



REFUGEE CRISIS AS A MOTIVE FOR POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN POLAND*

KRYZYS UCHODŹCZY JAKO MOTYW KOMUNIKOWANIA
POLITYCZNEGO W POLSCE

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ABSTRACT

The European debate on the refugee crisis and the related actions of the European Union has been an important part of the political communication undertaken by policy-makers in the EU countries. Thus, it seems essential to ask the question about the opinions of the most important Polish politicians regarding the causes and ways of managing the refugee crisis, but also about their stance regarding refugees coming from other cultures, and consequently whether they were in agreement on accepting refugees. Also, whether the opinions they expressed were likely to influence Polish society, and whether the problem of the refugee crisis was used for ad hoc political purposes, including in the election campaign.

Keywords: refugee crisis; political communication

ABSTRAKT

Europejska debata dotycząca kryzysu uchodźczego, a także działania Unii Europejskiej z nim związane, stanowiły ważny element komunikowania politycznego podejmowanego przez decydentów politycznych w krajach UE. Toteż istotnym wydaje się pytanie o to, jak kształtowały się opinie najważniejszych polskich polityków na temat przyczyn i sposobów zarządzania kryzysem uchodźczym, a także o ich stanowisko odnośnie do uchodźców pochodzących z innej strefy kulturowej, a w konsekwencji – czy byli oni zgodni co do kwestii przyjmowania uchodźców. Ponadto – czy wypowiedziane przez nich opinie mogły wpływać na polskie społeczeństwo oraz czy problem kryzysu uchodźczego był wykorzystywany w doraźnych celach politycznych, w tym w kampanii wyborczej.

Słowa kluczowe: kryzys uchodźczy; komunikowanie polityczne

* The article was written as part of the project *Three Stages of the Polish Approach to the Migration Crises 2015–2022. Denial – Confrontation – Management* implemented as part of the competition: WSMiP Competition for foreign trips (conferences).

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The European debate on the refugee crisis and the related actions of the European Union has been an important part of the political communication¹ undertaken by policy-makers in the EU countries. And undoubtedly, this topic was also used for the purposes of the current policies. A similar situation can also be found on the Polish political scene². And although the refugee crisis of 2015 itself virtually bypassed Poland as only about two thousand illegal crossings of the Polish border were recorded on the so-called Eastern European route running through the country (*Frontex Annual Risk Analysis for 2016*, 2016), it should be noted for comparison that there were over 1,800,000 ones on all European routes, including 800,000 on the so-called 'Balkan route' passing through Serbia and Hungary where an additional fence was built along the entire length of the Hungarian-Serbian border to prevent people from crossing the border (*Frontex...*, 2016; Ośrodek Badań nad Migracjami, 2015). Despite such a small number of illegal crossings at that time, the topic of the refugee crisis played an important role in the public political debate in Poland. Many reports and analyses (Sydow, 2016; Cywiński, Katner, & Ziółkowski, 2019; Sadura, 2021) even suggest that it was the anti-refugee rhetoric that paved the way for the Law and Justice Electoral Committee³ to gain power, and that it was also repeatedly used for ad hoc political purposes, including during the election campaign.

We could list many reasons for the effectiveness of such a narrative in the case of Poland. Among them is the low level of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity as a consequence of two world wars and the fact that after the Second World War Poland found itself in the Soviet sphere of influence with the policy of downgrading the role of religion and ethnic minorities (Pasamonik & Markowska-Manista, 2017; Adamczyk, Sakson, & Trosiak, 2016). Furthermore, after 1989 and during the socio-political transformation in Poland, a strong position of religion and the Catholic Church can be noticed in the social and political life of Poles, which results in the absence of other religions in the public space and also in the media.

¹ Political communication understood as an interactive process concerning the transmission of information between politicians, news media, and the public (Perloff, 2013).

² For the purpose of this analysis, examples of statements by politicians of relevant political groups in Poland will be cited. Two criteria were adopted for the selection of the party positions in question, i.e., relevancy in the electoral function and ideological diversity. According to these criteria, the following groups or party coalitions were selected: *Law and Justice*, *Civic Platform*, *Polish People's Party*, *Kukiz'15*, *Modern*, *Confederation*, and *Democratic Left Alliance*.

