

National minorities in Polish politics and its eastern neighbors

Polonya Siyasetinde Ulusal Azınlıklar ve Doğu Komşuları

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ÖZET

İkinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan sonraki siyasi değişimler sonucunda yüz binlerce Polonyalı doğu Polonya sınırını terk etti. Bu toplulukların eski Polonya toprakları ile olan ilişkileri ve Sovyetler Birliği'ne dahil olmaları eski SSCB'deki en büyük Polonyalı azınlıklardan birini meydana getirdi. 1989'dan beri devam eden siyasi değişimler ile Litvanya, Belarus ve Ukrayna'nın bağımsız bir devlet olarak ortaya çıkışı, Polonyalıların farklılaşarak şu anda üç farklı ülkede yaşamasına neden olmuştur. Litvanya, Belarus ve Ukrayna'daki siyasi değişimler bu ülkelerdeki Polonyalı azınlığın mevcut durumlarında farklılıkların yaşanmasına sebep olmuştur. Litvanya, Polonya ile birlikte Avrupa Birliği ve NATO üyeliğine giden yolu onayladı. AB mevzuatının yükselmesine rağmen, ulusal duyarlılık Litvanya'daki Polonyalı azınlığın konumunun bozulmasına neden oldu. Başkan Lukashenko'nun iktidar varsayımı, Belarus'taki Polonya kuruluşlarının ticari faaliyetlerinin azaltılmasına yol açtı. Polonya ile nispeten mümkün olan en iyi ilişkilere sahip ülke olan Ukrayna'da bile bu ülkede Polonyalı azınlığın pozisyonunu etkileyen bir milliyetçi düşünce hakim oldu. Polonyalı azınlığın konumu, Polonya'nın Schengen ülkelerine katılımını değiştirdi ve bu da Belarus ve Ukrayna'nın Polonya vatandaşlarının girişine yönelik vize politikasının sıklaştırılmasıyla sonuçlandı. Ukrayna'daki Polonyalı azınlığın durumu, yeni bir Ukrayna milliyetçiliğinin dalgasını tetikleyen Rusya'nın Kırım'a el koymasını kötüleştirdi. Rusya'nın ekonomik durumundaki bozulma, Polonya'daki Beyaz Rusya ile ilişkileri kolaylaştırdı. Belarus, Belarus'ta yaşayan Polonyalılar da dahil olmak üzere, bu ülkenin Polonyalı vatandaşlarına yaptığı ziyaretleri büyük ölçüde kolaylaştıracak olan Polonya ile küçük sınır trafiği konusunda daha önce imzalanan anlaşmayı uygulamaya karar verdi.

ABSTRACT

The political changes after the Second World War left the eastern Polish border, hundreds of thousands of Poles. Addressing the former Polish lands, and their incorporation into the Soviet Union has created one of the largest Polish minority in the former USSR. Subsequent political changes since 1989, the emergence of independent states, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine, the diversified situation of Poles living now in three different countries. Likewise, political changes in Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine was accompanied by changes in the position of the Polish minority in these countries. Lithuania, together with the Polish passed the road to membership in the European Union and NATO. Despite EU legislation increase national sentiment caused the deterioration of the position of the Polish minority in Lithuania. Assumption of power by President Lukashenko has led to a reduction of business activity of Polish organizations in Belarus. Even in Ukraine, the country with the relatively best possible relations with the Polish There was a time increase of nationality, which influenced the position of the Polish minority in this country. Once again, the position of the Polish minority changed the Polish accession to the Schengen countries, which resulted in a tightening of visa policy for the entrance of the Polish citizens of Belarus and Ukraine. The situation of the Polish minority in Ukraine worsened seizure of the Crimea by Russia, which triggered a new wave of Ukrainian nationalism. While the deterioration of the economic situation of Russia resulted in easing relations with Belarus in Poland. In 2016 Belarus has decided to implement the previously signed agreement on small border traffic with Polish, which greatly facilitate visits to Polish citizens of this country, including Poles living in Belarus.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Azınlıklar

Belarus

Litvanya

Polonya

Ukrayna

Keywords:

Minorities

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Poland

Ukraine

1. INTRODUCTION

In the early 90s, significant changes in the political and geopolitical situation in Central and Eastern Europe has occurred. The creation a number of independent nation-states in the immediate vicinity of Poland had a vast influence on individual national minorities, especially those living near the borders. There were huge changes to the political and economic relations between democratic in Poland and its newly independent neighbours and, to a large extent, between individual nations, now divided by borders. The process of expanding the area of European integration began led to the inclusion of some Central and Eastern European countries in the NATO and EU structures. At the same time, new opportunities to solve those problems emerged, and the national minorities were allowed to speak about their aspirations and problems openly.

Throughout the whole existence of the Polish People's Republic and the Soviet Union, the border between the two countries was primarily a barrier tightly separating Poles from the Russians, Lithuanians, Belarusians and Ukrainians living in the Soviet Union. Although the border between Poland and the USSR, which was reformed at the end of World War II (Wendt, Raczyński 1999), functioned for just 47 years (1944–1991), its impact on the area it divided turned out to be very durable. The demarcation of the border had a direct impact on the resettlement of hundreds of thousands of people, led to the almost complete isolation of the two parts of the divided territory and resulted in its significant diversification, both in national-cultural and political-economic terms. The multi-cultural and multiethnic character of the borderland that was shaped for hundreds of years, was destroyed (Efe et al. 2017). Moreover, the insularity of the border contributed to the peripherisation of the borderland, leading to its economic and social backwardness.

