

---

# THE UNCHANGEABLE PEACEFUL PERCEPTION OF THE TATARS OF INDIGENOUS POLISH MUSLIMS

**Katarzyna Czornik\***

*Institute of Political Science, Faculty of Social Science,  
The University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland*

(Received 10 June 2024, revised 12 January 2025)

---

## Abstract

Polish Tatars constitute an indigenous and, at the same time, the oldest Muslim group (Sunni Muslims of the Hanbali school) residing in the territories of the Republic of Poland since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Currently, the Tatars are the third largest recognized ethnic minority in Poland. Over the centuries, they have lost their native language but have retained many aspects of their identity and distinct religious, ethnic, historical and cultural characteristics. As indigenous Polish Muslims, Tatars enjoy respect from authorities as well as social tolerance and acceptance in Poland. In my view, their phenomenon lies in the ability to use their religious and ethnic distinctiveness as an asset and their peaceful assimilation process as a strength. The phenomenon of Polish Tatars is that despite their primarily religious distinctiveness, they have perfectly integrated into the Polish socio-political landscape. From the very beginning, they have respected Polish culture and the established traditions, never sought to impose their religious views, never acted against the Polish state, never threatened its security, and did not succumb to the radicalization commonly seen among Muslims in Western Europe, nor did they exhibit tendencies towards ghettoization. Their attributes include hospitality, patriotism, loyalty, social engagement and an inclusive attitude towards Poles. Polish Tatars have become an inseparable part of Polish society. Unlike the perception of Muslims who arrived in Poland or attempted to cross its borders illegally due to the refugee and migration crisis that began in 2015, the public perception of Polish Tatars has not changed and is not characterized by the widespread stereotype of ‘Muslim equals terrorist’.

*Keywords:* Tatars, Muslims, Islam, ethnic minority, Poland

---

## 1. Introduction

Polish Tatars constitute an indigenous and, at the same time, the oldest Muslim group living in Poland. They are Sunnis originating from the Hanbali school of Islamic law [1, p. 28-32]. They have inhabited the territory of the Republic of Poland since the 14<sup>th</sup> century as descendants of Crimean Tatars – Mongolic peoples. Currently, Tatars are the third largest recognized ethnic minority in the Republic of Poland, with an estimated population of around 1800 people. However, it should be emphasized that an exact estimation of the number

---

\* katarzyna.czornik@us.edu.pl

of Polish Tatars is not possible. This is because of significant discrepancies between official government data and the Tatar estimates, which considerably differ from the government statistics. Although Tatars constitute a relatively homogeneous ethnic group, they are not a homogeneous community. As rightly pointed out by Karolina Rodłowska, they include both autochthons being the descendants of Tatars settled in the Białystok region in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as well as migrants and even their descendants who arrived in Poland directly from former eastern voivodeships, incorporated into the USSR after World War II, or from the so-called Recovered Territories, to which they were resettled after 1945 [2, p. 7]. Over the centuries, they have lost their native language but have retained many manifestations of ethnic and cultural distinctiveness and unique traditions deserving protection. The two main localities inhabited by indigenous Tatars, are the villages of Bohoniki and Kruszyniany located in the Podlasie region, which are associated primarily with history, tourism and some symbolic connotations.

Tatars, as a Muslim ethnic minority in the Republic of Poland – distinguished primarily by their religion, Islam, and the associated cultural factors – have become an inseparable and fully accepted part of Polish society. The perception of Polish Tatars, despite being Muslims, within Polish society has remained almost unchanged for decades and is equally positive and tolerant. The presence and functioning of Tatars on Polish soil are fully accepted by both the authorities of the Republic of Poland and by the Polish people themselves. I posit that this state of affairs results from the fact that Polish Tatars pose no threat to the security of the Polish state, do not fit the erroneous yet widespread stereotype of the Muslim terrorist, nor are they prone to radicalization and ghettoization, as is the case with Muslims in Western European countries or with the new incoming Muslims due to the refugee and migration crisis that has been gripping Europe since 2015. Polish Tatars exemplify the phenomenon of Muslim openness, centuries-long cooperation and peaceful coexistence with Polish Christians.

With discussion research questions are: 1. What is the origin of the Tatars in Poland? 2. What formal and legal factors determine the status of the Tatars as an ethnic minority in the Republic of Poland? 3. What factors determine the identity, sustainability and continuity of the Tatar minority in Poland? 4. What institutional and non-institutional actions does the Tatar minority take to integrate and strengthen their own identity? 5. Does the religion practised by the Tatars – Islam – affect their perception by Polish society and authorities in the face of threats related to religious terrorism, radicalization and ghettoization? 6. Do the implications of the migration and refugee crisis pose a threat to the Tatars in Poland, the way they are perceived and their functioning?

## **2. Research methods**

In order to be able to answer these questions and to attain their stated objectives, the author of this manuscript employed various research methods and techniques. Among the most important include: 1) A literature review that allows for the study of the origins of the Tatar minority in the territories of the former and present Republic of Poland; 2) The analysis of sources and content that made

it possible to reconstruct the origins of Polish Tatars, their culture and historical factors; 3) A secondary analysis of the literature on the subject supported the conclusions regarding the unchangeable peaceful perception of the Tatars of indigenous Polish Muslims; 4) The institutional-legal method, which facilitates the identification of the normative foundations for the functioning of the Tatar minority in Poland as an ethnic, rather than national, minority, as well as the definition of their rights and obligations under both Polish and international law; 5) The factorial analysis which helps to identify the factors that condition the peaceful coexistence of Poles and Tatars, as well as the formal (institutionalized) and informal actions taken by the Tatar minority to maintain their own identity and survive as an ethnic minority.

### **3. A historical status of the Tatars minority in Poland**

Muslims have been residing in the territories of Poland for almost 700 years. However, as Marian Kopczewski pointed out, many researchers consider the journey of Ibrahim ibn Yaqub, a Spanish Jew who converted to Islam, through Polish lands in the years 965-966, to be the first contact of our ancestors with followers of Islam [3]. However, it was only in the 13<sup>th</sup> century that the real and long-term relation of the Polish state with Islam began. It was then that Mongol invaders advanced into Polish territory from the southeast, among whom were numerous followers of Islam. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Muslim Tatars appeared on Polish lands as refugees from the Golden Horde, from the Volga River area, the Crimea and the steppes [4, p. 18-21]. Lithuanian rulers, including Duke Vytautas, settled Tatars in the basin of the Niemen River and granted them land in exchange for military service, including in the fight against the Teutonic Order. Polish Tatars lived in the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. Tatar settlements in Lithuania and adjacent lands, in the Grodno and Nowogródek regions, survived until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and sometimes even longer [5, p. 35-51].

