



# **State, society, NGOs on Right-wing extremism in Poland**

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Paper for the conference of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation on  
**“Right-Wing Extremism in CEE-Countries. Strategies against Right-Wing  
Extremism.”**

**Budapest, 19. November 2010**

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### **1. Introduction**

The phenomenon of the right-wing extremism in the new democracies is undoubtedly complex and goes far beyond the questions of number and forms of the RE organisations in a particular country. It leads us to even more significant issues of the condition of the society, functions of national state institutions and their effectiveness, and of the role which the subnational cooperation plays in their national contexts.

Academic exploration of the field, explanation of the variables behind the extreme right presence in modern societies and, at last, implementation of this knowledge in a public sphere is a challenging task. In the case of the Republic of Poland, the state institutions still do not lead in any of these fields, although we can observe the progress in terms of legislature and project implementation.

In the last twenty years the Polish RE has embraced many different forms and has been active on different levels – local, national and, in the last decade, international. Although in the 90. the RE was far from the political significance, the situation changed in 2001, when some of the RE leaders (within the League of Polish Families party) entered mainstream politics.

At the same time, the number of non partisan forms of extremist organisations stayed active and diverted their communication channels. Their – very diverted and in some points mutually exclusive – ideological core consist of several features like anti-Semitism, Germanophobia, Russophobia, but also authoritarianism, strongly linked to the tradition of Catholic Church and xenophobia (homophobia in particular). These processes took place in specific social environment. In terms of religion (95% declared Catholics) and ethnicity (97% declared citizens of Polish nationality) Poland stays exclusively homogenous against other EU member states<sup>1</sup>.

This short overview aims to depict the complicated nature of the RE in Poland whose selection and classification in ideological terms became also a multilevel task. In the last decade, several NGOs and subsequently state authorities undertook variety of actions,

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<sup>1</sup> Data of the Central Statistical Office on the basis of the 2002 National Population and Housing Census.

directly or not-directly aimed in the RE. Nevertheless, the need for exploration, explanation and implementation of the anti-RE solutions still faces several problems.

## **2. The role of the state between prevention and repression.**

As it was indicated, the role of the Polish state institutions in counteracting the RE is ambivalent. The existing reports and analyses of such activities focus on its weaknesses and flaws, but what can be regarded as the first symptom of a state's role change is a few large-scale undertakings initiated recently by the state. The initial stage of their development however, hampers their proper evaluation.

The legal framework in Poland as a basic tool for the prevention and repression by the NGO activities and legal experts is considered to be sufficient. On the constitutional level there are several articles aiming to fight proliferation of the totalitarian and authoritarian ideologies in the public sphere. Article 13 of the Constitution forbids political parties and organisations whose programs are based on totalitarian methods and modes of activity of Nazism, fascism and communism and those whose programs or actions sanction racial or national hatred.

The second group of acts pertains to particular examples of the RE activities like ethnic or racial discrimination. The Polish Constitution prohibits discrimination in political, social or economic life for any reason whatsoever and also guarantees protection of the rights of national and ethnic minorities (Art. 32 and 35). The abovementioned provisions are developed further in a number of minor acts, like the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language, The Labour Code Act, the Law on Employment and Countering Unemployment. The Act on National and Ethnic Minorities introduces prohibition against discrimination and obliges public authorities to take certain steps to support intercultural dialogue, to protect persons subjected to discrimination, hostility or violence and to support complete and actual equality in economic, social, political and cultural life among members of minority and majority groups. The Penal Code stipulates penalties for crimes committed on the grounds of race, nationality, ethnicity or denomination (genocide, illegal violence or threats, desecration, incitement to hatred, or propagation of a fascist or other totalitarian regime). In 2010 several amendments extended significantly this catalogue.

Not only the propagation of the totalitarian regimes but also manufacturing, storing, importing and trading in the objects conveying totalitarian content (emblems etc.) has been prohibited under the pain of punishment. Also, since 1999 denying the crimes of the Nazis (and the Communists) has been defined as a punishable offense. Anyone breaking that law

may face imprisonment of up to three years.<sup>2</sup> Since 2001 Poland has adapted several international acts determining the role of the state in combating RE, e.g. the Framework Convention for the Protection of the National Minorities accepted in 2001.