Table 1. Polish Minorities In Belarus (1999), Lithuania (2001) And Ukraine (2001)

Country	Official number*	Unofficial**
Belarus	396000	900000
Lithuania	235000	300000
Ukraine	144000	900000

Source: https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polacy_na_Białorusi//na_Litwie//na_Ukrainie

*Based on official data of country

**Based on polish local organisation

This objective has been pursued for more than twenty five years at the level of international political, social and economic relation, administrative cooperation, as well as interpersonal tourist, business and commercial ones. Due to political, ethnic and historical circumstances, its course and results are different in each of Poland's eastern neighbours. These relations are shaped by the minorities living in the direct vicinity of the national borders, both the Polish minority living to the east of the border (tab.1) and the Ukrainian, Belarusian and Lithuanian minorities to the west (tab. 2). In political practice, due to historical circumstances and the needs of the current internal politics or current geo-political interests, the role a given minority plays in the bilateral relations between the country of residence for such minority and their kin-state may be different, not always "bridge-like".

Tablo 2. National Minorities In Poland In 2011

Minorities	Number of person according identification				
	Total	As a first	As only one	As second	Together with Polish identification
Ukrainians	51001	38387	27630	12613	20797
Belarusians	46787	36399	30195	10388	15562
Lithuanians	7863	5599	4830	2264	2961

Source: Own study based on data from the Central Statistical Office, based on the 2011 census

On the Polish relations with its eastern neighbors also it affects policy towards the Belarusian, Lithuanian and Ukrainian minorities in Poland. Belarusian, Lithuanian and Ukrainian minorities constitute about 0,3% of all minorities in Poland (tab.2). All minorities in Poland constitute about 3%, enjoying many privileges associated with Poland's adoption of the legal system in force in the European Union, which guarantees national and ethnic minorities many rights.

2. POLISH MINORITIES AT LITHUANIA

Over the past several decades, the Polish-Lithuanian relations went through very several different stages – from overt hostility, through "socialist friendship", early 90s mistrust, cooperation and strategic partnership within NATO and the EU at the beginning of the 21st century, to the clear cooling down of mutual relations. How they will look to the future largely depends on the situation of Polish and Lithuanian minorities in both countries.

At the turn of the 80s, the newly independent Lithuania regained widespread sympathies among Poles, so it was expected, that the Polish-Lithuanian relations will become model. Despite this obstacle, it was Lithuania whose relations with Poland in the early 90s were the worst among all neighbours. This exacerbation was influenced by the conduct of the Polish minority in Lithuania, but also by the nationalistic slogans by the „Sajūdis” party that took power in Lithuania and, to a large extent historically motivated, the dislike and distrust of the Lithuanians towards Poles.

After the conflicts of the early 90s, the interstate relations between Poland and Lithuania, constantly dominated by the issues of minorities, especially the Polish minority in Lithuania, the relations improved. In April 1994, after months of negotiations, the Treaty "on the good neighbourly relations and friendly cooperation" was signed. By signing the Treaty, both parties committed to observe all international regulations concerning national minorities, that have been guaranteed, among others, the right to freely use their national language in public and personal freedom, use their names and surnames in the original form of the minority, set up institutions, participate in the public life on equal terms with other citizens and to protect their national identity. The scale of the problems has been illustrated by the fact that Lithuania was the last of the new neighbours, with whom the Polish government signed an agreement of this type. A few months later the Lithuanian consulate was opened in Sejny in the Polish-Lithuanian borderland, and the Lithuanian government started financing the construction of the "Lithuanian House" for the Lithuanian minority in Poland.

In the 90s the border crossings in Ogrodniki and Budzisko were opened. These were the first Polish-Lithuanian border crossings after the Second World War (Wendt 1998). After Poland and Lithuania joined the EU in 2004, and both countries joined the Schengen Area in 2007, all limitations to crossing the border were lifted. This is an especially favourable situation for the Lithuanian minority living in the Suwałki region (Fig. 1), and a change which was hard to comprehend not so long ago, given that throughout the period of communism, the government has effectively prevented Lithuanians living in Poland from contacting the Soviet Lithuania, including their families.

The Polish-Lithuanian cooperation which was established at the state government level led to the creation of common institutions, including: the Consultative Committee for the Presidents of Poland and Lithuania, the Assembly of Deputies of the Polish and Lithuanian Sejm (1997), the Council for Cooperation Between the Governments of the Republics of Poland and Lithuania (1997), the Polish-Lithuanian International Commission for Cross- Border Cooperation (1996), the Polish-Lithuanian Local Government Forum (1998). In addition, the Polish-Lithuanian cooperation at the regional level has led to the creation of: "Pogranicze" (Borderland) Foundation in Sejny (1990), Polish-Lithuanian Chamber of Commerce (1993), the Lithuanian-Polish-Russian Committee for Border Regions (1997), the Association of the Local Governments of the Sejny Region, and the Polish-Lithuanian Forum of Non-governmental Organisations. The cross-border cooperation was also developing dynamically and diversely, resulting, among other, in the creation of the "Neman River" Euroregion in 1997, the cooperation between Polish and Lithuanian borderland municipalities and their twin cities, the cooperation of cultural institutions and schools, joint organisation of commercial missions and international affairs (Rykała 2008). These activities, along with other economic agreements, led at the end of the 20th century to the trans-formation of the Polish-Lithuanian relations, often called "the best in history" at that time, into a strategic partnership. Effective cooperation concerning the membership of both countries in the EU and NATO has been started, and the shared aspiration have brought Warsaw and Vilnius closer to each other.

