



**BELARUSIANS IN POLAND:  
ASSIMILATION NOT IMPLIED BY  
LAW**

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*This Working Paper focuses on the situation of the Belarusian minority in Poland, an autochthonous ethnic group which traditionally resides in the eastern parts of today's Podlaskie Voivodship and represents an integral part of the Belarusian-Polish borderland. The text argues that although Polish minority-related legislation formally complies with the international standards, its general effectiveness is significantly impeded by overall regional development of the Padliašša/Podlasie region.*

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Belarusians in Poland, despite being the third-largest officially recognised minority after Germans and since 2011 Ukrainians, do not attract much attention. When the problem concerns minorities, Germans or Ukrainians are usually mentioned. Further focus is placed on the Jewish minority which has strong links with Holocaust issues.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, there is still an ongoing debate with a strong political dimension whether Silesians should be treated as a specific ethnic group within the context of Polish minority-related legislation.<sup>2</sup> Thus, despite their relatively large numbers Belarusians remain somewhat in the shadow of other minorities in Poland in terms of academic research.

Belarusians represent an autochthonous population in the Padliašša/Podlasie<sup>3</sup> region which roughly corresponds to the territory of the Podlaske Voivodship. Being a part of the Belarusian-Polish borderland, the Padliašša/Podlasie region is historically very important for the Belarusians. This Belarusian-Polish borderland represents a region which is distinguished by relatively stable coexistence and interaction of different ethnic groups and cultures, which has resulted in the formation of a unique type of a rather specific culture, characterized by mutual tolerance and lack of conflict among the members of different ethnic and religious communities.<sup>4</sup> This area is therefore an



example of state borders that do not coincide with the ethnic ones and in which often linguistic and ethnic cultural factors<sup>5</sup> do not correspond to each other.<sup>6</sup> The area is characterised by a rather stable ethnic consciousness of its population, but at the same time it features a simultaneous belonging to different cultures and knowledge of different languages.<sup>7</sup> That is why the area of the Belarusian-Polish borderland in general and the Padliašša/Podlasie region in particular can be regarded as a historically defined topos which is situated in Europe's geographic centre and is internally configured by the factor of the Belarusian-Polish state border.<sup>8</sup>

## II. HISTORY OF BELARUSIANS IN POLAND WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF TODAY'S BORDER FORMATION

The very notion "Belarusians in Poland" within the context of historical developments in the region where they currently reside has always had somewhat different meanings within wider historical and national perspectives. These different meanings have a strong connection with the historical narratives in the region as well with the formation of people's identities.

First, within the context of the Polish worldview, the Belarusian-Polish borderland is referred to as kresy wschodnie (eastern borderlands). Therefore it is largely perceived as a historical, political and cultural reality and is thus present in the historical narratives and consciousness of the local Belarusians and Poles who live on both sides of the

border.<sup>9</sup> While terminology can produce associations with Polish domination and oppression against the Belarusian identity among Belarusians, Poles can link this interpretation with positive nostalgic feelings.<sup>10</sup> Second, the Belarusian-Polish borderland is often portrayed as a borderland between East and West, or in Huntington's typology Western and Orthodox civilizations.<sup>11</sup> That is why the religious factor is at least as important here as the ethnic one. Third, frequent changes of the borders that have occurred in the region in the 20th century have made it possible for scholars to treat entire Belarus as a borderland between Russia and Poland since "the position of Belarus between the two powerful and culturally different neighbors indicates that their influence, both individual and combined, is a major determinant of Belarus's identity, comparable in its significance to its indigenous tendencies".<sup>12</sup>

To understand the complexity of the ethnic and religious developments in the Belarusian-Polish borderland, an in-depth overview of the region's history and border formation is required. Once a part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania bound by the union with the Kingdom of Poland, at the end of the 18th century the region was annexed by the Russian Empire. There on the remnants of the old state a number of competing national ideas emerged which after the 1863 anti-Russian uprising embraced the mass population<sup>13</sup>, as "some patriots [of the former Commonwealth of Both Nations] recast the nation as the people, and nationality as the language they spoke".<sup>14</sup> Each of these narratives had its own grounds, arguments and scope of



opportunities, resulted in failures or achievements which could be summarized as understanding of the present in terms of closed possibilities.<sup>15</sup>

As for the territory of the current Podlaskie Voivodship, in the beginning of the 20th century this area was the place where Belarusian and Polish national ideas competed with each other. This rivalry cannot probably be considered as a full-fledged competition due to the fact that Polish nationalism was older and much more developed. This can also be explained by an overwhelmingly rural character of the Belarusian ethnic element, lack of national bourgeoisie and thus the very belatedness of the Belarusian national movement.<sup>16</sup> Another aspect to be considered is the confessional affiliation which in terms of the Padlašša/Podlasie has been a very important factor. On the one hand, the overwhelming majority of persons who belong to the Belarusian minority in Poland are affiliated with the Orthodox Church. On the other hand, in terms of the region's ethnic history, this linkage between Belarusian national identity and Orthodox religious affiliation has not always been the case. For instance, the results of the 1897 Census of the Russian Empire showed the domination of the Belarusian ethnic component in the predominantly Catholic Sakolka/Sokółka municipality.<sup>17</sup> However, the same group of peasant Catholic Belarusians in this area faced the shift towards Polish national identity which was revealed in a relatively strong movement for schooling in Polish.<sup>18</sup> Russian authorities emphasised in their reports "Belarusian Catholics consider themselves Poles and speak with each other in Belarusian

and Polish."<sup>19</sup> Thus, the historical developments in the region demonstrate that: Belarusian Catholics were much more easily subjected to the assimilation and embrace of Polish ethnic identity,