³ The PiS Electoral Committee comprised the following political groups: Law and Justice, Sovereign Poland (former Solidarity Poland), Poland Together, Right Wing of the Republic, National-Catholic Movement, and Piast Faction

Numerous studies show that Polish women and men are most afraid of followers of Islam (Strzeszewski, 2007). A CBOS⁴ survey conducted in 2015 during the refugee crisis showed that 44% of the respondents had a negative attitude towards Muslims, 33% had an indifferent attitude, and 23% had a positive attitude; in comparison, 79% of Poles had a positive attitude towards Catholics while only 4% had a negative attitude. At the same time, only 12% of those surveyed said they personally knew a Muslim. Most participants in the survey also stated that Muslims are mostly intolerant (64% of the respondents). Further, 63% felt that followers of Islam living in the West do not embrace its values, and 57% assessed that Islam encourages violence to a greater extent than other religions (CBOS, 2015a). According to the CBOS, the pejorative attitude towards Muslims may have originated from potential associations with violence or terrorism. On the other hand, the assessment of whether a conflict between Islam and the West is inevitable was not unequivocal. By way of comment, it can be stated that the optimistic forecast prevailed over the pessimistic one as 43% of the respondents believed that it was possible to find a common intercultural ground for agreement, while 34% of the respondents rejected this option (this was an increase by 15% compared with the previous 8 years), 23% were unable to take a position on this issue. Furthermore, the survey confirmed that Poles were divided in their diagnosis of the causes of conflicts between Islam and the West. And so, 40% of the respondents believed that they concern fundamental issues, i.e., mainly arising from the adherence to different values, or in other words, from religious and cultural differences. But a comparable proportion of the respondents (38%) stated that these antagonisms arise from competition related to conflicting economic interests and competition for political influence. Another 22% were unable to express their position on this issue. In addition, 64% felt that most Muslims are intolerant of customs and values other than their own. A similar percentage (63%) were even of the opinion that Muslim minorities living in Western Europe do not want to and do not adopt customs and values specific to the majority of the citizens in these countries. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the respondents identified Islam with violence and even expressed the opinion that it is the religion itself that encourages violence, including 51% who believed that Muslims generally accept the use of violence against the followers of other religions (19% and 24%, respectively, disagreed with these statements). Fifty

⁴ Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS), full name: Public Opinion Research Centre Foundation – an opinion poll centre based in Warsaw, established in 1982.

percent (50%) of Poles were convinced that most Muslims condemn terrorist attacks carried out by Islamic fundamentalists, but 21% were of the opposite opinion. The view that the reasons for Islamic extremism are attributable to poverty and social exclusion rather than religious principles was indicated by 49% of the respondents, while 28% were against this opinion. Furthermore, according to the CBOS survey, opinions were also divided on the attitude of Muslims towards followers of other religions. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of the respondents thought that most Muslims did not have a hostile attitude towards non-Islamic believers, while 3% disagreed with this opinion (CBOS, 2015a).

Thus, it seems essential to ask the question about the opinions of the most important Polish politicians regarding the causes and ways of managing the refugee crisis, but also about their stance regarding refugees coming from other cultures, and consequently whether they were in agreement on accepting refugees. Also, whether the opinions they expressed were likely to influence Polish society, and whether the problem of the refugee crisis was used for ad hoc political purposes, including in the election campaign.

