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Multiculturalism debates in Poland

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1. Introduction

According to the national myth, Poland has a beautiful and rich tradition of multiculturalism. Poles have always considered themselves as open to diversity and used to living alongside other cultures. Over the centuries Polish rulers were officially offering refuge to the religious and national groups persecuted in Western Europe, who then settled down in various regions of the Kingdom. It is also worth stressing that Polish state was officially bi-national (Kingdom of Two Nations – Poland and Lithuania) for almost three centuries, and the presence of ethnic groups, as Ukrainians, Byelorussians and Jewish was acknowledged, if only on cultural level.

In Polish literature, art and educational curriculum, the idyllic vision of multiculturalism understood as peaceful coexistence of various groups mingles with historically based understanding that this peace is fragile and can anytime end in a revolt, if some groups are not satisfied with the status quo. This version is now sold to the public as the historical identity of Poles. The nationalist ideas of the early 20th century are not mentioned as worth pursuing and are tacitly put apart. Thus the multiculturalism we are talking about has mainly to do with the tradition of 16th-18th century Poland, of which average people are very proud.

Since 1945, Poles unfortunately have not had broad possibilities to practice multiculturalism – under the post-communist regime and its homogeneity policy, the minorities were persecuted and often forced to leave the country. The generation remembering multicultural Poland gradually passed away, leaving in place people born and brought up in a homogenous society. Interestingly enough, the effect is that these people declare they are more open to other cultures (probably when thinking about the hypothetical Other and the historical tradition) than they actually do in practice (when they actually meet the Other).

In the following report, I will present the press and public debate analysis on post-immigration multiculturalism in Poland. The analysis of the more alive and diversified debate on historical multiculturalism, i.e. relations with historical ethnic minorities as Jews, Ukrainians and Germans, and Polish national identity, are not the scope of the present paper. In its relatively short post-communist history Poland has not yet experienced any major event that would call

to arms the advocates and adversaries of post-immigration multiculturalism. The concept has been discussed in Poland only in relation to the events that have been prominent in the Western European countries. Therefore, I will define the main streams of the debate in relation to the international crisis. On the national level, I will focus on a recent Simon M. case, the only instance, which could have brought up a nation-wide debate on immigration and cultural difference. The choice of the event depended on the number of articles found in the newspapers. And thus, minimum requirement being 10 articles on the given topic. The events that were chosen for analysis were as follows: London bombings of July 2005; urban riots in France in autumn 2005; and Danish cartoons affair and Simon Mol case.

The press for analysis was varied: *Gazeta Wyborcza* (left-wing post-Solidarnosc daily, from now on: GW), *Rzeczpospolita* (center government controlled daily, from now on: Rz); *Dziennik* (right-wing daily, from now on: Dz), *Nasz Dziennik* (far right, Catholic daily, from now on: ND). The number of articles to be researched varied from one newspaper to another. Interestingly enough, the right-wing *Nasz Dziennik* published the least on the chosen topics.

All in all, the material for analysis included 498 press excerpts, of which 28 concerned Simon Mol case, 108 – French riots, 109 – London bombings and 253 – Danish cartoon affair. Over 80% of them were short information notes, with little discursive value. The argumentative structures were to be found only in 20% of the texts (see final list).

2. Immigrants in the public discourse in Poland

The studies of the public discourse on immigrants in Poland have been in place only since late 1980's. The research interest in this issue came with the flows of foreigners coming to Poland. It is worth mentioning that until today this discourse is more about foreigners than immigrants, as only a few small settlement migration groups are present in Poland.

Grzymała-Kazłowska (2007) distinguishes three types of discourse analysis on immigrants in Poland: general research on Polish attitudes towards migrants, research on the attitudes of Poles towards specific categories and groups of immigrants, such as: refugees, foreign students, repatriates, expats and some particular national groups, and research on other specific problems linked with the attitudes of Poles towards immigrants including the issue of discrimination and prejudices or cultural representations of migrants.

The main source of knowledge about attitudes of Poles towards foreigners were the opinion polls (as OBOP or CBOS). Discourse analysis focused on groups easily distinguishable, new to the Polish reality. Thus the analysis of perception of refugees (Grzymała-Moszczyńska, Nowicka 1998) and Romanian Roma. There were also analysis of media and press discourse about foreigners coming to Poland to work, but mainly as highly skilled specialists from EU and other developed countries (Iglicka, Weiner 2003).

The most relevant study was the analysis of Mrozowski, who provided a comparative analysis of the representations of foreigners in the media in 1996 and 2002 (Mrozowski 1997, 2003). Using a wide range of the local press and no special point of interest, Mrozowski (2003) shows the evolution of the image of immigrants from demonization (in 1996) to idealization (in 2003). If in 1996 foreigners were mainly presented in the context of begging activities, illegal trade, organized crime and a threat to the internal order, in 2003 they were shown as productive, "domesticated" so to speak, beneficial for the society.

The studies also revealed the increasing presence in the Polish press the issue of immigrants in the context of Western European countries and four main discourses on immigrants: multicultural, state-oriented, national and sensational (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2007). As Grzymała-Kazłowska (2005) shows, the multicultural discourse in Polish press concerns mainly multicultural societies of Western Europe and North America.

