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National Identity of Poles in the Context of European Values

ABSTRACT

The article aims to refer to issues related to the understanding of national identity, assuming that the basic reference point for the theoretical analysis is the model of universally recognised European values. Attempting to concretise the concept of national identity and identify determinants affecting its shaping, reference was made to the problem of identifying Poles with European values. Since the problem of national identity was often the object of interest of researchers, especially during the intensification of integration processes in Europe and the impact of such phenomena as globalisation, migration or development of mass culture with a cosmopolitan character, there were observed increased anxieties of various nations encouraging underlining their own “separateness”, and also greater identification with the national community. The author does not treat this phenomenon as disturbing because, according to the latest trends related to the understanding of European identity, it can crystallise as the sum of the identity of European national countries.

Keywords:

European integration, national identity, European identity, national community, patriotic attitudes

INTRODUCTION

Many phenomena of contemporary reality related to globalisation, medialisation or processes of political and economic transformation of societies gave a new impetus to the interest in identity issues, and in the case of states belonging to the European Union provoked to give it a new context significant for Europe for cen-

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turies. It is considered particularly interesting in relation to Poles – our external image is most often closely related to one of the most important human needs – the need for belonging. It performs very important functions: it guarantees a sense of security and overall peace and answers everybody’s question – who I am. National identity, commonly understood as a permanent structure given to everyone along with births, results in particular from belonging to a given nation, culture and state. However, the 21st century, characterised by the approach to Europe as a certain cultural and psycho-social phenomenon, influenced the promotion of European identity, thus justifying its separation as an analytical category. Probably the European identity and its interpretation vary depending on the country’s involvement in integration processes and the period of membership of the EU and on the situation of individuals – more often they attach importance to the importance of those whose knowledge of foreign languages, education or professional position allows the use of opportunities to experience the range of European Union offers, bringing tangible benefits resulting from its international character.

According to a Eurobarometer survey (*Public Opinion in the European Union*, 2016), EU citizens declare their European identity and attach great importance to it – the largest number of people (over 70%) for whom being European is an important element of identity, was recorded in countries such as Italy, Luxembourg, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, and Finland, and the smallest in the United Kingdom and Latvia. The same source states that among the most important elements that create a sense of belonging to the European collectively, European respondents mention democratic values, geographical location, common culture and history, while the commonest symbols and religious heritage have proved to be the least important. At the same time, attention is drawn to the Maastricht Treaty, confirmed by the later provisions of the Amsterdam Treaty, according to which the European Union does not care about the unification of national cultures, but at the same time encouraging mutual knowledge and shaping of the cultural heritage of European importance (Roeder, 2011), which is visible is, for example, in the concept of European citizenship, which does not replace but supplements national citizenship. It is in line with Gerard Delanta’s (1999, p. 17) view that the “idea of Europeanism is too often mistakenly perceived as the cosmopolitan ideal of unity and as an alternative to the chauvinism of the nation state. In my opinion, it is quite the opposite. This idea should be considered in the broad context of worldview and not treat the nation state as its enemy, because this state determines the existence of the idea of Europeanism” – this means that European identity should be considered by analogy with national identities, and even as a continuation at a higher level. Therefore, it is worth analysing the relationship

between the Polish understanding of national identity and the awareness of values shared with other European countries.

THE CONCEPT OF NATIONAL IDENTITY²

National identity is a special sense of separateness towards completely different nations shaped by national-forming factors such as, for example, national symbols, language, tradition, religion or national colours, the consciousness of origin, national consciousness, national history, blood ties, as well as attitude to cultural heritage, territory, culture and the broadly understood national character. The feeling of this national identity is revealed especially in crises, when it is necessary to work together for the benefit of a completely understood nation's good, e.g., planning national uprisings. It is worth adding that the positive expression of the national identity is patriotism, and the negative one is chauvinism (Wojtkowiak, 2005).

