Ethnoregional Groups and National Minorities in Poland
and their Political Representations

1. Ethnic and regional differentiation of Poland – a historical background

Poland is one of the most ethnically homogenous countries in Europe and the world. It does not mean that there are no differences and no political movements and organisations representing specific ethnic or regional groups. To understand ethnic and regional differentiation of Poland it is worth to present, briefly, Poland’s history.

From the point of view of ethno-linguistic characteristics of Poland, the crucial moment was the settlement of the present territory of Poland by Slavic tribes in the early middle ages. Slavs occupied practically empty space after Celts and Germanic tribes (Goths and Vandals) had left this area. From the linguistic point of view dialects of what is now central and southern Poland were quite uniform while dialects of the present northern Poland along the Baltic coast (region called Pomerania, now two voivodships or regions: Pomorskie and Zachodniopomorskie, see map below the text) considerably differed from the central and southern dialects. The next turning moment was establishment of a state around Poznan, and later on around Poznan and Krakow, its expansion and its Christianisation in mid-10th century. This state, now called Poland, encompassed practically the whole present territory of Poland, except what is now Warmia-Mazury region (or Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship) then populated by a Baltic tribe called Prussians (related to present day Lithuanians and Latvians). Poland’s control over western part of Pomerania was, however, rather weak and short-lasting.

Existence of the Polish state is important for at least three facts: 1) emergence of Polish national identity (for long centuries limited to aristocracy and gentry) as a result of loyalty towards the state, its kings, and institutions of noble democracy. 2) shaping of what eventually became Polish standard national language (out of dialects of royal courts in Poznan and Krakow, and later on out of language of gentry and aristocracy). 3) stopping of the eastward expansion of German states in late middle ages. German expansion (expansion of German states and settlers, German language, culture and identity) progressed along the Baltic Sea in Pomerania, in Prussia (turning Prussians into Germans) and also in what is now south-western Poland – in Silesia (present day three voivodships: Dolnośląskie, Opolskie, Śląskie). It did not encompass the core area of Poland – the area in the triangle Poznan – Krakow – Warsaw. It is worth mentioning that the expansion of German language, culture and identity and the assimilation of the local Slavic (Polish) population was gradual, socially and territorially differentiated – it progressed from the west to the east and from the upper social strata to the lower social strata. This process was changed by the Reformation: Reformation accelerated Germanisation of Pomeranian and Silesian Protestants while decelerated Germanisation of Catholics. By the end of the 18th century Germanisation was practically completed in Western Pomerania and western part of Silesia (Lower Silesia), local (Slavic) dialects and identities remained among Catholic peasants (and petty gentry) in Eastern Pomerania and in Upper (eastern) Silesia. In Prussia, which since mid-16th century for more than one century was under Polish political domination (as its feud), apart form Germans (including germanised Prussians) there lived a population called Mazurs speaking a Slavic (Polish) dialect (settlers from the neighbouring Polish region, or autonomous duchy, called Mazovia in Laton, or Mazowsze in Polish (now in large part identical with Mazowieckie voivodship), and confessing Protestantism.
Parallel to the eastward expansion of German states, language and culture was the Polish political and cultural expansion to the east, to what is now Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine which culminated in the creation in the 16th century of the Commonwealth of the Two Nations (the Polish-Lithuanian Union) in which the Crown of Poland was the stronger partner. For our study this Polish eastern expansion is of lesser importance as it left only few traces on the present territorial differentiation of Poland, limited to the presence of relatively small minorities (Ukrainian, Byelorussian and Lithuanian).

Late middle ages was also a period of intense immigration of Jews to Poland, pushed out by economic situation and political persecutions from Western Europe.

In the 17th century the Commonwealth entered a prolonged period of crises (economic deterioration, wars against the new aggressive powers like Sweden, Turkey, Moscow/Russia, internal military conflicts and continuous erosion of the central government). Very important was the second half of the 18th century. On the one hand it was a period of a severe, disastrous political weakness which finally led to the loss of independence and partitioning of the Commonwealth by its neighbours: Russia, Prussia and Austria. On the other hand, however, it was a period of cultural flowering, among other things due to the activity of the Commission of National Education (Komisja Edukacji Narodowej) which took care of promotion of general education, development of the Polish language and literature, etc. It can be said that in this period the Polish national consciousness, as well as the Polish national language, took final shape. It should be underlined, however, that this consciousness and the language were limited to the gentry/aristocracy, mostly Catholic, of the areas that before the end of independence belonged to Poland.

The 19th and early 20th century was a time of intense national (nationalistic) agitation. The Polish national idea expanded, not without problems, to the Catholic peasantry speaking Polish dialects and living in the area that before the partitioning belonged to Poland. This idea was practically rejected by non-Catholics and non-Polish speakers of the former Commonwealth of the Two Nations.

A complicated situation was in afore mentioned Upper Silesia and Eastern Pomerania (Kashubia) in that time belonging to Prussia/Germany. In Kashubia among the local Catholic peasant (and petty gentry) population speaking Slavic dialects two national ideas competed: Polish national idea and Kashubian national idea. According to the first idea Kashubians were (ethnic) Poles speaking a specific Polish dialect, quite distant from the standard Polish language and other Polish dialects. They admitted existence of literature in this dialect, but tried to make this literature as comprehensive for other Poles as possible. As a matter of fact, the most outstanding personality representing this way of thinking, Hieronim Derdowski (Derdowszczi in Kashubian), is one of the most famous writers writing in Kashubian. According to the other idea, Kashubians were a separate (ethnic) nation speaking a separate Slavonic language. They tried to create a Kashubian language as distant from the Polish standard language as possible, or more than possible, using linguistic forms that were hardly understandable even for Kashubians themselves. Both streams agreed in one point: Kashubians were not Germans and they had to reject Germanisation. Both groups – Polish nationalists in Kashubia (being Kashubian regionalists) and Kashubian nationalists supported the idea of regaining independence by Poland (as a matter of fact, author of the Polish national anthem was a Kashubian). In Upper Silesia among the local Catholic peasantry (who later became industrial workers and miners) two national ideas competed; Polish and German. Speaking a local dialect (generally considered as a Polish dialect) was of little significance. For some people, speaking this dialect was an evidence of being Polish and obligation to defend the Polish national cause. For some other people, speaking it was regarded as a sign of backwardness that one should shed and replace by the German language and culture to be
modern and enlightened. Many people, in turn, lived in local communities without any supra-local (national) consciousness.