It is worth noting that broader contacts between Poles and Muslims progressed with the emergence of new trade routes and the development of trade. This period saw a kind of Polish-Muslim or Polish-Ottoman cultural diffusion, evidenced by Turkish additions displayed in the attire of the nobles, Ottoman design and decorative patterns increasingly fashionable in Poland, and admiration for Arabian horses [6, p. 100-115]. This last element of cultural diffusion has persisted to this day, as exemplified by the world-renowned stud farm in Janów Podlaski [A. Krzysztalowicz, History of the stud, The Janów Podlaski Stud, <http://www.janow.arabians.pl/en/history/stud.php>].

Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that Polish-Muslim relations during that period were not always peaceful. The political and religious circumstances of the time meant that the Polish state, which served as the bulwark of Christendom, naturally engaged in intercultural conflicts and growing antagonisms between the Islamic world and the Christian world. The expansionist policy of the Ottoman Empire was contrary to Polish national interests at the time. A symbolic event in this context was King Władysław III Jagiellończyk's campaign against the Turks,

which ended in the defeat of the Christian forces and the death of the king at the Battle of Varna in 1444 [7, p. 61-64]. The following two centuries were also marked by Polish-Turkish conflicts. The key and turning point for the history not only of Poland but of the whole of Europe was the so-called Relief of Vienna – the battle fought at Vienna on 12 September 1683, between the Polish-Imperial army under the command of King John III Sobieski and the Ottoman Empire army led by Vizier Kara Mustafa. The battle ended in the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, which from that point ceased to be a threat to the Christian part of Europe and in 1699 signed a peace treaty with the states of the Holy League in Karlowitz [4, p. 29-33].

Interestingly, the fates of Poles and Muslims were also intertwined peacefully, especially during the difficult period of the partitions of Poland and the complete disappearance of the Polish state from the world map for 123 years. During this time, many Poles migrated to the territories of the Ottoman Empire and found refuge there [8, p. 168-169].

Polish-Muslim contacts, however, were not only linked to the Ottomans but also significantly involved the Mongols and Tatars, dating back to the medieval period. The Tatars originated from the Mongolian steppes and reached Polish lands through Ruthenia and Lithuania as part of Mongol invasions and conquests [9, p. 736-738]. In May 1233, it was the Mongol Empire that began to pose a direct threat to Europe. For the Polish state, this threat involved three invasions that halted the process of uniting the Polish state. The first invasion was associated with the events of December 1240, when the Mongols captured Kiev and ultimately conquered Kievan Rus, which became part of the Golden Horde. The first contacts between Poles and Tatars, specifically Kipchak Tatars, date back to 1241, when the first unsuccessful Mongol invasion of Poland occurred under the command of Baidar. In the years 1259–1260, the Golden Horde under the leadership of Burundai achieved victory in an expedition against Bolesław V the Chaste. This was the so-called second Mongol invasion. At the turn of 1287 and 1288, the third Mongol invasion took place. The enemy forces managed to reach the Holy Cross Mountains, where they were defeated by the troops of Leszek the Black near Łagów. On the other side, Mongol forces reached Krakow and Podhale, where they fought a battle on the Dunajec River and were subsequently defeated by combined Polish-Hungarian forces at the battle of Stary Sącz [10, p. 409-438].

To sum up, it should be emphasized that despite the three Mongol invasions, the Polish state was never subjugated by the Golden Horde. Nevertheless, one implication of the Mongol invasions was the appearance of Muslim Tatars, who were part of the Mongol army, on Polish lands in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Looking back in history, it is worth noting that Lithuanian rulers were the first to come into contact with the Tatars. Those Tatars who settled in Lithuanian lands were called Lithuanian Tatars [Podgorki Family Archives 2011-2022, The Lipka Tatars, <https://www.podgorski.com/main/lipka-tatars.html>]. Over time, due to dynastic connections, Polish-Lithuanian unions and economic difficulties, Lithuanian Tatars began to settle in Polish lands as well. They were referred to as

Polish Tatars or Lipka Tatars (from the Turkish name for Lithuania). After the incorporation of the southwestern lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania into Poland, including Podlasie, Volhynia, Kiev and Bratslav regions, the Lithuanian Tatars became part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This initiated a true influx of Tatars into Polish territories from Lithuanian lands. In Poland, Tatars formed special light cavalry units (as their main occupation was military service) and enjoyed freedom of religion. Subsequently, the rulers granted them numerous privileges. Both the nobility and the Catholic clergy, including Jesuits, considered Islam to be less dangerous than Protestantism, especially since the Tatar nobility had largely assimilated into Polish culture. The practice of religious rituals and the preservation of traditions by Muslim believers were met with tolerance by the Polish nobility [11, p. 148-157]. The Constitution of 3 May 1791 granted Muslims in Poland full political rights [N. Zych, Making 'Good Muslims': Poland and the Lipka Tatars, <https://criticalmuslimstudies.co.uk/making-good-muslims-poland-and-the-lipka-tatars/>]. It is worth noting that until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, indigenous Muslims, i.e. Polish-Lithuanian Tatars, were the only Muslim religious minority in Poland. Interestingly, in Podlasie, King John III Sobieski granted land to several Tatar units, with two villages, Bohoniki and Kruszyniany, remaining Muslim enclaves in Poland to this day, featuring mosques and cemeteries.

Importantly, over time, the Tatars became an integral part of Polish society. Their attachment to Polish lands was evident in their lack of enthusiasm for the partitions of Poland. Many Tatars participated in Polish national uprisings, including the Kościuszko Uprising, the November Uprising and the January Uprising. Some Tatars, not accepting the political situation at the time, emigrated, while others fought for Poland, facing persecution, imprisonment or exile to Siberia by the tsarist authorities. Certainly, there was also a group of Tatars for whom the change in political sovereignty was of no consequence and even became an opportunity for profit and enlistment in the Russian army. There were also acts of vandalism and violence by Tatars against the Polish population during that period [12, p. 103-124].

Nevertheless, when the opportunity arose in 1918 to regain the Polish state, the majority of Tatars rose to the occasion, and their male representatives participated in the fight for independence. After the fall of the Tsarist regime, the Association of Tatars of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine was formed. In 1918, members of this organization established Tatar cavalry units within the army organized by Józef Piłsudski, which actively participated in the struggle to maintain the independence of the Polish state.