Multiculturalism on the Polish ground is presented rarely. Multicultural discourse before 2005 was the discourse of idyllic coexistence, of interest in the Other, of peaceful mixing of cultures. It was directly derived from the romantic visions of historical Polish multiculturalism of 17th century. This discourse promoted immigration as a value added in cultural sense. However, as Kazłowska proves, the discourse is rather of descriptive character, there have been no debates on the need, or else, of multiculturalism in Poland.

The two groups that are present in the press discourse are Vietnamese and Chechens. The first group is often presented in the context of settled migration, as a new growing enclave. Vietnamese are not very well known among the Poles, they do not mingle with Polish society, therefore the few articles about them serve as a source of information. They are always presented in a positive light, and their integration in linguistic or cultural terms (especially children) is very well seen. Poles see the Vietnamese as hard-working people, escaping communist regime. Since they belong to the so called "in/visible" minority¹, they do not evoke any debates nor negative emotions.

The Chechens constitute a different group – almost 90% of all refugee status applications are lodged by the Chechens. The inflow of asylum seekers in Poland grew from 568 in 1992 to 7088 in 2006. Chechens appear in the press discourse only in the context of refugees, integration of refugees and international politics, namely bilateral relations with Russia. Chechens are presented and perceived as a heroic nation fighting against Russian imperialism, suffering unspoken dreads, similar to what Poles suffered from the Eastern neighbor throughout centuries. The image of Chechens is thus tackled with compassion and understanding. This can be illustrated by the Polish coverage of Beslana attack. Most of the commentators and correspondents believed Beslana was a provocation of Russian secret service. The major cited proof (that was not reprinted in any major publication outside Poland) was the fact that attackers did not communicate among themselves in Chechen, but Russian.

Chechens are a Muslim community, however religion is not presented as their main characteristic. The problems that arise from time to time in the refugee camps are analysed from the cultural perspective, not religious. Chechens are believed to be difficult asylum seekers because they come from the clan culture and they also have the homo sovieticus mentality. Articles about Chechens are scarce, and they have not caused major problems on national scale. The common belief is that as soon as they get refugee or tolerated status in Poland, they leave for Western Europe. This belief is well grounded and it also excludes any discussions about post-immigration multiculturalism in relation to this group.

3. Simon Mol affair

Only very recently has Polish society witnessed its own scandal related to immigration. It was the case of Simon Mol that erupted in January 2007. Cameroonian poet and writer, granted refugee status almost 8 years ago in Poland, was accused of having consciously infected his numerous sex partners with HIV. The proofs supporting the charges, as being thrown against a black male, were scrupulously checked. It is thus known that while in the main Reception Center for Refugees in Dębak, Simon M. was diagnosed with HIV-1, the type observed only in Cameroon. Since then, the writer had risky sexual intercourses with dozens of women, till now the number oscillates around 100. Only four decided to testify and place charges. Apparently, Simon Mol refused to use condoms accusing his victims of assuming racists stereotypes (namely, if a man is black African, he must be infected). The incident was widely discussed in the media, but it did not have any political repercussions. For one, it concerned a refugee, and Polish politicians are very ware of commenting on this group; second, the

¹ In/visibility is a state of some racial minorities, who are visible for their race, but consciously ignored by the main stream. In case of contemporary Asian immigrants they are seen as the Other, but stereotypically there is almost no threat associated to their existence and thus they are easily ignored by the dominant population.

case tackled sexual behavior and practice, and in the today right-wing Poland any discussion about it (e.g. use of condoms) is seen as encouraging sexual permissiveness.

Recently, the journalists of *Rzeczpospolita* discovered that Simon Mol might have lied about his persecutions back in Africa. His case will be thoroughly investigated and his refugee status is thus in question.

Interestingly enough, the case of Simon Mol showed the degree of tolerance that exists on different levels of the Polish society. The extensive media coverage (mostly on TV) focused rather on the AIDS threat campaign than on the fact that the aggressor was a refugee, an immigrant, a black person. The case was not generalized to all refugees/immigrants in Poland. It was not in any way used as a starting point to the debate on multiculturalism in Poland, even if Simon Mol argues that the whole affair was the outcome of racists attitudes prevailing in Polish society. The commentaries were more focused on the personality and mental health of the accused than on his social or cultural standing. On the other hand, the anonymous internet fora debates showed aggressive racist commentaries, stigmatizing mixed couples. Anyway, the discussants on different levels (media, administration, police, doctors, anonymous bloggers) agree that the main force to blame in this affair is political correctness. PC is argued to be the main cause of the infection - the women just did not want to seem racist. As some title suggests (e.g. "Beauties and the Beast?") Simon Mol is not the only responsible part in the affair –the need for safe sexual behavior goes both ways, one can always say no.