On the other hand, Polish national identity is the awareness of belonging to the general Polish national community. It was shaped around national culture, language, customs and faith, mainly during the struggles for independence (Rotuska, 2011). The issue of developing the general national consciousness is one of the most controversial in all historical literature, which is also largely due to the value of all these assessments and the strong emotional colour. The national bond, which has a dominant character nowadays, in Polish conditions, contains many emotional elements. So when you talk about the patriotism of a given group or individual, this is tantamount to a positive assessment. The nationwide interest in the social consciousness functions as something nobler and much more valuable than the class interest, which, according to R. Szweđa (2011, p. 16), resulted in a significant blurring of class differences and raising classes more disadvantaged to the general role of the host of the state; striving to look for important traditions that integrate the nation, as well as perceiving the supreme value in the whole country.

Defining the national identity is often a problem. It mainly results from that even one concept of collective identity can in no way be an ordinary so-called extrapolation of the concept of individual identity, because no social group to

2 It should be noted that this is an issue arising from the general concept of identity based on a philosophical reflection functioning in two senses: as a relational expression, meaning "being the same" – called "qualitative identity" and as a sign of a certain "content" of the object is. The initiators of such an interpretation are: John Locke (in terms of the concept of personal qualitative type) and P. Riceura (in the scope of distinguishing identity for "idem" type identity ("same") and "ipse" ("self")) (Pawlak, 2000, pp. 129–130; Grzegorek, 2000, p. 54).

which the described concept of identity could be referred to, there is no psychic body of self-knowledge producing a certain thing that could be regarded as a close counterpart of individual self-consciousness. In turn, the concept of collective identity must inevitably focus attention on the general relationship between individual and culture. This collective identity would, in terms of the individual's assimilation (i.e., woven into its identity), be significant (valid) elements of the culture of a given community (nation). They constitute the foundation on which a „certain separateness from strangers and a sense of connection with one's own group and the awareness of continuity, as well as the historical duration of this group, as well as its collective integration” are formed, and mechanisms of constructing divisions that set all limits of familiarity and strangeness are shaped, it is in this approach that the phenomenon of this national identity is suspended from another phenomenon – national culture (Szpociński, 2000).

It is worth noting that the existing cultural potential of the state exerts a significant influence on the shape of the national identity described: historical complexes, museum collections as well as traditions, customs, works of art, resilience and meaning of already functioning cultural institutions, as well as the general level of education society, the number and quality of schools as well as universities. This potential, according to Hans-Georg Gadamer (1992, p. 29), really raises the historical consciousness of the nation and the self-awareness of its place and its exact role among other European nations.

National identity combines values, symbols, ideas, and stereotypes persisted in various works of national culture and remains in human consciousness. Mainly they serve to strengthen the whole national bond, integrate society, and provide him with a feeling of bond with a very strong emotional colour. The conscious and symbolic values of national identity in literary form are exhibited by J. Żylińska (1988, p. 72) by writing: „walls can be torn down, plots can be plundered, all inscriptions on the walls can be painted over, borders can be changed, people decimate or displaced or closed, but you cannot annihilate the entire world of symbols present in the important subconscious of heirs”.

The analysis of national identity requires separate self-determination towards „others” and precise separation of features, values and any differentiating behaviours. Its difference can be noticed, especially in comparison with other nations. It requires mainly a thorough answer to the following questions: „What Poland?” and „What Poles?” (Kieniewicz, 1999). As a rule, the method of integrating with a specific community is the expression of culture. A higher level of development of general political culture allows for much greater tolerance for „otherness”. However, in maintaining the national identity, the artistic heritage, as well as the

lasting memory of the past, are of great importance. In turn, in relation to them, one can speak about „otherness” and „dissimilarity” of all presented contents, while political and propaganda relations more often introduce the factor of „foreignness” (Schlesinger, 1987).