One of the political parties most critical of the wave of refugees on the Polish political scene was undoubtedly the Law and Justice whose leaders and rank-and-file activists argued that immigrants represented a serious cost to the national community while at the same time stressing that cultural differences are a substantial and problem that is hard to overcome, or even proclaiming that accepting refugees would mean a threat of Islamisation of the country. The statement that was most illustrative of the opposition of Law and Justice to accepting refugees was Jarosław Kaczyński's speech of September 18, 2015, delivered during a parliamentary debate: "It's not about accepting this or that number of foreigners; it's just that – there is a serious danger that a certain process will be set in motion. In short, it can be described as follows. First, the number of foreigners will rapidly increase, then they will not obey our laws and our customs, because they don't want to, and then, or in parallel, they will impose, in an aggressive and violent way, in the public space, their own sensitivities and their requirements in various areas of life. If anyone says that this is not true, let them look around Europe. Let them look at Sweden, for example. [...] What is happening in Italy? Churches are occupied and sometimes used as toilets. What is happening in France? Constant brawling, also Sharia being introduced, patrols to enforce Sharia. The same in London. Also in Germany, the strongest and toughest in this respect, such phenomena take place" (Kaczyński, 2015a, p. 14).

Another example of anti-refugee rhetoric used during the election campaign can be found in another opinion of the leader of the Law and Justice, this time delivered at an election meeting in Maków Mazowiecki: “There are, after all, already symptoms of the appearance of very dangerous diseases long unseen in Europe. Cholera on the Greek islands, dysentery in Vienna. All sorts of parasites, protozoa, which are not dangerous in the bodies of these people, but can be dangerous here. This does not mean to discriminate against someone, but it is necessary to check” (Kaczyński, 2015b).

In a similar vein, Jarosław Gowin, a Polish politician and publicist at the time, the leader of the Poland Together party, and later on, after the 2015 elections, chairman of the United Right Parliamentary Club, vice-president of the Council of Ministers and minister of science and higher education, also spoke out: “I think we can afford to take in more than 2,000 refugees. They should not be Muslims; they can be Christians, Jews, but not Muslims because they, some of them at least, not only fail to assimilate, but they even seek to destroy the principles on which Western civilisation is founded” (Gowin, 2015). An argument frequently used by the PiS (i.e., Law and Justice) was that political refugees are only a minority because the majority of those arriving in Europe are economic migrants.

Similar opinions about refugees were expressed by the founder of the Kukiz’15 grouping who repeatedly emphasised in the media that: “We are talking about immigrants, not refugees” (Kukiz, 2015b). Paweł Kukiz also argued that among those arriving from the Middle East to Europe were a lot of young men, and he commented this on TV saying: “These are healthy bulls and blokes, smiling when they jump out of motorboats. I have seen pictures like this. What sort of man leaves his wife and children and flees the war? Why didn’t he stay in Turkey if he is fleeing the war?”. At the same time he points out that: “Everything should be done so that women and children are not killed” (Kukiz, 2015b). The MP’s most hostile remark referring to refugees was a post on social media as a comment after the terrorist attack on the editorial office of “Charlie Hebdo”: “I wonder who is the bigger criminal, these savages or the political liberal left who brought these savages here” (Kukiz, 2015a). Paweł Kukiz also became famous for initiating a collection of signatures at the beginning of 2016 for a “Referendum on the non-admission of immigrants to Poland” which would include just one question: Are you in favour of Poland accepting refugees as part of the European Union’s relocation system? According to a statement by the spokesman for the Kukiz’15 club, 350,000 signatures were successfully collected, but that was an insufficient

number. Pursuant to the Act on Nationwide Referendum, the Sejm may decide to submit a specific issue to a referendum on the initiative of citizens who obtain the support of at least 500,000 people for their proposal. Kukiz'15 politicians revisited this idea on a couple of occasions, albeit unsuccessfully (Kukiz, 2016).

A slightly different stance and also opinion on these events was held by the then Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz, who argued that: "It is our duty to welcome migrants who are fleeing their homelands in fear for their lives" (Kopacz, 2015a), adding that: "We benefited, indeed greatly benefited, from the solidarity of our colleagues, our partners in Europe then when we had our own refugees. Today we cannot forget that. We must not be insensitive to this unhappiness that our media show every day, and at the same time say that we only want one-way solidarity" (Kopacz, 2015a). At the same time, she asserted that in the negotiations her government held with the European Union at the time she demanded the separation of refugees from economic migrants, the tightening of controls at the EU's external borders and the full control of Polish services over those who would reach Poland. At the same time, she stressed that: "Poland is and will be safe. Poland is and will be pro-European. Poland is and will be tolerant" (Kopacz, 2015b).