Orthodoxy was a sort of additional and very crucial protection element in preserving Belarusian identity in Padlašša/Podlasie. The First World War became a turning point in the formation of modern Europe dominated by a new form of statehood – a nation state emerged as a result of the old world's problems, but this form of statehood did not provide every nation with equal possibilities.<sup>20</sup> Poland "had emerged from the swirling process of modern statecraft as battered victors, establishing lessened replicas of the old imperial order with a large, diverse territory and a heterogeneous, multicultural population".<sup>21</sup> Belarus was much less successful in achieving its national goals, as the attempts to establish a nation-state on the ethnic Belarusian lands failed in 1918. Subsequently in 1919 the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed on part of this territory, while later in 1921 the country was divided between Soviet Russia and Poland.<sup>22</sup> As a result, Belarusian ethnic lands were cut almost in half and what is now the Belarusian-Polish borderland became part of the re-established Poland.

Such a configuration of the border left Polish Belarusians largely rural so that their national "intelligentsia was too small to serve as an ally for any Polish political formation" and "Belarusian national aspirations within Poland were seen as crypto-Bolshevism."<sup>23</sup> Moreover, "in the inter-war period, protection of rights of national minorities posed a serious



political problem to Poland which to a large extent had not been resolved then”.<sup>24</sup> It meant that all these minorities should be integrated in a manner that “all the natives of the Roman Catholic faith were registered as Polish”. Even though “many of those [people]... could not even speak the language, it was believed that being Roman Catholic in faith”, it was expected that “they would be completely assimilated within ten years or so”.<sup>25</sup> The outcomes of such policies led to the decrease of the number of Belarusians in interwar Poland: initially calculated around 3 million, it was reduced to 1,060,000 (census of 1921) and then to 990,000 (census of 1931), though the latter figure should be interpreted in combination with the category Locals (Belarusian: tutejšyja, Polish: tutejsi), introduced in the census of 1931, which numbered 707,000 persons, “who were probably all Belarusians”.<sup>26</sup>

The events of September 1939 when the interwar Polish state was partitioned as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact have been interpreted in an opposite way in Belarus and Poland. For Poles it is the country’s fourth partition, while for Belarusians it is the nation’s unification, although within the USSR.<sup>27</sup> As a result, the Belarusian SSR incorporated much of today Podlaskie Voivodship of Poland with the city of Białystok (Belarusian: Bielastok) as a regional centre.<sup>28</sup> However, after the Second World War the border between the USSR and Poland was revised according to the Polish-Soviet border treaty of August 1945. This international treaty led to the liquidation of the Belarusian SSR’s Region of Bielastok (Bielastockaja voblasć) and the subsequent

transfer of the most of its parts together with two districts of the adjacent Region of Brest to Poland.<sup>29</sup> Upon accomplishment of this transfer, the current border between two countries was established.

The subsequent population transfers conducted by the authorities on the both sides of the border contributed to the ethnic homogenization of the territories.<sup>30</sup> As a result of the Second World War, the integrity of a once territorially homogenous area was destroyed and this process marked the triumph of modern nationalism over traditional patriotism, so that “the mass populations embraced modern national ideas”.<sup>31</sup> The remaining minority community of Belarusians in Poland found itself under the country’s new communist rule. For the Belarusian minority in Poland the Communist regime was twofold.

On the one hand, it eliminated the Polish anti-communist paramilitary formations of the Poland’s Home Army (Polish: Armia Krajowa) from the Padliašša/Podlasie region. Some authors argue that paramilitary actions of these anti-communist formations against the region’s Orthodox population caused the growing mistrust of the Belarusian minority towards ethnic Poles and Catholics and simultaneously increased support of the new Communist authorities that crushed those formations.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, the Polish Communist regime attempted to institutionalise and centralise the life of national minorities conducted under the formula “one minority – one organisation”. Thus, in 1956 the Polish authorities granted the Belarusian minority the possibility to establish the Belarusian Social



and Cultural Society (Belarusian: *Bielaruskaje hramadska-kulturnaje tavarystva*).<sup>33</sup> It was established from above, as there had been no significant impulses from the Belarusian society to launch it.<sup>34</sup> This was the only legal organisation that acted on behalf of the entire minority group, being an umbrella for the entire national activities of Belarusians in Poland. As all other minority organizations, in Poland it was subordinated to the Polish Interior Ministry which also financed it. It is unclear whether this subordination might have caused potential difficulties for the national minorities in the country such as Poland where there had always been a strong anti-Communist sentiment. However, it is very likely that this status of minority organisations was not much appreciated by the nationally-oriented informal groups in the Polish society. Furthermore, the subordination of the Belarusians (as any other minority) by the Interior Ministry became a tool for effective control of their activities.<sup>35</sup> Simultaneously with the Belarusian Cultural Society, a Belarusian-language weekly “Niva” was established. Additionally, the authorities permitted learning of the Belarusian language and more than 10,000 pupils in the schools throughout Padlašša/Podlasie started learning their mother tongue.<sup>36</sup> These activities were closely linked with the undertakings of the Belarusian Social and Cultural Society that “published calendars and books of poetry, organised folk music festivals and literary competitions for young people and children.”<sup>37</sup> There was also the Belarusian Museum in Bielavieža/Białowieża that was closed in 1976 for lack of success.<sup>38</sup>