During the era of the Second Polish Republic, the activities of the Tatars became more formalized and institutionalized. The legal status of the Tatars as a religious community was first defined by the March Constitution of 1921, and later by the April Constitution of 1935. On 21 April 1936, the Polish Sejm adopted a law concerning the relationship between the Polish state and the Muslim Religious Union in the Republic of Poland (*Muzułmański Związek Religijny w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*) [13, p. 218-227]. All these legal acts expressed religious tolerance towards Muslims in Poland and guaranteed them extensive rights in various spheres of life. In 1923, the Warsaw Muslim Association

(Warszawski Związek Muzułmanów) was founded, and two years later, the All-Polish Muslim Association (Wszechpolski Związek Muzułmański). The association became independent from the Crimean muftiate and appointed its own highest religious leader. The first mufti of Polish Muslims was Jakub Szymkiewicz, who served as the representative of the Muslim Religious Union to the Polish authorities. The Union included 19 Muslim communities, which, during the interwar period, had 17 mosques. Thus, it can be claimed that the interwar period was a very good time for Polish Muslims, their development, the preservation of traditions, and to some extent, assimilation into Polish society. For example, in 1926, at a congress of Muslim intelligentsia, the Cultural and Educational Association of Tatars of the Republic of Poland (Związek Kulturalno-Oświatowy Tatarów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) was established. The Muslim community published the quarterly 'Przegląd Islamski' ('Islamic Review'), 'Życie Tatarskie' ('Tatar Life') and 'Rocznik Tatarski' ('Tatar Yearbook'). Muslim activists, subsidized by the Polish state, were not restricted by the authorities in maintaining contacts with foreign Islamic organizations. In 1936, the number of Muslims in Poland was around 6,000. Tatars, primarily residing in the Vilnius, Nowogródek and Białystok regions, were Polish citizens of the Muslim faith, speaking the Polish language [14].

World War II brought significant changes to the functioning of Muslims in Poland. Primarily, the war led to the destruction of the Muslim intelligentsia. After the occupation and the territorial changes of the Polish state, some Tatars remained on Polish lands, while others found themselves in the USSR, as the most numerous Muslim communities were located in the Vilnius region. However, it should be noted that some Tatars returned to Poland as repatriates. After World War II, two villages within Poland's borders retained their Tatar character: Bohoniki and Kruszyniany, located in today's Podlaskie Voivodeship. In 1947, the Tatar Religious Union was reactivated. However, the socialist period in Poland was not favourable to the functioning and development of Muslims in the country [15].

A significant change occurred only after the events of 1989 and the establishment of the Third Republic of Poland. Democratic Poland once again became a tolerant state towards other religions and a favourable place for the functioning and development of the Muslim minority – the Polish Tatars [16].

#### **4. Legal and formal status of the Tatar minority in Poland**

The Tatars in Poland are recognized as an ethnic minority. This status is derived from Article 2.4 of the most crucial normative act for their functioning in Poland, the Act of 6 January 2005 on national and ethnic minorities and on the regional languages. This act lists four minorities recognized as ethnic: the Karaim, Lemko, Romani and Tatar minorities [Ustawa z dnia 6 stycznia 2005 r. o mniejszościach narodowych i etnicznych oraz o języku regionalnym (Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and on Regional Language of 6 January 2005), Dz.U. 2005 nr 17 poz. 141, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu20050170141>].

It is important to emphasize, however, that the legal status of national and ethnic minorities residing in Poland, including the Tatar minority, is determined by a series of legal acts of varying positions in the hierarchy of sources of law in the Republic of Poland. The normative acts in force reflect the Polish state's commitment to the principles of equality, tolerance and the prohibition of discrimination based on race, ethnic origin, religion or gender, as well as the necessity to respect individual and collective rights and freedoms of persons belonging to national and ethnic minorities.

The constitutional protection of the Tatar minority, as an ethnic minority, is primarily guaranteed by the 1997 Constitution, specifically Articles 27 and 35. According to the legislator's intent and the provisions of Article 35, the Republic of Poland ensures Polish citizens belonging to ethnic minorities the freedom to maintain and develop their own language, customs and traditions, and to develop their own culture. Moreover, ethnic minorities have the right to establish their own educational and cultural institutions as well as institutions aimed at protecting their religious identity, and to participate in deciding on matters concerning their cultural identity. Article 27 states that "In the Republic of Poland, the official language is Polish. This provision does not infringe upon the rights of national minorities resulting from ratified international agreements" [Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 2 kwietnia 1997 r. (The Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997), Dz.U. 1997 nr 78 poz. 483, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu19970780483>]. This implies a constitutional guarantee of fundamental civil rights and freedoms for ethnic minorities, including cultural rights and freedoms.

It should be highlighted, however, that the Constitution, in Article 35, uses the terms 'national minority' and 'ethnic minority' without defining them. It was only the Act on Minorities of 2005 that provided definitions for these terms. According to the Act, an ethnic minority is defined as: "a group of Polish citizens that meets all of the following requirements: 1) it is numerically smaller than the rest of the population of the Republic of Poland; 2) it differs substantially from other citizens in terms of language, culture or tradition; 3) it strives to preserve its language, culture or tradition; 4) it is aware of its own historical and national bonds and is oriented towards expressing and preserving them; 5) its ancestors have inhabited the today's territory of the Republic of Poland for at least the past 100 years; 6) it does not identify itself with a nation organized in its own state" (Article 2.3 of the Act on Minorities) [Ustawa z dnia 6 stycznia 2005 r. o mniejszościach narodowych i etnicznych oraz o języku regionalnym (Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and on Regional Language of 6 January 2005), Dz.U. 2005 nr 17 poz. 141, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu20050170141>]. Thus, the differentiating criterion between a national minority and an ethnic minority, as indicated by the Polish legislator, is the identification of members of the minority with a nation. A national minority identifies with a nation organized in its own state, contrary to an ethnic minority. Considering the criteria specified in the Act, both objective (1, 2 and 5) and subjective (3, 4 and 6), the Polish legislator recognized that the Tatar minority meets all criteria to be granted the status of an ethnic minority.

The Act of 2005 on Minorities, being the most precise in its provisions directly related to the functioning of the Tatars (as well as other national and ethnic minorities) in Poland, is therefore the main and most important source of rights and freedoms for the Tatar minority in Poland and a determinant of their functioning. Its enactment was associated with the need to fulfil obligations that Poland had undertaken within the framework of the concluded bilateral and multilateral international agreements. According to the provisions of the Act on Minorities, five legal guarantees can be defined for individuals belonging to the Tatar minority (and other ethnic minorities). First, the right to freely decide to consider themselves as members of a minority (a minority member is not required to prove the belonging to a minority). Second, the obligation to disclose information about minority membership or to reveal origin, minority language or religion can only arise from the law. Third, the exercise of rights and freedoms arising from the Act on Minorities can be done individually or jointly with other minority members. Fourth, it is prohibited to use measures aimed at assimilating persons belonging to minorities against their will, and measures aimed at changing the national or ethnic proportions in areas inhabited by minorities. Fifth, discrimination based on belonging to a minority is prohibited. This last guarantee is linked to a more detailed obligation of public authorities to take appropriate measures aimed at: promoting full and real equality in economic, social, political and cultural life between persons belonging to a minority and persons belonging to the majority; protecting individuals who are subject to discrimination, hostility or violence because of their belonging to a minority; strengthening intercultural dialogue. This obligation is a task-oriented norm that does not specify the premises for undertaking action, the means of its implementation, or even the specific responsible public authority. The assessment of these elements is left to public authorities, making it difficult to demonstrate compliance or non-compliance [Ustawa z dnia 6 stycznia 2005 r. o mniejszościach narodowych i etnicznych oraz o języku regionalnym (Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and on Regional Language of 6 January 2005), Dz.U. 2005 nr 17 poz. 141, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu20050170141>].