DETERMINANTS AFFECTING THE FORMATION OF POLISH NATIONAL IDENTITY

The entire cultural potential of the state, including in particular: works of art, historical monuments, museum collections, traditions, customs, as well as the resilience of cultural institutions and the general level of education and education of the whole society, have a great impact on the shaping of national identity. The leading groups, elites, which at the beginning of the 20th century by S. Brzozowski (1910) were also called „cultural guides” (writers, artists, historians, ethnographers) and centres of their activity, namely: universities, research centres, have a significant influence, as well as cultural associations, scientific societies, etc.

It should be emphasised that a great influence on the shaping of national identity is also exerted by: family and school environment, all religious organisations, universities, general work environments, the army and all means of mass information, above all, television. Identity features are expressed in the same way as a „large homeland” (which is equated with the national state) and „small homeland” – family pages that are known, among others, from the Mickiewicz term „country of childhood years”. Polish national identity was shaped both in the period of the lofty superpower traditions of the Jagiellonian times (i.e., the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) and the years of weakening the internal state, or partitions of Poland, invasions, as well as occupation and various external addictions. Over the centuries, the Polish identity has been influenced mainly by Western ideas and such features of Byzantine civilisation as eastern hierarchy, ceremonial behaviour of power, and all authoritarian traditions (Golka, 2006).

It should be noted that during the partitions of Poland, this national identity of the Poles was sustained particularly by family education, cultural and social activities, conspiracy actions, and religious celebrations. While in the nineteenth century – means in the crucial period for the creation of modern nations – there was no Polish state on the map of Europe, the activity of Polish artists and writers became very important. They gained a great influence on all directions of national activities, and to this day, all the achievements of Polish culture of that time (e.g. poetic-martyrologic themes) affect the identity of Poles (Łastawski, 2006).

A special role in consolidating the national heritage among Poles residing in exile meets the multidirectional activity of Polish Catholic priests, which propagate national and religious values by reminding important events from the past, various national heroes, recognised works of art, and Polish literature. They emphasise common national fate, concern for cemeteries, national anniversaries and important church holidays. They take care of places of national remembrance and practice Polish religious and moral education (for example, first communions, confirmation, pilgrimages). In addition, many expatriates continue to show their attachment to national customs, namely national and family celebrations and Polish dishes (bigos, dumplings, black pudding, potatoes, pancakes, Silesian sausage, Masurian sausage, etc.).

The mother tongue also plays an important role in further consolidating national identity, which is a testimony of Polish identity and openness to others. He cements national ties and produces an important community of thinking or group feeling. The native speech allows the national community members to communicate freely and is an obvious sign of their distinctiveness towards other nations, a stable determinant of the national identity described in this article. While bonding the national community, the national language distinguishes it from others. It is the most commonly known symbol of the emergence of nationality and a recognised national culture guide.

Global processes of globalisation, integration and the universalisation of some organisations, pose a problem for many individuals, social groups and nations with a new confirmation of their identity. For this reason, in today's world, the issue of identity takes on significance, both as a concept and as multidimensional as it is for individuals or groups of political life. It precisely defines the interdependence between a team of historical data and the subjective awareness by politicians and analysts.

Poland is a largely Catholic country. Therefore, the relationship between this national identity and the Catholic religion can be thoughtless, though permanent (Podgórecki, 2009). For centuries, the Church has been an institution for Poles in which individuals perpetuate cohesive ties. Forces that radiate from such places – says Simmel (2009) – raise awareness of belonging

National patriotism is an indispensable national-generating factor and, at the same time, a manifestation of nurturing national identity. Etymologically, the word „patriotism“ has its origin from the Greek word *patriotes* or, in other words, a countryman. *Patrios* is someone who comes from the same father, and the *pater* is a father. On the other hand, Patriot is someone who shows love and respect for his homeland and, if necessary, willingness to suffer for her and sacrifices. In

addition, patriotism also manifests itself in a very strong emotional, social, and cultural, religious bond with its own nation, or with its history and general tradition, its values and all aspirations (Ciećkowski, 2000).