Another peculiarity of the Padlašša/Podlasie that has historically affected all ethnic groups living there is that this region is one of the poorest in Poland.<sup>39</sup> The economic situation thus implies potential migration to the urban areas especially among the youth. Since the cities in Poland were overwhelmingly dominated by the titular nation, migration from rural to urban areas meant for the persons belonging to the Belarusian minority accelerated assimilation, i.e. gradual Polonisation and changing of the ethnic identity within one or two generations. Some members of the Belarusian minority describe this predisposition to the assimilation by:

(1) connection of their Belarusian origin with the negative memories on their and their family’s poorness and achievement of the relative prosperity in the cities<sup>40</sup>, and

(2) negative reaction towards the spoken Belarusian language and Belarusian publications by the Polish majority, the case particularly applicable in the city of Białystok.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, despite significant successes in combating radical Polish nationalism Poland’s Communist regime failed to entirely eliminate the mistrust between the Poles and the Belarusians in the Padlašša/Podlasie region where these two ethnic groups collided. At the same time, policies of economic industrialisation and urbanisation pursued by the Communist authorities predisposed persons belonging to the Belarusian minority in Poland to the ongoing assimilation.



### III. CURRENT SITUATION OF BELARUSIANS IN POLAND

According to official Polish statistics, Belarusians are the third-largest national minority of the country.<sup>42</sup> Belarusians in Poland are an ethnic group that has traditionally resided in the south-eastern areas of the Podlaskie Voivodship.<sup>43</sup> During two national censuses of 2002<sup>44</sup> and 2011 in the Republic of Poland the number of ethnic Belarusians decreased from 48,737<sup>45</sup> to 46,787.<sup>46</sup> In the core area which is the Voivodship of Podlachia, this number decreased from 46,420<sup>47</sup> to 39,105.<sup>48</sup>

Contrary to the 2002 census, the 2011 census foresaw an option to choose multiple identities. Among those who declared themselves as Belarusians 30,195 persons declared Belarusian ethnicity as the sole one, while 36,399 claimed Belarusian ethnicity as their primary identity; a further 10,388 persons named Belarusian ethnicity as their second identity.<sup>49</sup> As a result, 64.54% of Polish Belarusians define Belarusian as their primary identity which characterizes Belarusians in Poland as the group with the highest percentage of self-consciousness among all recognized national and ethnic minorities.

The number of those who recognized Belarusian as their mother tongue is as high as 17,480.<sup>50</sup> However, the use of the language in home communication is somewhat more widespread, despite the fact that the number of those who declared the use of Belarusian in their home communication has dropped from 40,650 in 2002<sup>51</sup> to 26,448 in 2011.<sup>52</sup> The latter figure contains those 3,950 who use

Belarusian as the only language for communication at home as well as a further 22,498 for whom Belarusian is one of the languages used in the family – among them there are 22,419 who combine Belarusian and Polish languages.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the number of those who use Belarusian in their home communication in Poland dropped approximately 14 thousand between 2011 and 2002 and amounted to only 65% of the amount shown by the first census. This trend is partly explained through the increase of declaring of various dialects and patois spoken in the area as the languages for home communication which is especially typical for the area where Belarusian is traditionally spoken.<sup>54</sup> This trend may be observed by the activities of some Belarusian activists who promote elevation of “a more or less standardized version of Podlachian local dialects to the status of their full-fledged minority language, along with the standard Belarusian”.<sup>55</sup>

The Polish Law on national and ethnic minorities and on regional languages in its Article 9 stipulates that the minority language may be used along with the official language as a supporting one in the municipalities where “the number of minority residents, whose language is to be used as a supporting one, is no less than 20 percent of the total number of the municipality residents and who have been entered into the Official Register of Municipalities, hereafter referred to as “Official Register,” where a supporting language is used”. The same threshold applies to the opportunity to use bilingual signs of places and street names (Art. 12). Such a municipality should be included into the





Register of municipalities where names are used in the respective minority language.

The following table provides a list of municipalities with the significant number of Belarusians according to the censuses of 2002 and 2011<sup>56</sup>:

**Table 1: Municipalities with significant share of Belarusians in Poland<sup>57</sup>**

Census	Municipalities (percentage)
2002	Czyże (81.8%)
	Dubicze Cerkiewne (81.3%)
	Orla (68.93%)
	Hajnówka (64.9%)
	Narew (49.2%)
	Narewka (47.3%)
	Bielsk Podlaski (46.7%)
	Kleszczele (41.8%)
	Czeremcha (28.7%)
	Hajnówka – town (26.4%)
	Gródek (23.1%)
	Bielsk Podlaski – town (20.7%)
	Nurzec Stacja (16.4%)
	Michałowice (14.2%)
Milejczyce (13.1%)	
Białowieża (11.5%)	
2011	Czyże (76.5%)
	Dubicze Cerkiewne (63.7%)
	Orla (56.0%)
	Hajnówka (51.7%)
	Narewka (39.0%)
	Narew (37.0%)
	Bielsk Podlaski (36.2%)
Hajnówka – town (22.9%)	

As the table above shows, Belarusians constitute the absolute majority in four municipalities – Czyże, Dubicze Cerkiewne, Orla and Hajnówka.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, the number of municipalities where Belarusians have constituted more than 20 percent of the population dropped from 12 in 2002 to 9 in 2011. There are five municipalities that have introduced Belarusian language as a supporting one - Hajnówka – town (December

3, 2007), Orla (May 7, 2009), Narewka (June 16, 2009), Czyże (February 8, 2010), and Hajnówka (May 28, 2010). Moreover, since January 11, 2011 bilingual signs of places have been introduced in the municipality of Orla.