The legal and institutional status of the Tatar minority in Poland, though in a less direct manner, also stems from other normative acts binding on the Polish state. These are primarily international agreements to which Poland is a party. In this context, it is worth mentioning such legal acts as: the Charter of the United Nations, the European Convention on Human Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and finally, the Treaty on European Union.

Moreover, significant broad guarantees of individual and collective rights and freedoms for those belonging to the Tatar minority are provided by domestic legal acts, including but not limited to: the Act of 14 December 2016 – the Law on School Education (Article 88.3 and Article 104 point 4) [Ustawa z dnia 14 grudnia 2016 r. - Prawo oświatowe (The Act of December 14, 2016 - Education Law), Dz.U. 2017 poz. 59, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=>



wdu20170000059]; the Act of 7 September 1991 on the Education System (Article 13, 44zv and Article 44zzf.1) [Ustawa z dnia 7 września 1991 r. o systemie oświaty (The Act of September 7, 1991 on the education system), Dz.U. 1991 nr 95 poz. 425, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu19910950425>]; the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 18 August 2017 on the conditions and methods for preschools, schools and public institutions to perform tasks enabling the maintenance of national, ethnic and linguistic identity of students belonging to national and ethnic minorities and the community using the regional language [Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z 18 sierpnia 2017 r. w sprawie warunków i sposobu wykonywania przez przedszkola, szkoły i placówki publiczne zadań umożliwiających podtrzymywanie poczucia tożsamości narodowej, etnicznej i językowej uczniów należących do mniejszości narodowych i etnicznych oraz społeczności posługującej się językiem regionalnym (The Regulation of the Minister of National Education of August 18, 2017 on the conditions and manner of performing tasks by kindergartens, schools and public institutions enabling the maintenance of the sense of national, ethnic and linguistic identity of students belonging to national and ethnic minorities and the community using a regional language), Dz.U. 2017 poz. 1627, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20170001627>]; the Act of 5 January 2011 – Electoral Code (Article 95 § 2, Article 197 and Article 462 § 4) [Ustawa z 5 stycznia 2011 r. – Kodeks wyborczy (The Act of January 5, 2011 - Electoral Code), Dz.U. 2011 nr 21 poz. 112, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu20110210112>]; the Act of 6 June 1997 – Penal Code (Articles 118, 118a, 119, 256 and 257) [Ustawa z 6 czerwca 1997 r. – Kodeks karny (The Act of 6 June 1997 - Penal Code), Dz.U. 1997 nr 88 poz. 553, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu19970880553>]; the Act of 29 December 1992 on Broadcasting (Article 15.2, Article 15.4.3, Article 18.1, Article 21.1a.8a, Article 30.4a, Article 47h and Article 47o.1.2) [Ustawa z 29 grudnia 1992 r. o radiofonii i telewizji (The Act of 29 December 1992 on radio and television broadcasting), Dz.U. 1993 nr 7 poz. 34, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu19930070034>]; the Regulation of the Minister of Infrastructure of 10 August 2005 on placing additional names in the languages of national and ethnic minorities and in the regional language on signs and boards [Rozporządzenie Ministra Infrastruktury z 10 sierpnia 2005 r. w sprawie umieszczania na znakach i tablicach dodatkowych nazw w językach mniejszości narodowych i etnicznych oraz w języku regionalnym (The Regulation of the Minister of Infrastructure of August 10, 2005 on placing additional names in the languages of national and ethnic minorities and in the regional language on signs and boards), Dz.U. 2005 nr 157 poz. 1320, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20051571320>]; the Regulation of the Minister of Interior and Administration of 30 May 2005 on the method of transliteration of names and surnames of individuals belonging to national and ethnic minorities written in an alphabet other than the Latin alphabet [Rozporządzenie Ministra Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji z 30 maja 2005 r. w sprawie sposobu transliteracji imion i nazwisk osób należących do mniejszości narodowych i etnicznych zapisanych w alfabecie innym niż alfabet

łaciński (The Regulation of the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration of May 30, 2005 on the method of transliteration of names and surnames of persons belonging to national and ethnic minorities written in an alphabet other than the Latin alphabet), Dz.U. 2005 nr 102 poz. 855, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20051020855>].

Considering the above-mentioned legal acts, it should be emphasized that formally, legally and institutionally, Poland is a tolerant state, open to ethnic (and national) minorities and guaranteeing minorities broad rights and freedoms within all generations of human rights. The Tatar ethnic minority fits perfectly into the institutional-legal landscape of guarantees for minorities in the Republic of Poland. Not only does it possess, but it also fully enjoys the rights and freedoms to which it is entitled.

## **5. Demographic and Culture status of the Tatar minority in Poland**

During the period of the Third Republic of Poland, three national censuses have been conducted, with the first two providing numerical data on the Tatar minority in Poland.

According to the National Population and Housing Census of 2002, the Tatar minority had a population of only 447 individuals, including: 319 in the Podlaskie Voivodeship, 22 in the Masovian Voivodeship and 28 in the Pomeranian Voivodeship [Central Statistical Office, Wyniki Narodowego Spisu Powszechnego Ludności i Mieszkań 2002 w zakresie deklarowanej narodowości oraz języka używanego w domu (Results of the 2002 National Census of Population and Housing in terms of declared nationality and language spoken at home), <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechno/narodowe-spisy-powszechno/narodowy-spis-powszechny-2002/wyniki-narodowego-spisu-powszechnego-2002-narodowosci-oraz-jezyka/?pdf=1>].

In the subsequent National Population and Housing Census conducted in 2011, 1828 Polish citizens declared their belonging to the Tatar minority, including: 539 in the Podlaskie Voivodeship, 332 in the Masovian Voivodeship and 175 in the Pomeranian Voivodeship. According to the census data, Tatars resided in traditional Tatar colonies in the Białystok region, in the villages of Bohoniki and Kruszyniany, as well as in cities such as Białystok, Sokółka, Dąbrowa Białostocka, Warsaw and Gdańsk. Thus, in 2011, the number of Tatars in Poland was four times higher compared to the 2002 census. However, leaders of Tatar organizations in Poland emphasized that the actual number was significantly higher, ranging between 3,000 and 5,000 people [Central Statistical Office, Struktura narodowo-etniczna, językowa i wyznaniowa ludności Polski - NSP 2011 (National-ethnic, linguistic and religious structure of the Polish population - National Census 2011), <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechno/nsp-2011/nsp-2011-wyniki/struktura-narodowo-etniczna-jezykowa-i-wyznaniowa-ludnosci-polski-nsp-2011,22,1.html?pdf=1>].