The WW1 and the simultaneous defeat of all the three powers – Russia, Germany and Austria, opened the way for Poland’s independence. Describing the dramatic and complicated issue of defending independence (the Polish – Bolshevik war) and shaping Poland’s borders exceeds the scope of this paper. It is worth mentioning that Poland encompassed the whole Kashubia and (after a plebiscite on state belonging and three anti-German uprisings) a bigger part of Upper Silesia. (The area populated by Mazurs in East Prussia rejected the idea of joining Poland in a plebiscite, in a very unfavourable moment for Poland – when Polish army was fighting against Bolsheviks in a battle near Warsaw). After defeating the Russian Bolshevik army and the treaty with Soviet Russia, Poland entailed vast territories in the east where ethnic Poles were in minority).

The interwar Poland was a multi-ethnic state, with national (ethnic) minorities counting for about 1/3 of the population. Among some of them, mostly Ukrainians and Germans, quite frequent were radical political streams rejecting Poland and aiming at a new geopolitical order of Europe. At the same time, in the interwar period there progressed the process of consolidation of the Polish nation, strengthening of Polish national consciousness among a majority of the population. In the two regions mentioned above – Kashubia and Upper Silesia, Polish national identity, together with knowledge of the Polish standard language, started to penetrate or continued strengthening among the local population. In both regions, however, local or regional identity seemed to prevail over the national Polish one. In Kashubia it was expressed, among other things, in the continuation of the activity of the regionalist movement. The economic crisis, which affected Poland immediately after the war and again during the Big Recession, and was especially felt in industrial Upper Silesia, made that many Silesians were disappointed with Poland.

As a result of the WW2 Polish borders, both eastern and western, moved westwards. In the east, Poland lost to the USSR practically the whole territory with the mixed (Polish-Ukrainian, Polish-Byelorussian, Polish-Lithuanian) population. The number of ethnic Ukrainians also diminished as a result of voluntary or forced exchange of populations between Poland and the Soviet Ukraine. The holocaust committed by Nazi Germany in occupied Poland and the post-war migration of Jews to Israel practically annihilated the once numerous Jewish community.

In the west and north, the new Polish territory entailed practically the entire historical regions of Pomerania and Silesia, as well as the southern half of East Prussia. According to the decision taken by the winning powers immediately after the war, the there German population (which had not fled during the war) had to be resettled to Germany. (It was replaced by the Polish population from various regions, including former Polish territories incorporated by the USSR, and from abroad). Those who were allowed to remain were ethnic Poles. Therefore the question arose: who was ethnic Polish? This question was especially important and difficult in Upper Silesia given the big number of potential Poles there and the small ethno-cultural distance between local Poles and Germans and the vacillating attitude of many local inhabitants towards their ethnic identity. To distinguish Poles from Germans, the so called verification was carried out consisting in self-declaration and demonstration of a knowledge of Polish, including Silesian dialect (of course, Silesian Polish, not Silesian German, dialect). Even a poor command of Polish qualified a person as “Polish”. Due to the verification and resettlement and emigration of ethnic Germans, it was believed that there were no more Germans in Poland. The verification, expulsion of some Silesians and the atmosphere of suspicion towards the local population in Upper Silesia (often accused for collaboration with Nazi Germany during the war), not rare cases of discrimination and persecutions in the early post-war period created a psychological distance between a part of
the local Silesian population on the one hand, and “ordinary” Poles (who in large numbers immigrated to the region) and Polish authorities, on the other hand.

As regards the ethno-linguistic situation of the post-war Poland, two developments should be mentioned. The first is a massive shift from dialects to standard Polish, accelerated since the 1970s, which was territorially uneven. This phenomenon was relatively weak in Upper Silesia. In such a way the Silesian dialect (or dialects) being once a part of a large linguistic continuum encompassing central and southern Poland became a linguistic island. In this way this dialect became another symbol of (Upper) Silesian separateness and identity.

Another development which started in the 1980s and gained momentum in the 1990s was the change of the attitude, generally in Poland, but especially in Silesia, towards Germany and Germans. It was no longer shameful or risky to declare oneself as (ethnic) German. On the contrary, it became fashionable. As a result of this new situation, German minority appeared in the public life and was officially recognised in the 1990s. It also should be underlined that according to the German law, all persons born in the boundaries of Germany until 1938 and their descendants, are considered as German citizens. It means that in the present Polish Silesia still German citizens are being born. These persons at present have usually double Polish and German citizenship.

2. The ethnic composition of Poland – an outline

Before analysing in detail the ethnic composition of Poland’s population, it is worth describing some notions related to this issue. First of all, in Poland, as in (most) other countries of central and eastern Europe, the notions of narodowość (translated literally into English: nationality) and obywatelstwo (citizenship) are different notions and can not be used interchangeably. Nationality indicates belonging to a nation as a cultural-emotional community, regardless of one’s place of living or passport. Citizenship, in turn, indicates one’s state belonging without determining his or her emotional attitude to the state which issued his or her passport. Consequently, it is possible to be a Pole of German, British, US, etc. citizenship, and vice versa to be Polish citizen of German, Lithuania, Ukrainian etc, nationality.