Thus, despite increasing assimilation tendencies, the situation of the Belarusian minority is unique for Poland since the municipalities where it constitutes a majority are located next to each other and are surrounded by areas where Belarusians form a considerable minority and a border to Belarus.

However, only one of these 12 municipalities (Orlia/Orla from May 7, 2009) has so far introduced bilingual place-names. The main arguments against such practices are the huge financial burden as well as the implication that these bilingual signs are “unnecessary”.<sup>59</sup> It seems that the appearance of the bilingual place-names is however a matter of time but that more political will is needed. Moreover, it seems possible to expand the visibility of the Belarusian language in the Padlašša/Podlasie region for the areas traditionally linked with the Belarusian culture and Belarusians even though the current percentage of the Belarusians in these areas is less than 20 per cent.

So far the use of the Belarusian language is thus publicly almost “invisible” since its usage is limited to Belarusian media or schools. According to the Polish official data there are only 3,664 pupils in 40 public schools in Poland who learn the Belarusian language.<sup>60</sup>

The most visible examples of the Belarusian media in Poland are Warsaw-based



Belsat TV in Warsaw and Bialystok-based Radio Racja which all are financed predominantly by the Polish government, as well as daily radio programme and weekly TV programme made by the local branches of Polish Radio and Polish Television respectively.<sup>61</sup>

However, Belarusian language and Belarusian-related issues are represented by the weekly *Niva* (1,300 copies) and bilingual Belarusian-Polish monthly *Czasopis* (800 copies).<sup>62</sup> Among other titles issued in Belarusian or dealing with Belarusian issues one can mention the following titles: *Epocha*, *Haradockija Naviny*, *Pravincyja*, *Termapily*, *Annus Albaruthenicus*, *Bielski Hościniec* and *Przegląd Prawosławny*.

Even though according to the 2002 census Belarusians constitute only 2.5 per cent of the citizens of Bialystok the city is known as the centre of the Belarusian media outside Belarus.<sup>63</sup> Thus, Belarusian language is represented in the regional Polish media but its spread hardly reaches beyond the Belarusian minority in Poland or ethnic Belarusians in general.

Belarusians in Poland have their own organisations. “The Belarusian Federation established in 1990, unites seven organisations and works without any financial support from the Polish government.”<sup>64</sup> There are also Belarusian organisations oriented on youth or specific target groups. Among them one can mention the Belarusian youth movement which consists of the Belarusian Student Union and the Union of Belarusian Youth, the Belarusian Literary Association Bielavieža and the Association of Belarusian Journalists.<sup>65</sup> Various cultural events such as

music festivals and literary meetings are organised on a regular basis. Amongst them one can mention:

- Festival of Orthodox Church Music in Hajnaŭka/Hajnówka, or
- Belarusian youth music festival “Basovišča” in Haradok/Gródek.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, the Belarusian minority is active in Polish politics, having had their representatives present in the governing bodies of the various levels in the Podlaskie Voivodship. At the same time, the political participation of Belarusians at the national and regional elections has always been more effective within the platform provided by national-wide political parties, and particularly the Democratic Left Alliance.<sup>67</sup> Thus, after the crash of the Communism in Poland four ethnic Belarusians have been elected to the Polish Parliament (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Ethnic Belarusians in the Polish Sejm**

Name	Political Group	Years in the Parliament
<b>Eugeniusz Czykwin</b>	Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)	2001-present, also 1985-1993 <sup>68</sup>
<b>Aleksander Czuż</b>	Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)	2001-2005
<b>Sergiusz Plewa</b>	Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)	2001-2005
<b>Jan Syczewski</b>	Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)	1997-2001

As can be seen, the Belarusian minority has been traditionally leftist and pro-SLD oriented. One of its former leaders and once



the top-level Polish politician Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz was particularly popular amongst Belarusians.<sup>69</sup>

Despite the fact that he never declared his Belarusian ethnicity, the Belarusian minority considered him as “theirs”.<sup>70</sup> As for local elections, it is generally observed that in the areas where Belarusian or Orthodox population constitutes a significant majority the issue of their political affiliation with Belarusian, Orthodox or nation-wide political parties is of secondary importance.<sup>71</sup>

#### IV. OBSTACLES AND CONCLUSIONS

In regard to the situation of the Belarusian minority in Poland, there are two issues which require particular attention:

- Social both of internal and external nature; and
- Political both of domestic and foreign dimensions.

These two issues will be viewed accordingly one after another.

##### A. Social dimension

It is argued that the most important problem of the Belarusian minority in Poland is “the rapid assimilation process that has happened over the past few years.”<sup>72</sup> Even though the Polish Law on national and ethnic minorities and on regional languages prohibits any kind of measures aimed at the assimilation of minorities, the assimilation takes place. As, the table 3 shows, the age structure of the persons belonging to the Belarusian minority

in Poland is distorted, which means that this community is much older than the country’s average<sup>73</sup>.