The next National Population and Housing Census was conducted in Poland in 2021 [Central Statistical Office, Stan i struktura demograficzno-społeczna i ekonomiczna ludności Polski w świetle wyników NSP 2021 (The condition and

demographic, social and economic structure of the Polish population in the light of the results of the National Census 2021), <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechno-nsp-2021/nsp-2021-wyniki-ostateczne/stan-i-struktura-demograficzno-spoeczna-i-ekonomiczna-ludnosci-polski-w-swietle-wynikow-nsp-2021,6,2.html>]. However, it does not contain precise statistical data on the Tatar minority in Poland. It is worth noting that before the census, the Association of Polish Tatars (Związek Tatarów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) carried out a significant campaign promoting the declaration of Tatar nationality in the census. The campaign was called #každyTatarsięliczy (#everyTatarcounts) – National Census 2021. As highlighted on the Association's website, the census results have an impact on the functioning of every minority, facilitating the process of obtaining grants for cultural activities, for the protection of cultural sites, as well as for investments aimed at preserving the identity [<https://ztrp.pl/kazdy-tatar-sie-liczy-nsp-2021/>]. It is important to emphasize once again the issue of underestimation of the actual number of the Tatar minority in Poland. As stated on the official government website gov.pl, in 2024, there were still fewer than 2,000 Tatars in Poland [<https://www.gov.pl/web/mniejszosci-narodowe-i-etniczne/tatarzy>]. Meanwhile, Tatar organizations' websites suggest much higher numbers – even up to 5,000 to 6,000. Therefore, determining the exact number of Polish Tatars is problematic, given the significant discrepancies between official government data and Tatar estimates.

Importantly, over the centuries of residing in Poland, the Tatars have lost knowledge of their native language, which belonged to the Kipchak group of Turkic languages. The Tatar language is currently considered extinct in Poland. This process occurred among the Tatars living in the lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as early as at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Tatars living in Poland thus speak Polish, and their surnames have been Polonized. The Tatar language, however, is still alive in Russian Tatarstan and in Turkey. Interestingly, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Tatar organizations have undertaken initiatives to revive the Tatar language as part of their efforts to strengthen ethnic identity, including organizing special language courses. However, these efforts did not gain significant interest among Polish Tatars, and the effectiveness of the Tatar language revitalization was minimal [17, p. 4-5].

Interestingly, the Tatars in Poland publish their magazine in the form of a Polish-language quarterly 'Przegląd Tatarski' ('Tatar Review') and 'Rocznik Tatarów Polskich' (the 'Polish Tatars Yearbook'), and previously they published the bimonthly 'Życie Tatarskie' ('Tatar Life', 1998–2017). The most important cultural events organized by the Tatar minority include: Tatar Cultural Festival and the Polish Tatars Horseback Archery Championships held in the open-air museum near Białystok in Podlasie, the Tatar Culture Festival and the Academy of Knowledge about Polish Tatars organized in Sokółka and Bohoniki. For 23 years, the famous agrotourism farm Tatarska Jurta, run by Dżenneta and Mirosław Bogdanowicz, has been operating in Kruszyniany. It is known for its excellent cuisine with delicacies such as kibiny (dumplings) and pierekaczewnik (layered pie with meat or cheese). Poles visiting Podlasie eagerly explore Tatar villages renowned for their hospitality, kindness and understanding towards tourists

encountering Tatar Muslim culture and religion for the first time [[http://www.kruszyniany.pl/szlak\\_eng.html](http://www.kruszyniany.pl/szlak_eng.html)].

It is also worth noting that although the Tatar language has not survived as an element of Tatar identity, other factors have remained that define, unite and distinguish the Tatar minority in Poland. One of the most significant is undoubtedly the religious aspect, which has not lost its importance over the centuries. The Tatars in Poland have remained faithful to the religion they brought with them to Polish lands – Sunni Islam. Thus, in places where Muslim religious communities exist, there are prayer houses. In Podlasie, Bohoniki and Kruszyniany have old Muslim cemeteries (mizars) with inscriptions on tombstones in Arabic, Russian and Polish, as well as historic wooden mosques listed as Historic Monuments. Tatars observe Ramadan, celebrate Ramadan Bayram, and another major holiday, Kurban Bayram. They come from all over the country to Białystok for Bayram balls, often seeking potential spouses among other Tatars. As Wojciech Janicki pointed out, one might expect knowledge of Arabic among the Tatar population, or at least among Muslim clergy, as Islamic theology requires conducting services exclusively in Arabic. Interestingly, the reality is quite different. It was not until 1998 that a student, fluent in Arabic, returned to the Polish Tatar community from Quranic studies in Paris, where he had been sent by his religious community. Thus, Polish Tatars generally do not know either their native language or Arabic, regarded as the language of the Quran. It is worth adding that the Tatar Muslim community is visited by Islamic clergy, mainly from Turkey or Arab countries, who aim to support Polish Muslims with theological and linguistic knowledge [18]. However, the effectiveness of these visits is not very high, and certainly does not pose a threat of potential radicalization or ghettoization of the Tatar minority in Poland.

The fact remains that what distinguishes Polish Tatars is their extraordinary patriotism. For hundreds of years, they faithfully and bravely supported the Polish army, fighting in all the most important battles: Grunwald, Kirchholm, Vienna and Maciejowice. Even during the September Campaign of 1939, the 13<sup>th</sup> Vilnius Uhlans Regiment included a Tatar squadron. Today, patriotism among Polish Tatars remains a particularly distinguishing feature compared to other minorities. Joanna Klimowicz, referring to the exemplary patriotic attitudes among the Tatars, gives the example of Dariusz Szehidewicz, a Tatar teacher at a Białystok school and a scout leader, who was nominated for the prestigious ‘Anody’ for ‘Peacetime Insurgents’ Award by the Warsaw Rising Museum in the fifth edition of the award [Klimowicz, *Tatarzy w Polsce. Orient na Podlasiu*, July 29, 2018, <https://turystyka.wp.pl/tatarzy-w-polsce-orient-na-podlasiu-6278546059896449a>].

