

**Andrzej RYKAŁA\***

## **ETHNO-RELIGIOUS HERITAGE OF FORMER EASTERN TERRITORIES OF THE POLISH-LITHUANIAN COMMONWEALTH IN CONTEMPORARY POLAND<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** The main objective of this paper is to present the national and religious heritage of the Eastern Borderlands in contemporary Poland. The paper deals with the genesis and selected aspects of the spatial development of the ethnic and religious minorities (mainly Tartars-Muslims, Karaites and Armenians) that date back to the eastern areas of the former Republic (including the territories of Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine) but, due to the post-war border changes and migrations, formed clusters in contemporary Poland and organized various forms of group life.

**Key words:** ethno-religious heritage, ethnic minorities, religious minorities, Tartars-Muslims, Karaites, Armenians, Eastern Borderlands.

### **1. GEO-POLITICAL CONDITIONS OF THE ETHNO-CONFESSIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN POLAND AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

The Second World War (1939–1945) brought about radical spatial, ethnic and confessional transformations in Poland. They happened mainly because of the extermination of approx. 90% of the Jews living in Poland in the interwar period by the Third Reich. This national (common, both Jewish and Polish) tragedy also led to the destruction of the culture that had been created by them for nearly a thousand years, and had been unique in the history of life in the Diaspora. The Holocaust was also accompanied by migrations, massive both in scale and demographic complexity, caused by the expansive policies of Germany and the

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\*Andrzej RYKAŁA, Department of Political Geography and Regional Studies, University of Łódź, 90-142 Łódź, ul. Kopcińskiego 31, Poland, e-mail: aaronbund@gazeta.pl

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Soviet Union. According to Eberhardt's calculations (2010), these were one of the largest migrations in the history of the world and included approx. 30 million people between 1939 and 1950. The participants of the top-down movements during the final phase of the war with approval from the winning powers, i.e. United States, Great Britain and, after the war, Polish government, included certain ethnic groups, mainly Poles, Jews, Germans and Ukrainians. This selective, ethnically based migration started a process of religious transformation, as ethnicity and denomination often converged.

One factor that intensified these movements, while affecting an ethno-religious change in Poland was the relocation of political borders. The victorious powers, under the provisions of the Yalta (1943) and Potsdam (1945) agreements, drew them in an arbitrary manner, without regard for individual national oecumenes. However, they forced ethnic groups to adjust to these borders, which resulted in the aforementioned migrations.

Due to these shifts, Poland lost the eastern part of its inter-war territory. The loss of the so-called Eastern Borderlands was partially made up for by gaining some territories in the west and in the north, that belonged to Germany before that. The so-called Recovered Territories included the Western Lands consisting of the area between the Polish-German border defined after the First World War and the new border running along the Oder and Lusatian Neisse, as well as the Northern Territory encompassing the southern part of the former East Prussia. In addition, the Free City of Danzig was also included in the Polish territory. The post-war, and thus contemporary, Polish territory took the shape referring to the original territory of Poland from the 10–12th century. Thus, Poland returned to the area of Polish oecumene as defined by nature.

The ethnic composition of Poland travelled a course similar to its borders, i.e. from ethnic uniformity, through multi-ethnicity to clear quantitative dominance of one nationality (Rykała, 2009, 2011a). From a geographical point of view, there was a change in demographic trends dating back many centuries: during the past thousand years, the Polish and German populations gradually moved east to finally agree on the ethnic boundary similar to that of the early Middle Ages. As a result of shifting borders, as well as migrations largely stemming from them, almost all Germans were displaced from the territories taken by Poland (some of them evacuated even before the war ended, fearing the incoming front line), replaced mostly by Poles and representatives of other ethnic and religious groups.

## **2. EASTERN BORDERLANDS – TERRITORIES OF BELARUS, LITHUANIA, UKRAINE, POLAND**

The terms 'Belarusian lands', 'Lithuanian lands' and 'Ukrainian lands' that, apart from contemporary Poland, are an essential subject of the study, should be understood as the territories of contemporary Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine.

However, because the discussion is carried out in relation to variable spatial framework, this is not the only geographic criterion corresponding to these terms. These lands have remained for many centuries an integral part of the Polish-Lithuanian state,<sup>2</sup> and when they were excluded from Polish territory after the Second World War many religious minorities chose them as their homeland over the Soviet Union, where their 'little homelands' were now located. Therefore, calling them 'Polish lands', 'Poland', 'Polish state' or 'Polish-Lithuanian state' is also justified. In relation to the eastern areas of the Republic, these terms will be used as synonyms of 'Ukrainian lands', 'Belarusian lands', but also 'Poland' and 'Polish state'. Using the term 'Polish lands' seems appropriate, since the territory that now encompasses three contemporary political entities – Belarus, Poland and Ukraine – was, for many centuries, a uniform political unit administrated by the 1st and 2nd Republic, allowing the clusters of the religions in question to become permanent. Trying to avoid any resentment and the questioning of the existing geo-political reality, the author wishes to emphasize, that any references to the old delimitations in this regard is dictated by the geographical and historical nature of the discussion over the specificity of chosen elements of religious heritage spanning, among others, the territories of contemporary Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine (the eastern part of the old Republic), and continuing on the territory of today's Poland.

Another term to be used in relation to the area and subject of the study is 'Borderlands'. This concept conveys a very high emotional charge related to the Polish national memory, which certainly does not reflect the feelings behind the Ukrainian and other understandings of this word.<sup>3</sup>

The meaning of these Borderlands in the national consciousness is somehow expressed in Kolbuszowski's words (1995, p. 12), stating that:

The Borderlands are a one-of-a-kind equivalent of a geographical name, encompassing several regions, several lands, even several ethnic areas, considered nonetheless an area of Polish familiarity. One can say, that the Borderlands are almost a magical word for emotion, nostalgia, historiosophic reflection, thoughts about the peculiarities of the history of our country and our state, as well as our culture [...]. Because these Borderlands are at the same time the most striking reality of Polish history and its myth.

The term '(Eastern) Borderlands' has gained its contemporary meaning relatively recently – at the break of the 19th and 20th centuries. Earlier, as the axiological origins of the term shows, it meant the line laid down by the military watchtowers guarding the territory of the Republic along its south-eastern

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<sup>2</sup> Depending on the historical period synonymous with the term 'former Poland' will be the name: 'Polish-Lithuanian state', 'Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth', 'Commonwealth' and 'Republic'.