However, During the first decade of the twenty first century, after Lithuanian independence "settled down" and Lithuania joined NATO and the EU, the mutual relations worsen. Lithuania started experiencing the old resentments and fears of the small country faced with a much bigger and populous neighbour, who dominated Lithuania politically for many centuries and now had the largest national minority. In the relations between Poland and Lithuania, the small Lithuanian minority in Poland has become a tool the authorities in Vilnius that used in talks with the Polish government. When Polish authorities demanded respect for the rights of Poles in Lithuania, the Lithuanian government did not hesitate to raise the issue of discrimination of Lithuanians in Poland. Following the legal changes introduced in both countries in recent years, which are favourable for the minorities in Poland, while often being unfavourable in Lithuania, especially after adapting the Polish law to the EU regulations and the adoption of the act "on national, ethnic minorities and regional language" by the Polish parliament, the situation of the Lithuanian minority in Poland became much better than the situation of the Polish minority in Lithuania.

That is why the most important issue in the relations between the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Lithuania is the treatment of Polish national minority in Lithuania. The Lithuanian authorities have introduced a number of provisions limiting the rights, especially concerning language and education, of the minorities. The still unresolved issues include Polish spelling of the names in the identification cards and bilingual spelling of street names and places. According to Lithuanian law, only the Lithuanian spelling rules can be used in the Republic of Lithuania and no bilingual place names are allowed, even in areas where Poles are a vast majority to residents.

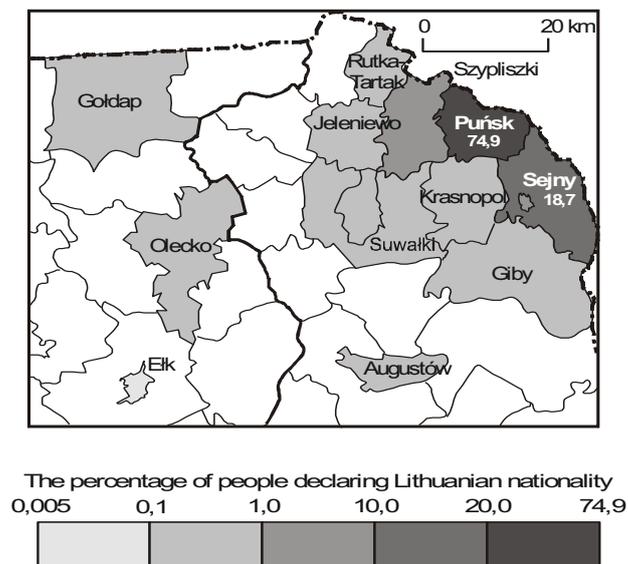
In 2011, the Lithuanian authorities have adopted the educational law that, based on the Lithuanian Poles, discriminates Polish schools in Lithuania. The most criticized provisions of the new education law are the standardization, since 2013, of the mandatory maturity exams in Lithuanian language in minority and Lithuanian schools (despite The existance of differences in their curriculum), increasing the number of Lithuanian language classes, the introduction, since September 2011, of Lithuanian history and geography classes in Lithuanian, as well as the "basics of patriotism", also in Lithuanian minority schools (where all subjects used to be taught in minority languages). The law also makes it easier for the local governments to close small, rural (non-Lithuanian) schools, which will surely decrease the number of Polish schools. For comparison, according to the Polish educational law, all Polish history and geography classes are obligatorily taught in all types of schools, and the compulsory maturity exam in Polish language is also standardized.

Its adoption led to mass demonstrations in Vilnius, and the intervention of the Polish authorities. Protests of Poles did not have any effect, as the new education law became the new honed of Polish-Lithuanian conflict. Another unsolved problem relates to the return of Polish property seized after the Second World War by the Soviet authorities and the current Lithuanian authorities, who are their legal heirs. In addition to problems of social and historical nature, there are also economic issues, exemplified by the refinery in Mažeikiai, the biggest foreign investment of PKN Orlen, which has been causing problems far exceeding what so called "market mechanisms" since its purchase by the Polish company.

Despite the many sensitive issues in the relations between the Lithuanian state and the Polish minority, Polish organisations and institutions had freedom to operate a real opportunity to influence the local Polish communities. In the Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions, a large part of the local administration is dominated by the Polish minority, there are representatives of the Electoral Action of Poles in the Lithuanian parliament, Polish schools function (though with numerous problems), also at university level. After Poland and Lithuania joined the EU and the tendency to remove the administrative and economic barriers between the two countries became more prominent, as well as a result of the progressing Lithuanisation of Vilnius, even the Lithuanian circles resentful of the Polish minority seem to realise, that it does not pose any threat to the territorial integrity of the Lithuanian state. However, the lack of support for Polish territorial autonomy, the issues of accepting the demands concerning the spelling of Polish names or bilingual signs and the regulations included in the new educational law show, that the Lithuanians are still afraid of Polish separatism and they treat many of the initiatives from the Polish minority as acts against Lithuanian sovereignty (Kowalski 2008).

The resolution of bilateral problems is surely hindered not only because of the lack of good will, but also because of the disproportionate nationality structure in both countries. Lithuanians in Poland are a marginal nationality, both in numbers and territory.