The deepening national identity crisis results from many phenomena that occur in social reality, both in the internal aspect of the state and in the global aspect. At present, even for the masses, every economic activity of a profit-oriented person related to trade, investments, financial and technological connections, etc., is becoming a priority for the masses. The overwhelming cult of money and unlimited freedom often conflict with the most important social principles such as social security, social solidarity, patriotism, attachment to the homeland or ethics, etc. (Nowak E. & Nowak M., 2011).

BASIC EUROPEAN VALUES

Reflecting on European axiology, reference should be made to the Constitution for Europe, which in both its preambles not only plays an important role in the process of applying and interpreting European law but also contains many phrases referring to „universal values“, „inviolable and inalienable human rights“, „the rule of law“, „progress and prosperity“, „the welfare of all residents, including the weaker and the most disadvantaged“, etc. (Witkowski, 2005, p. 40).

The Constitution in art. I–2 *expressis verbis* explains the values of the Union (*Traktat o Unii Europejskiej*, 2004) although they cannot be equated with the whole axiology of the Constitution, as it is richer and internally differentiated. According to art. I–2. The Union is founded on the values of respect for the dignity of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including those belonging to minorities. These “common values” correspond with the society “based on pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men” and are presented in detail in subsequent articles, e.g., in art. I–3 point 1 states that the Union provides its citizens with an area of freedom, security and justice without internal borders and an internal market with free and undistorted competition (Article I–4 point 2). The Union operates – under art. I–3 point 3 – for the sustainable development of Europe (economic growth, market economy, competitiveness, full employment, social and scientific and technical progress). The Union combats social exclusion, discrimination, promoting justice and social protection, solidarity between generations (“anti-ageing”), and protecting children’s rights. It considers economic, social and territorial cohesion and solidarity among the Member States as

a valuable asset while respecting the rich cultural and cultural diversity. language, ensuring protection and development of Europe's cultural heritage, but in external relations

The Union defends its values and interests (Article I–3 point 4). Among the principles in these relationships, we find: contributing to peace, security, solidarity and mutual respect between nations, to free and fair trade, to eradicate poverty and to protect human rights, in particular children's rights, as well as to respect and develop international law.

Thus, speaking of the “European community of values” (Wieruszewski, 2011, p. 197), it should be noted that the fundamental and rudimentary principles of the European Union concern respect for freedom, the prohibition of discrimination, ethical pluralism and respect for cultural diversity, equality and tolerance, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, protection of minorities, development of individuals, communities and states as principles or values xenophobia, intolerance, wars, totalitarianism, etc., are treated as negative. The principles and positive values of the constitutional law of the European Union can be added to solidarity in internal and external relations, striving to level the level of citizens' chances on the labour market and in the political sphere in the EU, integrating disabled people, immigrants and reintegration of people at risk of social exclusion.

The European Union, while striving for a peaceful future, must be based on common values, contribute to their protection and the general development of these common values, while respecting the diversity of traditions and cultures of the peoples of Europe, as well as the individual national identity of the Member States and the organisation of their public authorities at national, regional, and local levels. Therefore, it strives to promote stable and sustainable development and ensures the free movement of persons, services, goods and capital, and the general freedom of establishment (*Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, 2007).

Among the many axiological proposals that coexist in contemporary European culture, particular importance is attached to the dignity of the human person resulting from the Christian personalism always present in European culture. Therefore, the European constitutional act determines the idea of humanism – respect for man and his rights. The aim of the Constitution for Europe is to create institutional conditions for the existence and development of individuals, communities and states in the spirit of freedom, democracy, pluralism, equality, the rule of law, humanism, personalism, solidarity and human rights (Pałeczki, 1999, p. 16). It is a source of conviction that human dignity is inviolable, must

be respected and protected, and its foundation is autonomy expressed in the fact that man is the goal for himself and should never be treated instrumentally. It is connected with the right to life – no one can be sentenced to death or subjected to death, and he has the right to respect for his physical and mental integrity. No one shall also be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment or held in captivity or servitude.

Dignity as a European value is also the right to freedom, personal security, respect for private, family life, home and freedom of communication. It results in the right to marry or set up a family, guaranteed by national laws specifying the scope and conditions of using these rights (*Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, 2007).