<sup>3</sup> For Ukrainians, Belarusians and Lithuanians, the term 'Eastern Borderlands', which has a geographic and historical meaning in Polish language and research tradition, has a pejorative character and is an expression of the expansionist and repossessive tendencies.

border. Both the geographic and semantic range of the term changed over time – it expanded west and north to assume a fuller spatial meaning. The modern understanding of the term ‘Eastern Borderlands’, as shown, among others, by two prominent political geographers Eberhardt (1998) and Koter (1997), refers to the collapse of the Polish state in the 18th century, including the eastern territories of the Republic lost to Russia. This peculiar ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity, as well as its variability in national, religious and linguistic borders gave this area this intangible mythical value, apart from its ‘clearest reality’ (not only for Polish history) (Rykała, 2009).

### **3. THE ORIGIN AND SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIONS OCCURRING IN THE EASTERN BORDERLANDS**

One of the religions (denominations) shaping the cultural face of the Eastern Borderlands of the former Republic is Eastern Orthodox Christianity, whose individuality was sanctioned by the so called Eastern Schism (1054), i.e. the ultimate rift between the eastern and western Christianity, preceded by growing dogmatic divergence.

An attempt to define the origin of the Orthodox faith in Poland is not free of controversies. It should be mentioned that this origin, as well as the beginning of Christianization of Polish territories, is equated by some researchers with the contacts between the Slavic population living in the area with the Byzantine culture, which gained a more organized form in the 9th century (before the Great Schism), when Greek apostles Cyril and Methodius started their missionary activities. These activities, carried out in such countries as Moravia, which included parts of today’s Poland (Lesser Poland, Silesia), are considered a proof that the territories of contemporary Polish state were thus introduced into the Eastern version of Christian culture.

Given the fact that the territory of Poland forming in the 10th century was included, by way of the christening of its ruler (Mieszko I) in the western cultural circle, defined as the dominance of western Christianity, while the Methodian Christianity was clearly regressing, the largest influence of Byzantine Christianity on Poland came from Christianized Ruthenia which was, over time, partially included in the expanding Polish state.

Important influence on the growth of Orthodox Christianity in the eastern part of Polish territory was exerted by the neighbouring Kiev country or, more generally, Ruthenian lands, i.e. the territory (apart from such lands as Crimea and Bulgarian country) included in the Christianization mission of Cyril and Methodius and constituting its permanent heritage, parts of which were later annexed to Poland as part of the territorial expansion.

Byzantine-Ruthenian Orthodox tradition was present in the Polish state from the beginning of the 11th century (the reign of Boleslaw the Brave), when, as is widely acknowledged, the Methodian faith survived, mostly in the southern part of the country, in a relic form (Mironowicz, 2001, 2003, 2005). The origin of the Orthodox faith in the mentioned tradition in Poland is expressed in two dimensions: family and institutional, which includes, among others, marriages between the representatives of two Christian denominations (i.e. Latin, mostly among the dukes of the Piast dynasty and Orthodox among Ruthenian duchesses), and spatial, including the territories inhabited by the faithful of this tradition, later annexed by Poland as a result of its territorial expansion (Rykała, 2009, 2011a).

Even though they did not result in clear spatial consequences, the marriage ties and family alliances of Polish and Ruthenian courts surely reinforced the position of Orthodox Christianity, making it a significant element of the tradition of the emerging state. The introduction of the Eastern Christian tradition into the sphere of organization of the Polish state, dominated by Latin culture, is primarily the result of its territorial development. The Eastern Rite entered the spatial dimension with the annexation of the Czerwien Towns, as well as the southern part of Podlasie, probably in the 70s of the 10th century, surely after 1018, as the latest archaeological studies show. These lands on the Polish-Ruthenian border were part of that heritage of Eastern Rite, whose formation was heavily influenced by the fact that they remained under the political rule of Ruthenia from the first half of the 10th century till the 14th century (excluding the aforementioned periods of Polish rule). The permanent settlement of the Orthodox Church in the Polish state happened in the 14th century as a result of Poland's acquisition of a substantial part of the westernmost Russian principality, i.e. Galicia-Volhynia Principality, which was one of the districts of the former Kievan Rus. The Orthodox Church owed this position to the organizational structures formed during the almost two centuries of existence of the aforementioned political organism. By moving the political borders in the 14th century in relation to the borders of Polish national oecumene, whose cohesion formed in early Piast dynasty, the Polish state lost, in addition to its national uniformity (by annexing the territories inhabited mostly by Ruthenians, the ancestors of today's Ukrainians and Belarusians), also its religious uniformity (figure 1).

The situation of the Orthodox Church in Polish territory was also influenced by the personal union of Krewo, concluded in 1385 between Poland and Lithuania – two countries that had expanded the territory of the Orthodox Galicia-Volhynia Rus. It should be noted that Eastern Christianity in the Grand Duchy, introduced through the inclusion of other western Ruthenian principalities, played a significant culture-forming role at the time. In addition to joining both countries under one ruler, the aforementioned United Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania also brought about the Latin Christianization of Lithuania. Catholicism became the favoured religion in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, who was developing quite dynamically

its organizational structure, while the Orthodox religion was merely tolerated. These changes resulted in the decreased progress of the Orthodox Church in demographic, cultural, political and spatial terms.

The Orthodox Church influenced the religiosity and, in some sense, also the morality of other Christian inhabitants of the Republic. This effect was particularly pronounced, as shown, among others, by Różycka-Bryzek (1994), in the development of the monastic movement, the cult of icons, as well as church construction with Byzantine elements, which permeated the Latin Christian traditions of Polish territories.