Janusz Piechociński, then Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Economy and leader of the Polish People's Party (PSL), spoke of the position on the reception of refugees as a national decision and at the same time he suggested that: "The decision to accept migrants must be preceded by further consultations, including with the leaders of churches and religious associations" (Piechociński, 2015a). Additionally, he accused the EU by commenting that it 'overslept' and failed to notice that the refugee crisis was coming, something that had been obvious for a long time; so Europe appeared to be completely unprepared for this crisis. He also suggested that Poland could not leave refugees in camps and civilians in civil-war countries without help, and therefore he declared that: "Poles will send Polish food, pharmaceuticals and sanitary materials to the refugee camps" (Piechociński, 2015a). At the same time, he pointed to Algeria as a country that could be competent to channel aid to refugees, and he also mentioned that the donors of such aid would be the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank as well as some unnamed private charities (Piechociński, 2015b).

What came as a surprise, undoubtedly, was the attitude to the refugee crisis of the head of the Democratic Left Alliance, a party of left-wing provenance that should be associated with actions in favour of the right to asylum or against

any manifestation of xenophobia, racism, or anti-Semitism. Nonetheless, Leszek Miller himself explained why Poland should not agree to the forced relocation of refugees by saying that: “This voluntary basis is also required of the other party, i.e., potential refugees must know that if they want to be in Poland, they must accept Polish law and Polish cultural principles. They must agree to full integration; they must send their children to Polish schools, learn the language and take up a job. The offer should be: if you want to be a Pole, you can become one” (Miller, 2015a). Furthermore, he was critical of the EU’s actions and in particular of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel about whom he said that, together with the Austrian Chancellor “she decided overnight to circumvent all EU procedures, to simplify the entry of thousands of migrants into the EU. On what basis? Where was this consulted? Which EU body gave its approval to this? This is simply a scandal” (Miller, 2015b).

The issue of limiting the number of refugees admitted was also raised by Janusz Palikot, founder of the Twój Ruch [*Your Turn!*, also translated as *Your Move(ment)*] grouping and at the same time candidate of the United Left in the parliamentary campaign underway at the time, who repeated the argument that: “Poland is itself a weak, poor country with many people in need” (Palikot, 2015) and added that it is also important to only accept war refugees because they should find shelter in Poland while those who flee for purely economic reasons should be vetted and sent back to their countries. In a slightly different tone, Barbara Nowacka, Vice-Chairwoman of Twój Ruch, spoke about the necessity of accepting refugees regardless of their religion, but justified the attitude of left-wing politicians by the fact that even in social-democratic fraction in the European Parliament there is no clear position on immigrants (Nowacka, 2015a).

In conclusion, the narrative of the leaders of the Polish political scene regarding the refugee crisis in 2015 seems to be similar, with the majority of those cited being sceptical about accepting the number of war refugees proposed by the EU, arguing this mainly on the basis of Poland’s economic constraints and fears of threats to the country’s security. Solutions that were declared included financial or in-kind assistance to refugee centres already existing in other countries. Sadly, among the political opinions presented, one will also find some that are rather hostile, or can even be construed as hate speech. When trying to provide an answer to the question of where such conservative attitudes of the Polish elite towards refugees came from during the 2015 crisis, it is certainly necessary to pay attention to the fact that the attitude of Polish society towards Muslims, including war refugees from Muslim countries, was not unequivocally favour-