Interesting commentaries on the situation were provided by the experts in African studies. Prof. Ryszard Vorbrich said

Please understand: we see an educated man, wearing a good tie, fluent in English. We start quite naively suppose that he thinks the same way we do. As if he were a European, only a black one (...) But in reality this man can talk with us about Shakespeare using the same categories that we do, but his views on the basic questions in life are fundamentally different. (Rz, 09.01.07)

Experts emphasize the issue of difference, as the culturally determined belief in magic on all levels of African societies. Some indicated that many African shamans advise "giving AIDS away" through sexual intercourse as a treatment. The Polish society, as presented in this discourse, is ignorant, has little experience in dealing with culturally different people. Poles are not prepared to look deeper than the outfit and language. They assume that mentality is somewhat automatically related to the looks, they forget the importance of upbringing and cultural rootedness. Poles have been very open towards refugees, but this can change as the result of Simon Mol affair.²

Interestingly enough, *Nasz Dziennik*, the Catholic weekly, did not publish even one piece of information on the affair. The reason might be the topic – promiscuity of the main culprit and his victims, of whom one is a devoted believer.

To sum up, the scarcity of texts about immigrants reflects the two major characteristics of the situation in Poland: the very numbers are low thus the society is not interested in the newcomers; foreigners in Poland have not been engaged in any major affair that would evoke widely spread public debate on post-immigration multiculturalism. The debates have been more often focused on the hospitality of Polish society or lack of it. The objective has been to prepare Poles for the presence of the Other.

² Simon Mol is now kept under arrest – his case is in court. Since the eruption of the scandal in January, the media have ceased writing about him altogether.

4. Multicultural discourse in Poland – keeping an eye on Western Europe

Post-immigration multiculturalism occurred in the public debate in Poland only by the way of tragic events in London and France. The debate was thus about the meaning of the very concept of multiculturalism, of the models of integration. The debates rose the level of understanding of immigration-related issues in the Polish society. What is interesting, the commentators and correspondents were shifting identities: one group would write about these issues as outsiders (not really Europeans), the other – as insiders (Europeans). These shifts resulted in diverse representations of immigrants. An interesting divergence from this pattern was only a few texts that talked about possible implications of the present situation for Polish immigration policy.

Majority of the texts commenting on either London bombings or French riots were short information notes. However, the newspapers included also commentaries by Polish and foreign intellectuals. *Gazeta Wyborcza* published also reports by its reporters from the countries in question.

4.1 'They have a problem'

In this group, the authors wrote about London bombings and French urban riots mostly as some crime story happening on another planet. They did not try to make the messages universal. This group consisted of descriptive articles, impressions from „the spot”, analysis of the problems on the local level.

The discourse on multiculturalism was a **discourse of enlightenment**. Immigration and immigrants were showed as historical facts and figures, non real, distant reality.

For the first time in the history of Polish media, the concept of multiculturalism was so thoroughly analyzed and presented in a variety of sources. Since Polish journalist have little expertise as far as multiculturalism is concerned, they often asked foreign commentators for an opinion. London bombings were a great opportunity to define multiculturalism. The idyllic idea of multiculturalism as coexistence of various ethnic groups was shattered in the series of articles. The authors indicated the dangers of the British multicultural model. The British experts were often quoted: *“The danger of the British model is that people enjoy their identity, but they do not share it. I believe it to be the fundamental problem. We need to have communities who are proud of what they are, it includes also the British. However, these communities need to interact.”* (GW, 01.08.05). Thus multiculturalism means shared coexistence, an ideal close to Polish tradition.

The history of immigration to Western Europe was presented as a historical process, in a form of background information. Journalists illustrated their stories with two integration models present in Europe: the favorable British model and the compromised French model. They indicated that the British immigrants manage much better than the French ones and that the colored inhabitants of the Great Britain go up the social ladder quicker than the native British. The roots of this situation lie in the French attitude towards immigration:

The French tried to solve the problem of integration of non-European immigrants by force and by persuasion. The recent blustering statement of the Minister of Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy: “I will clean this all”, was not far from the traditional French policy of forced assimilation towards the newcomers from Northern and Western Africa. Assimilation, which did not spare any place for cultivation of the customs brought from the old fatherland by the “new French”. (RZ, 08.11.05)

However, even the British model has its drawbacks: *“On the continent everyone is mainly forced to be first and foremost a citizen, and not the member of a minority. In Great Britain everyone can do whatever they wish, and this is why many immigrant societies conduct “double life”.”* (GW 01/08/2005) *“The consensus was shattered in the July attacks. Multiculturalism has sense only when it leads to some form of social peace, in which the*

leaders of communities control their sheep, incurring in them religious or moral values, leading, however, to acceptance of the universal public order.” (Dz, 28.09.05) Obviously, the idea of multiculturalism in its modern, western form is foreign to Polish experience. The explanation of problems was a straight line of errors committed in the past. Much was said about the consequences of a passive approach to immigration:

What we observe right now is only the top of the iceberg, the result of 20 years of wrong policies, which bore fruit of disappointment and anger among these people. (GW, 10.11.05)

France needs determined, courageous politicians, who will know how to face the fears and racism which permeates this country; who have equal respect for the dignity of all citizens and who, in the name of social unity of the French Republic, reject the discourse about “French immigrants”, kept alive four generations after their arrival to France (Dz, 23.11.05).

The message was that French, and Western Europeans, face crisis they caused themselves, in the first place. The ignorance and passivity were stigmatized. Moreover, as right-wing media claimed, in the light of dead values in Western Europe, any attempts of assimilation have to fail: *“The skin color has nothing to do with this [riots across Europe], but the culture does... The ideas for assimilation the liberals have, are easily reducible to promoting methods of contraception.” (ND, 15.11.05).* Multiculturalism is thus not telling people how to lead their family life, it is to show them that they have to enter spiritual path, where they can find the culture of the hosting country they can accept and follow.

