

Muslims in Poland: Tatars, Refugees and Immigrants

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Abstract

Polish Muslims are a small community, which is consisted of diversified groups such as Tatars, Chechens, Algerians etc. The Tatars are the most indigenous group among the Polish Muslims. At present, the Islamic community of Poland has expanded by the coming up of migrants from Muslim countries as well as diplomats and businessmen. They are Muslims who began to arrive in Poland in the middle of the 20th century, chiefly from countries of the Middle East, North Africa, Iran and Afghanistan. This article examines the constitutional status and position of Muslims in Poland in general and the Polish Tatars in particular. The role of Tatars regarding the Polish Islam and the importance of religion (Islam) in building Tatar identity are the main focus and crux of this study. The situation of non-Tatar people such as Muslim emigrants has also been briefly investigated in this context.

Key Words: Polish Muslims, Tatar Identity, Other Islamic Groups

Özet

Polonya Müslümanları, içinde Tatar, Çeçen, Cezayirli vb. çeşitli grupları barındıran küçük bir cemaattir. Bu Müslüman gruplar arasında Tatarlar Polonya'nın en eski yerlileridirler. Ancak günümüzde Polonya Müslüman Cemaati çeşitli Müslüman ülkelerden gelen göçmenler, diplomatlar ve işadamlarını da bünyesine katarak büyümüşür. Bunlar 20. yüzyılın ortasından itibaren genellikle Ortadoğu, Kuzey Afrika, İran ve Afganistan gibi bölgelerden Polonya'ya gelen Müslümanlardır. Bu makale genelde Polonya Müslümanlarının özelde de bu ülkede yaşayan Tatarların anayasal hakları ve durumlarını ele alınmaktadır. Polonya İslamı'nda Tatarların rolü ve dinin (İslam) Tatar kimliğinin oluşmasına yaptığı katkı bu makalenin üzerinde durduğu diğer önemli noktalardır. Bu bağlamda ayrıntıya girmeden araştırılan bir diğer konu ise Tatarların haricinde diğer Müslüman göçmenlerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Polonya Müslümanları, Tatar Kimliği, Diğer İslami Cemaatler

Nowadays, Muslims in Poland constitute a small religious minority. This community, although not so large, is much diversified. The people of Tatar origin were the only group of Muslims in Poland until the Second World War. At present, this group has been increased by migrants such as students from Muslim countries as well as diplomats and businessmen. They are Muslims who began to arrive in Poland in the middle of the 20th century, chiefly from countries of the Middle East, North Africa, Iran and Afghanistan. From the beginning of the 1990s, an increased influx of people professing Islam to Poland has been observed. Besides numerous businessmen, diplomats and their family members, the others are mainly students

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from the Arab countries who come to pursue their study in Poland. Among the category of businesspersons, the number of Turks is more. During recent years, we can also observe the presence of Muslim political refugees which consists mostly of citizens of Iraq (10%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (5%), Afghanistan (4%).

Polish authorities do not have exact data about the number of believers of Islam. According to the census of 2002 almost 97 percent of the inhabitants of Poland claimed to be Polish, however only 1.23 percent (i.e. 471.500 persons) declared themselves to be member of other nationalities and faiths.¹ The official statistical data are based exclusively on the information of the Muslim Religious Association [Muzułmański Związek Religijny (MZR)].² The unofficial number of Muslims in Poland is currently estimated to be around 20.000, including 5.000-6.000 people of Tartar origin. Muslims constitute only 0.04 % of the total population of Poland.³

Legal status of Muslims in Poland

The Communist authorities treated national and religious minorities as the 'necessary evil' that should not be given any attention. There was no uniform policy against the minorities between 1945 and 1989. Also the attitudes of the Polish state to particular minorities were different. However in the post-Cold War era it became evident that Poland is the homeland of other ethnic groups as well, whose problems require special legal and political solutions. After years of political non-existence national and ethnic differences became the issue of political and legal agenda in Poland. In the 1990s the situation of national and ethnic minorities began to change in a positive manner in the country. The rights of ethnic minorities found its reflection in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) and in the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities (Ustawa o mniejszościach narodowych i etnicznych).

The Article 35 of the Polish Constitution (enacted on 2 April 1997) stresses two main points:

¹ Ludność. Stan i struktura demograficzno-społeczna 2002: Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2002, [Population. The state and the demographic and social structure 2002: National General Census of Population and Flats 2002], GUS, Warszawa: Zakład Wydawnictw Statystycznych, 2003.