Besides, Polish law and tradition distinguish between mniejszości narodowe (national minorities), mniejszości etniczne (ethnic minorities) and grupy etniczne (ethnic groups). Some ten years ago a new category was introduced to the Polish law: społeczność posługująca się językiem regionalnym (community using a regional language). National minorities are communities of people possessing Polish citizenship but being parts of nations (in the cultural-emotional terms) having their own states (kin-states) outside Polish borders; additionally such communities have to live in Poland “traditionally” which in practice means at least one hundred years. Ethnic minorities are communities of Polish citizens not belonging to the Polish (cultural-emotional) nation but not having their kin-states abroad. The category of community using a regional language was “invented” for Kashubians to recognize their cultural and linguistic specificity without declaring them a national or ethnic minority because it would imply denying their belonging to the Polish (cultural-emotional) nation. Ethnic or ethnographic groups are peoples belonging to the Polish (cultural-emotional) nation and revealing some characteristics different from the rest of Poles. The list of recognized national minorities, ethnic minorities and the community using a regional language is determined by law. The law does not determine ethnic or ethnographic groups. The recognised national minorities are: German, Czech, Slovak, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Lithuanian, Armenian and Russian; the recognized ethnic minorities are Tatar, Karaim (a once Turkish-language people confessing a variety of Judaism), and Lemko (a part of Carpathian Ruthenians, the other part...
considers itself a regional group of Ukrainians). The only community using a regional language, as mentioned above, are Kashubians.

Classification as a national minority, ethnic minority or community using a regional language has political (prestigious) and legal significance. Among the consequences of this classification is the obligation by the state to protect such a community (e.g. contributing to financing its institutions like cultural associations, schools, etc, and, since a few years ago under some circumstances – introducing its language as an auxiliary language, beside Polish, in local administration, in local bilingual place names, etc.). Classification as national minority has an additional consequence: political parties representing national minorities do not need to exceed 5% threshold at general elections to gain seats in the parliament. (It is enough for such a party to win a seat in its constituency, other parties lose their local “gains” if they don’t exceed the 5% threshold in the whole country). The only national minority who in practice took advantage of this privilege is the German minority which since the first democratic parliamentary elections in 1990 wins seats in the parliament (at the beginning four seats, recently one seat in the Sejm, the lower chamber).

Apart from the above mentioned national minorities, ethnic minorities and the community using a regional language there live in Poland representatives of various nationalities, some of them having their institutions, like the Vietnamese, but they are not considered as traditional national minorities and don’t enjoy rights of national (ethnic) minorities.

One of the tricky issues related to the ethnic composition of Poland’s population is assessment of the number of individual minorities. In everyday life nobody was asked to declare his or her ethnicity (except for the above mentioned “verification” directly after the WW2). Unlike for instance the practice in the Soviet Union where one’s ethnicity was determined and written in his/her identity card, in socialist Poland such practice was absent. Practically the only sources of information were declarations of leaders of officially recognised organisations representing national or ethnic minorities as well as reports of security services for their internal use. This issue was not a welcome subject for scientific research. The situation changed after 1989 when Poland changed the political regime. On the one hand the issue of national (ethnic) minorities ceased to be a taboo and many scholars started investigating this issue, on the other hand two censuses, in 2001 and 2011, included questions of nationality (ethnicity) and language. Although these censuses greatly differ as regards their methodology, wording of the questions of nationality/ethnicity and language, and, to some extent, social mood in which they were carries out (encouraging or discouraging to declare one’s national/ethnic identity) they do give some orientation as to the numbers of individual nationalities. It is worth mentioning that in the latter census people could declare double identity: the first (the stronger) and the second (the weaker) identity. This methodology was a reaction to demands of some groups (for instance Kashubians) who did not want to choose between Polish and non-Polish identity. It is also worth stressing that respondents could declare their belonging not only to the “recognized” categories, for instance they could declare their Silesian nationality despite the fact that Silesians are not legally recognised either as national minority or as an ethnic minority.

Not surprisingly, the biggest ethno-linguistic group in both censuses were Poles, in 2011 it turned out that about 95% of Poland’s inhabitants declared Polish nationality as their only identity, plus 2% combining their Polish and other identity. Only about 1.5% declared non-Polish national identity. (The remaining 1.5% are those who refused to answer the question on nationality/ethnicity). In absolute terms, as regards “recognised” national and ethnic minorities, the number of persons declaring any of those minorities accounted to 314 thousand, out of which 193 thousand as the first and 135 thousand as the only identity (and 132 as an identity combining non-Polish with the Polish identity). The biggest minorities, exceeding ten thousand people, were: German (147.8 thousand together, 74.5 thousand as the
first and 44.5 thousand as the only identity), Ukrainian (respectively: 51, 38.4, 27.6), Byelorussian (46.8, 36.4, 30.1), Roma (Gypsy) (17, 12.6, 9.9), Russian (13, 8.2, 5.2), Lemko (10.5, 7.1, 5.6). Other minorities were: Lithuanian, Jewish, Armenian, Czech, Slovak, Tatar and Karaim. The Lithuanian minority (about 8 thousand altogether) distinguishes itself by the compact territory inhabited (along the Polish-Lithuanian border), strong identity, high activity of its organisations and by the high degree of retention of language.

More numerous than the “recognised” minorities, however, turned out to be the two “non recognised” minorities or ethno-regional groups: Silesians and Kashubians. Silesian identity, as the only or one of two identities, was declared by 847 thousand persons (outnumbering by far the biggest “recognised”, German, minority). Out of those 847 thousand 436 thousand declared Silesian identity as their first identity, 411 thousand as their second, and 376 thousand as their only identity; more than 50% of those declaring any Silesian identity – 431 thousand in absolute terms - combined their Silesian with Polish identity. In the case of Kashubians, 16 thousand declared themselves as only Kashubians, and 216 thousand as both Kashubians and Poles, out of which 1 thousand as more Kashubians than Poles and the remaining 215 thousand as more Poles than Kashubians.