Multiculturalism was also discussed as a form of social cohesion:

*The problem of the Paris unsettled banlieus reflects the French sores. The politicians are far away from reality, the failure of the acclaimed integration model, anachronic system of social assistance, absurd urbanistic conceptions. Not only France has problems with immigrants, but its example is especially telling. The country, proud to bear the name of the fatherland of human rights, fences off the sons and grandsons of the newcomers from beyond the Mediterranean with the wall of poverty, unemployment, racism and dislike. France seen from beyond this wall looks like a hostile monolith. The mutual misunderstanding grows. Dislike turns into hatred. It leads to the **clash of civilizations**. It is not necessarily the clash between Islam and the West, but more an insurrection of the poor against the affluent. (Rz, 07-11-05)*

In this context, the French experience seemed like a total failure, not because of wrong implementation of multiculturalism as a policy, but because of a vision of coexistence that excluded difference. Interviews with inhabitants of banlieus, reprinted in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, offered examples, and even proofs, of this problem. Polish reader could identify the same excluding structure as it is present in Polish banlieus, inhabited by the white Poles.

The lack of social cohesion in the country of immigration leads to the clash. The ghost of revolution floats somewhere in the background of the text. Multiculturalism, as a form of coexistence means mainly equality, but not on paper. Polish reader can learn that integrations really means something when it goes beyond the paper, when it is practiced by the society and its institutions.

Multiculturalism, as a form of coexistence of radically different people and cultures in one place, was also presented as being the only cure for the inescapable future of Europe. Europe, that will not make it without immigrants, like it or not. The US was set as the example.

Europe will not make it without next immigrants. The only recipe, it seems, can be the construction of a multicultural society, in which traditions, religion, beliefs of anyone have, if they don't do harm, equal rights. It is a very difficult process, in many points reminding of the process the United States went through while integrating their citizens, coming from different cultures and parts of the world. But it is inescapable, if

“Liberty, equality, fraternity” is to really mean something in France and Europe. (Rz, 08.11.05)

On the other hand, the so acclaimed British model seemed to fail as well. The coexistence, which Poles believe to be also a part of their history, has not done the job. The failure, according to the journalists, concerned only one group of immigrants, i.e. Muslims. London bombings and French riots brought about the **discourse of cultural clash**. Islam and European tradition cannot be reconciled, for various reasons. This standpoint was often taken both by pro-European media and the anti-European ones.

The journalists never failed to underline the religious denomination, as if willing to show why the models fail to work in the end. Secular model of coexistence in Western Europe is not possible, because:

a Muslim prefers to interact with a declared Christian than a man, whose way of thinking is alien to him... an ordinary Muslim, who is not an extremist, is going to understand a model of the State based on Christianity more easily than a system, which fences off religion. (ND, 12-13.11.05)

The newspapers published interviews and commentaries by such intellectuals as Tariq Ramadan or Emmanuel Todd to bring another perspective to the debate. They discussed the events in London and in France as dramas taking place somewhere else. Foreign names of the opinion-giver only helped the process of estrangement. In this perspective, of being outsiders to the issue, the underlying belief was that Poland would not be touched by such problems in any near future. The distancing of the Other made the idea less scary. The tone was more informative, cool.

The texts presented a very important notion – immigration, multiculturalism, are mostly national problems, solutions to them differ from country to country. All the countries actually fail, but these are Western European countries, so we, the Poles, don't care. Polish people can observe the dramas and tragedies from a distance.

4.2 'We have a problem'

On the other side of the spectrum were the articles and commentaries that represented a global approach. They were written from the position of “we, Europeans”, where Poles were identified with a larger cultural and geographical unit, and thus took on more alarming tone. Europe here was not divided into small local entities with different problems that do not cross borders. Here, the London attacks were attacks on European identity and French riots were the expression of global divisions across liberal, democratic and wealthy societies. The terrorism is a new phenomenon that urges Europeans to think about their identity, about who they want to be. Polish media decided to participate in this debate:

Being European should mean the universal citizen identity, which allows the migrants and their children to feel at home. In theory it should be easier to feel a Turkish, Algerian or Moroccan European than a Turkish German, Algerian French or Moroccan Spanish, because European identity is wider, more general. But it is not easier. ... So, to cope with the biggest problem, not only French one, but of our continent, we have to be able to define from the beginning, what it means to be European. (GW, 15.11.05)

This urge to redefine what it means to be European can be difficult for nations with the colonial past. Poland is not one of them, thus Polish reader needs clarifications. Centuries of European domination are the key to understand the problems other cultures face.

The need to prove their equality is even stronger, because it comes from the representatives of the cultures and civilizations old as the world. They don't feel worse from us in any aspect. Or they don't want to feel worse. They want to have their cultures recognized as equally important that the European one. ... They are

not led, however, by the desire to destruct, to revenge. I don't think they even oppose Europe, that we face confrontation. It is rather penetration, an attempt to search for a new justice not through a conflict, clash, but the desire to participate in our better, more affluent life. (GW, 06-07.08.05).