To conclude, in Poland wide catalogue of legal acts enables making illegal different and distinct types of RE actions.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the existence of such legal framework seems not to have been used in a considerable degree. Mostly by the NGO working on a field of anti-semitism, xenophobia, tolerance etc. provide adequate data. The evaluation of the effectiveness of Polish judiciary and executive has also been carried out by the European and international institutions: The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

The general picture of the Polish judiciary in “hate crime cases” is far from perfect. The main accusations and recommendations for the judiciary concerns number of issues:

- racially motivated crimes against persons of the Arab, Asian and African origin,
- anti-Semitic activities in the State party, including the desecration of Jewish cemeteries,
- anti-Semitic hate speech and the dissemination of anti-Semitic material via the Internet,
- manifestations of racial hatred during sport events remains permanently high,
- groups such as the All-Polish Youth, the National-Radical Camp, Liga Polskich Rodzin (the League of Polish Families) and the local chapter of the Blood and Honour group, which are reported to be involved in promoting racial hatred and racial discrimination.<sup>4</sup>

This problematic issues result from day-to-day practice of Polish jurisdiction and has been confirmed by analyses of several legal proceedings against RE activists and organizations in Poland in last three years. One of the reports reveal issues which contradict the recognition of the Polish legal framework as sufficient and effective. The first example comes from the area

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<sup>2</sup> Detailed information could be found on "Analysis of the Domestic Law Concerning Blasphemy, Religious Insult and Inciting Religious Hatred in Albania, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Turkey, United Kingdom on the Basis of Replies to a Questionnaire". Council of Europe 14 May 2010.

<sup>3</sup> In the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) opinion, several Polish legal acts on racism and xenophobia demand improvement and further specification.

<sup>4</sup> Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 2009, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G09/462/80/PDF/G0946280.pdf?OpenElement>

of exploration and explanation of the RE as such and its symptoms – *during the proceedings we observed difficulties in recognizing cases as racist or nazi/fasist ones, (...) although there are legal basis for punishing such crimes, in practice courts and public prosecutors rarely made legal classification of the acts.* (Jagielski 2009) The second issue deals with experts appointed by the courts – in few cases expert's opinions on racism, xenophobia or neo-nazi has been used to classify the cases (Bodnar 2006). The problematic nature of terms like racism, xenophobia, neo/nazism resulted in contrary and controversial experts' reports. In 2010 the court of law in Wroclaw heard a case of some activists of the RE National Revival of Poland (NOP) and neopagan RE Zadruga, who took part in the demonstration carrying swastikas and hailing slogans: *White power!, Poland for Poles!, Poland only white!* etc. In experts' qualifying such crimes as racist or neo/fascist was out of question<sup>5</sup>. In such cases also judicial decisions lack uniformity of. The same acts (e.g. public usage of the Nazi symbols, tattoos) have been qualified differently. Last but not least, most of the domestic and international analyses underline the fact that in most of the reported cases Polish police and prosecutors refuse to pursue the matter and start proceedings. In courts, prevailing number of the cases is considered as of minor social harm, and therefore lenient judgments have been given. Treating RE actions as unimportant or insignificant 'hooligan pranks' is also a case in executive institutions.

The major achievements in the last years were as follow: the competences of the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men have been extended to cover, amongst others, racial discrimination. Some measures have been taken in favor of the cultural and linguistic rights of national and ethnic minorities. The Polish authorities have launched and supported many initiatives to combat antisemitism, particularly in schools. They adopted a Programme for the Roma community in Poland in 2003 and the most important Programme for Countering Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related Crimes (led by the Polish Ministry of Interior). Its main tasks are: Maintaining a database on individual instances of discrimination due to race and ethnic origin, anti-Semitism and xenophobia, Developing and implementing the social and demographic data collection and analysis system in cooperation with other government administration units in order to monitor the phenomena of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia, cooperating with international organizations, like the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Union and the Council of Europe, making reports on the

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<sup>5</sup> [http://wyborcza.pl/1,75478,7673592,Czym\\_jest\\_rasizm\\_\\_Zaskakujaca\\_opinia\\_bieglego.html](http://wyborcza.pl/1,75478,7673592,Czym_jest_rasizm__Zaskakujaca_opinia_bieglego.html) (28.09.2010)

cases of ethnic discrimination, racism and xenophobia present in Poland; the Team takes the above actions in close cooperation with domestic NGOs active in the sphere of counteracting and combating racism, anti-Semitism, discrimination on ethnic grounds and xenophobia. In 2010, their activities were still in a preliminary stage of consultations with several NGOs and creating the central database software.