As regards geographical distribution of national and ethnic minorities in Poland, they tend to be located in actual or historic (previous) border areas: Germans and Silesians in Upper Silesia (former Polish-German borderland, present day Śląskie and Opolskie voivodships), Kashubians in Pomerania (former Polish-German borderland), Byelorussian along the Polish-Belarusian border, Lithuanians along the Polish-Lithuania border. The main exception to this rule is distribution of Ukrainians and Lemkos – in northern and western parts of Poland, where these minorities were transferred during the Polish-Ukrainian conflict in the 1940s.

It should be underlined that the above numbers are only tentative. It is also worth noting that these numbers, except for Silesians, are much lower than previous estimates based on declarations of leaders of minorities and indirect investigations based on objective criteria rather than self-identifications.

3. Political representations of national and ethnic minorities and ethno-regional groups

3.1. General characteristics

The term “political representations” here is used in the sense of political parties or other organisations acting in the interests of given communities. From the point of view of existence/non-existence and forms of activity of organisations representing minorities the post-WW2 history of Poland can be divided into three periods: 1945-1956, 1956-1989, and after 1989. The two turning points were 1956 – liberalisation of the then socialist/communist system, implying, among other things, recognition of existence of national/ethnic minorities and beginning of establishing of organisations representing these minorities, and 1989 – transition from socialism/communism to democracy, implying liberalisation of forms of activity of these organisations.

In 1956-89, organisations nominally representing national and ethnic minorities were established by the ruling party and state authorities (in cooperation with reliable persons from respective minorities, usually members of the ruling party), were financed and controlled by state authorities (mostly by the ministry of internal affairs). For each recognised minority one organisation was established. They were organised according to one scheme and had even

1 Source: www.stat.gov.pl (The Main Statistical Office, GUS), A. Rykala, 2014, Mniejszości narodowe i etniczne w Polsce z perspektywy geografii politycznej (National and ethnic minorities in Poland from the perspective of political geography), in: Acta Universitatis Lodzensis, Folia Geographica Socio-Oeconomica, No 17, 2014, ed. by Marek Sobczyński, pp. 100-102
similar names: Ukrainian Socio-Cultural Society, Byelorussian Socio-Cultural Society, Lithuanian Socio-Cultural Society, etc. These organisations in fact played a double role: as representatives of given minorities in relation with state authorities, and as instruments of state control over these minorities. In the centre of activity of these organisations was predominantly preservation of folklore and social issues. Apart from these organisations there were various local societies engaged with cultivation of local folklore, studying local history, collecting and preserving local architecture, tools etc. Somewhere between minority societies and local societies was the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association (Zrzeszenie Kaszubsko-Pomorskie) who was not considered as a minority organisation but was something more than just a local society.

The political transition of 1989 and afterwards brought about changes in the organisational life of minorities and ethnic and regional groups. In the case of the recognised minorities the main change was the end of protection-control of their organisations by state authorities. This, together with internal agitation within these communities, resulted in transformation of the old associations, emergence of new ones representing a large spectrum of opinions and interests of members of minorities. As regards their political representation in central, regional (since 1999) and local authorities, it can be said that in most cases they were too weak (too small) to independently win seats in the central parliament and regional parliaments. Quite often representatives of minorities won seats in parliaments starting in election lists of all-national political parties, usually left-wing (“post-communist”) and liberal parties. This is especially the case of the Christian Orthodox community in north-eastern Poland (Podlaskie region) whose representatives usually stood for election in lists of left-wing parties. At local levels members of minorities used to gain positions in local governments starting as independent candidates, although their ethnic identity and belonging to minority societies could be of some relevance.

Maybe more important developments happened in the case of the until then not recognised communities. One of such developments was the political and legal recognition of the German minority accompanied by its activation: establishment of several organisations representing this minority, and its appearance in the parliament (due to the above mentioned election privilege for minority organisations, to its territorial concentration and due to standing for election under one heading called “German Minority”), and in the regional parliament and government in Opolskie voivodship where it is a meaningful political force. It is also active in the Silesian (Śląskie) voivodship but without such successes. It can be noted that after the initial activism, in the following years this minority became less and less active. It can be attributed to emigration of its members to Germany, to emergence of the competing Silesian identity, to the effects of Poland’s accession to the European Union in 2004 (reducing real or imagined advantages of being German in Poland), etc.

Another important developments were the change of the legal and political status of the Kashubian community and emergence of the Silesian ethno-regionalist movement. These two cases are dealt with separately below.

3.2. Kashubian ethno-regionalist movement

As mentioned above, Kashubian ethno-regionalism has a long tradition, dating back to the 19th century, when this region belonged to Prussia/Germany. It continued its activity, in

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2 For more information see e.g. Roman Szul, Poland’s Language Regime Governing Kashubian and Silesian (in) State Traditions and Language Regimes, edited by Linda Cardinal and Selma K. Sonntag, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca 2015 pp. 79-96; Cezary Obracht Prondzyński, Kim są
different circumstances, in independent Poland in the interwar period. In the early post-WW2 years, especially in 1948-55, this movement had no organisational form given the then political regime in Poland. Taking advantage of the political thaw in 1956, Kashubian activists established Kashubian Association (Zrzeszenie Kaszubkie, in Polish, or Zrzesz Kaszëbskô, in Kashubian). After a union with some smaller local organisations from the Pomeranian region, it took the present name of Kashubian-Pomerania Association. Its headquarter is in Gdansk (the main city of the Pomeranian region) and its geographical area of activity is concentrated in Pomerania, mainly in its central part where ethnic Kashubians form a majority or substantial part of the population, although legally the territorial scope of activity is not limited to this area.