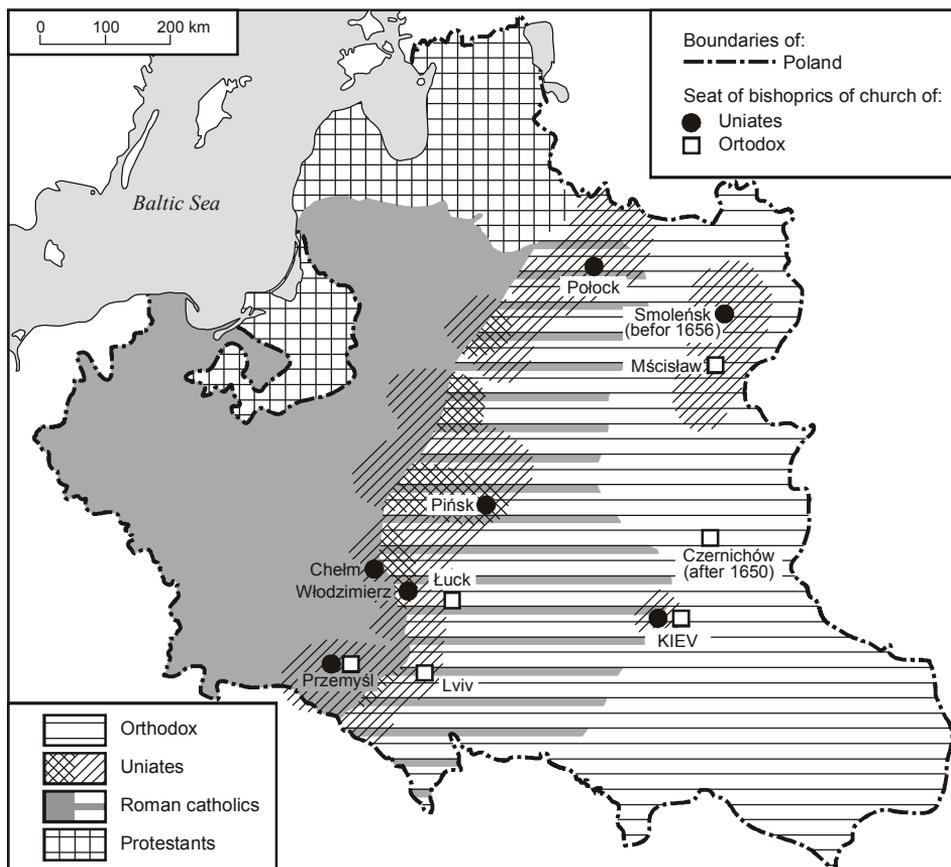


Fig. 1. The seats of bishoprics of Orthodox and Uniate Churches and the approximate areas of concentration of the followers of major Christian denominations (mid-17th century)

Source: own elaboration

Significantly more negative consequences for the Orthodox Church in the Republic, as compared to the Union of Krewo, were brought about by the church union of 1596 between some Orthodox bishops of the Polish-Lithuanian

Commonwealth and the Catholic Church. As a result of this union, the Uniate Church was formed. The union – which came mostly from the need to counter the influence of the newly created Patriarchate of Moscow on the Orthodox bishops in Poland, as well as to remain independent of Russia, which was trying to conquer the Polish-Lithuanian territory – instituted the primacy of the Pope in cases of church jurisdiction over some Orthodox clergy and believers in the Commonwealth. In addition to the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church, the Uniates also recognized its dogma, while retaining their own liturgy in the Church Slavonic language, the hierarchy, the Julian calendar, marriages and church polity, as well as considerable independence of the administration.

As a result of most superiors and believers of the dioceses within the Crown joining the union, the southern and eastern regions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania remained the largest concentration of Orthodox Christians until the end of the First Republic.

Even though the legal status of the Orthodox believers improved, Catholicism remained the official religion, with dissent (conversion) punishable as a criminal offence, until the end of the First Republic. The state policy towards the Orthodox Church was clearly reflected in demographic and territorial aspects of its operations. The Orthodox Church did not stop being discriminated until the partitions, when the territories of its influence were taken over by the Tsarist Russia. Incorporated into the Russian Orthodox Church, it began to recover, which was expressed primarily in the growth of the number of believers and the territorial ‘expansion’ of the Orthodox Church in the former Republic. This was, however, happening at the cost of disbanding (by including it in the Orthodox Church) of the Uniate Church, as well as the loss of local traditions and rites. However, the Uniates kept their separate structures – now as the Greek Orthodox Church – under the Austrian rule.

One can say that the origin and territorial development of the Orthodox Church and the Uniate Church in Poland were significantly influenced by the geographical and political conditions, mainly the changes in political rule. The reactivation of the Uniate (Greek Catholic) Church on Polish soil was helped by Poland regaining independence. The territorial extent of the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches in the Second Republic roughly reflected the administrative ranges of the partitioners.

Started with the expansion of Casimir the Great to Principality of Galicia-Volhynia and Podolia, the territorial expansion of Poland to the east included, as was already mentioned, a fragment of the neighbouring ethnic oecumene with clearly Orthodox religious nature. But the divergence between the political borders and the boundaries of Polish national oecumene has led to the inclusion of territories not only inhabited by the Orthodox believers, but also by other religious and ethnic groups, in the structures of Polish state. These terrains, apart from native population, included enclaves inhabited by newcomers such as Armenians, Karaites and a relic group of Tartars, faithful to their own religious traditions (not Islam), mostly integrated into the Ruthenian surrounding by converting to Christianity (Orthodox).

More Armenians, Karaites and Tartar settlers professing Islam joined the ethno-religious structure of Poland when the Union of Krowo was concluded.

The first Muslims, coming to Polish lands as early as in the 13th century mainly as merchants, travellers and conquerors fighting in the Mongolian armies, did not form a permanent enclave. The direct origin of the Muslim population in Poland, in its widest meaning of the later Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, comes from Tartars, who came from the Mongolian population assimilated with Turkish Kipchaks. The Tartars arriving in the 14th century in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were mostly refugees from the Golden Horde and the prisoners captured there. Their arrival marked the beginning of permanent development of Tartar and Muslim colonisation of the Polish-Lithuanian lands, which also included the territory of today's Ukraine.



Fig. 2. Larger Tartar, Karait and Armenian clusters (14th–18th centuries)

Source: own elaboration

The Tartars were given land from the Lithuanian dukes, along with mandatory military service in separate dynastic-tribal companies. The arrangement of the oldest Tartar settlement indicates that they were initially largely military, strategic

and defensive, in nature. Tartar villages were located mostly near the capitals and around fortified castles, such as Vilnius, Grodno, Trakai, Kaunas and Punie, where they were supposed to perform the function of military watchtowers (Borawski, Dubinski, 1996). In addition to these centres, they were also embedded in border areas to protect them. Grand Duke Witold turned the Tartar settlements into a defensive belt against the Order of the Teutonic Knights and the Livonian Brothers of the Sword. One has to remember, that Tartar emigrants were allowed to also settle down outside of the borderlands, i.e. not only in proper Lithuania, but also, though less frequently, in Polesie, Left-bank Ukraine and Volhynia. In Ukraine, Volhynia and Lesser Poland – in the regions under Polish Crown's rule, many Tartar prisoners were also settled up until the mid-17th century (figure 2).

Since the mid-16th century, when there were approx. 7 thousand Tartars, they were not settling in such large numbers. At the end of the 18th century, there approx. 13 thousand of them (taking into account only the Tartars owning land with families). The decreasing number of emigrants gradually weakened the social and cultural ties of Polish Tartars with their territory of origin, which also had an impact on the disappearance of many elements showing the identity of this group (language, customs) (Rykała, 2005, 2007).