The main argument for claiming this enterprise (un)effective is the fact that in 2005, within the framework, the National Prosecutor's Office undertook activities aimed at establishing whether there were any organizations based on anti-Semitic or racist ideology operating in Poland. In particular, all appellate prosecutors' offices were ordered to check whether such organizations appeared in the preparatory proceedings conducted by their subordinate offices. In establishing that such organizations did exist, individual regional prosecutors' offices were obliged to implement administrative and legal measures with a view to making such organizations illegal. The results of the check, however, proved that there were no such organizations in Poland.<sup>6</sup>

In Polish reports prepared for FRA authorities have identified racist crime and violence as an issue particularly affecting the Roma. Police trainings have been included in the national government Program for the Roma Community in Poland that began in 2004. The issue of broader police training, i.e. including issues of other minority groups subjected to racist violence and crimes, emerged in relation to the implementation of programs aimed at combating discrimination, the National Action Plan Against Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and The Community Action Program to Combat Discrimination in Poland. The other issues of racist crime and violence were claimed to be currently implemented into police training programs (with single example of a one-day training focusing on racism and related crimes has been developed in 2005, as part of professional training for field police officers). Moreover, efforts to introduce contents that inform the police on how to deal with racist crime and violence, racist offenders and victims of racism as part of classes on police professional ethics, human rights and victims' rights were claimed. Lack of knowledge of possible emanations of racism, neo/facism like hate speech crimes and open negligence of the police and guard officers were the main issues that raised objections from the anti-RE street workers.

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<sup>6</sup> REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION. Periodic reports of States parties for the COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION (CERD)

On the level of education and training numerous initiatives were reported. The addresses were: police officers of different levels, judges, civil servants as well as NGO activists. In the field of elementary and secondary education, the projects promoting tolerance, rising awareness of effects of anti-Semitism or racism were the domain of non-government organizations.<sup>7</sup> Their main activities consisted in creating and disseminating materials for teachers and involving pupils in variety of educational projects (summer schools, art contests etc.). In official primary and secondary education curriculum (implemented in 2007 after the dismissal of a controversial Minister of Education Roman Giertych, the leader of radical right LPR party) some of this aspects were introduced into the Civic Education and History courses, namely characteristics and evaluation of nationalism and racism in XIX century, multicultural character of the mid-war II Polish Republic, chosen examples of multiculturalism in contemporary societies.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, these topics were not obligatory and depended on teachers' choice. They were also not necessarily included in the school books. The latest report on the (chosen) school books content analysis gives us several important hints<sup>9</sup>. The problems of stereotypes and ethnic discrimination were, in authors' opinion present occasionally, the issues of anti-Semitism, racism, nationalism and xenophobia has been presented with no recent examples.

### **3. Public acceptance of RE in Middle and East Europe versus supporting democracy.**

The level of public acceptance of the RE in Poland could be operationalized in different ways. The most direct measurement – the exact number of RE activists is hard to estimate. Also membership in the biggest and most institutionalized examples – political parties and associations is vague. According to the official party documents, The League of Polish Families membership rate in 2006 (in time of biggest electoral support and parliamentary successes) oscillated around 6000.<sup>10</sup> Another quantitative measurement of the level of public acceptance for RE is the electoral support for political parties. The most successful example of radical right initiative was the abovementioned League of Polish Families, the party gained 1 025 148 of votes (7.8%) in 2001 and 940 762 of votes in 2005. The leaders managed to join

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<sup>7</sup> The list of such initiatives in the years of 2007-2009 is accessible on the website of The Open Republic Association,

<sup>8</sup> Information in Polish on the website of Polish Ministry of Education, [www.men.gov.pl](http://www.men.gov.pl)

<sup>9</sup> The main aim of this project was to provide a qualitative content analysis of the 80 out of 150 school books (History, Civic education, Polish) in search for the promotion of tolerance, antidiscrimination behaviors etc.