The text leaves no doubt as to where Poland lies, it is Europe, with all its history, traditions, problems. There is no attempt of distinguishing this part of Europe from old colonial superpowers. Polish cultural experience of existence on the outskirts of the Western Europe is irrelevant in the view of the growing strength of non-European cultures. The firm presence of the significant others solidifies Europe in one, impermeable block, which the newcomers want to penetrate. Multiculturalism is the way of accommodating the claims of equality.

The key notion here is the notion of European identity. Polish newspapers did not make any distinction between Poland and Western Europe, focusing on **the discourse of European values**. However, there was no definition of what "European" means. In some texts, the values included democratic values of equality, secularism, freedom. Thus any religiosity and European values were a pure contradiction, impossible to go hand in hand. Muslims were presented as people of different, dangerous mentality:

Their aggression can be caused by the fact that they are becoming like us. They live on the West, in the cage of the western values, laws and rules. But they don't identify with them. Very often they even don't know why not. ... The majority of revolutionaries in the history of the human kind did not have the background of poverty, it was not destitution and no future that pushed them on the road of revolution and terror. ... The suicide terrorists of today from New York or London come from good families. Because of the ideological Islamism, to which they turn, their contestation takes on the most extreme forms. (16-17.07.05)

Their presence in Europe was sometimes interpreted almost as the fifth column. The Muslims living in Western European countries were perceived as a threat to European identity and culture based on the ideas of Enlightenment.

However, other definitions of European values included a strong religious component. Europe means Christianity, but nowadays Christianity is being destroyed all over the continent. The problems with immigrants stem from the fact, the Europe has nothing to offer value-wise, as in France:

It is a fact that France and the countries in the similar situation have begun to collect the fruit of their erroneous policy. On one hand, the masons governing in France, by destroying Christianity, destroyed a distinct cultural and religious face of this country, on the other – they allowed for the massive inflow to France of civilization-wise totally alien emigrants... The recent events uncovered without mercy the weakness of the secular republic and the power of the Islam masses, which can be controled by e.g. extremists, dreaming about the Eurocalifat. (ND, 8-11-05)

The immigrants coming from strong cultures, rich religious backgrounds are stronger than European nihilism that is prevailing across the continent. They can only despise the culture that offers them nothing:

We will have here a rebellion of Muslim youth. There is of course the question, if it is in a secular form of protests (burning down cars) Paris style or of fundamentalist form (bombs in the subway) London style. Contemporary Barbarians are rising their heads to claim the rule over the continent. And it may be only a question of time when the contemporary Vandals burn down Brussels. (ND, 15.11.05)

Thus Islam, with the expansionists ideas, is a threat to the very existence of Europe.

Because of the faster processes of globalization, caused, among others, by the development of the internet, the Muslims living nowadays in Europe live in a "broader

world” than 20 or 30 years ago. ... The development of the electronic “virtual neighborhoods linking Muslims in various corners of the globe had an enormous impact on the way the idea of ummah started to be “imagined”. The concept of ummah gained a special meaning among the groups characterized by the awareness of living far away from their “holly land” or their home country. (GW, 09.08.05)

The image of Islam as an invisible spider web wrapping the world is very suggestive. The conflict emerging out of this phenomenon is inevitable. The concept of *ummah*, new to the Polish reader, can be scary. Europe, as a home to this type of Muslims, not willing to integrate but constructing their united state, is clearly endangered, and Poland is endangered with it.

4.3 ‘We might have a problem’

There were only two commentaries that pointed clearly to the link between the ignorant Polish immigration policy and immigration policies that failed elsewhere.

The events in London and in France were used to some extent as an early warning system. **Discourse of prevention** was the most important here. Multiculturalism accompanying the presence of migrants is different from what we know. Thus we should be prepared for a change, a change that will surely lead to the same problems as in Western Europe today, unless Polish do not learn on the mistakes of the others. The key message is that multiculturalism, diversity are not anything bad themselves, but when left unattended they might become social problems. The story of this “turning bad” was presented in the texts.

The failures made somewhere else were then pointed out in the resent Polish policy, especially towards the Chechens. The passiveness of the government in respect to this group opens way to its marginalization and then a backlash in the future:

If Poland does not quickly elaborate effective immigration policy, the unnoticeable problem of integration of refugees can explode with the power comparable to the riots in France. It’s better to learn on the mistakes of others than our own. ... In order to avoid the mistake of France, Poland cannot limit itself to offering to its migrants a bed and board. There should be opportunities for their real assimilation, the common system of values should be created (assuming that Chechens are Muslims), in one word – make so, that having accepted Polish citizenship they will feel real Poles, of Chechen origins. (GW 14/11/05)

Thus the idea of the authors was that the Other can become scary unless Polish governments don’t do anything with it. Polish refusal to accept the reality of 300 thousand undocumented workers from Ukraine, not counted Vietnamese, asylees with tolerated status who come and go is dangerous. Ignorance causes problems, pretending that the problem will at some point go away causes riots. That was the French lesson which was to be learnt by Polish decision-makers.

