totally different and an analysis of their status and perception serves as an indicator of accepted patterns for assimilation and forbearance towards strangers and otherness in Polish society.

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 from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Their right to religious freedom has practically never been questioned. Tatars assimilated as they gradually lost their language and began to use Polish 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

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<sup>39</sup> M. Buchowski, K. Chlewińska, *Poland*, in: R. Zapata-Barrero, A. Triandafyllidou (eds.), *Addressing tolerance and diversity discourses in Europe*, Barcelona 2012, p. 355.

<sup>40</sup> R. Włoch, “Islam in Poland. Between Ethnicity and Universal Umma”, *International Journal of Sociology*, vol. 39, no. 3 (2009), p. 60.

product. The 2011 census showed 1,916 people declaring Tatar ethnicity.<sup>41</sup> Assimilation, which has lasted for centuries, has made the community almost invisible. Today, Tatars live mostly in big cities, and they have merged with Polish society. They continue contracting marriages with Christians, and some have stopped practicing Islam.<sup>42</sup>

Interestingly, the perspective of arrival of Muslims from Arab countries raised concerns about “our Muslims”, i.e. Polish Tatars. In facing the refugee crisis, Polish people are afraid that the Tatars 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 aversion of most Poles to those considered alien and to “incomprehensible” cultural practices. 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, religious matters comprise only as a secondary issue.<sup>43</sup> The example of the Tatars shows that their faith does not make them “alien” and they are fully accepted. The negative attitude towards Muslims, mostly Arabs, ensues mostly from cultural and racial differences. One can see the specific character of this attitude in the controversial edition of popular right-wing Polish weekly magazine *W Sieci* (*The Network*). In February 2016 the cover of this weekly splashed a graphic depiction of “the rape of Europe”. The continent was symbolised by young blond women draped loosely in a European Union flag and being assaulted by darker-skinned male hands. Although only the arms and hands of the assailants are in view, the message of the headline is clear: “the Islamic rape of Europe”. Bearing in mind that the Polish discourse on tolerance focuses on racial differences, it is worth noticing that the photo does not reveal the religious denomination of the aggressors, only their race.

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<sup>41</sup> Report in Polish: *Ludność. Stan i struktura demograficzno-społeczna. Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2011*, GUS [Central Statistical Office], Warszawa 2013, [http://stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/LUD\\_ludnosc\\_stan\\_str\\_dem\\_spo\\_NSP2011.pdf](http://stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/LUD_ludnosc_stan_str_dem_spo_NSP2011.pdf), 2 May 2016.

<sup>42</sup> K. Warmińska, „Polskość” a „tatarskość”, in: M. Kempny, A. Kapciak, S. Łodziński (eds.), *U progu wielokulturowości. Nowe oblicza społeczeństwa polskiego*, Warszawa 1997, p. 278.

<sup>43</sup> M. Buchowski, K. Chlewińska, *Poland . . .*, *op. cit.*, pp. 355–357.



Making the intention of the edition perfectly clear, the editors declared:

In the new issue of the weekly *The Network*, a report about what the media and Brussels elite are hiding from the citizens of the European Union.<sup>44</sup>

The edition was the reaction to the New Year's Eve sexual assaults in Germany in 2015/2016. The Polish magazine pointed out that local governments in German cities, and most Western media outlets, at first ignored the story and only started reporting on the incidents on January 5<sup>th</sup> 2016, after a wave of anger on social media made covering them unavoidable. The journalist writing for *The Network* accused European media of ignoring or minimising the problems arising from the massive influx of immigrants and acts of violence in the name of tolerance and political correctness. Outlining the fundamental differences between eastern Islam and western Christianity (culture, architecture, music, gastronomy, dress), the editorial explains these two worlds have been at war over the last 14 centuries and the world is now witnessing a colossal clash of two civilizations in the countries of old Europe. This clash is brought by Muslims who come to Europe and carry conflict with the Western world as part of their collective consciousness. Concluding the cover article, Aleksandra Rybińska warned

<sup>44</sup> *W Sieci (The Network)*, 15–21 February 2016, p. 2.

against the collapse of the West in the face of this “Islamic rape”, quoting British historian Arnold Toynbee statement: “Civilizations die from suicide, not by murder.”<sup>45</sup> The magazine also had strong words for German Chancellor Angela Merkel, whom it accused of listening more to the German industrial lobby which claimed campaigns for cheap labour from outside the European Union.