The arrival of the first groups of Tartars, who professed Islam, also marks the beginning of permanent Karaite settlements in the area in question. This coincidence is not accidental, but a consequence of the development, including territorial development, of their religion – Karaism.<sup>4</sup> As a result of the missionary activity of the spiritual leaders, between the 8th and 10th century, Karaism reached the multi-ethnic Khazar Country, which had existed since the 7th century and ultimately fell in the 13th century under the pressure of Genghis Khan's conquest. The followers of Karaism, originating from the Khazar population assimilated with other Turkish-speaking native tribes, started the history of this faith in Polish-Lithuanian territory. Given the fact that the lands included in the Khazar Khaganate were later included in the Mongol-Tatar state, called the Golden Horde (13th to 15th century), which was the birthplace, among others, of Tartars settled in Poland, it must be concluded that the genesis of the Karaite settlement in Polish territory is related to the Tartar Muslim who came to the land (Rykała, 2008a, 2011b).

The first Karaim settlements in Poland formed as a 'splinter' of the 12th-century migration of Central-Asian and Eastern-European peoples to Central Europe (to the Hungarian Lowlands), whose main stream did not cross the contemporary and

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<sup>4</sup> Karaite Judaism (Hebrew *qara* – to read, to recite), also called Karaism, is a monotheistic religion that originated in the 8th century in Mesopotamia, then belonging to the Caliphate of Baghdad. It emerged from Judaism as a movement of opposition against the recognition of the Talmud as the true source of faith. The main core was formed by the followers of Mosaism inhabiting this territory since the Babylonian captivity (i.e. since mid-6th century BC). Karaites are, above all, loyal to the authority of the Hebrew Bible, combined with the principle of individualistic interpretation independent of any authority, the assumption of the canonic exclusivity of the Torah and the recognition of the Decalogue as a foundation of the religious doctrine and the basic moral code.

modern borders of Poland. This relatively small group of Karaites settled in the lands of the then Galicia-Volhynia Principality (including Halych, Lviv, Lutsk).

Apart from the territory of the Ruthenian oecumene (today a part of Ukraine), the Karaims also came to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at the end of the 14th century. They (several hundreds of families) were brought from Crimea by the then ruler, Duke Witold, during his war expedition against the Golden Horde. These families were settled in Trakai – a town then serving as the capital of the Duchy and, some time later, in neighbouring settlements. The decision to choose these sites (as well as the decision to bring Karaites in) was not accidental, but resulted from a political tactic aimed at defending the territory of the Lithuanian state, especially its borderland. Grand Duke Witold turned the Karaite settlements into a belt to defend against the Livonian Brothers of the Sword. They were also located near capital cities and around fortified castles, such as the aforementioned Trakai, as well as Vilnius and others, where they served as military watchtowers (Rykała, 2008a, 2011b).

After the collapse of the Polish state, the social situation of the Karaites, as well as the territorial parameters of the partitioners towards this religious group changed. As a result of the partitions, Tsarist Russia included the Karaites from the former Polish-Lithuanian state, as well as from the former Crimean Khanate, which was annexed by Russia in 1783. Inhabiting the same country helped Karaites coming from different clusters keep in contact. On the one hand, it postponed the process of assimilation with the culturally foreign surrounding, yet on the other, it was disadvantageous to the Karaite clusters in the Polish-Lithuanian territory, whose size was decreasing due to Karaites emigrating to the central and southern (Crimea) parts of the Empire, that offered better conditions for their economic development.

During the partitions, a small group of Karaites also came to Warsaw from Crimea, mainly for commercial purposes (including tobacco trade).

Karaites in the Polish-Lithuanian lands were initially a small religious and ethnic group, one of the smallest ones, even though more than 30, maybe even 50 Karaite communities are thought to have existed in the 17th century. At the end of the 17th century, some 4 to 7 thousand Karaites lived in Poland, the number did not exceed 2 thousand in early 19th century, only to drop to approx. 1 thousand in the inter-war period (1931) (Rykała, 2008a, 2011b).

A similar model of some convergence between religion and nationality was presented by the Armenians, members of the Armenian Church.<sup>5</sup> Armenian colonization in the area, with its different phases and directions, was caused by

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<sup>5</sup> Opting for Monophysitism (the existence of one divine-human nature in Jesus Christ) contrary to the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon (451), Armenian Church became a national Church fully independent of the Universal Church (breaking the dependence on Constantinople). The differences in interpretation of the formula of the Trinity were not the only, or even the most important, axis of division leading to the formation of the Armenian Church. The forming of different theological reflection and separate structures of the Church was influenced by the geographical aspect of this development, involving diverse historical, cultural and social determinants.

two basic needs – economic and political. The two remained in close relationship with the geopolitical situation of the Armenian state. Its independence fostered emigration of Armenian merchants and craftsmen, while periods of political subordination intensified a wave of war (political) refugees.

In the 13th, and certainly in the 14th century, the lands within the Ruthenian oecumene (Principality of Galicia-Volhynia), but beyond the limits of Poland, included Armenian communities in such places as Kamianets-Podilskyi, Lviv, Lutsk, Volodymyr-Volynskyi. Serving a role of important commercial centres between the East and the West, these towns became the initial seats of major Armenian clusters. The biggest of them were Kamianets and Lviv that, after the Turks conquered Kaffa (the centre of Armenian settlement in Crimea) in 1475, as well as parts of Asia Minor and the Balkan Peninsula, saw, along with other centres, an influx of larger groups of Armenians from those regions. These clusters were incorporated into the Polish state in the 14th century, when Casimir the Great annexed the Principality of Halych with Lviv.

Between the 15th and 18th century, the Armenian colonization, which was in some part a result of internal migration of settlers within the Republic, included more centres, such as Yazloverts, Bar, Pidhaitsi, Tyśmienica, Zamość, Kutu, Rashkiv, Mohyliv-Podilskyi, as well as Jarosław, Kazimierz on the Vistula River, Lublin, and Warsaw.

Thus, Armenians formed their centres mainly in towns in the south-eastern parts of the former republic, close to its borders. In this case, however, the peripheral location proved to be beneficial for Armenian settlements, as it served as a trade route between Eastern and Western European commercial centres. The thickening of Armenian settlements, especially in Podolia, where most of them were located, was also impacted by the Union of Lublin in 1569. Owing to the Union, Polish magnates gained better conditions for the economic development of their estates, mainly cities, in the Podolia, which was annexed by the Republic (Polish Crown). In order to increase their participation in international trade, the owners attracted Armenians, who specialized in trade and craft, to their centres.