able. In June 2015, the CBOS conducted another survey, *Poles' Attitudes towards the Problem of Refugees*, which showed that 72% of Polish society supported provision of assistance to war refugees (14% were against). However, when referring to specific situations in which Poland would grant refugee status to certain groups, doubts about the legitimacy of such a course of action already emerged. At that time, attitudes were more favourable towards the granting of refugee status to Ukrainians from the areas occupied by pro-Russian separatists than towards receiving refugees from the Middle East and Africa (33% in favour and 53% against) (CBOS, 2015b). According to another poll, the level of openness of Poles to accepting refugees from countries affected by armed conflict was one of the lowest since May 2015. At that time, only 40% of the respondents were of the opinion that Poland should at least temporarily receive them, with the majority of this group believing that they should be allowed to stay temporarily until they can return to their country of origin (35%), and only very few thought that refugees should be allowed to settle in our country (5%) (CBOS, 2015b). Moreover, it should be emphasised that the events of 2015 coincided with the election campaign in Poland, which undoubtedly made the political debate more heated, something that even politicians themselves called attention to: "This should be a nationwide discussion, a reflection on values and opportunities. An election campaign must not be conducted by playing upon some people's feelings of hurt and the fear of others. In our country, this is happening in an overly hectic atmosphere. And after all, this is about long-term decisions. Questions need to be asked about who to accept, how to accept, how to distinguish between refugees and economic migrants, how to assimilate and whether to assimilate everyone, what we can do within the international community to end the conflict in the Middle East. [...] This is also a test for the European Union. How is this Europe with the Schengen Area going to function in a few years' time? What about the idea of a two-speed Europe?" (Nowacka, 2015b).

It did not take long before a similar situation involving the need to solve the problem of refugees and immigrants arriving at Poland's borders occurred; it was in August 2021, when President Aleksandr Lukashenko responded to the imposition of EU sanctions on Belarus for the hijacking of the plane with the dissident journalist Raman Pratasevich and launched actions aimed at facilitating the cross-border trafficking of illegal migrants and refugees coming from Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Middle Eastern and African countries across the border with the EU into Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. The Polish authorities considered these actions as a situation resembling a hybrid war and declared a state of emer-

gency in the area bordering Belarus (Fraszka, 2021; Bodziony & Rudnik, 2022). A breakthrough event in this situation took place on November 8, 2021, when hundreds of foreigners arrived at the Kuźnica border crossing and attempted to enter Polish territory supported by Belarusian services (Opryszek, 2021). Since then, the Polish Border Guard has reported many attempts to illegally cross the border while using the ‘push-back’ method, i.e., taking foreigners to the border without accepting and processing their asylum applications and not allowing anyone to cross the Polish border. The Belarusian party exploited these situations by accusing Poles of causing a ‘humanitarian crisis’ and appealed to the Polish authorities to treat migrants humanely and allow them to enter the territory of Poland. The Polish government, on the other hand, precluded journalists from reporting on the developments in the border area and presented its own narrative on the events on the Polish-Belarusian border stating that those desiring to enter the territory of the Republic of Poland were mainly young men, sadly failing to mention that the victims of the humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border were also women and children (Bodziony & Rudnik, 2022). An important message was the press conference that was convened at the headquarters of the Podlaskie Regional Branch of the Border Guard on October 7, 2021, following a meeting of the Committee on National Security and Defence Affairs, during which the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border was the main topic. At the time, Deputy Prime Minister for National Security Affairs Jarosław Kaczyński emphasised that Belarus was waging a hybrid war against Poland and at the same time pointed out that there was plenty of evidence that Belarusian services were helping migrants who were trying to cross the Polish-Belarusian border: “There is no pressure from refugees here; these are economic migrants that arrive, or they are actually brought in, and the action is organised by the Belarusian authorities; it happens with the consent of the Russian authorities”. He additionally referred to the idea of building a barrier on the border and stated that previous experience with illegal migrants in Greece and Hungary had shown that effective border protection can only be ensured by means of barriers, thus he announced that: “Such a barrier will be built on the part of the border that does not run along the middle of the River Bug” (Kaczyński, 2021a). On another occasion he explained why there was no need for journalists to be present at the border: “There is no need for journalists to appear at the place where the state of emergency is in force to report on the events there. I don’t see the point or the need, especially because unfortunately there is a great deal of ill will. If things were normal in Poland, if there were no ‘total opposition,’ just normal opposition, if the language

was not so horribly degraded, vulgarised, if we could just talk normally. The limit of any freedom is defined by the principles that define other people's freedom" (Kaczyński, 2021b).