The front cover of this politically conservative Polish magazine may be one of the most politically incorrect and provocative illustrations of the migrant crisis to date. *The Independent*, a British online newspaper, accused the editorial of *The Network* of arousing fear in society by borrowing from a long-established set of racial codes.<sup>46</sup> Ishan Tharoor, a journalist at *The Independent* quoted a Twitter user who compared *The Network's* cover to the Nazi-era imagery and fascist propaganda that prevailed during the Second World War. For example, social media users uploaded a poster of a Second World War era Italian fascist call to arms, showing a dark foreign soldier seising a European woman or a French colonial soldier groping another girl. *The Independent* concluded that the risk of a cultural invasion somehow contaminating Polish societies is, frankly, a phantasm conjured by fear-mongers.<sup>47</sup>

## “REFUGEES WELCOME TO POLAND”

Although such exasperating anti-refugee attitudes appear to have won over the majority of Poles, not everyone shares these views: many have instead been standing up to call for greater inclusion, revealing a much more complex social dynamic than is usually portrayed by the media. In demonstrations provoked by the refugee crisis that took place in September 2015 in many Polish cities, counter-protesters held banners aloft reading “Refugees, Welcome.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> A. Rybińska, “Piekło Europy”, *W Sieci (The Network)*, 15 February 2016, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> I. Tharoor, “The so-called ‘Islamic rape of Europe’ is part of a long and racist story”, 18 February 2016, at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/isis-daesh-isil-polish-magazine-a6880951.html>, 7 May 2016.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> W. Rokicka, “Refugees welcome in Poland”, at <https://witness.theguardian.com/assignment/55f03403e4b0fd3fbc76f6b/1707753>, 7 May 2016.

Pro-refugees campaigns among Poles can also be seen in the Internet. The members of the initiative "Refugees Welcome Polska" are convinced that refugees should not be stigmatised and excluded by being housed in mass accommodation centres. Instead, they should be able to live in shared flats (or other normal housing situations) with Poles, even on a small scale. To make it possible, the initiative established a website where every Polish citizen who is interested in helping refugees and has a free room in their flat or house can register.<sup>49</sup> Then, through the organisation Refugees Welcome Polska, Poles who have registered themselves will be put in touch with a person who has fled to Poland. If it is necessary, the organisation will help to finance some expenses of hosting refugees. The Polish initiative is a part of international network whose sister organisations may be found in Germany, Austria, Spain and Greece.

Another initiative is the NGO foundation Refugee.pl which was established in January 2015 by the ten employees and supporters of the Refugee Counselling Centre of the Polish Humanitarian Organisation.<sup>50</sup> Refugee.pl continues the work of the Refugee Counselling Centre while members of the foundation try to encourage Polish people to welcome refugees by running education programs, assuming that more knowledge means less fear. At present, the Refugee.pl foundation is conducting two projects aiming to support the pre-integration process of refugees (applying for asylum) settling into Polish society.<sup>51</sup>

One interesting example of the internal controversies around the refugee crisis is the reaction to a private initiative called Estera Fund. The president of the foundation, Miriam Shaded, is the daughter of a Syrian-born Presbyterian pastor in Warsaw. According to Shaded, Estera Fund was established to help Syrian Christians who "for the sake of their religion followers of Christ are savagely tortured and exterminated. Their religious affiliation often prevents them from seeking help in the neighbouring countries."<sup>52</sup> Estera Fund assists Syrians in their homeland by offering them

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<sup>49</sup> <http://refugees-welcome.pl>, 7 May 2016.