Of course, more radical media offered another solution:

When we look at the French events from the Polish point of view, only one conclusion comes to mind: we need to do anything to introduce broad pro-family solutions in the legal and economic system. It should be a priority task for the new government. Because Poland might not have a high economic growth, it may not have huge highways, but when there is no people, it will soon face the same problems France has today. (ND, 15.11.05)

Immigrants came to France because there were not enough people to work. They are not assimilated into liberal pseudo-culture thus they make children. This children, as they are acculturated into nihilism, organize riots. Ergo, if Poland wants to have no problem with riots of immigrants, nor with cultural clash, the Poles should make more children. These simple

recipes, requiring less engagement than immigration policy, were accepted by the government, which started paying 250 euros for every born baby.

5. Danish cartoons affair

Danish cartoons affair exploded in Poland only in the last days of January 2006. The whole debate was over in the end of February. Within this time, Poland managed to distance itself from other European countries on the international scene, Polish government dismissed the editor in-chief of the main Polish newspaper and Polish society discovered the presence of a home grown Muslim minority. The debate had two streams – Europe vs. Muslim and Polish democrats vs. the government of PIS (Law and Justice, the governing party).

5.1 Freedom of speech in the national context

The affair had a strong impact on the national scene. *Rzeczpospolita*, a national daily, in 49% state owned, published two of the original twelve cartoons on February 4, 2006. The reaction of the Polish government was immediate. Polish prime minister apologized the Muslims of the world for the publication, he also wrote a letter of protest to the Danish prime minister. The official rationale for these actions was the security of the Polish soldiers in Iraq, the fear of terrorist attacks in Poland and the fear of economic repercussions abroad (after the boycott of Danish products). The country with invisible Muslim minority was not afraid of internal conflicts, the main issue was a possible threat from the outside. However, this view was contested.

Prime Minister Marcinkiewicz, apologizing for the publication in "Rzeczpospolita", decisively stood one step before the European orchestra. Maybe he did the right thing, led by the worry about the Polish soldiers in Iraq. But why didn't he advocate the withdrawal of the troops at the beginning of his term? It would have been a greater act of courage (and giving him more popularity in Poland and in Europe) than criticizing a publication in an independent newspaper. (Rz, 11.02.05)

The commentators were more prone to believe that the government grabbed the pretext it had long waited for. The real issue at stake was the taking over of the important newspaper, which editor-in-chief had not been particularly interested in collaboration with the new authorities. The government aimed at putting its own man on this position. It was even more evident, when a private ultra liberal newspaperperson (*Najwyższy Czas*) reprinted all twelve cartoons. *Rzeczpospolita* faced charges, *Najwyższy Czas* did not. The discrimination of the newspapers was evident.

The attack on the major newspaper was in reality the war over its control. Thus, those, who supported publishing of the caricatures were at the same time in the opposition to the government, in the opposition to the right-wing forces taking control over Poland in the early 2006. Their adversaries were usually ultra-Catholic groups, milieu linked to the ruling party, to the media empire of Father Rydzyk³.

The pro-government media decided to follow the official argumentation of the government:

It is really pitiful that the fear of the media aggression of the spoilt libertine milieu dominated everything. For them freedom does not go hand in hand with responsibility. If they really want to attack others in the name of their own freedom, let

³ Father Tadeusz Rydzyk has built a media empire around the Radio Maria. *Nasz Dziennik* is part of this media group. Rydzyk is believed to blackmail the current government because he has enormous influence on the Catholic electorate, especially after the death of John Paul II. The Church has condemned the hate speech promoted by the Radio (anti-Semitic, homophobic, anti-scientific), but the empire is still growing and is threatening the unity of Catholic Church in Poland.

them do it at their own risk, endangering their own life in Iraq, Syria or Saudi Arabia, not hiding behind the Polish state and Polish society (ND 7.02.06)

The typical image of a coward following the suit of the liberal/European/atheist groups and forgetting his own Polish/Catholic/conservative roots was presented in this argumentation. The publication was claimed irresponsible, even counter-patriotic, what in these times can be a dangerous accusation. Thus, the content of the publication was not that important, the Muslim riots world-wide were only used instrumentally to bring the fear and insecurity to the mind of a Polish reader. The idea of Poland, as being unimportant and on the peripheries of the international events and thus safe, was shattered.

The courts, which few months after the elections were still fairly independent, were included in the debate. Muslim Religious Association in Poland, which represents Muslims living in Poland since 1600s, informed public prosecutor about a possible crime. Interestingly enough, they did not explicitly claim they had been offended, but they rose concerns about the safety of the Polish soldiers in Iraq. After few days they redraw charges, upon receiving the apologies from the editor in-chief. They underlined that Islam teaches to forgive, what was a clear break off from the violent demonstrations in the Muslim countries and in Western Europe. The authority of public prosecutors was crucial for democratic debate in a democratic country; it actually ended the whole discussion half a year after the charges were brought to the court: *"The expert in Islam decided that the followers of Islam could have felt offended by the publication. But the public prosecutors, after having interrogated the editor in-chief, Grzegorz Gauden, stated that "Rzeczpospolita" had not any intention to offend, but only to show solidarity with the European media."* (Rz, 31.08.06)

On the other side of the spectrum, the opposition argued for the freedom of speech in Poland. The concerns did not address the Muslim protests, but the actions of the Polish government under prime minister Marcinkiewicz: *"We won't sit in silence. Until they close our free newspapers, mouths and consciences, we are going to speak out. Louder. And no one is going to tell us what we can or cannot do in a free country."*(Rz, 11.02.06) The informative character of the publication was also underlined:

They were a quotation, citation, example and not – published suddenly and without cause – offending, vulgar provocation. "Rzeczpospolita" did not order these pictures, it only wanted to inform Polish reader about the phenomenon... In the end of the day, don't we, as mature citizens of a medium size European country have the right to information? (Rz, 11.02.06)

Unfortunately, this reaction was futile. The government got rid of the editor in-chief and took over the newspaper, which from then on has published pro-government texts.