From its establishment the association has roughly retained its organisational form and aims of activity, although detailed form and aims did change. All the time it has been a socio-cultural organisation, never a political party, although from time to time it expressed its opinions on matters related to politics. The main aim has been to preserve and promote cultural distinctiveness of Kashubians. In this regard of special importance is the status of Kashubian as a special dialect of Polish or a separate language. Until the democratic transformation of Poland in the 1990s, the association, without expressing its opinion whether Kashubian was a special dialect or a separate language, was active in the idea of promotion and standardisation of Kashubian. One of results of this activity was elaboration in the 1970s of a standard Kashubian spelling, which was a step towards standardisation of Kashubian. This spelling was somehow changed in the 1990s when some letters common to Kashubian and Polish were replaced by letters absent in Polish (e.g. “ę” was replaced by “ã”, so, for instance “jęzëk”, in Polish “język”, in English “language”, became “jãjzk”; pięc, Polish “pięć”, “five”, became “piãc”, etc.).

The democratic transformation of Poland in the 1990s opened new possibilities for the Kashubian ethno-regional movement in general and for the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association in particular. This transformation happened in a time of a surge of the idea of regionalism in Europe (with the popular slogan of “Europe of regions”), especially in countries of the European Union to which Poland aspired. This created favourable atmosphere for expression of regionalist sentiments and activities. In the case of Kashubians, the fundamental task was preservation of their ethno-regionalist specificity, especially preservation of the Kashubian dialect/language which had entered an advanced stage of retreat in everyday life. In this domain, activity of Kashubian regionalists was two-pronged: on the one hand they tried to make Kashubian more prestigious by creating works in this idiom (beyond the until then prevailing area of poetry and short stories) and getting rid of the stigma of “corrupted Polish” and not a language, on the other hand by upgrading its legal status as a language. In both areas Kashubian regionalists, headed by the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association, achieved considerable successes (although one may doubt if they managed to revert the retreat of Kashubian in the private sphere). Kashubian entered (although often in a modest degree) new spheres like radio, television, internet, church masses; the new spelling contributed to creation of the image of a separate language. In 1995 Kashubian was officially recognised as a “regional language” (this formula was invented in the 1990s due to the European Charter for Minority or Regional Languages sponsored by the Council of Europe). As a result, it received official protection (including monies for Kashubian institutions, like the Kashubian Institute), was admitted to schools (as a subject), to

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See its website: [http://www.kaszubi.pl](http://www.kaszubi.pl) (in Polish and Kashubian only)
place names (together with [standard] Polish), and, theoretically, to local administration as an “auxiliary” language.

As regards political activity, there are no Kashubian political parties. In all-national (all-Polish) and regional elections Kashubians vote for all-national parties, and in local elections usually for independent candidates or local election committees. It does not mean that Kashubian organisations are absolutely absent in the political sphere. The main representative of Kashubians is the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association. It is organised as an “organisation of organisations” which means that both the Association and each of its territorial branches (at present about seventy) have legal personality. Local leaders are usually members of the Association or are backed by it. For several years, in 2002-2010, chairman (president) of the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association, professor Brunon Synak, was chairman of the regional Pomeranian Sejmik (regional parliament), which is the second most important position in the regional government. The Association is also present at the central level – as member (since 2005) of the Joint Committee of the Government and National and Ethnic Minorities. In 2005 Kashubians were officially recognised as a “community using a regional language”. Kashubians and their language were also recognised internationally. The Association is member of the Federal Union of European Nationalities.

Kashubians don’t strive for a change of their region in the map of Poland, for instance to single out their settlement area and to establish a separate territory and receive a special status (now they are in minority in the Pomorskie voivodship). Kashubians are more engaged in non-territorial political issues. In Polish realities a political issue is declaration of national (ethnic) belonging. The two censuses of 2001 and 2011 with questions concerning national (ethnic) belonging instigated a debate in the Kashubian community. Before the 2001 census some radical activists appealed to declare “Kashubian nationality”, but the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association call on Kashubians to declare Polish nationality and to demonstrate their Kashubian identity by indicating Kashubian as their native language. At the same time, it complained that Kashubians had to choose between being Polish or Kashubian, while they in vast majority are both Polish and Kashubian. This opinion contributed to the change of the question on identity in the next census where most Kashubians declared Polish as the first and Kashubian as the second identity.

Kashubian ethno-regionalism deserves attention not only for its own merits but also for influence it exerted on a much more powerful and radical Silesian ethno-regionalism/nationalism.