Some very critical remarks regarding the people camping out at the Polish-Belarusian border were voiced by Krzysztof Bosak, one of the leaders of the Confederation alliance, who judged that those people "are not particularly friendly inclined and use children instrumentally" (Bosak, 2021a) and are not refugees, but plan to get to Western European countries for economic reasons. In another statement, he proposed his own solution to the situation by calling for increased pressure on Belarus from international organisations and asserting that the sanctions thus far had been 'symbolic', although at the same time he criticised the government's actions saying: "If you don't want to be a failed state, if you don't want to be some sort of territory governed by some bureaucrats from international organisations, if you don't want to be a migration corridor for other nations, utilised for the sake of big geopolitical interests, then you have to show that you control your own territory". He also suggested that it would be humanitarian to help by sending them back to the countries they came from (Bosak, 2021b).

One of the leaders of the largest opposition party, the Civic Platform (PO), Grzegorz Schetyna, was critical of the government's actions. Although he called the events at the border not only an anti-Polish but also an anti-EU provocation, he acknowledged that Poland was not coping with the situation and should first of all turn to the EU institutions for help: "We will be stronger in the dispute with Lukashenko when we have the EC and Europe on our side. [...] We must have the full support of the EC; [...] it is necessary to involve Frontex, the European agency that manages the borders and which should support us" (Schetyna, 2021a). He also called it a mistake not to allow Polish journalists into the border area because the consequence of this is that the European public only gets knowledge of the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border through the propaganda message prepared by the Lukashenko regime, which shows Poland in a bad light. Furthermore, the PO leader accused the Law and Justice government of using this conflict to build support for itself: "This is campaign rhetoric. They are not interested in closing this issue" (Schetyna, 2021b). He thereby confirmed and agreed with the claim that the issue of the migration crisis helped the Law and Justice party win the parliamentary elections in 2015.

Various aspects of the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border were pointed out by Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, leader of the PSL. He spoke, among other

things, of “elevating the crisis to an international level” by which he meant that Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki should request a meeting of the European Council in order to involve the entire European Union in solving this migration crisis (Kosiniak-Kamysz, 2021a). He also noted that Poland was losing the information war because not allowing journalists on the Polish side meant that BBC or CNN crews were on the Belarusian side where their coverage could be manipulated because they might, e.g., interview people who had been planted for them by Lukashenko’s services. He also saw the need to help mothers with children and added that those in need of “a glass of water and a slice of bread” must not be denied help. He stressed that: “Security and humanity can go hand in hand. And humanitarian aid should be given. This is where the voice of the Church is important. Caritas could do a lot of good” (Kosiniak-Kamysz, 2021b).

An unfavourable assessment of the government’s actions was also expressed by Włodzimierz Czarzasty, the leader of the New Left party, who claimed that those in power were doing nothing to end the crisis at the border and that should above all use all diplomatic channels. Like other opposition leaders, he was of the opinion that: “The Law and Justice likes to keep it going, to do surveys so that they could demonstrate that they have 2–3 per cent more. And if someone dies in the forest, it generally enhances the drama. It’s very unfair, very inhuman” (Czarzasty, 2021). Czarzasty also stressed that the Left was the only formation for which the humanitarian aspect of the situation was paramount, and appealed: “I want to tell you that we will never change our position – whether it is a refugee’s child or a non-refugee’s child, it is a child; whether it is a woman or a man, it is a woman or a man the same as us” (Czarzasty, 2021).

In conclusion, it should be stated that, as during the migration crisis of 2015, among the leaders of Polish parliamentary groups there is present a narrative in which the crisis at the border was again presented as a threat to Poland and Poles, which was mainly exploited by those in government. Opposition politicians, on the other hand, saw the need to involve the European Union or diplomatic channels to resolve the situation at the border. Moreover, an important change was that the theme of humanitarian crisis finally appeared, and an attempt was made to present the situation from this perspective. However, this perception did not fully convince Poles, and a survey conducted at the time showed that the majority, i.e., 52% of Poles surveyed supported the push-back method, while 41% believed that refugees’ applications for international protection should be considered (CBOS, 2021). This indicated that Poles’ opinions on the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border were divided and that the politicians’ anti-refugee

narrative, including the use of fear management by the ruling group in current policy, may have resulted in increased political support.