5.2 Freedom of speech in a global context

However, the debate on the publication had also its global dimension. Polish commentators joined the international debates on the limits of the freedom of speech, on the religious symbols and European ethics. The point of departure was often the same: Poland is on the outskirts of the problem:

As of now, in Poland not many have thought about the results the wave of hatred in the world of Islam can have. We cannot be blamed for this – there are almost no problems with Muslims in Poland and almost no Muslims themselves. All our debates on integration of over 20 million Muslims in Europe are derivative. The present Polish debate is also, somewhat, derivative. (GW, 07.02.05)

Whatever we in Poland will say or write, this will not have any impact on the debate across Europe. This is not Us yet. Therefore, the debates in the Polish newspapers, which did not referred to the case of *Rzeczpospolita*, were not especially heated. Newspapers asked mainly intellectuals to express their opinion. Apart from *Nasz Dziennik*, the dailies published

commentaries of the known Polish and international philosophers, theologians and historians. The debate had mainly two opposite sides: defending freedom of speech in all its aspects; proposing limitation of freedom of speech when it comes to religion. The first type of arguments was based on the ideas of European democracy and European values, the second – on the concepts of religious sacrum and profane.

The problem was to decide if the Prophet should be treated on the same level as, e.g. Christ, in a Catholic country:

I understand that the Prophet is a religious symbol and is under protection, but I don't think that – particularly in Poland – His followers should be treated as an object of veneration, especially murderers. Using the analogy, anyone believing in anything should be protected against the mockery. (Rz, 18.02.06)

This standpoint recognized the nullity of Poland and its close-to-no-role in the international Muslim crisis. The claim to protection of religious beliefs from the ridicule was presented as just absurd. Especially in the view of the Polish experience, and accordingly, the strongest argument Polish intellectuals had was the historical one. Some of them tried a pan-European illustration:

We, Europeans – this is how our reasoning goes – can offend feelings of others defending freedom of speech. You – we say to Muslims – cannot take this freedom away, because nobody gave it to us for free. We achieved it after centuries of Saint Inquisition, the Night of St. Bartolommeo, religious wars, Nazism and Holocaust. We are thus several centuries (and millions of killed because of intolerance) ahead. If we give away to you, you will submerge us with your fanaticism and intolerance and we will go back to the point we don't want to go back to. (GW, 07.02.06)

Europe-wide arguments about the role of freedom of speech in democracy were often cited. Muslims were presented as mad crowds, who do not understand the term “private media”, over which no government has any authority (although in the Polish case it was quite the opposite). But many more publicists related to a stronger argument, based on historical experience of Poles: *We have just gone out of the system, where political joke was punished by prison. We should remember about it. (Rz, 06.02.06)*. 50 years of communist censorship recurred several times, if not explicitly, often as the non-vocalized background knowledge. The experience was one of the most important arguments for the defense of the freedom of speech in its totality.

However, Polish journals took also a closer look at the core of the issue. Apart from the detailed explanation of the whole sequence of events that led to the crisis, they also tried to present the other side of the issue. Some accused Saudi Arabia and Syria of bringing the problem to unusual dimensions, and other Muslims – of hopping on the wagon: *“Muslims were not offended, they decided to feel offended [...] They merely look for a pretext to express their hatred towards the West.. (Rz 08.02.06)* Such a straightforward, not politically correct view was also present.

However, some publicists also checked on the Danish side for provocation. And thus the reader of *Gazeta Wyborcza* could learn that:

The biggest Danish daily, which published the Mahomet cartoons as the first one is closely linked to the nationalist party Dansk Folkeparti. At the same time, the Muslim immigrants pushed to the margins of the society don't have their high-range newspapers. A doubtful heroism it is, to demonstrate freedom of speech towards those, who cannot answer. (GW, 18.02.06)

Dansk Folkeparti was then described as a party, whose leaders are anti-EU racists, who refer to immigrants as “weeds”. Such a party could not act otherwise than to try to evoke negative emotions among Muslims, to damage further their image. These subtleties of the European political games were otherwise lost on the Polish reader.

Religious intolerance, or better – intolerance towards religiosity in contemporary Europe was a much more often discussed question. Across Polish newspapers we could observe emergence of a conservative front. The voices varied from moderate to radical, with radical being mostly the voices of *Nasz Dziennik*. Its journalists focused not on the violence of Muslim protests, but on Western European culture: “*Apart from the threats of some Muslim groups, which apparently do not see anymore other way of getting respect for their religion from the western atheists, the events described above show the growing aggression of the atheist milieus towards the followers of all religions.*”(ND 02.02.06) Interestingly enough, the newspaper was more interested in the victims when the Muslim protesters started killing Catholics in Asia. Then, the newspaper blamed Western European nihilism for the deaths.