This distorted structure implies that if the current path is followed the number of Belarusians in Poland could face a significant decrease in their number within a rather short period of time. Therefore, the attitudes of the Belarusian activists towards the official number of Belarusians in Poland revealed by the national censuses of 2002 and 2011 should be discussed. The results of the first were criticised by Belarusians from two angles. The first one dealt with the issue of losing the region’s cultural diversity and the threat of minorities’ assimilation. It was linked with the second angle which referred to the lack of the Law on national minorities in force in Poland. For instance, Professor Jaŭhien Miranovič stated in 2004 in the weekly “Niva” that “unless the law becomes reality the number of

*Table 3: Age structure of Belarusians in Poland*

<b>Economic age group</b>	<b>Average level in Poland, per cent</b>	<b>Belarusians in Poland, per cent</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Pre-working age (0-17)</b>	23.15	13.90	6th lowest among all ethnic and national minorities
<b>Working age (18-59/64)</b>	61.80	52.12	3rd lowest among all ethnic and national minorities
<b>Post-working age (60/65 and older)</b>	15.04	33.98	4th highest among all ethnic and national minorities



Germans, Belarusians or Lithuanians will approach the today's number of Tatars or Karaites that are shown as an example of multiculturalism in Poland".<sup>74</sup> This refers to the Polish government which has pointed to the Tatars or Karaites as demonstrating diversity in Poland. It is important to mention here that according to the 2002 census Germans made up 0.4% of the population, Belarusians – 0.13%, and Lithuanians – 0.02%, while on the other hand both Tatars and Karaites made up less than 0.01% of the population.

The results of the 2011 census are still seen as very optimistic due to the fact that "[i]t is difficult to find any trace of Belarusianess on the streets of Bielastok, Bielsk Padliaški, or Hajnaŭka, where most of the Belarusian population lives."<sup>75</sup> It is thus argued that in the cities and towns where Belarusian minority resides Polish language "is not just dominant — it is exclusive" while Belarusian speech is more typical for the rural areas in which "[t]he older generation that used Belarusian speech most often is departing, due to natural causes."<sup>76</sup>

Another issue is the religious factor partly described above. The Padlašša/Podlasie region is still referred to within a stereotypical perspective when ethnic breakdown is often equated to the confessional one, i.e. within the region a Catholic is perceived as a Pole while an Orthodox – as a Belarusian.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, the 2002 census showed that in the Padlašša/Podlasie region with its 150-200 thousands of people who belong to the Orthodox confession only about one third declared Belarusian ethnicity.<sup>78</sup> The others two thirds have adopted Polish identity which

creates a unique phenomenon considering the fact that Roman Catholicism is traditionally considered one of the main milestones of Polishness. Therefore, the autochthonous Orthodox population of the region regardless of their ethnic affiliation is often commonly referred to an "Orthodox minority".<sup>79</sup> Thus, despite the fact that the Belarusian identity in the Padlašša/Podlasie region is limited nearly to the adherents of the Orthodox confession, the religious factor and conservatism of the Orthodox population may in fact speak for the Belarusian organizations by more actively addressing the multicultural consciousness of the borderland population, for instance through promoting their adherence to both Belarusian and Polish nations.<sup>80</sup>

## *B. Political dimension*

This dimension has both internal and external aspects.

First it concerns the predominantly leftist political views of Belarusians with the subsequent attitude of the Polish majority in the context of the Communist past and Orthodox religions of Belarusians. As it was shown above, Polish nationalism was seen as the biggest evil for the Orthodox Belarusian population. Thus, current antagonisms between Belarusians and Polish nationalists may cause additional difficulties for the Belarusian minority particularly in the context of stained Belarus-Poland relations. Another important issue is the attempts of the Polish authorities to do away with the country's communist past which sometimes can indirectly incite interethnic hatred. For instance, "sometimes certain local Białystok



newspapers argue that Belarusians contributed to the introduction of communism into Poland<sup>81</sup> which can lead to a potentially growing public perception of the region's Belarusians as a non-autochthonous foreign group. Finally, the borders of the electoral districts in the Podlaskie Voivodship towards the inclusion of all areas where Belarusians constitute a majority or a significant minority have long been a subject of harsh debates that to some extent included regional authorities, Belarusian minority and occasionally produced critics from the Belarusian Foreign Ministry.

The second dimension is the relationship of the Belarusian minority in Poland with Belarus. In the view what has been mentioned above the treatment of the Belarusian minority in Poland has to become the regular issue of Belarusian-Polish relations. It may be assumed that since the very beginning of its independent foreign policy<sup>82</sup> Belarus took close attention to the problems of the Belarusians in Poland.<sup>83</sup> However, the current state of Belarusian-Polish relations leaves for the Belarusians in Poland in fact somewhat less chances for protection by their kin-state. In other words, any intrusion of the Belarusian authorities into issues related to the Belarusian minority in Poland may be interpreted as an attempt of the undemocratic regime of Lukašenka to legitimise itself.

## V. OUTPUT

Having no separatist tendencies but undergoing rapid assimilation, the Belarusian minority in Poland aims to “be treated as equals, to be able to develop their own culture

and customs and to participate actively in the governing of the region where they live,”<sup>84</sup> i.e. to fulfil its collective rights of not being discriminated by the majority. The policies of the democratic Poland with regards to the Belarusian minority prior to the EU accession may have been best described by Polish writer and intellectual Jerzy Giedroyc's quote of August 2000: “We conduct the worst possible policies toward the Belarusian minority. It damages our image.”<sup>85</sup> It implies that despite internal democratisation and introduction of individual human rights, until 2005 Poland had failed to implement a comprehensive domestic Law on national minorities that could also protect their collective rights.

From the formal perspective, Polish minority-related legislation provides comprehensive protection for its minorities. Moreover, it largely provides funds for maintenance of minority culture and education. At the same time, despite the fact that Art. 5 of the Polish Law on national minorities prohibits any kind of assimilation and measures aimed at a change of ethnic proportions in the minority-populated territories, in the case of the Belarusian minority the actual assimilation is taking place followed by changes of ethnic proportions in the areas in question. Thus, despite all positive developments pursued by the Polish state, it is still required to significantly improve the economic component of minority protection which encompasses overall regional development in order to provide people with more incentives to stay in their respective regions.