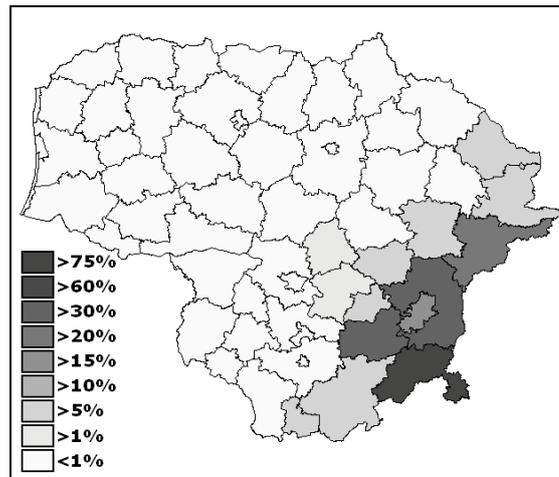
Fig. 1. The Percentage Of People Declaring Lithuanian Ethnicity In The Polish-Lithuanian Borderland, By Commune, Based On The 2002 Census



Source: Own study based on data from the Central Statistical Office

Tight groups of Lithuanians live in the north-eastern end of Poland, along the border with Lithuania (Fig. 1), but they are a majority only in Puńsk municipality. According to the 2011 census, there is only approx. eight thousand ethnic Lithuanians and people of Lithuanian origin in Poland.

However in 2016, Poles in Lithuania are the largest ethnic minority, about 210 thousand of 2,91 million people (7,2%), significantly shaping the history of Lithuania (both in the old days in and in the twentieth century). Poles are the largest national minority, concentrated mainly in the Vilnius region, in the south-eastern part of Lithuania (fig. 2). In the district of Vilnius they represent 25% of the population, including in the area of the Vilnius 60%, and in Salcininkai approx. 80%.

Fig. 2. Polish Minorities In Lithuania (2011)

Source: https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polacy_na_Litwie

In Vilnius Poles they constitute 16% of the total population. Of course, this does not justify the asymmetry in the relationship towards minorities. The Government of the Republic of Lithuania, regardless of the changing political options, consistently fails to comply with all the provisions of the Treaty of 1994 with Poland and discriminates Poles. In view of such national and political relations between friendly, fully democratic states, members of the EU and NATO, the state of relations with Belarus or Ukraine should not come as a surprise. By limiting the rights of national minorities in their territory, the Lithuanian authorities at the same time gave various forms of support, financial, organizational, and political, to ethnic Lithuanians living broad, including those in Poland.

3. POLISH MINORITIES IN BELARUS

After the proclamation of independence of the Republic of Belarus in 1991 and the related dissolution of the USSR, the emancipation of the former republics within the Empire, and the ongoing process of democratisation in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, there was a common hope for the development of friendly, partner neighbourly relations with all newly-created eastern neighbours of Poland. The Treaties of good neighbour ship and friendly cooperation with Belarus and Ukraine were signed as early as 1992, but the consecutive years verified these expectations, especially in the case of Belarus (Atasoy et al., 2017).

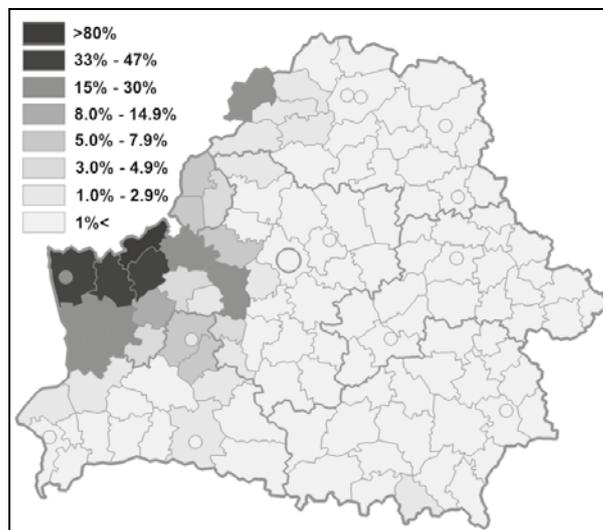
In the mid-90s, Poland attempted to commence trans-border cooperation within the Euroregions, many of which were being created around that time. In 1995, the "Bug River" Euroregion was created in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland, which was joined in 1998 by the Brest province in Belarus. In 1997, the "Neman River" Euroregion was created in cooperation with Lithuania and Belarus (Wendt 2004a). However, the Euroregions in the Belarusian region are practically non-existent. This is due to distrust of the Belarusian authorities of Poland and the EU, the lack of active cooperation, legal differences, and the lack of legal and financial condition of the Belarusian local governments.

The coming to power of President Alexander Lukashenka in 1994 began the process of political integration with Russia and the re-sovietisation of Belarus, which included the restoration of the flag and the national emblem from the Soviet era and once more equality of rights of Russian and Belarusian language in public life. From 1991 to 1995 the only official language in Belarus was Belarusian. Based on the results of a nationwide referendum in 1995, introduced two official languages: Russian and Belarusian. According to the 2009 Belarusian national census were only 2.2 million of 9.5 million citizens in Belarus use the Belarusian language in their households. There has been a gradual reduction of democratic and national freedoms. In a few years, Lukashenka's government turned into an autocratic regime and the political system of Belarus became a dictatorship. The whole political, social and economic life has been under supervision of the state, or the president, who now wields absolute power. The persecution of the small opposition movement have been intensified, which significantly worsened the relations between Belarus and the Western-European countries, including Poland. The EU has repeatedly imposed various sanctions, but they have not brought significant changes in the political situation in Belarus. Brutal persecution of political opponents is still a fact, basic

democratic freedoms are not provided, violations of human rights are widespread, and the political cooperation with Poland and other EU countries is not functioning. As a result of Lukashenka’s policy, Belarus remains outside the area of European integration and does not function as a state of law.