The right to individual freedom of thought, conscience and religion is particularly valued in Europe – it includes elements such as freedom of changing religion or beliefs, manifestation either individually or jointly with others, privately or publicly of their religion or all beliefs through practising worship, practising, teaching and participating in rites. In addition, all citizens have the right to freedom of expression. This right also includes the freedom of having views and receiving and transmitting information or ideas without the interference of public authorities and regardless of existing state borders. Art and all scientific research are free from various limitations. Academic freedom is always respected. Everyone has the right to study and access to vocational and continuing education.

Everyone in Europe also has the right to take up work and pursue a freely chosen or accepted profession. Hence, intellectual property is always protected. The discrimination is prohibited, particularly on the grounds of sex, race or colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or beliefs, political views or any other views, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation. The European Union respects cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. Equality between all men and women in all areas, including general employment, work and pay, must be ensured.

For the political elites in Europe, the universal values and common philosophical and legal achievements, human rights, democracy, the principle of freedom, equality, free-market are of fundamental importance. In other words, the humanistic heritage of Europe is expressed in constitutional axiology, which is a symbol of unity and identity and interpretation of the principles of good living. Therefore, as A. D. Smith (1991) claims, the greatest guarantor of building a true, collective, European identity would be to create a situation in which the collective consciousness, memories, traditions, myths and symbols analogous to those observed in nation-states appear in the consciousness of Europeans.

IDENTIFICATION OF POLES WITH THE VALUES CONTAINED IN THE CONSTITUTION FOR EUROPE

Poles are a nation aware of their belonging to Europe and their Europeaness, and it is Europe that has always been the most important reference point for responding to the task (Mazowiecki, 1997). Poles never felt alienated in Europe. According to the opinions commonly found by the author, our attachment to European civilisation decided to survive the general Polish identity in which the love of freedom, independence and all values resulting from Christian culture is rooted. An indication of Poland's connection with the general European culture and its values was also a contribution to all reflections on the feeling of European identity (Łastawski, 2009).

According to P. Mazurkiewicz (2001), European identity is perceived by Poles in two ways. Some understand it as a „supra-national” identity, i.e., cosmopolitan identity. By this definition, it should be assumed that nations are simply an artificial creation, and a completely new strong European identity replaces the existing national identifications. In turn, the second understanding of the European identity, close to Catholic environments, states that the so-called „Post-national identity” (or civic identity) assumes the necessity of general rising above all national identities and focusing precisely on the concept of transnational citizenship, constitutional patriotism or a common political culture – European identity originates from previous historical experiences of each country.

The Polish nation has always been shaped as part of the European cultural community, and took over the patterns of the West and always adapted them to Polish conditions (equality, brotherhood, or freedom). Poles have connected many elements with Europe, including religious, legal, and even artistic. At the same time, they maintain quite different achievements of culture, language and customs, which strengthened and influenced the shape of Polish national identity. Poles exalt their own values and strongly identify themselves with the whole nation. They believe that they are the most Catholic, that their literature, art, and native language, have a particularly strong, symbolic value, that the whole nation has a specific mission to play; it is the Christ of the nations.

Our society knows that being a Pole can also be a European, but in principle, only such an order can be accepted. First, we focus on the national identity, and only then we identify with the broader, i.e., European. After Poland acceded to the European Union, the society felt stronger ties with Europe, even called its full citizens. However, the remains of the tradition of Sarmatianism, as well as the great influence of Catholicism, all the traditions of the „bulwark” of Europe, vari-

ous remnants of the Romantic ethos, long-term aspirations for freedom, traditions of religious tolerance, patriotism and the distinctiveness of national character bind them with an „invisible ribbon” with a sense of general Polish national identity. Although it was shaped mainly by the influence of European identity and belongs to a similar cultural circle, it is because of contemporary tendencies towards individualism that Poles, like other nations, aspire to individualisation. Of course, this is not a rule in any way as there are often exceptions. Defining myself in Poland as a European is no longer controversial. It depends on the individual selection of the unit. In addition, the new generation is much more aware of pro-Europe. Poles generally co-create European identity while preserving the most important features of national identity preserved for centuries. They also seek recognition by all the peoples of the European Union for their entire cultural heritage. It seems that better-educated Poles see the relationship between general national and supra-national identity much more clearly (Rotuska, 2011).