## **6. Institutional and non-institutional status of the Tatar minority in Poland**

With the conclusion, it should be emphasized that the Tatars in Poland remain an organized minority, supported by the operation of four major organizations: the Association of Polish Tatars (Związek Tatarów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej), the Tatar Cultural Society Foundation (Fundacja

Tatarskie Towarzystwo Kulturalne), the Muslim Religious Community (Muzułmańska Gmina Wyznaniowa) in Białystok, and the Muslim Religious Union in the Republic of Poland (Muzułmański Związek Religijny w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej).

As stated on the official website of the Association of Polish Tatars (ZTRP, <https://ztrp.pl/stowarzyszenie/>), headquartered in Sokółka (Bohoniki 23) and led by Jan Adamowicz, this organization gathers Polish citizens of Tatar descent. Members emphasize that their ancestors settled in Poland centuries ago and were ready to take up arms in every need of their homeland, chosen of their own free will. The Association's goals include preserving the ethnic awareness of Polish Tatars, integrating the Tatar population, cultivating and promoting Tatar traditions being also part of Polish culture, and defending and supporting the social, economic and professional interests of its members.

The Association of Polish Tatars operates as an institutionalized entity. The current leadership was elected by the VIII Congress of Delegates of the Association, which took place in Bohoniki on 4 September 2021. The governing bodies, whose term lasts for five years, include the Central Council (comprising the president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and a member) and a three-member Central Audit Committee.

Since 2005, the Association has had the status of a public benefit organization, allowing citizens to donate 1.5% of their tax to the organization. It also has four branches: the North-West Branch (based in Gdańsk), the Podlasie Branch (based in Białystok), the Bohoniki Branch and the Masovia Branch (based in Warsaw). To become a member of the Association, one must fill out a membership declaration [Związek Tatarów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, <https://ztrp.pl/stowarzyszenie/>].

The goals and form of the Association's activity are precisely defined by its statute, with the current version adopted on 28 May 2022. In the very first section the statute declares that the Association is the direct successor of the traditions and legal heir of former Polish Tatar organizations, such as the Circle of Polish Muslim Academics (Koło Akademików Muzułmanów Polskich), the Association for the Aid of Poor Muslims (Stowarzyszenie Pomocy Biednym Muzułmanom), the Cultural and Educational Association of Tatars of the Republic of Poland (Związek Kulturalno-Oświatowy Tatarów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej), Association of Tatars of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine (Związek Tatarów Polski, Litwy, Białorusi i Ukrainy) and the Association of Polish Tatars (Związek Tatarów Polskich w RP). The Association draws upon the over 600-year-long historical tradition of the Polish Tatars, representing and continuing this tradition. It is also stated that the association, as a representative of the Tatar ethnic group, can have its representatives in the National Assembly of the Republic of Poland, local government bodies of all levels, EU institutions and other international organizations. The statute lists eleven statutory goals, including: founding and supervising a youth organization; conducting informational and publishing activities; providing support to members, including social welfare assistance; organizing educational and training activities; organizing own forms of physical recreation, tourism and mass sports; organizing

cultural, educational and sports events, exhibitions, and conducting other educational activities; developing cooperation with the relevant state and local government bodies as well as political, social, religious, professional organizations and research institutes; fostering cultural and scientific cooperation with Tatar associations operating in other countries; obtaining funds for the association's goals through various forms of economic activity; obtaining funds for the association's goals from the government, local government, the European Union and private sponsors; conducting charitable activities [Statut ZTRP, [http://ztrp.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Statut.ZTRP\\_28.05.2022.pdf](http://ztrp.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Statut.ZTRP_28.05.2022.pdf)].

The Association can implement its projects thanks to its financial resources, which include membership fees, donations, bequests, grants, income from own activities and public donations. Significant in this regard are grants from the Ministry of the Interior and Administration. From 2014 to 2023, these grants were effectively used for organizing various cultural, educational and sporting events to integrate Polish Tatars and promote Tatar culture. Major initiatives include the Tatar Spring Festival NAVRUZ, the Tatar Culture Festival, the Summer Academy of Knowledge about the Tatars, and the restoration of horseback archery tradition for the Tatar community. The most important initiatives included: the Tatar Spring Festival NAVRUZ; numerous editions of the Tatar Culture Festival (the 10<sup>th</sup> edition took place in 2023); the Summer Academy of Knowledge about the Tatars (the 25<sup>th</sup> jubilee Academy was held in 2023; it was entitled 'Socio-cultural activities as a factor strengthening the identity of the Tatars', and the 26<sup>th</sup> Summer Academy of Knowledge about the Tatars, entitled 'Clan-family-community as an element of the transmission of the Tatar cultural heritage' has been scheduled for 28-29 June 2024); the restoration of the tradition of horseback archery in the Tatar community; the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Association of Polish Tatars combined with the Tatar Ball (in 2022); subsequent editions of the Tatar Children and Youth Camp in various Polish cities – Warsaw, Krakow, Wrocław (the 11<sup>th</sup> edition took place in 2022); recreational and educational workshops for Tatar children and youth in Bohoniki; the reconstruction of the Bunchuk of the 1st Squadron of the 13<sup>th</sup> Vilnius Uhlan Regiment in 2018; Tatar language courses in 2014 and 2017; a scientific symposium – *Kitab, Hamail as carriers of culture, tradition and behaviours of Polish Tatars (Kitab, Chamail jako nośniki kultury, tradycji i zachowań Tatarów Polskich)* in 2015 [Związek Tatarów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, <https://ztrp.pl/stowarzyszenie/>].

The Association of Polish Tatars is thus the most important, recognizable, extremely efficient and effective organization that not only integrates Polish Tatars but also ensures that the Tatar identity remains alive among this ethnic group.

Another important organization institutionalizing the activities of Polish Tatars is the Tatar Cultural Society Foundation, officially registered on 2 September 2013, and led by President Róża Chazbijewicz. As emphasized by the foundation itself on its website, the foundation's mission is to restore the Tatar cultural heritage, promote awareness of the centuries-old presence of Tatars in Poland and Polish-Tatar coexistence through educational and promotional activities. Important aspects of the foundation's operations include: the activation

of the younger generation, striving to instil in the young people a desire to learn about Tatar culture, mutual meetings and getting to know each other. It is claimed that the name of the foundation purposefully defines its goals, including primarily activities for the cultural and educational development of children and youth, social integration of the Tatar minority, emotional reconstruction of Tatars, awakening of a sense of ethnic identity and preservation of national traditions. These goals are indeed achieved through a series of projects funded, among others, by the Ministry of the Interior and Administration. The foundation conducts educational activities (educational boards, cultural meetings, conferences, publications), promotional activities (correspondence, promotional materials), integrative activities (Tatarlandia, cultural meetings), and cultural activities (the song and dance group Buńczuk, cuisine, music, dance) [Fundacja Tatarskie Towarzystwo Kulturalne, <https://fttk.org/>].