In the second half of the 17th century, approx. 3 thousand Armenians lived in all Armenian communities in Poland (Zakrzewska-Dubasowa, 1981). Armenians, as well as representatives of other religious minorities, were subjected to gradual Polonisation. The ethnic specificity of the territories where most of these centres were created also influenced the process of Ruthenisation. These processes inevitably lead to a reduction in the number of people identifying with an ethnically distinct group of Armenians. However, they did not result in a quantitatively significant exodus of believers from their religion, which remained in union with the Roman Catholic Church in Poland since mid-17th century, which allowed many followers of the Armenian Catholic Church to retain their Armenian identity. The vast majority of Armenian clusters mentioned here survived until the demise of the Second Republic (Rykała, 2009).

#### 4. IN CONTEMPORARY POLAND – RELIGIOUS HERITAGE AS A LEGACY OF THE BORDERLAND OF OECUMENES AND *IN CRUDA RADICE* ACTIVITIES

##### 4.1. Immigration, Location, Ownership and Organizational Activities

As a result of territorial changes, the westernmost part of the borderland of Polish and Ruthenian (Belarusian and Ukrainian) oecumenes, along with their Orthodox and Greek Catholic religious legacy, remained within Polish borders.<sup>6</sup> The clear ethnic and religious distinction of the Polish-German border (apart from the strong atheistic indoctrination of the German Democratic Republic government which, over half a century, led to the creation of the most religiously indifferent group of citizens of that country), was not reflected in eastern Poland. However, this central-eastern and south-eastern part of the country, densely populated with Orthodox Christians and Greek Catholics, lost its religious uniqueness over the next few years. This happened as a result of the resettlement of the population living there: externally, to the Soviet Union (1944–1946) and internally, as part of Operation ‘Vistula’ (1947), to the so called Recovered Territories. The Operation was performed in 1947 using religious criteria (membership in the Greek Catholic or Orthodox Church) and involved the elimination of concentrated settlements of Ruthenians (including Ukrainians, Lemkos, Boykos) in south-eastern Poland, which was aimed at preventing further activity of the underground Ukrainian movement in favour of including these territories in Ukraine (Rykała, 2011a). As a result of internal and external resettlement, the territories in central-eastern and south-eastern Poland densely populated by Orthodox Christians and Greek Catholics lost their religious uniqueness over the next few years. Apart from the loss of belongings and property, the worsening of living conditions and the disintegration of family life of the refugees and the destruction of their cultural heritage, operation ‘Vistula’ also brought significant transformations in the territorial aspect of the Orthodox Church and, especially, the Greek Catholic Church. Since then, other areas, mostly in the north and west of the country, became important for both Churches, in addition to the eastern and south-eastern Poland (figure 3).

The newly formed Poland included only a few clusters of others, “borderland” ethno-religious minorities: Muslims of Tartar origin (including Bohoniki, Kruszyniany, Białystok, Krynki, Sokółka and Suchowola), Karaites (in such places as Warsaw and Podkowa Leśna) and Armenians (Cracow). The largest of these clusters were outside of Poland. The establishment of the new eastern

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<sup>6</sup> As a result of the Second World War and the changes in borders caused by it, the Orthodox Church in Poland lost over 90% of their belongings. In 2002, the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church had 509,700 followers, and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church – about 82 thousand (*Wyznania religijne*, 2003; Rykała, 2009).

border required solving the problem of the citizens of pre-war Republic that found themselves in the area annexed by the Soviet Union. Based on the agreements between the representatives of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PCNL) and the governments of the Soviet republics of Belarus and Ukraine (9th September 1944), as well as Lithuania (22th September 1944), and the consecutive agreement between the Polish and Soviet governments (6th July 1945), it was established that any persons of Polish and Jewish descent who lived permanently on the land given to the Soviet Union, and had Polish citizenship until 17th September 1939, have the right to choose the nationality and place of residence in one of these two countries.

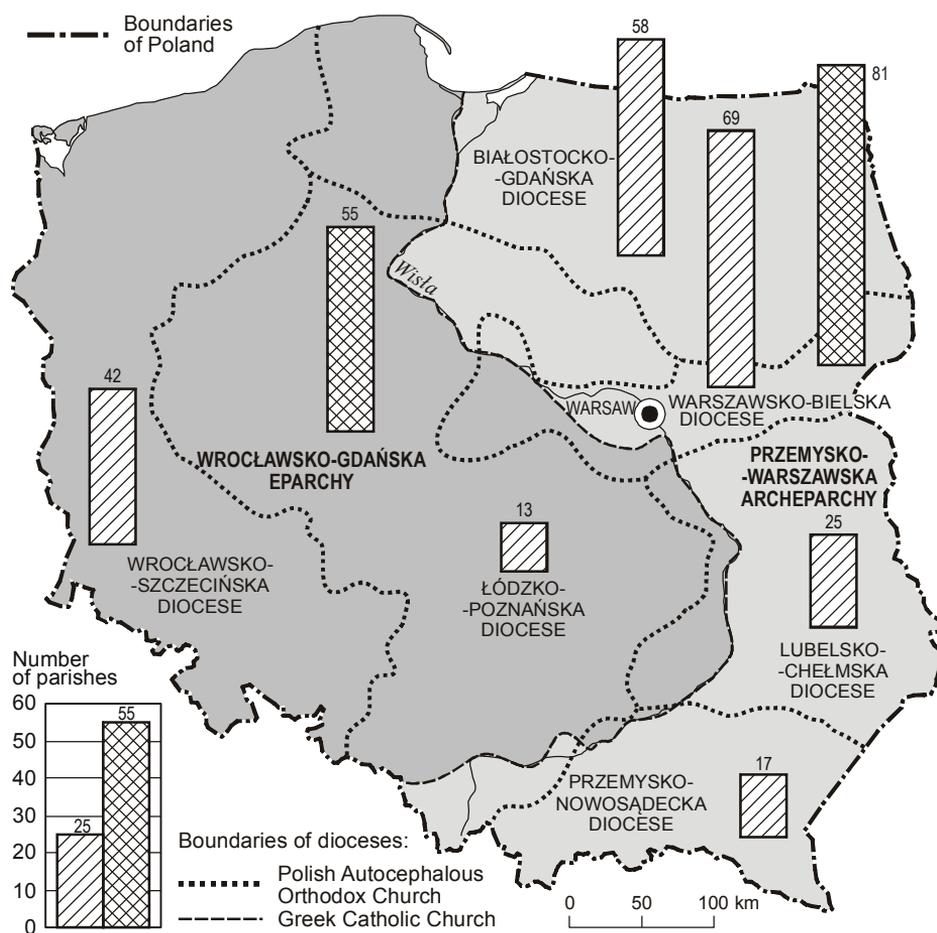


Fig. 3. Territorial-administrative structure of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Poland

Source: own elaboration

Any persons of Tartar, Karaite and Armenian descent interested in repatriation found it hard, or even impossible to leave because of the lack of criteria concerning nationality which, unlike citizenship, is the actual, not legal status, and is thus determined by non-ethnic factors. The Soviet authorities were interested in ridding the former borderlands of any people with strong Polish identity, coming from intelligentsia and urban communities. The attitude towards ethnic minorities was different than towards the groups of Poles mentioned above, who were often hostile towards the Soviet system. They were treated as workforce needed by the economy, assuming they would be loyal citizens of their new country (Rykała, 2011a).