In 2005, the Belarusian authorities led to the breakup of the unity of the Union of Poles in Belarus, at the time the largest independent social organization in Belarus. Currently, there are two Polish national organisations of the same name, one "official", recognized by the Belarusian authorities, the other unrecognized, discriminated against, cooperating with the Belarusian opposition and acknowledged by the Polish authorities. The Polish minority in Belarus is divided and used for current political purposes. Part of it supports Lukashenka’s dictatorship, expecting all kinds of privileges, some favour the opposition, hoping to improve the situation of Poles after the democratisation of Belarus. According to the 2009 Belarusian census, 294.5 thousand people declared Polish nationality (fig. 3). This means a decrease in the number of Poles by over 100 thousand people in just 10 years. Numerically speaking, Poles are the second biggest minority in Belarus, after the Russians, mainly living in the north-western region of the country, near the border with Poland and Lithuania.

Fig. 3. Polish Minorities In Belarus (2009)



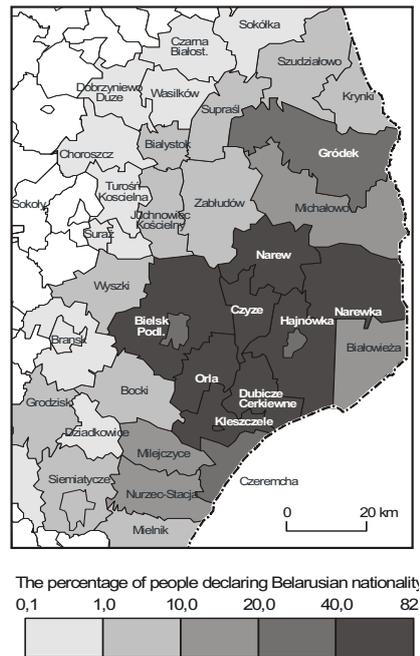
Source: Spis narodowy Białorusi 2009, www.pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polacy_na_Bia%C5%82orusi

The support for Belarusian opposition, non-governmental organisations and Polish minority in Belarus, co-organised and co-financed by the Polish government (mainly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), is one of the priorities of Polish policy in terms of international cooperation in favour of democracy and the development of citizen society, especially from diffusion of idea of civil society and democratisation processes (Wendt, Ilięş 2003). It is met with strong criticism and counteractions from the Belarusian government. One of the most spectacular manifestations of Polish authorities' commitment to promoting democracy in Belarus was the launch Radio “Racja”, a non-public radio station broadcasting from Białystok and Biała Podlaska in the Belarusian language, also available online, intended for the Belarusian minority in Poland and the citizens of Belarus, funded by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, operating in 1999-2002 and again since 2006. The main objective of the station is to provide the Belarusian citizens with the access to independent information about events and the situation in Belarus, Poland and the world and TV Belsat, a satellite TV channel broadcasting since 2007 in Belarusian, financed and legally owned by Polish Television. Many programs, including news, are also availabilities on the internet. The main objectives of the station are the same as the objectives of Radio “Racja”. It is the only independent Belarusian-speaking television station available in Belarus, which breaks the monopoly of information of the Belarusian authorities. In September 2011, on the initiative of several non-governmental organisations, the Belarusian House was opened in Warsaw. It is supposed to become a place to unite the Belarusian diasporas, coordinate the activities of the Belarusian emigration democratic organisations and support the repressed activists of the Belarusian opposition, as well as a place for discussions among all the organisations fighting for democratic Belarus. It also serves as a centre to inform the Polish public about the events in Belarus.

At first decade of XXI century, the mutual relations between Poland and Belarus are the worst of all the neighbouring countries. They are further aggravated by the character of the border between the countries. The Polish eastern borderland, especially the Polish-Belarusian and Polish-Ukrainian one, is often referred to as

Latin-Byzantine "frontier of civilisation", as the border between the Western and the Eastern civilisations (Bański 2008, Huntington 1997, Kowalski 1999, Eberhardt 2004, Pawluczuk 1999). Running roughly along the Polish border with Belarus and Ukraine, the cultural division line emerging on the basis of the western Christian tradition and the influence of Orthodox culture, is the most enduring divide of the European continent (Bański 2008). Since 2004 it has also been "strengthened" by serving as the external border of the EU, which means that the eastern borderland of Poland, both in cultural and in political sense, can be treated as the frontiers of Western Europe, while the external EU border serves as the main axis dividing Europe.

Fig. 4. The Percentage Of People Declaring Belarusian Ethnicity In The Polish-Belarusian Borderland, By Commune, In The 2002 Census



Source: Own study based on data from the Central Statistical Office

The contemporary Polish-Belarusian border serves as a barrier between completely different political, economic, legal, social and cultural realities. It clearly divides not only the Polish and Belarusian societies but also Belarusians living on both sides of the border (Fig. 4). It differentiates them not only in formal, but also in cultural, mental and economic sense, to a much larger extent than the Ukrainian border. It can surely be described as one of the strongest civilisation barriers in modern Europe.

Paradoxically, as a consequence of the policy run by Lukashenka for over ten years aimed at denationalising Belarusians by removing Belarusian national symbols, limiting the use of Belarusian language (especially in schools), the liquidation of independent Belarusian organisations and media, it is currently easier (and safer) to be an ethnic Belarusian in the Republic of Poland than in the Republic of Belarus.