<sup>50</sup> The full name of organization is: *Małgorzata Jasiczek-Gebert Foundation Refugee.pl*. Małgorzata Jasiczek-Gebert was the manager of the PHO Refugee Counselling Centre for many years until her death in 2011.

<sup>51</sup> <http://refugee.pl/projekty/projekty-realizowane/>, 7 May 2016.

<sup>52</sup> <http://fundacjaestera.pl/en/>, 8 May 2016. The whole campaign is financed by private funds from charitable institutions, communities and churches, as well as people of good will.



legal aid in gathering documents necessary for leaving the country and receiving Polish visa and refugee status. In Poland, the foundation takes care of the refugees, accommodates them and provides them with the means necessary for a decent life. It also helps them in assimilating by, among other things, teaching them Polish. Having received approval from the Polish authorities, Estera Fund has organised the arrival of more than 150 Christian Syrians to Poland. However, Polish NGOs have accused Estera of applying discriminatory criteria by choosing refugees of only one religion. Miriam Shaded aroused even more controversy in February 2016 because of her public call (in the Polish press and in social media) to outlaw Islam as a totalitarian system, which legitimises crime.<sup>53</sup>

## AN ALTERNATIVE SOLUTION: PROJECT LEBANON

Facing the fact that most Polish citizens are against taking in the refugees from the Middle East, the Polish Centre for International Aid (PCPM) has proposed an alternative compromise solution, namely securing basic shelter for Syrian refugee families in Lebanon. PCPM is the largest Polish secular non-governmental organization providing foreign humanitarian and development assistance.<sup>54</sup> Its ongoing project, entitled "Project Lebanon", has been implemented since 2012. Both Muslim and Christian locations are included in the project. As there are no camps for Syrian refugees in Lebanon because the Lebanese government does not allow them to be established, such refugees are forced to rent apartments or other lodging spaces such as garages or basements (paying 200–400\$ a month). Because of the high cost of rent, refugees quickly lose their savings. "Project Lebanon" aims at securing basic shelter for 630 refugee families currently living in north-eastern Lebanon.

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<sup>53</sup> "Meet Miriam Shaded of the Ester Foundation in Poland & Her Desire to Outlaw Islam", at <http://tellmamauk.org/meet-miriam-shaded-of-the-esther-foundation-in-poland-her-desire-to-outlaw-islam/?lang=pl>, 8 May 2016.

<sup>54</sup> The NGO was founded in 2006 and since then has implemented over 40 projects in the core areas of health and education, secure livelihoods, and refugee assistance. It focuses its primary efforts in six priority countries: South Sudan, Ethiopia, Palestine, Tajikistan, Lebanon, Georgia. PCPM has been the single largest recipient of funds from the Polish Government (Polish Aid).

Thanks to previous UN funding and current funding from Polish Aid, PCPM is able to pay rent to Lebanese families letting apartments to refugees (150\$ per month). Financial resources to cover those costs are transferred to families via debit cards issued by a Polish bank. The project is being implemented in 11 locations in the north-eastern part of Lebanon, close to the Syrian border. The locations are situated in the Lebanese province of Akkar, which was the region most affected by the refugee crisis.

“Project Lebanon” is an integral part of the Regional Response Plan for Syrian Refugees coordinated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). One of the UNHCR’s weekly reports has described the benefits of “Project Lebanon” for the refugees and host community alike, as follows:

PCPM’s project is one of the first and longest-running activities in Lebanon that focus on lifting the burden on Syrian refugee families renting accommodation. Furthermore, the project has an equal impact on the Lebanese host communities that are affected by presence of refugees, a population that is equal to or even surpassing the local population in some locations.<sup>55</sup>

Within the framework of “Project Lebanon”, this Polish organisation has built playgrounds for the children of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. These playgrounds were manufactured by a Polish company and transported to Syria by ship. The main objective of this initiative is to reduce war trauma and its effects on children.