3.3. Silesian ethno-regionalist/nationalist movement

The territorial basis of this movement is Upper Silesia. In the present territorial organisation of Poland it is central-western part of the Silesian (Śląskie) voivodship (region) and, to a lesser extent, eastern part of the Opole (Opolskie) voivodship, in other words areas populated by the autochthonous Silesian population. Other parts of the Silesian voivodship, which don’t share historic and ethnic characteristics with the central part of the voivodship, don’t participate in this movement. Neither other parts of historic Silesia (western part of Opole voivodship and Lower Silesia [Dolnośląskie]), populated by immigrants from various parts of Poland after the WW2, share ideas of Silesian ethno-regionalism/nationalism. It should be added that even in the central part of the Silesian voivodship the autochthonous Silesian population is in minority because of the migration (out- and in-migration) processes in the past, described in the first chapter of this paper. It should also be underlined that the areas under consideration has played an extraordinary role in Poland’s economy being its “industrial heart” due to its heavy industries and coal mining. This renders the “Silesian issue” a special meaning.
Silesian ethno-regionalism/nationalism in the present form is a relatively new phenomenon dating back to the 1980s and 1990s. A phenomenon called “regionalism” existed in the Polish part of Silesia in the interwar period, but the present Silesian regionalism has little, if any, in common with the interwar regionalism. In that time Silesian “regionalism” was rather a top-down movement, a kind of social engineering, inspired by the voivod (representative of the central government) in Silesia Michał Grażyński, whose aim was to create a kind of supra-local identity among the Silesian people, meant as a step towards making them “fully-fledged” Poles given their weak Polish consciousness. The present Silesian regionalism/nationalism was inspired or instigated by political liberalisation in Poland in the 1980s and 1990s, and the broader pro-regionalist atmosphere in Europe (within the concept of “Europe of regions”). In Poland, of special significance for the Silesian movement was emergence of the German minority and its successes (legal recognition, institutionalisation, representation in the central parliament and in local governments) and successes of the Kashubian ethno-regionalism. As regards the German minority, it is worth mentioning that both movements – Silesian regionalism/nationalism and German minority movement – appeal to a large extent to the same population in Upper Silesia, therefore successes of the German minority were both inspiration and a challenge for the Silesian movement. As regards the influence of Kashubians on Silesians, it is first of all related to the status of the local idiom. Recognition of Kashubian as a regional language was a strong incentive for Silesian activists to demand the same. Of some importance were also developments in neighbouring Czech Republic in the early 1990s, namely activation of the Moravian regionalism/nationalism and recognition of Silesians in the Czech Republic as a nationality. (After a few years, Moravian and Silesian regionalism/nationalism in the Czech Republic practically disappeared as a meaningful socio-political phenomenon).

From the psycho-political point of view, Silesian (in Poland) ethno-regionalism/nationalism is stemming from two mutually interrelated feelings: harm and pride, or, in other terms, from the inferiority and superiority complex. The feeling of harm stems from the real or imagined (or re-activated) memories of the above described historic developments (the verification, expulsion, lack of comprehension for the situation of Silesians during the Second World War, discrimination after the war in access to better position in state administration, insufficient respect by the state and majority population for Silesian popular culture, teasing for speaking Silesian dialect in school, etc.) and from the (would-be) economic exploitation by (the rest of) Poland. In sum, the feeling of harm results from what Silesian regionalists/nationalists call the subordination of Silesia to “Warsaw” (understood as centre of political power in Poland). As regards the feeling of pride or superiority complex, it has its roots in the conviction in cultural and civilisation superiority of Silesians over (other) Poles resulting from their (Silesians’) adherence to Western, European, civilisation, while (other) Poles belong to the Eastern, Asian, civilisation. This adherence to the Western civilisation is, according to this point of view, manifested in the culture of hard work, honesty, reliability, etc., supposed to be absent or less intense among (other) Poles. Another source of pride, actively exploited by Silesian regionalists/nationalists, are past achievements in several areas (business, industry, science, literature, etc.) by personalities originated from Upper Silesia, usually ethnic Germans, in pre-war Silesia, or in Germany or abroad. Appropriation (incorporation) of achievements of these personalities can be considered as an act of getting rid of, and compensation for, the traditional image of Silesians as community of peasants turned miners lacking a higher culture.

Silesian ethno-regionalism/nationalism has changed the traditional (real or imagined) ethnic landscape (composition) of Silesia as an area populated by Poles, Germans and undefined “locals” that would grow Polish or German. Now, in Upper Silesia, five groups with blurred and unstable borders between them can be distinguished: Poles in Silesia (people of strong Polish identity, often originated from outside the region, not sharing or opposing ideas of
Silesian regionalism/nationalism), Silesian Poles or Polish Silesians (people combining their Polish national and Silesian ethno-regional identity, understanding and sharing, to some extent, Silesian grievances and aims; here are both people of local origin and “assimilated” immigrants from other parts of Poland), Silesian Silesians (people rejecting the choice: German or Polish, at the same time rejecting “Silesianness” as folklore of a lower class population), German Silesians or Silesian Germans (people of local Silesian origin of German cultural and emotional orientation, usually in the western part of Silesia and possessing double Polish and German citizenship, many of them being descendants of Silesian insurgents fighting for incorporation of Silesia to Poland in 1919-1921) and Germans in Silesia (this category was added here more for elegancy and symmetry of the model, rather than for its importance, as after the verification and emigration starting from the 1970s, one can hardly expect existence of a numerous Germans without Silesian roots).

It should be underlined that this classification is based on identity, emotional and political criteria, and not on objective criteria like for instance language. There is a discrepancy between language and identity – the biggest among Germans (including Silesian Germans) for whom the language of daily communication is usually Polish, and German is a symbolic language, used as an ornament or learned at school, but learning German in Poland is not limited to ethnic Germans. Polish Silesians tend to treat Silesian as a dialect and use Silesian or standard Polish depending on the context. Politically active Silesian Silesians regard Silesian as language, fight for its official recognition as a regional language, declare the need for its upgrading and standardisation while usually use Polish in their political activity.

Since the late 1980 there emerged several organisations representing various streams of Silesian regionalism or nationalism. One of the oldest is Związek Górnośląski (Uppersilesian Union), established in 1989, with its headquarter in Katowice, the main city of the Silesian voivodship. It is a socio-cultural organisation whose aims, structure, forms of activity and political orientation are similar to the above described Kashubian-Pomeranian Association. It can be said that this organisation perfectly inscribes itself in the profile of “Polish Silesians” or “Silesian Poles”. Radical Silesian nationalism is represented by Związek Ludności Narodowości Śląskiej (Union of the Population of Silesian Nationality), established in 1996 but never officially registered. The very name of the organisation indicates its political orientation – treating Silesians as separate nation, which implies rejection of belonging of Silesians to the Polish (cultural and emotional) nation. Consequently, this organisation treats Poles and Poland as enemies and oppressors of Silesians. Courts several times refused to register this organisation on the ground that there was no “Silesian nationality”, and only Silesian ethno-regional group. This opinion was shared by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in 2004 to which the Union made appellation. Despite the lack of legal registration the Union exists, is present in internet and publishes some newspapers and otherwise visible in the public life. This organisation was established by a group of young people headed by Jerzy Gorzelik, a scholar, who was chairman of the Union until the European Court’s verdict.