Therefore, the Belarusian state is not as important as a point of reference for the ethnic Belarusians in Poland as their kin-state is for ethnic Lithuanians or Ukrainians. Sociological studies confirm that representatives of the Belarusian minority commonly view Poland, not Belarus, as their kin-state. They feel a strong emotional, historical and political connection with the Polish state and they assess the Polish society much more positively than the Belarusian people living across the border. Therefore, they commonly assume the role of "Polish citizens" not "Belarusian minority" in external contacts (Sadowski 1995). This has been confirmed by the research done by M. Bieñkowska-Ptasznik (2007) comparing Lithuanian and Belarusian minorities. She claims that Lithuanians identify their capital city with Vilnius, they feel a connection to the Lithuanian state and are more involved in what happens in Lithuania. On the other hand, the Belarusians identify their capital with Warsaw or Białystok, while their attitude towards the situation in Belarus, especially towards the policy of President Lukashenka, is predominantly critical. Among older people, especially the rural population, the positive assessment of the political system in Belarus was dominant. The good and stable economic situation of the people of Belarus was emphasised, and President Lukashenka was seen as a "good host". The actions of the Belarusian opposition were criticised by the respondents for aiming to destabilise the political situation and

leading to poverty and unemployment. Such assessments stem, among others, from the positive view of the times of the People's Republic of Poland and the negative attitude towards the democratic transformations after 1989 in Poland, commonly held by the Belarusian community.

The diverse attitudes of the Belarusian minority toward Belarus are also apparent in the varied perception of the minority by the leaders of Belarusian organisations. Among the Ukrainian and Lithuanian minority organisations operating in Poland, there is hardly any difference and division concerning their relations with their kin-state, while among the Belarusian organisations, the attitude to the Republic of Belarus, its authorities and political system is one of the most contentious issues and the main (apart from the assessment of communist Poland) division and conflict line. Operating for several dozens of years, the Belarusian Social and Cultural Society (BTSK) is the biggest organisation representing the Belarusian minority in Poland. Since its inception in 1956, it has been emphasizing its clearly left-wing character and keeping friendly reactions with the Belarusian authorities. This cooperation can be seen, among others, in the exchange of folk bands (partially financed by the Belarusian side), joint organisation of cultural events, scientific conferences and publications. BTSK cooperates with the "official" Union of Poles in Belarus recognized by the Belarusian authorities, which co-organises annual scientific conferences and artistic events. BTSK activists go to Belarus, where they often publicly declare their support for the policies of President Lukashenka. In return, Poleis is visited by Belarusian officials and politicians invited by BTSK.

On the other hand, the activists of Belarusian organisations created in the 90s, standing in opposition to BTSK and nationalist in character, are decidedly negative in their assessment of the Belarusian government. They often stress, that they do not maintain any contact or cooperation with the "official Belarus". On the contrary – one of the Belarusian leaders in Poland, Eugeniusz Wappa, has been banned from coming to Belarus by the authorities in Minsk, while the main Belarusian-speaking periodical ("Niwa" weekly) is officially banned there. This does not mean that these organisations do not maintain any contacts with Belarus. They cooperate with the opposition, some journalists and NGOs. They are also involved in the activities of Radio Racja and Belsat Television. However, the newly formed associations do not have a wide support among the Belarusian community in Poland, and their activity is usually limited to a few intellectual urban communities.

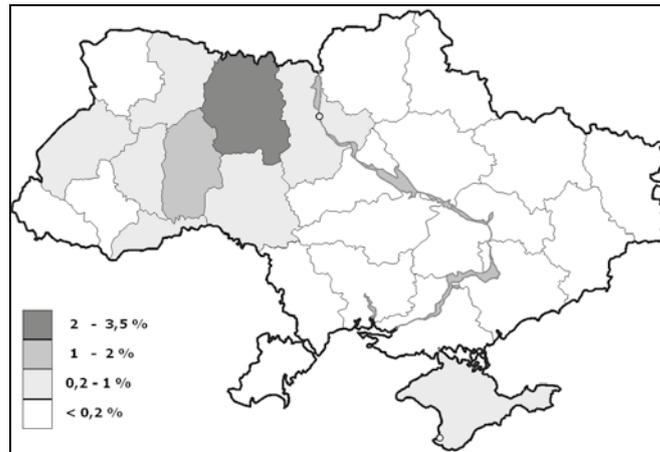
There is a clear correlation between the opinions concerning the situation in Belarus voiced by the leaders of the leftist BTSK and the main base of this organisation, i.e. the older generation of rural Orthodox community, and the opinions voiced by the Belarusian nationalist organisations and the young, educated generation supporting these organisations.

Just as the activists of Belarusian organisations differ in their assessment of the political reality in Belarus, they also differ in their assessment of the situation of the Belarusian minority in Poland after the Polish accession in the EU. The president of BTSK believes that Polish EU accession did not change anything in the circumstances of the Belarusian minority, while the activists of organisations standing in opposition to BTSK emphasise the positive role of European legal standards in protecting the rights of minorities and better protection of minorities following the accession. While the deterioration of the economic situation of Russia resulted in easing relations with Belarus in Polish. In 2016 Belarus has decided to implement the previously signed agreement on small border traffic with Polish, which greatly facilitate visits to Polish citizens of this country, including Poles living in Belarus.

4. POLISH MINORITIES IN UKRAINE

The Polish-Soviet border was effective in hindering relations between the Poles and the Ukrainians and was destructive to the multicultural character of the borderland. On both sides, both the Polish and the Soviet communist regimes implemented a policy of assimilating minorities. As a result, over 30 years (1959–1989) the number of Polish people in Ukraine has decreased, according to official statistics, from 363.3 thousand, to 219.2 thousand and in 2001 to 144,1 thousand (fig. 5). The number of ethnic Poles in the borderland Lvov region decreased by more than a half, from 59.1 thousand, to 26.9 thousand.