However, the common approach of Poles to some of the values recognised in Europe as a priority is sometimes considered doubtful. The starting point is the popular belief that Europe’s identity should not supplant the national one but complement it with the most important, common values. According to the *Report of the scientific community of the Polish Academy of Sciences on European integration and the place of Poland in this process*, edited by prof. Jerzy Wilkin (2017), in a study carried out in May and June 2016, up to 37% of Poles declared that in the future, Poland would be better off outside the European Union and see the progressive differentiation of Polish cultural and social attitudes from the attitudes of Europeans in others countries of the community. As many as 49% of Poles consider the EU’s key achievements to be the abolition of internal EU borders and the freedom to settle and work throughout the EU (26%). Poles believe that the EU is a relatively democratic grouping (84%) and that the more affluent member states should support financially less wealthy members. More often than other Europeans, Poles blame the European Union for unnecessarily extensive bureaucracy and excessive legislation (36%) and the loss of national sovereignty (17%). Also in Poland, the highest number of people (71%) was found among the countries surveyed, which expresses the view that immigration from Muslim countries should be completely stopped, which raises doubts as to whether Poles agree to the same axiological attitudes as the inhabitants of other countries of the community, to phenomena immigration and multiculturalism.

SUMMARY

For many years, the Polish national identity was closely related to the general political, social, and religious values of the European nations. For years, Poles have benefited from all the achievements of the most important European countries. The tough fate of the Polish nation and its weaker cultural and economic potential due to the difficult post-war history had and often still have an impact on it. It should not come as a surprise that many Poles are concerned that EU policy may contribute to the status of Poland as a „raw material“ country with colonial and vassal features. There are still growing doubts whether the inflow of immigrants will not cause an increase in unemployment, or will there be further incidents of falsifying history and destroying our traditions, and whether Polish banks will not be transferred to West European bankers.

All this is related to the fact that European identity is being built only over several dozens of years, and the identity of individual nations has already followed a multi-generational/multi-century history. Therefore, many difficult situations require time. Identity is built, after all, with a common history, common experiences, and conditions for living. And they are different in Europe all the time.

Common interests are very important in shaping identity. The valorisation of traditional national values should be based on a common understanding of often diverse interests. It is very important that all nations, and thus every citizen, have a sense of belonging to a community in which all national characteristics are generally respected. Without this, it is impossible to shape a common national and European identity. This identity is the quintessence of the connection of the whole society, respect for diversity, and the general understanding that everyone in Poland and Europe represents one continent. It is worth remembering that when general security is at stake (terrorist attacks, the risk of rockets launching by North Korea, etc.), the voice of the entire united Europe will sound much more loudly than the voice of individual states. Therefore, in 2017, the European Commission proposed building such a political agenda so that each Member State would find its place in it. The summit in Sibiu on May 9, 2019, at which decisions will be taken to verify many assumptions, including the axiological dimension, will be the culmination of activities aimed at preparing the new EU reality in the 27 Member States:

1. A value union in which there is no place for citizens and employees or second-class consumers.
2. A more united Union, with the Schengen area extended to include Bulgaria and Romania, and a new instrument for accession to the euro area to assist the

other Member States in adopting the single currency and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

3. A stronger Union in which more decisions are made by qualified majority voting, in which the economic and monetary union is strengthened by the establishment of a European Minister of Economy and Finance, the transformation of the European Stability Mechanism into a European Monetary Fund, and the creation of a budget line for the euro area in the EU budget.
4. A more democratic Union with new rules on financing political parties and foundations, with the new Code of Conduct for Commissioners and support for transnational lists in European Parliament elections (Unia Europejska, 2017).

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