With the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the discussion on the presence of refugees in Poland became a relevant topic again. Between February 24, 2022, and August 8 of that year, 5,369,000 Ukrainians, mainly women and children, crossed the Polish borders (Straż Graniczna, n.d.). The most important change with regard to attitudes towards refugees arriving in Poland should be noted among politicians of the governing party. This was noticeable both in the decisions made by the decision-makers and in their statements. Already in March 2022, a special act was adopted giving refugees from Ukraine access to the labour market, health care system, and education. Ukrainian citizens could obtain a personal ID No. PESEL and Poles hosting them in their homes could apply for reimbursement of the cost of accommodation and food (PLN 40 per person for up to 120 days) (*Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2022 r. o pomocy obywatelom Ukrainy...*, 2022). Jarosław Kaczyński himself stated on many occasions that: "We will certainly not leave refugees without support. Of course, the ideal solution is for them to start working, but I know that there are problems with this. [...] the demographic characteristics of the refugees are specific because they are mostly women with children. It will absolutely not be the case that we leave our Ukrainian friends without help" (Kaczyński, 2022b). But he also commented: "We have a rule – no relocations. If someone wants to stay here, they stay, and if they want to leave, they leave. We don't force anyone to do anything", and he added: "Of course we think we deserve some help, but we don't go around asking for it. We are a country completely in a good shape, more than three times richer than in the early 1990s and more than three times richer than Ukraine, per capita" (Kaczyński, 2022a). That was a comment on not asking the European Union for help in this matter. Michał Dworczyk, head of the Prime Minister's Office, spoke in a similar vein on Polish Radio Channel 1: "Regardless of how the situation develops, Poland will not leave its friends without help. Anyone fleeing war will be able to count on help" (Dworczyk, 2022a). At the same time he added that EU funds to help refugees "must be found", arguing that: "We are dealing with the largest migration crisis in Europe in history after the Second World War". But he was also critical of the European Union which, in his view, deliberately decided not to allocate special funds to help countries that receive refugees: "There is an attempt to stir the pot and sell it politically and image-wise as huge aid" (Dworczyk, 2022b).

Critical of the government's actions was Donald Tusk, the leader of the Civic Platform, who said "[...] I am aware that the Polish government has delayed and actually is still delaying an active policy inside the European Union even though there are funds there to help refugees. I have already quoted a couple of times these incomprehensible to me words of the representatives of the government and Law and Justice, that 'they are not going to ask', that is, they will not fill in this voucher. In fact, you only need to make some slightest effort so that the European money that is waiting will come here to Poland; I am talking about the money that is precisely earmarked for helping refugees" (Tusk, 2022b). At the same time, the former Prime Minister repeatedly referred to the need to support Ukrainian refugees. Already on March 29, 2022, during a visit to Zduńska Wola, he visited a refugee centre and declared that: "For me, it is very important that everyone in Poland feels that we remember one another. Everything must be done to save unity and solidarity with Ukraine" (Tusk, 2022a).

From the very beginning, Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz expressed concern for Ukrainian refugees and drew attention to the need to simplify procedures on the labour market as well as to launch classes in schools and kindergartens with psychological support because, as he wrote on Twitter: "We cannot leave children alone with the trauma of war" (Kosiniak-Kamysz, 2022a). And like Donald Tusk, he criticised the government for its lack of action in the European Union, but during his stay in Rozdziele, where he visited the youth hostel where refugees from Ukraine had found shelter, he added: "Without self-government, this would not have happened. This community of self-government in various places in Poland passes the test. A lot of people took a risk, without waiting for resources, they made decisions. It is good that there is coordination with the state authorities because we are able to appreciate how something works well or is finally starting to work well" (Kosiniak-Kamysz, 2022b).