Why is the option to help the refugees without relocating them to Europe a reasonable proposition? The first reason is the much lower cost of providing help in Lebanon. For example, the EU’s financial allocation for the internal relocation of one refugee from Greece or Italy to another country would, in Lebanon, suffice to provide comprehensive humanitarian aid to 13 Syrian refugees, cash for sheltering 29 refugees or food assistance to 42 refugees. These numbers show that the Polish government can help the refugees more efficiently, without inviting them to Poland.

Another argument is based on the wishes of the refugees themselves. Many of them, especially the elderly, do not want to relocate to Europe. In

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<sup>55</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Inter-Agency Regional Response for Syrian Refugees (12–18 September 2013)”, 18 September 2013, at <http://www.ref-world.org/docid/523c2f7e4.html> and at <http://www.alnap.org/resource/19525>, 10 May 2016.

Lebanon they live in a similar cultural environment to that of Syria. Those who are staying close to the border can sometimes even see their own houses from this distance. Thus, they prefer to stay in Lebanon and wait, hoping that one day they can go back to their homeland.

The solution offered by The Polish Centre for International Aid is a kind of “third way” – between the rejection of refugees and taking them into European countries. Unfortunately, this third way is not very present in the Polish media or political discussions.

## DISPARITIES IN AID FOR REFUGEES

# 6000 €

The amount of money that the European Union will allocate to each refugee in Europe



## IN LEBANON IT WOULD BE SUFFICIENT TO ENSURE

full humanitarian assistance for



**3 FAMILIES = 13 REFUGEES FROM SYRIA**

(according to UN guidelines : 175\$/family /month)

providing shelter for



**7 FAMILIES = 29 REFUGEES FROM SYRIA**

(PCPM project : up to 80\$/family/month)

providing food aid for



**10 FAMILIES = 42 REFUGEES FROM SYRIA**

(the UN World Food Programme : 13.5\$/person/month)



Join PCPM in supporting refugees in Lebanon

**<http://pcpm.org.pl/our-projects/lebanon>**

Source: <http://pcpm.org.pl/disparities-in-aid-for-refugees.html>, 3 December 2016

## POLISH HOSPITALITY: NOT FOR EVERYONE?

On Poland's official travel website one can read the following:

You will be overwhelmed by the exceptional hospitality offered by the Polish people and the good-hearted everyday social rituals you will experience. . . .

If you are invited for dinner, better go on an empty stomach because otherwise you will find it difficult to feast on a generous helping of soup with noodles, pork cutlet with cabbage and potatoes, topped with a cheesecake and washed with a bottle of home distilled flavored liquor.<sup>56</sup>

However, when we examine the official government policy towards refugees, one must admit that this legendary Polish hospitality applies only to the locals, tourist or expats. In opinion of the members of Polish organizations helping the refugees the absence of any integration policy by the state is a policy in itself and a deliberate choice.<sup>57</sup> After making their claim for refugee status, refugees are taken to a welcome centre and accommodated in a well-appointed former barracks. The refugees receive three meals a day, with a bus taking children to school while the adults can attend language lessons. Each person receives only 70 zloty (16 euros / 18\$) a month in pocket money. The hardest part comes after refugees leave the centre. After they leave, the state offers each refugee only 100–270 euros (110–300\$) a month for a year. They are then left to their own devices, supported only by non-profit organizations that offer language lessons or help them overcome administrative hurdles. As the government's integration policy exists only on paper, it is the NGOs and local authorities who try to take over from there. The lack of available work, along with financial benefits that are higher in Western Europe, discourage refugees from staying in Poland. No wonder that for most refugees arriving in Poland is only a stop-over on the way to wealthier European Union member states.

Thus, the contemporary debate on tolerance in Poland refers constantly to the mythical tolerance of the historical Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania, resulting in a low-level of social conscience regarding the real problems of minority groups.

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<sup>56</sup> <http://www.poland.travel/en/useful-information/polish-manners>, 1 May 2016.