As for participation of minorities in the decision-making process, Belarusians can be seen as a role model. According to the results



of the 2002 national census none of the other minorities has such a large territorial potential which includes a number of several adjacent municipalities where Belarusians are in the majority or constitute a considerable minority<sup>86</sup> which includes the Hajnaŭka/Hajnówka commune (Polish: *powiat*) and eastern parts of the Bielsk-Padliaški/Bielsk Podlaski commune.<sup>87</sup> The long-debated issue on the inclusion of all areas where Belarusians constitute the majority or a significant minority into one

electoral district could provide an additional impetus for these endeavours.

Further enhancement of the qualitative policies towards the Belarusian minority in Poland can also have real impact on bilateral Belarusian-Polish relations. It is the Padlašša/Podlasie region that can significantly contribute to the democratisation and Europeanisation of Belarus<sup>88</sup> as well as become a real bridge in reconciled Belarusian-Polish relations.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See: Zimmermann, Lynn W (ed.). *Jewish Studies and Holocaust Education in Poland* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2013).
- <sup>2</sup> Kowalski, Mariusz. Białorusini w Polsce według Spisu 2002 (Belarusians in Poland according to the 2002 census), in: *Czasopis*, 06/2004. At: <[http://www.slanko.com.pl/czasopis/in.php?id=0406/2004\\_06\\_c17](http://www.slanko.com.pl/czasopis/in.php?id=0406/2004_06_c17)>.
- <sup>3</sup> The name is given in Polish and Belarusian respectively, note all Belarusian geographic and personal names are given according to the official rules of transliteration adopted by the Belarusian government.
- <sup>4</sup> Biaspamiatnykh, Mikalai N. *Etnokulturnoe pogranichye i belorusskaya identichnost: problemy metodologii analiza kross-kulturnykh vzaimodeystviy (Ethno-cultural borderland and Belarusian identity: problems of methodology of the analysis of cross-cultural interactions)*, (Minsk: RIVŠ, 2007), 5.
- <sup>5</sup> For instance, a person may not speak literary form of Polish or Belarusian, but claims his or her belonging to this respective ethnic group.
- <sup>6</sup> Biaspamiatnykh, *Op cit.* note 4, 5.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 158-159.
- <sup>12</sup> Savchenko, Andrew. *Belarus – a Perpetual Borderland* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2009), 5.
- <sup>13</sup> Snyder, Timothy. *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 5.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.
- <sup>16</sup> Hroch, Miroslav. *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: a Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 152, 159.
- <sup>17</sup> Tokć, Siarhieĭ. “Dasledavanni dziazhaŭnaj administracyjaj Hrodzienskaj hubierni etničnaha składu Sakolskaha pavjeta ŭ druhoj pałowie XIX — na pačatku XX st.” (Studies of the ethnic composition of the Sakolka county in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century made by the state administration of the Hrodna/Grodno province), 9 *Bielaruskі Histaryčny Zbornik - Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne* (1998). At: <[http://kamunikat.fontel.net/www/czasopisy/bzh/09/09art\\_tokc.htm](http://kamunikat.fontel.net/www/czasopisy/bzh/09/09art_tokc.htm)>.
- <sup>18</sup> Tokć, Siarhieĭ. *Bielaruskaja wioska na miazhy epoch. Żmieny etničnaj samašwiadomaści sialanstva va ūmovach raspadu tradycyjnaha ahrarnaha hramadstva (pa materyjalach Haradzienščyny 19 – pieršaj treci 20 st.) (Belarusian village at the margins of epoches. Changes of ethnic consciousness of peasantry under the degradation of the traditional agrarian society (based on the data of the Hrodna area in 19 – the first triens of the 20 centuries)*, (Hrodna: HrDU, 2002). At: <[http://autary.iig.pl/tokc/knihi\\_vioska\\_02.htm](http://autary.iig.pl/tokc/knihi_vioska_02.htm)>.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> Briedis, Laimonas. *Vilnius: City of Strangers* (Budapest and New York: CEU Press; [Vilnius]: Baltos Lankos, 2009), 194.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> Snyder, *Op.cit.* note 13, 52-72.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.
- <sup>24</sup> Łodziński, Sławomir. “The Protection of National Minorities in Poland”, 9 Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (1999), Minelres – minority electronic resources. At: <[http://www.minelres.lv/reports/poland/poland\\_NGO.htm](http://www.minelres.lv/reports/poland/poland_NGO.htm)> (accessed: 15 August 2013).
- <sup>25</sup> Vakar, Nicholas P. *Belorussia. The Making of a Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), 121.
- <sup>26</sup> Fowkes, Ben. *Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict in the Post-communist World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 73. Note: Data and conclusions provided by the author are given with the reference to two further scholars.
- <sup>27</sup> Trenin, Dmitrii. *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border between Geopolitics and Globalization* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment, 2002), 41.
- <sup>28</sup> Wilson, Andrew. *Belarus: the Last European Dictatorship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 106.