However, it is extremely important and worth emphasizing that the foundation's authorities unequivocally indicate on their online posts that alarming trends related to the emigration of the Tatar community members have been evident for many years, which could consequently lead to its gradual disintegration. The increasing internal divisions and the unprecedented scale of migration of Muslims from the Middle East to Poland are also of concern [E. Kaczmarczyk, What does a Pole think when they hear 'Muslim'?, April 5, 2023, <https://salamlab.pl/en/what-does-a-pole-think-when-they-hear-muslim>]. The migration and refugee crisis does not positively affect the functioning of the Tatar minority in Poland, as the presence of incoming Muslims reinforces many negative stereotypes in Polish society (e.g. related to terrorist activities and threats to the security of the Polish state), which may be unjustly associated with the Polish Tatar community, causing significant harm to this historical ethnic minority in Poland [19].

The third institution that significantly influences the functioning of the Tatar minority in Poland is the Muslim Religious Community in Białystok. The community has a long tradition, having been registered as early as 1960. It owns a prayer house where prayers are held every Friday and on public holidays. An Islamic Cultural Centre is currently under construction. The present imam of the Białystok community is Mirzogolib Radzhabaliev [Muslim Religious Community in Białystok, [https://www.facebook.com/MGWwBialymstoku/?locale=pl\\_PL](https://www.facebook.com/MGWwBialymstoku/?locale=pl_PL)].

Importantly, the Muslim Religious Community in Białystok is one of six religious communities that constitute the fourth most significant Muslim institution operating in Poland, the Muslim Religious Union in the Republic of Poland (MZR), which unites Hanafi Sunnis. The Union represents the Muslim community in contacts with the Polish government and local administration, as well as foreign governmental and religious institutions. MZR is the oldest, most important and most numerous organizations of Polish Muslims. According to estimates by the authorities of this organization, there are about 5,000 Polish Muslims, with the main group being the Tatars [The Muslim Religious Union in the Republic of Poland, <https://mzr.pl/>].

As previously mentioned, the origins of the Muslim Religious Union date back to the interwar period. The organization was established on 28-29 December

1925 during the All-Polish Congress of Delegates of Muslim Communities in Vilnius. The first mufti of the Union was Jakub Szynekiewicz, and the legal status of the organization was regulated by the Polish Parliament with the Act of 21 April 1936 on the relation between the State and the Muslim Religious Union in the Republic of Poland. World War II interrupted the activities of the organization. They were resumed in 1947, and since then the Union has continuously worked for the Tatar-Muslim community in Poland. During the Polish People's Republic era, the Muslim Religious Union was the only organization that united Tatar Muslims and had a monopoly on all cultural, educational and religious activities. This situation changed only in 1989, following the systemic transformation in the Republic of Poland and the establishment of the Association of Polish Tatars.

The legal basis for the operation of the Muslim Religious Union is the aforementioned 1936 law, according to which Polish Muslims remain in religious and moral connection with their co-religionists abroad, creating their own religious association independent of any secular or religious authorities abroad. The Muslim Religious Union was granted legal personality, which allowed it to own movable and immovable property. Muftis, imams and muezzins were recognized as clergy in Polish law. Mosques and clergy could start receiving state subsidies. The law established the obligation to pray for the well-being of the Republic of Poland and its President during Friday prayers, and the organization of prayers on state holidays also became obligatory. However, it is worth emphasizing that the regulations from before World War II do not match up to the realities of the Union's activities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, for many years, the Union activists have been trying to change these regulations, but so far, new legal solutions adequate to the needs and realities of the functioning of the Tatar minority in Poland have not been adopted [20, p. 41-65].

Nonetheless, according to the current statute, the Muslim Religious Union pursues seven main objectives: representing the interests of the Union members before the state and local authorities as well as and non-governmental organizations; representing Polish Muslims before foreign Muslim organizations; promoting the concept of Islam, its teachings and adherence to Islamic principles; striving to deepen the knowledge of Muslim science, culture and art; taking care of existing mosques, cultural centres, prayer houses and cemeteries; undertaking necessary actions to establish new religious, cultural and educational centres and training personnel for such centres; providing assistance to the Union members as well as to the poor and needy. The leading goal of the Union, similarly to other organizations, is to maintain the Tatar identity and integrate the Tatar community. Therefore, to address the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in 2020, the Muslim Religious Union in the Republic of Poland launched the website [muzulmanie.pl](http://muzulmanie.pl), intended to serve as a source of information not only about religious practices but also about other aspects of the believers' lives, such as medicine and ecology in Islam ('eco-Islam') [Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Eco-Islam, <https://www.ifees.org.uk/about/about-ifees/>].

Since 2014, Tomasz Miśkiewicz has been leading the Muslim Religious Union as the Mufti of the Republic of Poland and the Chairman of the Supreme College of Muslim Religious Union in the Republic of Poland. He succeeded



Stefan Mustafa Jasiński in this position. The Union's authorities also include three other members and a secretary. There are six Muslim communities functioning within the Muslim Religious Union in Poland: Białystok, Bohoniki, Kruszyniany, Gdańsk and two in Warsaw (Fatih and Caucasus).

The extensive cultural and educational activities of the Union are made possible, similarly to the other organizations, through grants received from the Ministry of the Interior and Administration. According to financial reports, these grants enable the publication of the Union's socio-cultural quarterly 'Przegląd Tatarski' ('Tatar Review') and 'Rocznik Tatarów Polskich. Seria 2' (the 'Polish Tatars Yearbook. Second series'), an informational booklet 'Tatarzy na Podlasiu' ('Tatars in Podlasie', 2022) as well as numerous albums and books (the latest in 2024 include 'Czasopiśmiennictwo Tatarów polskich po roku 1945', 'Muzułmański Cmentarz Tatarski w Warszawie' and a collection of tales 'Złotowłosa Totombaj. Tatarskie bajanie'). The Union is also responsible for various renovation and construction projects, notably the renovation of the Tatar Islamic Cultural Centre in Suchowola, the restoration of the minaret at the mosque in Gdańsk, and the expansion of the Prayer House in Białystok. The Union also actively engages in online activities to adapt to the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Every Friday, a new khutbah – a sermon delivered by the khatib at the mosque during the communal Friday prayer – is posted on the Union's website, featuring primarily religious content but also addressing current events. For example, on 10 April 2024, the sermon for Ramadan Bayram (Eid al-Fitr) was delivered by Mirzogolib Radzhabaliev, the imam of the Muslim Religious Community in Białystok, and was entitled "All the Best! Happy Bayram!" [Khutbah on the occasion of Ramadan Bairam (Eid al-Fitr), April 10, 2024, <https://mzr.pl/khutba-swiateczna-on-line/>].