On less radical side, the main questions answered by the moderates were the questions about the limits of the freedom of speech when it comes to religious beliefs; what a religion is, why it is important and why it is fragile:

The postulate of limiting religion only to the private sphere shows a total misunderstanding of the phenomenon of religiosity. It is not believing in dwarfs! Meeting God, a believing man finds a source of the deepest joy and the promise of the eternal life. ... If he didn't want to share this good news with the others, he either wouldn't believe for real or he would be a terrible egoist. Religion is thus a very private and individual matter of every man, but it is not totally unpublic, because it has a missionary aspect. ... (Rz, 15.02.06)

Religion is not a secret matter, it cannot be. Religion needs to be protected since it is the core of what constitutes any human being. Even the violent one brings about profound emotions:

So when I ask myself on which side I am in this fundamental argument, and even if I strongly disapprove of burning flags, throwing Molotov cocktails at the stores or terrorist threats, I nevertheless have to answer: on the side of religion. Because facing the choice between the culture, which diminished the religion to pseudo-cabalistic strings on the wrists of some pop-culture starlets, and the culture which can decide to die for religion and (falsely understood) sainthood – it is hard not to choose the last one. (Rz, 09.02.06)

The cultures thus are in a conflict: the easy European way has no understanding of the Absolute. But this can in turn leads to a tragedy: “*Devaluation of the meaning of the Cross, person of Jesus Christ, and from the Muslim perspective – also the Prophet Mahomet makes us live on the axiological and religious sands, where the road signs of the great religious symbols become empty slogans.* (Rz, 09.02.06). Diminishing the importance of religious beliefs leaves human being alone in the wasteland, therefore people ought to fight for the limitation of the freedom of speech to respect what is left from the past greatness of human spiritual life.

The European drama and tragedy is radical atheism, blatant nihilism and uprootedness. But if for the Western Europe it might be too late to be saved, Poland can still shape its future. “*I would love that one of the positive fruit of the Mahomet cartoons affair was the reminder sent to possibly all organizers of our public space that Christians are people as well.*” (Rz, 08.02.06). Christians were thus portrayed as victims of freedom of speech with a long tradition of offensive actions addressed against them. The respect for all religious was thus claimed. Although: “*In the end I express joy that I follow a religion, which matured to tolerance. To a patient keeping up with others' lack of respect. Thanks God. We set a good example, which is always needed.* (GW, 06.02.06) Thus Christianity is a religion of tolerance, which Islam is apparently not, but can become.

6. Conclusions

The short overview of the media debates in Poland was to acquaint the reader with the circumstances and development of the nation-wide debates on post-immigration multiculturalism. The main challenge of the analysis was the lack of well-developed debate battles on this topic in Poland.

The question that comes to one's mind immediately is thus: why are there no debates on this issue? The answer is, as usual, multi-layered. First and foremost: Polish homogeneity has not been really contested since 1945. The national minorities are, exactly, national not immigrant minorities, and as such are not seen as an alien element in the Polish social and national tissue. The lack of visible minorities helps not to trigger the crisis. Secondly, there is almost no partner to have a dialog with. Debates on multiculturalism usually involve, on the national level at least, majority and minority. Old minorities are however well assimilated, have full rights and make no claims. New minorities are scarce and ephemeral. There is no citizenship issue, as people who claim it are mostly return migrants. The question of citizenship, belonging or claim-making is thus inexistent. It is thus difficult to change the national definition of multiculturalism. It is so deeply embedded that to celebrate the year of immigration and multiculturalism, the Polish EMPs have proposed a trip to the Polish Eastern border, to show well assimilated, developed and integrated minorities of immigrants who came to Poland 200 years ago.

Therefore, the Polish press could only analyze secondary data on multiculturalism elsewhere, for the lack of the significant Other in this sense. Polish significant Other is nowadays European Union as the organization and cultural entity. Thus, the debate on multiculturalism was to a large extent a debate on the European identity of Poles. They could not decide on one option, and it was chosen depending on the newspaper. More pro-European approach resulted usually in more policy-oriented reporting and commenting, often with the future recommendations, whereas placing Poles outside of the EU resulted almost always in descriptive, anti-Muslim or anti-immigrant texts.

Danish cartoon affairs had another dimension since on the Polish ground two forces collided – Christian, pro-religion stream and liberal, pro-freedom of speech. Thus the cartoons served really as a point of departure for the domestic debates, assessment of the state of Polish democracy and the state of Polish spirituality.

Interestingly enough, the ignorance of the presence of immigrants in Poland raises concerns about the quality of reporting, but also – the real objective of the press. The lack of contestation apparently prepares the ground for silent integration (assimilation). The issue at stake might be that integration in the form multiculturalism can succeed as long as immigrants are not perceived as a threat to national or cultural identity. Polish society has been quite open and not felt threatened in its social structure and the newspapers are generally not destroying this image – they just pretend Poland has not yet a problem.

What however shows through all the texts is that Polish authorities do not want problems others have now. In the media discourse, the “no” to the immigration from the culturally different regions sounds low but firm.

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