Many members of these communities who, to a large extent, assimilated Polish culture, decided to abandon their 'small homelands' and settle in Poland. The decision to leave the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR), and the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR), where most of these clusters were located, was extremely difficult for several reasons. Firstly, there were cultural and emotional reasons, as leaving for Poland meant, to some extent, abandoning many centuries of heritage, which was so closely related to the so called Borderlands. Secondly, there were political reasons that we have already mentioned since, as Soviet citizens (since 1939), they were not officially included in the repatriation efforts.

In addition, the authorities in each of the three Soviet republics neighbouring with Poland had different reactions to repatriation attempts of the representatives of these minorities. The Ukrainian authorities were more interested in full de-Polonization of the part of the pre-war Republic under their rule (this was largely influenced by the Polish-Ukrainian conflict in Volhynia and the so-called Eastern Galicia, started with the extermination of Polish population by Ukrainian nationalists). They were also waiting for the arrival of Ukrainians resettled from Poland, who needed places to live. Therefore, they did not hinder 'their' Tartars' and Karaites' efforts to move to Poland. On the other hand, the authorities of LSSR, who saw themselves as the successors of the Grand Duke Witold of Lithuania, the initiator of Tartar and Karaite settlement in their area, were strongly opposing the repatriation of their population. As Eberhardt (2010) points out, this approach to leaving was also caused by the Lithuanian fears of depopulation of the eastern and southern parts of the country. In spite of all the dilemmas and difficulties, many Tartar, Karaite and Armenian families managed to escape to Poland.<sup>7</sup> Due to the fact that the young people brought up in the independent state showed the strongest affinity with Polish culture, they dominated the emigrants (especially among the Karaites). Most Tatars and Karaites, especially the elderly, who felt more attached to their native traditions in the place owned by them for generations, not to the nation, chose to stay in the USSR.

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<sup>7</sup> Large opportunities for Tartars and Karaites to reach Poland from, among others, Volhynia and Eastern Lesser Poland, were provided by joining the Polish Army. Many of them, as demobilised soldiers, later brought their relatives (including people taken away to Germany for forced labour) as part of a family-joining operation.

The first wave of repatriations in 1946 involved several thousand people from these minorities, including many Armenians and approx. 150 Karaites, while the second wave, which began in 1956 and lasted until the next year, involved a few hundred of them. The people coming to Poland in the second half of the 1950s also included some who used the loosening of the political system brought about by the so called Thaw. This short-lived breath of strictly controlled freedom allowed, among others, an increase in contacts between the citizens of neighbouring countries. The acquaintances and friendships started at that time between the representatives of these minorities from Poland and the USSR sometimes became marriages. Such couples were usually not barred from settling in Poland.

Most immigrants settled in the so-called Recovered Territories. Huge damage to the rest of the country, coupled with the implementation of the settlement and development programme in the newly acquired area have left the immigrant scarce choice of places to live. Due to the higher standard of building, richer infrastructure, potential jobs, as well as preserved religious buildings, these lands were an attractive place to settle. Larger Tartar clusters formed in such places as: Jelenia Góra, Wrocław, Legnica, Oleśnica, Krosno Odrzańskie, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Trzcianka Lubuska, Stargard Szczeciński, Szczecin, Wałcz, Szczecinek, Gdańsk, Olsztyn, Elbląg; Karaite settlements: in Ełk, Gdańsk, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Olsztyn, Opole, Słupsk, Szczecin, Wrocław; Armenian: Wrocław, Gdańsk, Gliwice and Opole. The settlement of immigrants was accompanied by a 'latitudinal' rule – people from the Ukrainian SSR were usually directed to Silesia, while the immigrants from the Lithuanian SSR went to the northern part of the Recovered Territories. Less concentrated and significantly less populous settlements of Tartars, Karaites and Armenians in the Western and Northern Territories than in the Borderlands was one of the reasons for the systematic assimilation of these groups.<sup>8</sup>

The delineation of the new eastern border also caused a radical change in the wealth of these parts of the ethnic minorities that chose to stay in Poland. This situation obviously made it hard to keep the traditions and customs of their own group, as well as to care for its culture, inevitably leading to the loss of religious and ethnic uniqueness. All places of worship and property owned by Karaites and Armenians remained in the USSR. Thus, the religious life in a new place of settlement had to be organized almost from scratch. Due to their insignificant population, as compared to the inter-war period, the community of Polish Karaites did not have opportunities, nor the need to build their characteristic places of worship. After the war, there was only one Kenesa (Karaite temple) operating institutionally, located in Wrocław. In reality, it was an apartment converted into a Kenesa. Karaites had only one cemetery in Warsaw, founded in 1890, which was

<sup>8</sup> As a result of the immigrants' difficulties in adapting to an ethnically, culturally and religiously foreign surrounding, some Tartar immigrants participated in re-emigration, moving to Podlasie, which had a tradition of settlements of this population.

and still remains far more important than just a burial ground for them.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the Armenian liturgies started in Roman Catholic churches: in Cracow – the church of the Divine Mercy, Gliwice – in the church of the Holy Trinity and Gdańsk – the church of St. Peter and Paul, as well as in the Res Sacra Miser chapel at Krakowskie Przedmieście in Warsaw.<sup>10</sup>