The politically most important representative of the Silesian regionalism or nationalism is Ruch Autonomii Śląska (Movement for Autonomy of Silesia). It was established in 1990, and its activists are largely members of the Union of the Population of Silesian Nationality. Since 2003 its leader is above mentioned Jerzy Gorzelik and its headquarter since 2001 is in Katowice. Unlike the Union of the Population of Silesian Nationality, Movement for Autonomy of Silesia (Polish abbreviation: RAŚ) is a legal organisation, and unlike the above mentioned Uppersilesian Union and the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association, it is a political organisation which stands for elections. The main aim of this organisation, inscribed in its

name, is gaining autonomy for Silesia (not yet clear in what territory). Given that since 1999 Polish voivodships or regions (their number is 16, among them is Silesian voivodship) enjoy a form of self-government, the demand for autonomy for Silesia means further enlargement of competences of the regional Silesian government. Since its founding RAŚ has underwent a significant political evolution from a marginal radical group, known mainly for controversial anti-Polish statements of its leader Jerzy Gorzelik, to a politically moderate, respectful player on the Silesian regional scene, present in regional parliament and government. The declared aim of gaining autonomy for Silesia (or regaining autonomy that the Silesian voivodship had in the pre-war Poland), according to RAŚ, would benefit Silesia as it would promote its economic and cultural advancement while not undermining territorial integrity of the Polish state. An important field of activities of RAŚ is culture, identity and history – studying and publishing of historical works, usually presenting the high cultural heritage of the region and its sufferings under foreign (more often Polish than other) domination, efforts for official recognition of the Silesian language and its standardisation, etc. The declared programme of RAŚ, unlike that of the Union of the Population of Silesian Nationality, is addressed to the whole population of Silesia, not only to ethnic Silesians (“Silesian Silesians”), including non-Silesian areas of the Silesian voivodship (to them RAŚ promises economic prosperity and non “exporting” to them Silesian identity).

The change of focus of RAŚ from provocative political statements and actions towards economy and culture and from Silesian Silesians towards the whole population of the region enlarged its political basis. RAŚ also largely capitalised on results of the 2001 census which revealed existence of people declaring Silesian nationality (their number was then 173 thousand), which was even stronger according to the 2011 census (see above). Analysing the phenomenon of the present Silesian ethno-regionalism and especially nationalism it is worth pointing to its sociological and demographic aspects. Proponents of Silesian ethno-regionalism/nationalism can be called “new Silesians”, they are mostly young, educated people rejecting the folkloristic image of Silesians together with their fragmentation, including dialectal5.

As mentioned above RAŚ is a political organisation standing for all kinds of elections: local, regional, national and European (to the European parliament). Sometimes it does it in broader coalitions with all-national parties, sometimes independently. In regional (in Silesian voivodship and in Opole voivodship) and in all-national elections, since 2000 RAŚ stands independently. The 5% threshold in the all-national elections eliminates RAŚ, as it is impossible to it to exceed this percentage of votes nation-wide. In the election to the regional parliament of Silesian voivodship in 2006 RAŚ received 4.35% of votes and no seat. It considerably improved its result in 2010 receiving 8.49% of votes and winning three seats, one of them by the leader of RAŚ Jerzy Gorzelik who became member of the regional government (executive body) as its vice-chairmen. In the next election, in 2014, it did not improve its results receiving 7.49% of votes although this result gave RAŚ four seats in the 45-strong regional parliament and a place in the regional governing coalition and some positions in the regional government6. RAŚ also stood for regional election in the Opole voivodship receiving a meaningless percentage of votes in the range of 1-2%.

5 A detailed sociological analysis of “new Silesians” and of the Movement for Autonomy of Silesia can be found in: Elżbieta A. Sekuła, et al., Być narodem? Ślązacy o Śląsku (To be a nation? Silesians about Silesia), Wyższa Szkoła Psychologii Społecznej, Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR, Warszawa 2012
6 Source: Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza (State Electoral Commission):
The 2014 regional election indicates that RAŚ has probably reached its ceiling. One of reasons of this is practically absence of RAŚ in the non-Silesian parts of the Silesian voivodship. Another reason is the reputation of the organisation, originated from the early stage of RAŚ history and the beginning of its leader’s political activity, as a group of anti-Polish separatists, which makes that more popular and known persons avoid joining it and standing for elections as RAŚ candidates.

Movement for Autonomy of Silesia is a very active organisation — apart from its activity in the regional Silesian parliament and government and in local governments in Upper Silesia, it organises several events, one of them being yearly “March of Autonomy” (Marsz Autonomii) on July which gathers peoples under Silesian yellow-blue flag, edits some publications, etc. It is also present in several international organisations uniting ethnic or national minority groups from various, mostly European, countries where it promotes the idea of Silesians as a (persecuted) ethnic or national minority in Poland.

One of strengths and weaknesses of RAŚ is its leader Jerzy Gorzelik. It is largely due to his activity, determination, organisational talents and skills (among other things the ability to make skilful use of internet and other modern media) as well to his political flexibility. Movement for Autonomy of Silesia has grown to be the politically strongest ethno-regionalist or nationalist organisation in Poland and an active player on the regional Silesian scene. However, he is also its weakness. Many people in Poland and in Silesia remember his early statements considered as deeply offensive for Poland and Poles. The label of anti-Polish separatists attached to the Movement, largely due to him, limits Movement’s political basis given that the vast majority of inhabitants of the present Silesian voivodship are Poles (“Polish Poles” or “Polish Silesians”).