- <sup>29</sup> Trusaŭ, Aleh. *Nieviadomaja nam kraina: Bielaruś u jaje etnagrafičnych mieżach (A country unknown for us: Belarus in its ethnographic borders)* (Minsk: Knihazbor, 2009), 94-96.
- <sup>30</sup> Snyder, *Op. cit.* note 13, 2-5.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> Maksimiuk, Jan. “Z bliższych płaszczyzn zabyćcia (From the nearest layers of slumber)”, 7-8 *Arche* (2006), 47-48. At: <<http://arche.bymedia.net/2006-7/maksimiuk706.htm>>, (accessed: 20 January 2012); Mironowicz, Antoni (Miranovič, Anton), “National Minorities in Poland Today”, Nagypál, Szabolcs and Peter Šajda (eds.) *A Pentatonic Landscape Central Europe, Ecology, Ecumenism: Ecumenical Anthology I*, (Budapest: BGÖI WSCF-CESR, 2002), 121-122.
- <sup>33</sup> Mironowicz, A., *Op. cit.* note 32, 122.
- <sup>34</sup> Maksimiuk, *Op. cit.* note 32.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>37</sup> Mironowicz, A., *Op. cit.* note 32, 122.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>39</sup> Stepanenko, Polina. “Tam, u nashih sosedej (There by our neighbours)”, *Euramost* 23/03/2007, At: <<http://www.euramost.org/index.php?artc=11560>>.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>41</sup> Miranovič, Jaŭhien (Mironowicz, Eugeniusz). “U Polšcy i Finlandyi (In Poland and Finland)”, 1(2486) *Niva* (2004), At: <[http://niva.iig.pl/issue/2004/01/art\\_02.htm](http://niva.iig.pl/issue/2004/01/art_02.htm)>.
- <sup>42</sup> The Law of the Republic of Poland on national and ethnic minorities and on the regional languages, adopted 6 January 2005 defines national minority as “a group of Polish citizens, which is numerically smaller than the rest of the population of the Republic of Poland; significantly differs from the remaining citizens in its language, culture or tradition; strives to preserve its language, culture or tradition; is aware of its own historical, national community, and is oriented towards its expression and protection; its ancestors have been living on the present territory of the Republic of Poland for at least 100 years”. The law also establishes a list of ethnic groups which are recognized as national/ethnic minorities. Belarusians are therefore classified as a national minority in Poland. Source: English translation of the Law on national and ethnic minorities and on the regional languages, Ministry of Administration and Digitization of Poland. At: <<http://mniejszosci.narodowe.mac.gov.pl/download/86/12617/zweryfikowanal.pdf>>.
- <sup>43</sup> Characteristics of the national and ethnic minorities in Poland, Ministry of Administration and Digitization of Poland. At: <<http://mniejszosci.narodowe.mac.gov.pl/mne/mniejszosci/charakterystyka-mniejs/6480,Charakterystyka-mniejszosci-narodowych-i-etnicznych-w-Polsce.html>>.
- <sup>44</sup> Prior to the National census of 2002 the last census which contained questions on ethnicity was conducted in Poland in 1931.
- <sup>45</sup> National Census 2002: Population according declared ethnicity and voivodships, Central Statistical Office of Poland. At: <[http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/PUBL\\_nsp2002\\_tab13.xls](http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/PUBL_nsp2002_tab13.xls)>, (accessed: 15 August 2013).
- <sup>46</sup> Population: demographic and social situation and structure, National Census 2011, Central Statistical Office of Poland. <[http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/LUD\\_ludnosc\\_stan\\_str\\_dem\\_spo\\_NSP2011.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/LUD_ludnosc_stan_str_dem_spo_NSP2011.pdf)> (accessed: 15 August 2013).
- <sup>47</sup> National Census 2002: Population according declared ethnicity and voivodships, *Op. cit.* note 45.
- <sup>48</sup> Population: demographic and social situation and structure, National Census 2011, *Op. cit.* note 46.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, see also *Op. cit.* note 51, which is also relevant for the languages declared as mother tongues.
- <sup>51</sup> National Census 2002: Population according declared ethnicity and language used in contacts at home, Central Statistical Office of Poland. At: <[http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/nsp2002\\_tab19.xls](http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/nsp2002_tab19.xls)>.
- <sup>52</sup> Population: demographic and social situation and structure, National Census 2011, *Op. cit.* note 46.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, among such dialects or patois the following variants are mentioned: dialect of the Polish-Belarusian borderland, Ruthenian (*ruski*), Belarusian-Ukrainian dialect, Belarusian dialect – simple language (*język prosty*).
- <sup>55</sup> Maksymiuk, Jan. ‘No Easy Way Forward: a personal note on Poland's Belarusian minority’, 25/1 *Belarusian Review*, (2013), 13-14. At: <[http://thepointjournal.com/output/index.php?art\\_id=213&spr\\_change=eng](http://thepointjournal.com/output/index.php?art_id=213&spr_change=eng)>.
- <sup>56</sup> The names of municipalities with less than 20% of Belarusians are given in italics.