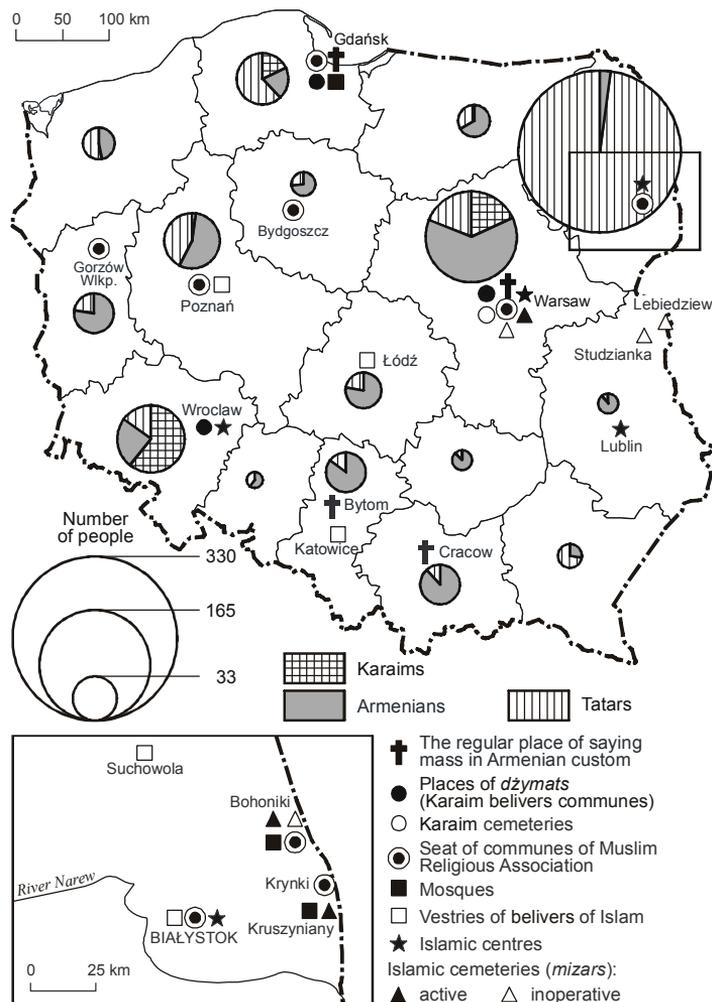


Fig. 4. Distribution, institutional operations and cultural heritage of Muslim Tartars, Karaites and Armenians in Poland at the beginning of the 21st century  
Source: own elaboration

<sup>9</sup> A Karaitic necropolis was also a place of assembly, where the Karaites met not only to perform the rites dictated by their faith and religious tradition (assemblies were mainly held to celebrate Lent and to say prayers for the victims of the plague of 1701), but also to maintain the group bonds of their community.

<sup>10</sup> Armenian-Catholic parishes of Holy Trinity in Gliwice and of St. Peter and Paul in Gdańsk are personal parishes.

Apart from these cities, Armenian masses were also occasionally celebrated in other bigger Armenian settlements (such as Wrocław, Opole, Oława). From among the discussed minorities, by far the best situation was enjoyed by the Muslims of Tartar descent in post-war Poland, who had two temples in Podlasie (in Bohoniki and Kruszyniany) and several operating cemeteries (figure 4).

Going beyond the 'religious sphere', we should mention some effects of their contemporary activity that are also important for maintaining their group's uniqueness. Owing to the efforts of many Karaites, their publishing operations are thriving. Apart from all the periodicals published by this community in post-war Poland, which were a continuation of titles from the inter-war period, one notable periodical being published today is the social, historical and cultural magazine *Awazymyz (Our Voice)*. Some self-sufficiency in this regard is provided by their own publishing house, 'Bitik', which releases books and brochures concerning Karaite issues. The other two minorities also publish their own social, cultural and scientific magazines: Armenians – *The Bulletin of the Armenian Cultural Association*, Tartars – *The Yearbook of Polish Tartars* (Rykała, 2009).

Maintaining the identity of the group is also promoted by: in the case of Polish Armenians – two Saturday schools for Armenian children (in Warsaw and Cracow), in the case of the Karaites – the Karaite Folk Band 'Dostlar' for children and youth (in Warsaw).

The most widespread forms of maintaining their religious and ethnic identity among the analysed minority groups, also aimed at protecting their cultural heritage, are the organizations and foundations representing them. The Muslim of Tartar descent are associated in the Muslim Religious Union (Muzułmański Związek Religijny, or MZR, headquartered in Białystok with communities in Białystok, Bohoniki, Kruszyniany, Gdańsk, Gorzów, Warsaw, Poznań and Bydgoszcz) and the Association of Polish Tartars (Związek Tatarów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) in Bohoniki. In the case of the Armenian minority, such functions are provided by: the Armenian Cultural Association (Ormiańskie Towarzystwo Kulturalne) in Cracow, Armenian Cultural Society, part of the Polish Folk Association (Koło Zainteresowań Kulturą Ormian przy Polskim Towarzystwie Ludoznawczym) in Cracow and Warsaw, the Association of Armenians in Poland (Związek Ormian w Polsce) in Gliwice, the Armenian Foundation of the Armenian Cultural Society (Fundacja Ormiańska Koła Zainteresowań Kulturą Ormian) in Warsaw and the Foundation for Culture and Heritage of Polish Armenians (Fundacja Kultury i Dziedzictwa Ormian Polskich) in Warsaw. The tradition of representing the Karaite community is continued by organizations dating back, just like MZR, to the pre-war period: the Karaite Religious Association (Karaimski Związek Religijny, KZR) with religious communities in Warsaw, Gdańsk and Wrocław, and the Association of Polish Karaites (Związek Karaimów Polskich) in Wrocław.

#### 4.2. Religion and Nationality – the Issues of Population and Identity

The distance between the political borders and the borders of Polish oecumene that has been growing for centuries had led to the situation, where the structures of the Polish state include territories not only inhabited by Ruthenian Orthodox Christians, but also by other ethnic and religious groups. Ukrainian territories under Orthodox influence, but also Lithuanian lands, where religion initially played a significant culture-forming role were included in Tartar, Karait and Armenian colonization. This was desirable for political, military (Tartars, Karaites) and economic (Armenians) reasons. Polish culture had a huge ideological and material impact on the area of this settlement, which remained uniform politically under the administration of the First and, to a large extent, also the Second Republic. The ties to Polish culture in various dimensions were so strong for many Tartars, Karaites and Armenians that, when they found themselves outside the Polish state after 1945, they migrated back to its territory.

In post-war Poland, the majority of settlements related to migration were created *in cruda radice*, while the communities of the minorities in question became clearly diasporic. The process of loss of some unique features of Tartars, Karaites and Armenians (especially their languages) that started when they lived in the Borderlands, became even deeper in the new conditions. Separated from its traditional cultural background, it inevitably led to a decrease in the number of people identifying themselves with this ethnically unique group and the loss of some elements responsible for their religious activity.

When discussing the population of minority groups in contemporary Poland, one has to refer to the aforementioned issue of their perception, or the perception of at least parts of them, both in ethnic and cultural terms. According to Polish law, the Armenians are recognized as one of the nine national minorities in the country, while the Tartars and Karaites are two of the four ethnic minorities. The model of convergence between faith and nationality in some parts of these communities is a unique situation when compared to other minorities in Poland, with a probable exception of some Jews, whose national identity is marked by their faithfulness to their Judaic tradition. But treating the whole minorities as religious and national groups at the same time is unjustified.