<sup>10</sup> Official party website [www.lpr.pl](http://www.lpr.pl) (20.04.2007)

together the nationalistic streams and enter the parliament in 2001. The party gained also ten seats in the European Parliament and became a junior partner in the governing coalition in 2006 (with Law and Justice, PiS party and populist Self-defense party). Shortly afterwards it failed to meet the threshold in the parliamentary elections of 2007, gaining 209 171 votes (1.3%).

This move from the margins to the mainstream, enabled the party to gain some of the influential public offices - the party leader Roman Giertych held a post of the Minister of Education, other LPR members were in boards of public companies. This success had been widely commented and provoked questions of perception and level of acceptance of the society of the party ideology and actions. Other representatives of the radical right spectrum stayed marginal in terms of electoral support on national and local level. In the last decade, the electoral support on national level varied from 7300 votes for the National Revival of Poland (NOP) to 2600 votes for Polish Community (PWN-PSN) led by K. Tejkowski. This approach in exploring the RE public support level could be used as a starting point for further discussion on the social perception of the RE. The fact that RE embraces legal and institutionalized forms and gains (in some cases marginal but stable) number of votes could be an interesting indicator of both social and public (state) attitudes.

Even more important is the information on public interest and acceptance of the non registered and/or illegal forms of RE existence. Variety and dispersion of organizations made the task of quantitative analysis impossible. Accessible data differ from one another but in general, show growing trends in membership and diversity of RE forms. The estimated number of participants of a training camp which took place in Poland in 2003 was thousand young sympathizers of Polish members of the International Third Position (ITP).<sup>11</sup> Active participation in RE actions takes many forms, e.g. marches in commemoration of national days of remembrance, paramilitary trainings, stadium vandalism, racist or anti-Semitic incidents on the streets.

Regarding the psychological profile of the radical right parties' electorate, it belonged to the most pessimistic group of voters in terms of their attitude to change and a readiness to engage in it, which markedly applied to the LPR contingent. They fell somewhere around the average in terms of self confidence and willingness to cooperate (CBOS 2002). No widely known and systematic research has been done on psychological profile of the non-partisan RE activists. The perception of the ideology and RE actions could be partly derived from the

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<sup>11</sup> <http://krytyka.org/index.php/artykuy-naukowe/rone/274>

existing surveys on attitudes toward other nations, level of anti-Semitism and other psychological characteristics. Especially, the anti-Semitic appeal is considered to fuel the RE ideology and different forms of action.

The Jewish community in Poland today is very small, estimated at between 5.000-10.000 people. Nevertheless, anti-Semitism remains an active phenomenon in the Polish society. Research conducted by Warsaw University sociologists revealed that the proportion of Poles who subscribe to “strong” anti-Semitic views doubled in the period 1992-2002 from 8 to 16 percent. According to Professor Ireneusz Krzemiński, the rise in anti-Semitic attitudes could be attributed to the increased presence of the anti-Semitic discourse in the public sphere, not least through Radio Maryja (Krzemiński 2006). The survey has been continued in 2009 – the main results revealed the change of the trend, but only some particular aspects. Polish attitudes toward Jews and other nations has not confirmed the “traditional anti-Semitic stance”. Around 80% of interviewees did not share the opinions on so called „blond legends”. This traditionally understood anti-Semitism was non-existent in the youngest cohorts. Nevertheless, the strong level of reluctance toward Jews has been revealed in terms of “intention to rule the world”, or to “control the international financial institutions”. The possibility to neighbor on or to be ruled by person of Jewish origin has been rejected by more than 70% of the respondents. These opinions were shared by respondents of different political/ideological affiliations. These results are strengthened by the openly anti-Semitic discourse present in widely available publications and media not only from the RE spectrum.