The above analysed organisations — German Minority, Uppersilsian Union, Union of the Population of Silesian Nationality, and the Movement for Autonomy of Silesia, do not present the full list of organisations in one or another way representing Silesian ethno-regionalism/nationalism. Their number exceeds ten, they form a kind of consultation platform named “Uppersilesian Council” (Rada Górnośląska). There are also individuals engaged in the ethno-regionalist/nationalist Silesian movement.

The Silesian ethno-regionalism or nationalism is by far the strongest movement of this kind in Poland. It has considerably changed the cultural and political landscape in the region and is visible also from “Warsaw”. Movement for Autonomy of Silesia is the biggest regionalist party in Poland, it has broken the monopoly of all-Polish parties (and ephemeral local-regional groupings) as electoral players. It seems, however, that after a dynamic growth from the late 1980s, Silesian regionalism/nationalism has reached its “glass ceiling”. It has encountered several problems, hard to be solved. The first is the identity of the population to which it is addressed. The initial radicalism of such organisations like the Union of the Population of Silesian Nationality and Movement for Autonomy of Silesia addressed to Silesians rejecting their Polish identity while making these organisations visible in the region and in Poland as a whole and giving them the first impetus, estranged many Silesians of Polish orientation, let alone Poles living in Upper Silesia, and eventually limited those organisations’ political base. The second problem is the territory of action. Movement for Autonomy of Silesia postulates transforming the present Silesian voivodship into autonomous Silesia, but large parts of this voivodship in the north, east and south not only do not share Silesian identity but often are hostile to the idea of Silesian autonomy. Incorporation of socio-economic all-regional postulates while giving RAŚ some percentage points of electoral success is threatening of diluting ethno-cultural identity demands into political games for

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7 This is also opinion of an outstanding Silesian regionalist/nationalist Dariusz Dyrda. See D. Dyrda: Autonomia przez język, “Śląski Cążung” Nr 4(50), May 2016
8 See D. Dyrda, op. cit.
current economic issues. Another problem is the tension between “old” and “new” Sileians, between those who want to preserve Silesian culture as it is now, a myriad of local identities, dialects and customs, and those who strive to reject traditionalism and unify Silesian ethnicity, to transform Silesians into an ethnic nation.

3.4. Other regionalist movements and organisations

Apart from the above analysed movements and organisations several regionalist movements and organisations of various character and various durability can be mentioned. Undoubtedly, Związek Podhalan9 (Union of Podhale People) deserves special attention. This organisation, established in 1919 and having several thousand members in 75 territorial branches in Poland and some in the USA and Canada, represents Podhale ethno-regionalism. Podhale is area encompassing Tatra Mountains (the highest mountains in Poland) and the surrounding areas. The basis of the Podhale ethno-regionalism is a specific culture resulting from traditions of alpine herding and history of free shepherds (as opposed to serfdom in other parts of the country) and robbers and now expressed mostly in music, dialect, dress, specific religiousness and in the feeling of pride and of being different from peoples from lowlands. The main aim of the Union of Podhale People is cultivation of Podhale identity and culture. It does not stand for elections but exerts some influence on local politics. Podhale highlanders overwhelmingly vote for right-wing parties, connected to the Catholic Church. Of similar character, but much weaker is Związek Kurpiów10 (Union of Kurpie People), established in 1996 and representing Kurpie regionalism (northern part of the present Mazowsze voivodship), whose specificity is folklore and dialect. Of different character is Unia Wielkopolsan11 (Union of Wielkopolska People – Wielkopolska is a large historical region around Poznan). It was established in 1990 in Poznań, its aims was establishment of Wielkopolska voivodship (this voivodship was established during the reform in 1999, but its territory is smaller than that designed by the Union), economic development of this region and decentralisation of Poland as well as investigating and presenting history of the region. This organisation is politically active, it stood for parliamentary elections winning several seats in the central parliament in the 1990s (before the 5% threshold was introduced), it is present in the regional parliament of Wielkopolskie voivodship and in local governments. Besides, there are several regional movements without organisational structures, such like the Galician regionalism, a movement of intellectuals engaged in studies and popularisation of history of Galicia (a part of the Habsburg empire until the first World War, not to be confused with Spanish Galicia).

4. Final remarks

Despite the fact that Poland is ethnically a very homogeneous country, there are groups of citizens with enough strong local, regional or ethnic identities to act for preservation and demonstration of elements constituting their identities and their socio-economic interests, and to establish and sustain organisations and institutions engaged in these activities. Forms of their activities range from non-political socio-cultural actions to informal backing of politicians standing for local, regional or national elections, to directly standing for elections and participating in local and regional government. The requirement to exceed 5% of votes to win seats in the central parliament practically eliminates regional and ethnic groups from the

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9 For more information see (in Polish only): http://www.zwiazek-podhalan.com
10 For more information see (in Polish only): http://www.zwiazekkurpiow.pl
11 For more information (only in Polish) see: http://unia.wielkopolan.pl
parliament. The exemption to this rule made for parties representing national minorities enables one of them, namely the German minority, to be present with 1 to 4 MPs in the central parliament. On the regional level two organisations, apart from ad-hoc short-lasting groupings, have gained meaningful, though minority, positions in parliaments and governments. These are German Minority (a federation of organisations) in the Opolskie voivodship and Movement for Autonomy of Silesia in the Silesian voivodship. Among those organisations which don’t participate directly in parliaments and governments Kashubian-Pomeranian Association deserves a notice for its achievements in promoting Kashubian ethno-linguistic identity.

Administrative map of Poland and ethnic regions (Kashubia, Upper Silesia, Podhale)