## **7. Conclusions**

Polish Tatars are undoubtedly an ethnic group that has been historically, culturally, and nationally integrated into Polish society for nearly ten centuries. As indigenous Polish Muslims, they enjoy respect and social acceptance. Despite continuous efforts to maintain, strengthen and develop their sense of religious (Islamic), ethnic and cultural identity, they exhibit a high level of patriotism and social engagement.

Their uniqueness lies in the ability to use their religious and ethnic distinctiveness as an asset and their peaceful assimilation as its strength. The phenomenon of the Tatars also lies in their ability to maintain their ethnic and religious identity while perfectly fitting into the Polish landscape. From the very beginning, they have respected Polish culture and traditions, never sought to impose their religious views, never acted against the Polish state, never threatened its security, and did not succumb to the radicalization commonly seen among Muslims in Western Europe, nor did they exhibit tendencies towards ghettoization. Their attributes include hospitality, patriotism, loyalty and an inclusive attitude towards Poles. The key phrase that has accompanied the

development of a strong European Union for decades, ‘unity in diversity’, can undoubtedly be also applied to Polish Tatars [21].

The Tatars, as an ethnic minority in Poland, enjoy considerable freedoms, and the Polish state fully supports their efforts to maintain their ethnic and religious identity. This support is evident through numerous grants from the Ministry of the Interior and Administration provided to organizations dedicated to integrating the Tatar community in Poland. Organizations such as the Association of Polish Tatars, the Tatar Cultural Society Foundation, the Muslim Religious Community in Białystok, and the Muslim Religious Union in the Republic of Poland have been supported by Polish authorities for years, which enables them to organize numerous cultural and educational events centred around Tatar traditions, publish their own magazines, informational materials and books, organize summer academies – trips for children and youth to learn about and nurture Tatar culture, and carry out renovation and construction projects focused on restoring or building new places of worship.

In summary, it should be emphasized once again that over the centuries, Polish Tatars have become an integral part of Polish society. Unlike the perception of Muslims who arrived in Poland or attempted to cross its borders illegally due to the refugee and migration crisis that began in 2015, the perception of Polish Tatars has not changed and is not characterized by the widespread stereotype of ‘Muslim equals terrorist’.

However, noted that Polish Tatars themselves stress that one of the greatest threats to their continuity as a group in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the refugee and migration crisis and the associated uncontrolled migration of people from the Middle East and Africa. Socially unacceptable behaviours often accompanying individuals who have crossed the borders illegally and who are Muslims, have or may have a negative impact on the perception of Tatars as followers of Islam in the future. Tatars recognize that the religious life of Muslims in Poland in the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an extremely dynamic process and at the same time a transitional stage between the past situation, where the only Muslims in Poland were Tatars, and the present, where the vast majority of Muslims are newcomers who approach religious worship differently than Tatars, are more demanding and are susceptible to radicalization processes. An example of tensions and discrepancies between indigenous Muslim Tatars and incoming Muslims was the establishment of another Muslim religious organization, the Muslim League in the Republic of Poland (Liga Muzułmańska w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej), on 14 April 2001. This was in response to the steadily increasing number of incoming Muslims in Poland, who perceived tasks related to their religiosity differently from the Tatars, leading to intra-Muslim disputes in Poland. The refugee and migration crisis has only deepened these tendencies.

## References

- [1] D. MacEoin, *Sharia Law or ‘One Law for All’?*, Civitas, London, 2009, 127, ISBN 978-1906837082
- [2] K. Rodłowska, *Tatarzy polscy. Ciągłość i zmiana*, Fundacja Sąsiedzi, Białystok, 2017, 233, ISBN 9788364505430

- [3] M. Kopczewski, *Przegląd Naukowo-Metodyczny. Edukacja dla Bezpieczeństwa*, **2** (2013) 47-63, ISSN 1899-3524
- [4] I. Barnes, *Restless Empire: A Historical Atlas of Russia*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, 2015, 240, ISBN 9780674504677
- [5] [5] P.R. Magocsi, *This blessed land: Crimea and the Crimean Tatars*, University Of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2014, 160, ISBN 9780772751102
- [6] P. O'Brian, *Empires, Crusaders, and Invasions through the Middle Ages*, Cavendish Square, New York, 2016, 160, ISBN 9781502606792
- [7] D.A. Howard, *A History of the Ottoman Empire*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017, 412, ISBN 978-0521898676
- [8] M. Provence, *The last Ottoman generation and the making of the modern Middle East*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017, 314, ISBN 9780521747516
- [9] R.C. Martin, S.A. Arjomand, M. Hermansen), A. Tayob, R. Davis and J. Obert Voll, *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim world*, Macmillan, Farmington Hills, 2003, 1000, ISBN 9780028656038
- [10] N. Berend, P. Urbańczyk and P. Wiszewski, *Central Europe in the High Middle Ages: Bohemia, Hungary and Poland c.900 - c.1300*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, 546, ISBN 9780521786959
- [11] A. Zamoyski, *The Polish way: a thousand-year history of the Poles and their culture*. John Murray Publishers Ltd, London, 1988, 432, ISBN 9780719546747
- [12] M. Tuna, *Imperial Russia's Muslims: Islam, empire and European modernity, 1788-1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015, 292, ISBN 9781107032491
- [13] L. Podhoredecki, *Tatarzy. Od Czyngis-chana do XX wieku*, Bellona, Warszawa, 2010, 248, ISBN 9788311118010
- [14] K. Jarecka-Stępień, *Elektronik Siyaset Bilimi Araştırmaları*, **1** (2010) 50-63, ISSN 1309-7008
- [15] K. Warmińska, *Nurt SVD*, **2** (2017) 111-122, ISSN 1233-9717
- [16] T. Pilch, *Warmińsko-Mazurski Kwartalnik Naukowy, Nauki Społeczne*, **3** (2017) 53-73, ISSN 2084-1140
- [17] W. Janicki, *Czasopismo Geograficzne*, **71** (2000) 173-187, <https://phavi.umcs.pl/at/attachments/2014/0215/130614-04-tatarzy-w-polsce-narod-grupa-etniczna-czy-ludzie-pogranicza.pdf>
- [18] J. Danecki, *Literature of the Polish Tatars*, 40-52, in *Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe. Widening the European Discourse on Islam*, K. Górak-Sosnowska (ed.), University of Warsaw Press, Warsaw, 2011, 343, ISBN 9788390322957
- [19] M. Stojkow, *Central and Eastern European Migration Review*, **7(2)** (2018) 185-196, doi: 10.17467/ceemr.2018.17
- [20] K. Weber, *Practices of Belonging: Identity Among Polish Tatars*, Doctoral Thesis, University College London, London, 2023, 231, <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10170987/>
- [21] A.S. Nalborczyk and P. Borecki, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, **22(3)** (2011) 343-359, doi: 10.1080/09596410.2011.586514