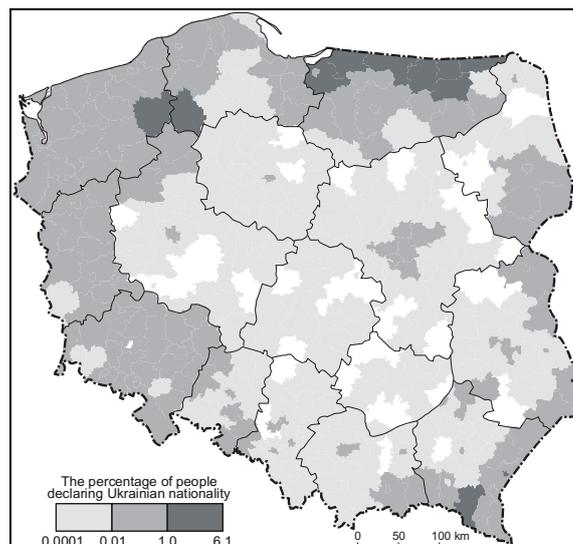
Fig. 5. Polish Minorities On Ukraine (2001)



Source: pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polacy_na_Ukrainie#/media/File:Polish_minority_in_Ukraine_2001

As a result of displacement and dispersion of the ethnic Ukrainians in the northern and western parts of the country in 1947, the process of assimilation in Poland proceeded more rapidly, although there are no official statistics for the period (fig. 6). The traces of culture and religion of individual minorities were also being destroyed.

Fig. 6. The Percentage Of People Declaring Ukrainian Ethnicity, By Districts, In The 2002 Census



Source: Own study based on data from the Central Statistical Office

The situation changed after the fall of communism in Poland, the dissolution of the USSR and the emergence of independent Ukraine in December 1991. Poland was the first country in the world to recognize the independence of Ukraine, the very next day after its formal announcement. The former border with the totalitarian Soviet Union became the border between two sovereign states. Crossing it was greatly facilitated. In addition to the existing border crossing in Medyka, which was the only one for decades, new ones, both road and railway ones, were created in Dorohusk, Hrebenne, Hrubieszów, Korczowa, Krościenko, Przemyśl, Werchrata and Zosin. The new political situation gave hope for a revival of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland, which remained economically, socially and culturally dead throughout the communist times (Barwiński 2009; Sobczyński 2001, Barwiński et al., 2017).

The revival of the borderland can also be seen in the dynamics of cross-border traffic. A growth trend could be seen since mid-90s, with a small slump in 1998. A dramatic increase in the number of people crossing the border, up to over 19 million people per year, occurred between 2005 and 2007. Six months earlier, in May 2004, another significant change in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland occurred, namely Polish accession to the European Union (EU). One of the consequences was the transformation of the Polish-Ukrainian border into the

EU's external border, which came with many limitations, such as increased border control and the introduction of the visa requirement for citizens of countries outside the EU. The rapid increase in cross-border traffic in this period seems surprising, given the new formal requirements associated with crossing the border, mainly relating to the so-called EU visas. Before Poland joined the EU, Ukrainian citizens also needed to have entry visas to Poland, though they were free, reusable and easy to obtain. After the Polish accession to the EU, the so called EU visas were introduced. They were harder to obtain, yet still free. Only after Poland joined the Schengen Area the visas became paid and the procedure became more bureaucratic and complicated. However, the Poles still do not require a visa to go to Ukraine. It can be argued that it was the Polish accession to the EU that contributed to increasing cross-border traffic. As a member of the EU, Poland has become an attractive country for many foreigners from the east, and the interest in economy, trade and tourism has grown, both in Poland and Ukraine. Comparing the Ukrainian section of the border with other Polish fragments of the EU's external border (with Russia and Belarus), we can clearly see that the growth of cross-border traffic after 2004 only happened on the border with Ukraine, where the traffic became significantly higher than on the other two borders.

The situation changed dramatically with Polish accession to the Schengen Agreement in December 2007. The introduction of visa fees for Ukrainian citizens to all Schengen Area countries, including Poland, as well as the bureaucratisation of the visa application procedures caused a slump in border traffic. In just two years (2008–2009), the number of people crossing the Polish-Ukrainian border fell from more than 19 million to just 11.7 million, and it still remains far lower than 5–7 years ago, despite a growth tendency that could be seen over the last two years.

A radical reduction in arrivals of Ukrainian citizens to Poland after 2007 led to the collapse of the borderland trade exchange, which has negative consequences for the inhabitants of the borderland. Since the early 90s, good relationship between Poland and Ukraine directly translated into economic benefits, extremely important for the region. They resulted, among others, from the mobility and resourcefulness of the people who frequently cross the border in connection with the local trade, smuggling of alcohol and cigarettes, as well as looking for a job, but also for family reasons and tourism. One of the consequences of cross-border exchange were the frequent, sometimes regular contacts between the residents of the borderland with the people on the other side of the border, as well as with their language and culture. This had an impact on the perception of national minorities living in the borderland, both Polish and Ukrainian (Wojakowski 2002). Sealing the border in preparation for Polish accession to the EU, as well as the increase in visa requirements in December 2007 have significantly limited these contacts.

According to the leaders of Ukrainian organisations in Poland, most of whom have a positive opinion about Polish accession to the EU, its most important outcome for the Ukrainian community are the monitoring of the minorities' situation by European institutions, improved subjectivity of the minorities and the government's greater understanding for the demands of the minorities. Further down the list are the financial benefits, primarily resulting from the opportunity to indirectly obtain EU funding through grants from local governments or financing for renovations of Orthodox and Greek Orthodox temples, nearly in the all country (fig. 6).