An important issue addressed by politicians was the enactment of the aforementioned special law, i.e., the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of the Country. This issue was addressed by most political leaders calling for collaboration. In a similar vein, the leader of the New Left, Włodzimierz Czarzasty, commented on the radio programme Signals of the Day that: "These are the kind of things that I think should unite, not divide" (Czarzasty, 2022a) and the Act should guarantee the writing down of all these rights, "which Ukrainian citizens must have anyway because they have to eat, work, sleep, get medical treatment and study" (Czarzasty, 2022a). In addition, he also saw the need for other European countries to support Poland

in helping Ukraine. And reporting on his Warsaw meeting with Lars Klingbeil, the joint leader of the German SPD, he explained: “I asked for support for the Polish efforts to provide funding for Ukrainians residing in Poland. We need 12 billion euros” (Czarzasty, 2022b).

As can be seen, the aforementioned leaders representing relevant groupings on the Polish political scene, whether they are representatives of the ruling camp (PiS) or the opposition (PO, PSL, and New Left), were unanimous in acknowledging the necessity of assistance for refugees from Ukraine.

The only dissenting voice was that of Krzysztof Bosak, a leader of the Confederation, who admittedly said on Radio Zet that Ukrainian refugees should be helped, but “without exaggerating with the overzealousness and with billions of zlotys in social programmes from the pockets of Poles” (Bosak, 2022a). When his alliance was the only one not to vote in favour of the law supporting refugees from Ukraine, he explained: “Let’s not blur the distinction between citizens and foreigners legally residing in Poland”. He criticised the fact that pursuant to the law, all refugees were automatically included in the Polish social benefits system for a year and a half, and he judged that this was done under more liberal rights than for Polish citizens (Bosak, 2022b).

The discourse on refugees in Poland, which began in 2015, had its subsequent iterations in 2021 and 2022. When analysing the statements of important figures of the Polish political scene, a certain evolution can be seen. While during the refugee crisis in 2015, Polish politicians were reluctant to admit the possibility of accepting refugees, and even those who were in favour of accepting them treated it as a necessity to fulfil an obligation imposed by the European Union. And the arguments put forward in the statements and declarations in that period were predominantly of an economic nature, emphasising that Poland could not afford to accept refugees from the Middle East and Africa and highlighting cultural and religious differences. On the one hand, this discourse coincided with opinion polls conducted by both the CBOS and the Centre for Research on Prejudice (CBU, 2016) of the University of Warsaw, which showed that dislike of Islam in Poland was at a very high level and that unfriendly attitudes towards Muslims were mainly due to ignorance and a sense of fear. On the other hand, the statements that fuelled this fear could not remain without influence on Polish society. After all, the beneficiaries of such a narrative in the election campaign were those political groups that presented themselves as those who do not agree to accept refugees and declared they would protect Poland against dire threats. A slightly different discourse could be observed during the conflict on the

Polish-Belarusian border. This time, questions about the humanitarian aspect of this crisis began to arise and opposition politicians demanded the involvement of the European Union in solving the problem. A different situation emerged with the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Most political parties took the side of the refugees from Ukraine. They called for help and support for Ukrainian women and children fleeing the atrocities of war. Opinions differed on specific solutions to the situation. Opposition politicians mainly accused the government of failing to take action regarding the acquisition of European funds for refugees. Of course, it should be added that the attitude of the majority of Poles towards refugees from Ukraine remains favourable, which also cannot fail to influence the policy makers. Finally, it is also worth noting that narratives relating to the widely understood refugee crisis have not exhausted their potential and will presumably accompany us in the upcoming parliamentary election campaign. After all, these issues are present in the ongoing election pre-campaign as evidenced by the adoption by the Sejm on June 15, 2023, of a resolution expressing opposition to the EU relocation mechanism for illegal migrants (Sejm RP, 2023)⁵.

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⁵ The adoption of the resolution was preceded by a debate during which Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of the Law and Justice party, announced that a referendum would be held on the issue. Raising this subject by the ruling party seems to be intentional as the EU decisions do not concern immigration, but are a proposal to create a mechanism whereby a state which is unable to cope with an influx of refugees who have the right to apply for asylum in the EU asks the European Commission to activate the principle of solidarity.

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