- <sup>57</sup> Gross, Krzysztof. 'Ilu w której gminie Białorusinów' (How many Belarusians are there in each municipality), 2 *Czasopis* (2004). At: <<http://kamunikat.fontel.net/www/czasopisy/czasopis/2004-02/15.htm>>; List of municipalities where not less than 20% of population belongs to national or ethnic minorities or uses regional language, Ministry of Administration and Digitization of Poland. At: <<http://mniejszosci.narodowe.mac.gov.pl/mne/mniejszosci/wyniki-narodowego-spis/7003,Wykaz-gmin-w-ktorych-nie-mniej-niz-20-mieszkanow-nalezy-do-mniejszosci-narodowy.html>>.
- <sup>58</sup> There is only one more municipality in Poland where ethnic or national minority makes up the majority of the population – Puńsk with the Lithuanian majority in the north-eastern part of the Voivodship of Podlachia and bordering on Lithuania. Note: there is also a number of municipalities where the linguistic community of Kashubians represent the majority of the population.
- <sup>59</sup> Korbel, Janusz. “Dwujęzyczna Europa bez polskich Białorusinów?” (Bilingual Europe without Polish Belarusians?), 01 *Czasopis* (2009). At: <<http://czasopis.pl/czasopis/2009-01/art-7>>.
- <sup>60</sup> Characteristics of the national and ethnic minorities in Poland, *Op.cit.* note 43.
- <sup>61</sup> Maksymiuk, *Op.cit.* note 55.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>63</sup> Hardzijenka, Aleh. Białoruskaja dyjaspara: sučasnyja prablemy i perspektyvy (Belarusian Diaspora: Contemporary problems and perspectives). At the website of the World Association of Belarusians “Bačkauščyna”: <[http://zbsb.org/index.php?view=article&catid=34%3A2008-08-07-08-35-02&id=808%3A-q-q&option=com\\_content&Itemid=104](http://zbsb.org/index.php?view=article&catid=34%3A2008-08-07-08-35-02&id=808%3A-q-q&option=com_content&Itemid=104)>.
- <sup>64</sup> Mironowicz, A., *Op.cit.* note 19, 122.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>67</sup> Czykwin, Eugeniusz. “Nasza wyborcza historia” (Our electoral history), 11 *Przegląd prawosławny* (2002). At: <[http://www.przegladprawoslawny.pl/articles.php?id\\_n=244&id=8](http://www.przegladprawoslawny.pl/articles.php?id_n=244&id=8)>.
- <sup>68</sup> Note: In 1991 Eugeniusz Czykwin was elected from the list of the Orthodox Electoral Committee, which was the only case so far in post-communist Poland when a member of Belarusian minority was elected from the list of the political group which represents a minority. Source: *Ibid.*
- <sup>69</sup> Mironowicz, Eugeniusz (Miranovič, Jaŭhien). “Białorusini w wyborach parlamentarnych i samorządowych w Polsce w latach 1989-1994” (Belarusians in parliamentary and self-government elections in Poland in 1989-1994), 4 *Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne* (1995), 121-131.
- <sup>70</sup> Olczyk, Eliza. “Król Słońce bez dworu” (King the Sun without the court), *Rzeczpospolita* (06/03/2009). At: <[http://www.rp.pl/artykul/16,272763\\_Krol\\_Slonce\\_bez\\_dworu.html](http://www.rp.pl/artykul/16,272763_Krol_Slonce_bez_dworu.html)>, (accessed: 20 January 2012).
- <sup>71</sup> Czykwin, Eug. *Op.cit.* note 68.
- <sup>72</sup> Belarusian in Poland, *Op.cit.* note 35.
- <sup>73</sup> Raport Dotyczący Sytuacji Mniejszości Narodowych i Etnicznych oraz Języka Regionalnego w RP (Report on the situation of national and ethnic minorities and regional language in Poland), Annex nr. 2, 3-4.
- <sup>74</sup> Miranovič, J., *Op.cit.* note 41.
- <sup>75</sup> Miranovič, J., “I don’t know how many Belarusians there are in Poland”, 24/2 *Belarusian Review* (2012), 6-7. At: <[http://thepointjournal.com/output/index.php?art\\_id=137&spr\\_change=eng](http://thepointjournal.com/output/index.php?art_id=137&spr_change=eng)>.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>77</sup> “Z prof. Andrzejem Sadowskim o mniejszości białoruskiej (With prof. Andrzej Sadowski about Belarusian Minority)”, *Wrota Podlasia*, n.d. At: <[http://www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/wywiady/Z\\_prof.\\_Andrzejem\\_Sadowskim\\_o\\_mniejszosci\\_bialoruskiej.htm](http://www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/wywiady/Z_prof._Andrzejem_Sadowskim_o_mniejszosci_bialoruskiej.htm)>.
- <sup>78</sup> Stepanenko, *Op.cit.* note 39.
- <sup>79</sup> “Z prof. Andrzejem Sadowskim o mniejszości białoruskiej (With prof. Andrzej Sadowski about Belarusian Minority)”, *Op.cit.* note 77; Czykwin, Elżbieta. “Druga strona lustra(cji)” (Other side of mirror (lustration), 10 *Przegląd prawosławny* (2013). At: <[http://www.przegladprawoslawny.pl/articles.php?id\\_n=3227&id=8](http://www.przegladprawoslawny.pl/articles.php?id_n=3227&id=8)>.
- <sup>80</sup> “Z prof. Andrzejem Sadowskim o mniejszości białoruskiej (With prof. Andrzej Sadowski about Belarusian Minority)”, *Op.cit.* note 77
- <sup>81</sup> Mironowicz, A., *Op.cit.* note 6, 123.
- <sup>82</sup> UN membership of the Belarusian SSR cannot be viewed as independent foreign policy from 1945 up to 1990.



<sup>83</sup> Kraučanka, Piotr, *Belarus na rasputje: zapiski diplomata i politika (Belarus at the crossroads: Memoirs of a diplomat and politician)*, published in the newspaper Narodnaja Vola. At: <<http://old.nv-online.info/index.php?c=ar&i=618>>.

<sup>84</sup> Mironowicz, A., *Op.cit* note 19, 123.

<sup>85</sup> Zapis przebiegu spotkania internetowego z Jerzym Giedroyciem (Transcript of the internet meeting with Jerzy Giedroyc), 11/08/2000. At: <<http://kulturaparyska.onet.pl/artukul.asp?M=291>>, (accessed: 20.01.2012).

<sup>86</sup> Kowalski, *Op.cit* note 2.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Zapis przebiegu spotkania internetowego z Jerzym Giedroyciem (Transcript of the internet meeting with Jerzy Giedroyc), *Op.cit* note 85.



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