<sup>57</sup> "No country for refugees: Hostile Poland's growing fear of migrants", at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world/no-country-for-refugees-hostile-poland-s-growing-fear-of-migrants/story-Cg8Pf60h5m5wtCDhpbg4mO.html>, 1 May 2016.

## THE POLES BETWEEN VALUES

The conflict between the pro-refugees Poles and those who are opposed to taking them shows the conflict of values within the Polish nation. According to research based on the World Values Survey conducted by the political scientists Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, cultural values that vary between societies may be divided into two predominant dimensions: traditional versus secular-rational values; and survival versus self-expression values.<sup>58</sup> Traditional values emphasise the importance of religion, national pride, and traditional family values. Secular-rational values have the opposite preferences to traditional values. Survival values place an emphasis on economic and physical security. This is linked with a relatively ethnocentric outlook and low levels of trust and tolerance. Survival values involve a priority of security over liberty and distrust in outsiders. Self-expression values give high priority to self-expression, interpersonal trust and quality of life. Some values more common in societies that embrace self-expression values include growing tolerance of foreigners, rising demands for autonomy and freedom from central authority. This is expressed by participation in decision-making in economic and political life.<sup>59</sup>

The complex reaction of Polish society to the refugee crisis shows that the Poles are situated at a crossroads between traditional and secular-rational values. Polish society is also divided between survival values and self-expression values. Pro-refugee organizations and individuals displaying tolerance of foreigners embrace self-expression values, while the Poles who are against taking in the refugees from Middle East embrace survival values. However, these groups have something in common. In both cases, their protests in public spaces and on social media show the importance of self-expression for Polish society. In particular, the protests emphasise the importance of a specific subset of self-expression values, namely "emancipative values". According to Inglehart and Welzel, emancipative values combine an emphasis on freedom of choice and equality of opportunities.<sup>60</sup> Emancipative values, therefore, involve priorities for

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<sup>58</sup> R. Inglehart, Ch. Welzel, "Changing Mass Priorities: The Link Between Modernization and Democracy", *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 8 (June 2010).

<sup>59</sup> [https://web.archive.org/web/20131019112321/http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs/articles/folder\\_published/article\\_base\\_54](https://web.archive.org/web/20131019112321/http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs/articles/folder_published/article_base_54), 30 November 2016.

<sup>60</sup> R. Inglehart, Ch. Welzel, "Changing Mass Priorities . . .", *op. cit.*, p. 15.

lifestyle liberty, gender equality, personal autonomy and the voice of the people. This subset of values constitutes the main cultural component of human empowerment and encourages nonviolent protest. Thus, emancipative values make civil society more self-expressive and vitalise civil society.

Many different concerns – such as security, Catholic identity, and European economic disparities – are guiding the Polish public's declining support for refugees, particularly those from the Middle East and Africa. For policymakers and civil-society groups who seek to restore public support for immigration, it is crucial to recognise that the driving forces behind anti-immigrant sentiment in Poland are hardly unique. The amalgamation of security fears due to concerns about crime and terrorism, economic fears about the distribution of public resources, anti-EU sentiment resulting from a sense that supranational bodies are eroding national sovereignty, have been seen across the European continent (i.e. in the success of the Freedom Party of Austria). While these reasons of public anxiety are not unique to Poland, the case of anti-refugee sentiment in Poland clearly demonstrates how these factors can overlap and intersect. Despite the calls by Pope Francis to help refugees, the Roman Catholic Church, traditionally an important player in Poland has also not helped to soften the attitudes of the Polish public. However, at times the Catholic Church stance on the issue was divided among those who accepted Francis' guidelines and church leaders whose views mirrored those of the Polish public. Thus, the influential Polish bishop, Tadeusz Pieronek, said that fears of Muslim refugees are "justified", which is why the church should only "open its doors to Syrian Christians".<sup>61</sup> Moreover, after the shift in the Polish government's position, the governments of the Visegrad Group are in even closer alignment in their rejection of the EU's common refugee policy than they were before.

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<sup>61</sup> <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/polen-angst-und-kalkuel-1.2640725-2>, 12 March 2017.

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