Independent Ukraine is not very supportive for the Ukrainian minority in Poland. According to activists in Ukrainian organisations, this support was non-existent throughout the first dozen years of Ukraine's independence. Despite the large Polish community living in Ukraine and a clear (unfavourable for the Poles) asymmetry in the rights of the Polish minority in Ukraine and the Ukrainian minority in Poland, the question of the situation of national minorities is not a key topic in the official international relations between Poland and Ukraine, especially compared to the relations with Belarus or Lithuania. The economic and geopolitical issues are much more important. There are, however, numerous NGOs such as "Wspólnota Polska" Association and foundations such as Aid to Poles in the East Foundation actively working with dozens of Polish organisations in Ukraine. Assistance is also provided by the Polish local governments and partner cities. On the other hand, state authorities (especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage) support Polish schools in Ukraine, libraries, publications and cultural activities of Polish organisations by co-funding scientific conferences, as well as renovations of temples, graveyards and memorials. The scale of the needs is, of course, disproportionate with the support (Wendt, Czerwionka 2015).

Official political relations between Poland and Ukraine since 1991 were appropriate, though not free from mutual prejudices and stereotypes. The turning point came with the so-called "orange revolution" in Ukraine (21.11.2004–23.01.2005), during which Poland decidedly and effectively supported Ukrainian democratic parties calling for repeating falsified elections and making Ukraine fully independent from Russia. After President of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko took office (2005–2010), Poland became one of the closest political

partners of Ukraine, often serving as its "advocate" at the EU and NATO. This role often has been hampered and restricted by disputes between a fraction of President Yushchenko and Prime Minister Tymoshenko, and especially by the clear closing-up "orange" authorities of Ukraine with extreme Ukrainian nationalists. Mutual political relations were manifested both in symbolic acts of reconciliation (e.g. cemeteries in Lvov and Volhynia) and in joint actions in the international arena, economic projects and sports events. Awarding the right to organise the European soccer championship in 2012 to Poland and Ukraine became yet another positive factor in activating Polish-Ukrainian cooperation. The policy of the Polish governments towards Ukraine, although not always consistent, sought to strengthen the democratic mechanisms and to link Ukraine as closely as possible to the structures of Western Europe, which is extremely important from the point of view of Polish geopolitical interests (Wendt 2004b). The current complex internal political situation in Ukraine under President Viktor Yanukovich, as well as the turning of political and economic elites towards Russia makes the cooperation more difficult, and the political relations between the countries may once again be called, at best, appropriate. The situation of the Polish minority in Ukraine worsened seizure of the Crimea by Russia, which triggered a new wave of Ukrainian nationalism.

Moreover, they are heavily burdened with historical circumstances, that have a special dimension in case of Polish-Ukrainian history. The general area of the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands has seen numerous bloody ethnic conflicts that are still alive in the collective consciousness of both Polish and Ukrainian nation. Historical legacy and national resentments are revealed, among others, in disputes surrounding the organisation of various national or cultural events of various minorities on both sides of the border, monuments to honour the soldiers of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) or their victims, World War 1 and 2 graveyards. History, including its contemporary evaluation and interpretation, is still far more divisive than uniting for Poles and Ukrainians in both countries, despite multiple gestures of reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

One consequence of the contemporary processes of political, economic and military integration of the European continent is the strengthening of its division into the Western Europe (in its widest meaning) and the Eastern Europe (not included in the integration process). At the Polish border with Belarus and Ukraine, the line of the modern division, strengthened in the literal (technical measures to protect the borders) and legal sense (visa regulations) overlaps with the civilisation, cultural and religious division line that has been shaped over the ages. Despite the claims from the government in Warsaw of "Polish eastern policy", we can see a clear turn towards "western policy". In political, military and economic sense, Poland is clearly facing west, which results in turning away from its eastern neighbours, which is particularly disadvantageous for political and geopolitical reasons. Despite spectacular attempts by various governments to revive the cooperation, especially with Ukraine and Lithuania, Poland does not currently have any arguments, especially economic or financial ones, to conduct an effective, pragmatic eastern policy, and not a policy based on historical sentiments.

When we compare the contemporary ethnic structure and national policy of Poland and its eastern neighbours, we can see clear asymmetry in both quantitative and legal-institutional aspects. There is currently a markedly smaller population of Ukrainians, Belarusians and Lithuanians living in Poland than the Polish population in the territories of our eastern neighbours. At the same time, the national minorities in Poland enjoy wider rights and better conditions to operate than Poles living in Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania.

The improvement of the legal situation of ethnic minorities in Poland is related, among others, to Poland accession into the EU, which is recognised and appreciated by the leaders of national organisations, who stress that the main consequences of Poland's membership in the EU for the communities they represents are not the potential financial benefits, but an improvement in legal standards concerning the protection of ethnic minorities. This is a universally held opinion, very strongly rooted in the consciousness of the leaders of national organisations, even though it is not exactly applicable to EU legislation. The EU law does not include any regulations concerning the rights of ethnic minorities, even though the EU requires its members to respect the standards of international law concerning minorities. The EU legislation only protects the so called less-used languages, which may mean, in practice, some of the languages used by ethnic minorities, but it does not introduce a common national policy. As a result, each country regulates the legal issues of ethnic minorities on its own. The EU legislation clearly prohibits discrimination due to gender, race, religion, ethnic and social origin and the colour of one's skin, yet no EU documents directly mentions ethnic minorities. There are also no special programmes for financial supports of minorities. Thus, they can only apply for financing for their projects as

part of general EU initiatives (structural and cohesion funds). The legislation of the European Council concerning the legal protection of ethnic minorities is much more extensive (Budyta-Budzyńska 2010).

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