² See: Niektóre wyznania religijne w Polsce w 2001 r. [Some religions in Poland in 2001] 'Mały rocznik statystyczny 2003', Główny Urząd Statystyczny. [Online]: www.stat.gov.pl/serwis/polska/2003/rocznik4relig.htm (21 July 2007).

³ A.S. Nalborczyk, Status prawny muzułmanów w Polsce, [Legal status of Muslims in Poland], [in:] 'Muzułmanie w Polsce' ed. by A. Parzymies, Warszawa: Dialog 2005, p. 230. See also: S. Ismail, Islam i Muzułmanie w Polsce [Islam and Muslims in Poland]. [Online] : <http://www.islam.com.pl> (7 February 2005).

- a) The Republic of Poland ensures Polish citizens belonging to national and ethnic minorities the freedom to maintain and develop their own language, customs and traditions, and to develop their own culture.
- b) National and ethnic minorities have the right to establish educational and cultural institutions, institutions designed to protect religious identity, as well as to participate in the resolution of matters connected with their cultural identity.

The Polish Constitution guarantees legal protection to its national and ethnic minorities. The regulation of the status of national minorities in the Polish political system was propelled basically by two trends. On the one hand, it was the result of political motivation for establishing good neighborly relations with all its neighbors and, in consequence, stabilization of its geopolitical position in Central Europe. This process was started by signing the Treaty with Germany in 1991 and was completed by signing the Treaty with Lithuania in 1994. On the other hand, it was the result of obligation for establishing efficient system of protection of human and citizen rights, part of which was the protection of people belonging to national and ethnic minorities.

The Act on National and Ethnic Minorities of 2005⁴ stipulates the following points as shown below:

- a) It defines the national and ethnic minorities in Poland. The draft introduces definition of national and ethnic minority as follows: ‘a group of a distinct origin, traditionally residing on the territory of the Polish state and constituting [numerical] minority as compared to the rest of the citizens, and which is characterized by the objective to sustain its culture, traditions, language, national or ethnic consciousness’;
- b) It states that ‘every person belonging to the minority has a right to the free decision whether to be treated as a person belonging to a minority, but such a choice or taking advantages of rights connected with it does not result in any unfavorable consequences’;
- c) It states that ‘nobody can be obliged, unless on the basis of the act, to reveal information about his or her own affiliation in a minority, or reveal one’s origin, minority’s language or religion’;
- d) It is forbidden to apply any means purposing assimilation of persons belonging to the minority if these means are being applied against their will and it is forbidden to apply

⁴ 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; Dz. U. 2005 Nr 62, poz. 550.

means purposing the change of nationalistic or ethnic proportions in areas inhabited by minorities’;

- e) It states that ‘nobody can be forced to prove one’s minority affiliation’;
- f) It permits using the minority language, in chosen communes, as the accessory language, in contact with organs of the commune and in legal proceedings of the first instance;
- g) It determines that along with place-names determined by Polish language, traditional names of towns and streets in the minorities’ languages can be used;
- h) The right to sustain and develop their culture and national or ethnic identity;
- i) The right to associate for peaceful purposes;
- j) The right to profess and practice their own religion;
- k) Freedom of access to the means of mass communication;
- l) The right to free use their own native language in private and public live;
- m) The right to use one's own name [as it is spelled and pronounced] in a minority language;
- n) The right to display in his/her minority language information of private nature visible to the public;
- o) The right to study one's native language and to be instructed in it;
- p) The right to maintain trans-frontier contacts with persons of the same national or ethnic affiliation;
- q) The right to free participation in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs in particular in relation to minority issues.

It seems to have no problems for Poland with small minority groups. However, problems still persist because there is no clear government policy dealing with this subject. Most Poles identify Roman Catholics as the only true Polish citizens. On the other hand, the Polish government has signed and ratified many international human rights conventions, most of which contain statements prohibiting any ethnical, national, or religious discrimination. One of these conventions is the European Convention of Security and Cooperation Accords signed on 29 June 1990 by Poland, Lithuania, Belorussia, and Ukraine. On the whole there is still not enough protection for the minorities by the Polish government and law. Minorities in Poland are still discriminated and they have to face intolerance in societal life. A law was enacted on 21 April 1936, which regulated the relations between the Polish state and the Muslim Religious Association of the Republic of Poland (Ustawa z dnia 21 kwietnia 1936 r. o

stosunku Państwa do Muzułmańskiego Związku Religijnego w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej). Today, among many legal regulations, the most important one is said to be the guarantee of recognition of Islam as official religion by the state.⁵ The Act determines the details of relations between Polish state and believers of Islam, including maintaining the contact with the Muslim Religious Association. The person who wants to perform religious life should have obtained Polish citizenship and have a good command of Polish language. The Act of 1936 guarantees Muslims the same rights as Catholic Polish. The same Act ensures the oath of the head of the Muslim Religious Association on the Koran. Also he should oblige himself to keep fidelity to the Republic of Poland and must respect the Constitution as follows:

“I promise and swear to God for the holy Koran that during the office that I take, I will do the best of my understanding and fulfill my duties in accordance with the conscience, solemnly complying with the Koran’s directions and the rights of the Republic of Poland, and that I will make the subordinate clergy comply with these decisions and rights as I do. I promise and I swear that keeping fidelity to the Republic of Poland I will respect the Government established by the Constitution and that I will make the subordinate clergy respect it too. Caring about the prosperity of the Republic of Poland, I will not participate in actions and deliberations that would bring damage to Polish state and the public order...”⁶

The above-mentioned act gives Polish Muslims the right to impart their religious instructions in the public schools. It can be taught by persons appointed by school authorities and by the mufti.⁷ This right was later confirmed by the legal Act on the educational system on 7 September 1991, which prescribes that public schools have to give opportunity to maintain the national, ethnic, linguistic and religious identity.⁸ The Act of 1936 adopted by the Sejm (Polish Parliament) is already over seventy years old. One should bear in mind that many of its clauses are obsolete and do not fit with reality. Representatives of the Muslim Religious Association have been conducting negotiations with the government for a few years now regarding amendments to this act. The expose on a new act which is supposed e.g. to list Muslim holidays, to bestow the right to discharges from service in these days for the Muslims.

⁵ Ustawa z dnia 21 kwietnia 1936 r. o stosunku Państwa do Muzułmańskiego Związku Religijnego w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, [Act on the relation between the state and the Muslim Religious Association in the Republic of Poland of 21 April 1936], Dz. U. z dnia 24 kwietnia 1936 r. Nr 30, poz. 240 z późn. zm. obowiązuje od 24 kwietnia 1936 r.

⁶ Ibidem, Art. 9.

⁷ Ibidem, Art. 32.

⁸ Ustawa o szkolnictwie narodowym, z dnia 7 września 1991 r., [Act from the 7th September 1991 about the educational system].

The Tatar Muslims - 600 years of the tradition of Polish Islam

Map 1. Muslims in Poland



Source: Own Research

The Tatars appeared first time in 1397 in Poland, who rejected the paganism and accepted the Christianity. Besides that they got married to the Poles.⁹ First Tatar Muslims came to the Republic of Poland in the 14th century, where they stayed as prisoners from the

⁹J.Drabina, Wierzenia, religie, wspólnoty wyznaniowe w średniowiecznej Polsce i na Litwie i ich koegzystencja [Believes, religions, communities in medieval Poland and Lithuania and their coexistence], Kraków 1994, p. 161.

Golden Horde.¹⁰ They were also called Tatars, Polish Tatars, Polish-Lithuanian Tatars, Lipki or Muslims.¹¹ Emigrants from various areas of the Golden Horde joined them in the subsequent centuries (and later from the Crimean Khanate), and small groups of Muslims from the Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Turkey. According to some sources, during the period of the greatest emigration, namely in the 16th and 17th centuries approximately 200.000 Muslims lived in the Republic of Poland.¹² Tatars were employed mainly in the military. Kulwicka-Kamińska and Kamiński wrote even about the intentional accepting of Tatar settlers by the Lithuanians in order to use their military skills against the Order of Teutonic Knights.¹³

The fact is that the Polish Tatars had separate troops in the Polish army since the Battle of Grunwald in 1410¹⁴ until the Second World War.¹⁵ In return for their military contribution they obtained nobility from the Polish state and received lands from rulers and kings. Besides, Polish Tatars enjoyed the religious freedom and were able to built prayer houses like mosques.¹⁶ In the 19th century ethnically diversified Muslims began to arrive in the Polish Kingdom. They were mainly merchants from the East who settled in large Polish cities, e.g. in Warsaw. Since 1917 refugees came mainly from the Caucasus and the Crimea to Poland, where the Bolshevik revolution occurred.¹⁷

After the gaining of independence in 1918 Poland remained a multinational country in which members of national minorities made up more than one-third of the total population. It was a high proportion even compared with Central European countries. In the interwar period, protection of rights of national minorities created a serious political problem for Poland - a problem which, to a large extent, was not resolved. Only four percent of contemporary Poland

¹⁰ M. M. Dziekan, *Historia i tradycje polskiego islamu*, [History and Tradition of Polish Islam], [in:] *Muzułmanie w Europie*, ed. by A. Parzymies, Warszawa: Dialog 2005.