When estimating the size of these minorities, taking into account the ethnic category, one can use the data from the national census statistics from 2002. With all its imperfections, the results obtained in this way showed that at the beginning of the 21st century, there were 495 people declaring Tartar nationality (including 447 with Polish citizenship), 45 Karaites (43) and 1082 Armenians (262) in Poland. It should, however, be noted that, due to their strong bonds with Poland, exemplified in the clearest way by the post-war emigration, the ethnic identity of many representatives of these minorities is expressed by their affiliation with their

Tartar, Karaite or Armenian nationality, as well as the Polish one. Thus for many people of Tartar, Karaite and Armenian descent, religion remains a significant element of identification with the communities discussed here. Therefore, it is their denomination, not their nationality that serves as the basic criterion of group identity. Those defining their sense of individuality in religious terms were mainly associated in organizations focused on maintaining the religious activities of their members: MZR, with 5 thousand members in 2002, and KZR, with 150 members in the same year. The number of people participating in the Armenian rites at that time was estimated at about 8 thousand. We should assume that not all members of these organizations were inclined to define their uniqueness in national terms, which surely influenced the census number of people with fully-formed Tartar, Karaite and Armenian national identity.

In contemporary Poland, the religious minorities in question, especially the Muslim and Armenian ones, are not just simple continuations of the communities dating back to the Borderlands. The role played by the Tartars in the development of clusters of Muslims in Poland should not be underestimated. For centuries, they were the dominating, or even the only, followers of Islam in Poland. But with the advent of colonisation, Poland saw an influx (mostly during the partition of some parts of Poland by the Russian Empire) of Muslims of different ethnic descents, such as Azeris, Bashkirs, Uzbeks, Circassians), though the influx was not as massive and mostly sporadic. The intensification of international relations in the 20th century fostered the inflow of immigrants from other Muslim countries to independent Poland. They were mostly diplomats, students and scientists (since the 1960s and, on a larger scale, since the 1970s) and entrepreneurs (since the beginning of political transformations in the 1990s). The Muslim immigrant community has also seen an inflow of refugees in the recent years. These are people who come to Poland due to a justified fear of persecution in their homeland for religious, ethnic or political reasons. Apart from the groups mentioned above, the Muslim minority also includes Poles who converted to Islam due to some kind of contact (family, cultural, tourist) with the Islamic tradition (both in Poland and abroad), but also due to the need to present certain social stance (the need to challenge the existing social order).<sup>11</sup> Especially in the past twenty years, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of Muslims in Poland. At the beginning of the 1990s there were approx. 5 thousand of them, mostly of Tartar descent. It should therefore be assumed that the dynamically growing number of Muslims in Poland in recent years, its social and ethnic structure and, more generally, its face, is not determined by the Polish Tartars that persist in their faith but, to a large extent, Muslim immigrants and Polish converts.

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<sup>11</sup> According to various estimates, there are from 20 to 30 thousand Muslims living in Poland now. Among them, there are 2 to 5 thousand Tartars and people of Tartar descent, approx. 16–20 thousand foreigners (including 7 thousand with permanent stay card) and approx. 2 thousand Polish converts to Islam (Rykała, 2007).

Denomination also remains a significant element of cultural identity for Polish Armenians, even though the union with the Roman Catholic Church has led to gradual assimilation with their Polish surrounding. One can say that people who declared Armenian nationality also largely accept the religious heritage of Polish Armenians. In the absence of accurate data concerning the number of followers of the Armenian Church in Poland, it can be concluded that the vast majority of people identifying themselves as Armenians are members of the Armenian Catholic Church.<sup>12</sup> However, it is possible that some people identifying themselves as Armenians in the census due to their strong historical and cultural, as well as religious (through the doctrinal agreement between the Armenian and Roman Catholic Churches) bond with Poland, are nonetheless members of the Roman Catholic Church. It is also influenced by vast territorial distribution of the representatives of this community, which makes it impossible to practice the Armenian faith where they live.

The Armenian Catholic services are attended by the members of the so-called new immigration, without Polish citizenship and belonging to the Armenian Apostolic Church. The number of such people is estimated at 40–60 thousand. Thus, some sources estimate the number of the followers of this Church at 8 thousand, which seems to be a grossly inflated value and matches the estimated number of Armenians, repeated until recently, and not the real number of followers of the Armenian Church in Poland (Rykała, 2009).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it must be said that the religious heritage of the Eastern Borderlands of the Republic in contemporary Poland, limited in this geographical and historical study to the communities stemming from Orthodox Christianity, as well as the Muslim minority of Tartar descent, Karaites and Armenians, is an unquestionable historical, cultural and, to some extent, political value. It is a testament of the singular multiculturalism of the former state, possible due to its relative tolerance for other nations and denominations, which can serve to reinforce the feeling of patriotism among Poles and other descendants of the former Republic. It is, however, far from the patriotism that is limited to respect and love for the homeland stemming from the social and emotional bond with

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<sup>12</sup> This thesis is largely confirmed by the studies on a representative group of people of Armenian descent in Poland performed by Kozłowski (2002), who claims that 52% of people of Armenian descent are members of the Armenian-Catholic Church, while the remaining part identify themselves as Roman Catholics. According to him, respondents of Armenian descent who were members of the Armenian Church identified themselves as Armenians, while the ones belonging to the Roman Catholic Church – as Poles (Rykała, 2006).

the country of one's origin, its culture and tradition. These minorities remain a cultural and historical connection for the countries that ultimately emerged from the old Republic – Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. The specific ethno-religious and linguistic diversity, accompanied by the divergence of national, religious and linguistic borders, have given the Eastern Borderlands their 'clearest reality', as well as an intangible mythical value. The post-war fate of many representatives of the community, expressed mainly in their immigration to Poland and the abandonment of their 'small homelands' show how strong the idealistic and material impact on the Borderlands was exerted by Polish culture, with its immanent Orthodox, Uniate, Muslim-Tartar, Karaite and Armenian heritage. State policy aimed at protecting these minorities, as well as support for them provided by those who are aware of the importance of the unique cultural and historical heritage of the former Republic seem desirable. As the post-war history of these minorities shows, they undergo significant quantitative fluctuations, leading to them gaining the status of the 'smallest minorities' (Karaites), as well as ethnic and cultural fluctuations (Muslims, Armenians), that reduce their 'borderland' character (which is not meant as a negative conclusion) in their heritage.

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