Less striking is the data on level of racism and xenophobia. The survey results from 2008 suggest that the level of declared national xenophobia is declining. If we look at the attitude to other nations from a longer perspective we may see that positive feelings increase with regard to almost all the nations on the list. Nonetheless the latest results of CBOS revealed that Poles share negative feelings in the attitude to the following nations included in the survey: Turks, Romanians, Arabs and the Roma. Negative feelings prevail over the positive feelings more visibly in case of Romanians but it is most visible in the attitude towards Arabs and the Roma. Attitudes toward Jews according to the same survey were ambivalent – 31% of the respondents declared their positive feelings, 35% stayed neutral, negative feelings were in case of 27% and 7% could not answer this question. (CBOS 2010).

#### **4. Developing, networking, internationalizing of the Anti RE-organizations.**

The scope of the anti-right-wing movements is country-wide but not regularly distributed and active in the urban spaces (most of the NGO are located in Warsaw, eastern part of Poland – Białystok and southeast-west part Malopolska region and Silesia). Among variety of forms and projects we can distinguish:

- antifascist/antiracist groups, organizations and networks
- organizations countering intolerance and promoting the idea of multicultural society,
- general human rights organizations,
- LGBT organizations,
- feminist and women's organizations,
- crisis intervention and crime victim support organizations,
- popular alternative media (Grell et al. 2009)

On a bases of recent interviews with NGO leaders and members (Grell et.al. 2009, Kasprowicz 2010) the information delivered from the NGOs' official websites and materials the process of networking and internationalising of the anti-RE organisations is under way. International cooperation has been seen as an objective need. Some of the organizations were active within transnational networks such as UNITED and ENAR. Representatives of LGBT NGOs (the Campaign Against Homophobia) are the members of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) and International Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth and Student Organization (IGLYO). There is also some degree of cooperation in the Polish context. Joined activities take place several times a year – counter-marches organised as an alternative for neonazi or radical ones, country wide projects like MUSIC AGAINST RACISM, Kick out the Racism out of the Stadiums (Never Again Association), Law against hatred (Open Republic). None official network of the anti-right-wing organisations was identified.

**Anti-RE organizations in Poland.**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Contact details</b>
<b>(Stowarzyszenie przeciw Antysemityzmowi i Ksenofobii “Otwarta Rzeczpospolita”)</b>	www.otwarta.org Krakowskie Przedmieście 16/18 00-325 Warszawa otwarta@otwarta.org +48 22 828-11-21
<b>Never Again Association (Stowarzyszenie “Nigdy Więcej”)</b>	www.nigdywiecej.org redakcja@nigdywiecej.org (48)601360835
<b>Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (Fundacja na rzecz ochrony dziedzictwa żydowskiego w Polsce)</b>	www.fodz.pl +48 22 436 60 00 fodz@fodz.pl
<b>Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka)</b>	www.hfhrpol.waw.pl Zgoda 11 00-018 Warszawa hfhr@hfhrpol.waw.pl
<b>Association of Roma in Poland (Stowarzyszenie Romów w Polsce)</b>	www.stowarzyszenie.romowie.net biuro@stowarzyszenie.romowie.net (48)33-8426989
<b>Association for legal intervention (Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej)</b>	00-391 Warszawa Al. 3-go Maja 12 lok. 510 Telefon/faks: (+48 22) 621 51 65 interwencja@interwencjaprawna.pl
<b>Lesbian Coalition (LBT) (Porozumienie lesbijek)</b>	www.porozumienie.lesbijek.org Wrocław porozumienie_lesbijek@tlen.pl
<b>Culture for tolerance, Fund (Fundacja Kultura dla tolerancji)</b>	www.tolerancja.org.pl/
<b>Judaica Foundation - Center for Jewish Culture</b>	www.fundacjajudaica.pl ul. Meiselsa 17, 31-058 Kraków tel. +48 12 430 64 49, 430 64 52
<b>Lambda Warsaw Association (Stowarzyszenie Lambda Warszawa)</b>	www.lambdawarszawa.org warszawa@lambda.org (48)22-6285222
<b>Campaign Against Homophobia (Kampania Przeciwko Homofobii)</b>	www.kph.org.pl/ info@kampania.org.pl (48)22-4236438