¹¹ Nowadays Tatars are calling as: Lithuanian - Polish Tatars, Belorussian Tatars, Lithuanian Tatars, Tatars of Republic of Poland, muslimowie and muślimi.

¹² J. Kulwicka-Kamińska, I. Kamiński, *Islam po polsku*, [Islam in Polish Style], Poznań: Drukarnia Świętego Wojciecha 2007, p. 115, P. Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, [Tatars in Old Republic of Poland], Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza 1986.

¹³ J. Kulwicka-Kamińska, I. Kamiński, *Islam po polsku...*, p. 114.

¹⁴ July 15, 1410, The Battle of Grunwald took place between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania on one side (c. 39 000 troops), and the Teutonic Knights on the other (c. 27 000 troops). The Teutonic knights were defeated and never recovered their former influence. After the battle, rumours spread across Europe that the Germans had only been defeated thanks to the aid of tens of thousands of heathen Tatars, though it is likely there were no more than 1.000 Tatar horse archers at the battle, the core being the entourage of Jalal ad-Din, son of Khan Tokhtamysh. Participation of Tatars in this battle became later the reason for the complaint to the Vatican State. They were claiming that Poles and Lithuanians had supported the paganism.

¹⁵ See: J. Gutowski, *Broń i uzbrojenie Tatarów* [The weapons and armanent of Tatars], Warszawa 1997, and S. Kryczyński, *Kronika wojenna Tatarów litewskich* [War chronicle of Lithuanian Tatars], Gdańsk 1997/1998.

¹⁶ See: J. Sobczak, *Położenie prawne ludności tatarskiej w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim* [Legal status of Tatar population in Grand Duchy of Lithuania], Poznań: PWN 1984.

¹⁷ J. Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii Tatarów polskich 1794-1944* [From Polish Tatar History 1794-1944], Pułtusk: Wyższa Szkoła Humanistyczna w Pułtusk 1998.

belongs to a national minority. This considerable low percentage of non-Poles resulted from the modification of Polish borders according to the Agreement of Yalta, which shifted numerous Belorussians and Ukrainians to the USSR and removed ethnic Germans from Poland. After the Second World War the Polish state authorities claimed that, under this circumstances Poland has become a homogeneous nation-state. National homogeneity was considered to be one of the most important fundamentals of the new state. Nowadays, the people of the Tartar origin in Poland are estimated to be nearly 6.000. A similar number of Tartar origin people live in Lithuania and around 10.000 in Belorussia. It is estimated that total number of Tatars inhabiting the areas of the former Polish state does not exceed 20.000 people. They live in the Białystok region, in the Pomerania and in the western regions of the country.

Islam in Poland

Majority of Polish Muslims belong to the Sunni Islam. Tatar Muslims in Poland follow the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam. It is easy to write on the Islamic beliefs of Tatars, whose faith is deeply rooted in the Polish reality. Polish Tatars have the oldest traditions. The fact is that Muslim Religious Association established by Tatars, is the only Muslim association in Poland that has chosen its Mufti.¹⁸ Islam determined the identity of Tatars throughout the centuries. However in the beliefs of Polish Tatars one can find traces of some pre-Muslim Turkish elements as well as some features of local people belonging to Christian faith.¹⁹

Despite limited contacts with the Middle Eastern countries Tatars have lacking of the knowledge of the Quran and Sunnah.²⁰ However the Arabic language has never been an obstacle to the religious practices of Tatars.²¹ There are many characteristic features of Tatar Islam²² such as sadaqa.²³ Polish Tatars have taken the custom called 'sadoga', which consists

¹⁸ In Poland this function fulfills Tomasz Miśkiewicz from 19 of March 2004, chosen during the 5th Congress of the Muslim Religious Association, as the first Mufti of the Republic of Poland, after 1945.

¹⁹ J.Kamocki, Zderzenie obyczajów i zwyczajów muzułmańskich Tatarów ze zwyczajami ludowymi chrześcijańskiej ludności polskiej, [in:] 'Orient w kulturze polskiej' [Orient in Polish Culture], materials from session of 25 years Museum Asia and Pacific, Warsaw, 15-16 October 1998, Warszawa 2000, p. 139.

²⁰ Sunnah, literally means 'trodden path', and therefore, the sunnah of the prophet means 'the way of the prophet'.

²¹ K. Warmińska, Tatarzy polscy. Religijność a dylematy tożsamości [Polish Tatars. Religiousness and Identity Dilemmas], [in:] 'Między wschodem a zachodem', ed. by P. Stawiński, Częstochowa: Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna w Częstochowie 1995.

²² S. Kryczyński, Kronika wojenna Tatarów litewskich..., p. 178.

of distributing sweets and sweet buns to all people present at the ceremony. Furthermore the tradition about the Muslim 'saints' is also known to Muslims from Białystok, which is somehow contrary to the foundations of the orthodox Islam.²⁴

In this regional veneration of the saints there are some Christian influences. Acculturation processes can be observed such as having portraits of the dead person which is fundamentally contrary to Islamic principles. Furthermore, the external construction of mosques does not differ from the churches and the crescent is the only typical feature representing Islam.²⁵ Unfortunately, one of the negative effects of separating the Polish Muslims from the rest of the Islamic world in the period of People's Republic of Poland is the lack of proper theological education. Majority of Polish imams had to get their religious knowledge through their own studies. Nowadays Muslim Religious Association sends young people to study abroad like Saudi Arabia. Great majority of the Muslims living in Poland are not aware of fulfilling Islamic rituals such as praying and wearing traditional clothing. Because of not leaving their work places on Fridays Polish Tatars often come to the mosques on Sundays. They say: 'Islam is the religion for people. Nobody will require the Polish Muslim woman to wear hijab in the streets. We are Muslims, but we are also Poles.'²⁶ According to some Muslim women wearing scarves in Poland would be contradictory to the principles of Islam.

Tatar Identity

Ethnic and cultural complexity of Lithuanian-Polish Tatars can be described as follows: A Tatar from Lithuania speaks Belorussian or Polish, considers himself as a Pole, professes Islam and writes with Arabic alphabet.²⁷ Religion shaped the identity of the Polish Tatars. Islam helps Tatars to protect their ethnic identity of Tatars and religion is connected somehow with nationality. Islam described as a 'Tatar Islam' with the peculiar local character and departed from Muslim orthodoxy and Christian religion and culture.²⁸ So the Tatar

²³Sadaqa is voluntary Islamic charity or obligatory charity. Sadaqa may be financial assistance, public service, or even a smile to someone who needs it. It is often the social norm to give Sadaqa when visiting sites holy to Islam or making pilgrimage.

²⁴ M. M. Dziekan, *Historia i tradycje polskiego islamu...*, p. 207.

²⁵ A. Kołodziejczyk, *Cmentarze muzułmańskie w Polsce [The Muslim Cemeteries in Poland]*, 'Studia i Materiały - Cmentarze' 7(10) 1998, Warszawa: Ośrodek Ochrony Zabytkowego Krajobrazu.

²⁶ Sz. Hołownia, *Polskie dzieci Allaha [Polish Children of Allah]*, 'Newsweek Polska'. [Online] No 11, 2004, [07 February 2005].

²⁷ Cz. Łapicz, *Kitab Tatarów litewsko-polskich (Paleografia. Grafia. Język)*, [Kitab of the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars (Paleography. Graphy. Language)], Toruń 1986, p. 33.

²⁸ K. Warمیńska, *Tatarzy polscy. Tożsamość religijna i etniczna [Polish Tatars. Religious and Ethnic Identity]*, Kraków: Universitas 1999, p. 72.

identity is based mainly on the religious dissimilarity from the other faiths. Belonging to the Tatar tribes is an important thing for Tatar people. According to Katarzyna Warمیńska, a Polish researcher, there is no contradiction between the facts of being a Tatar, Muslim and Pole simultaneously. The example of Polish Tatars shows the multifacetedness of the symbolic aspect of the national identity. It illustrates the dynamic and context of creating of the social identity by individuals that want to preserve their religious and ethnic identities on one side, but on the other side, they want to accustom strangeness stemming from this identity.²⁹

Tatars have become an integral part of Polish socio-cultural landscape. All of them consider themselves Poles and they know Polish language and Polish culture. Throughout the centuries they were nearly assimilated with autochthonous population. But the determinant of their identity was Islam. Social differences make the relationships and contacts between the Tatar and Arab students rare. The opinion of Tatars about the Arabs indicated as follows: ‘Our civilization and culture are different. We have borderland culture. We are assimilated. Arabs came from various countries and even different continents and they do not understand much our customs and traditions.’³⁰ However, some Muslims from the Middle East and Africa who do not know and do not understand the specificity of Tatar community and accuse them of losing the Muslim orthodoxy by adjusting to the European culture.³¹

Loss of tribal languages as the factor determining the processes of assimilation

Tatar people coming from various corners of the world to Poland brought different languages, customs, and tribal manners with them, whose language was not homogenous from the very beginning. Czesław Łapicz thinks that ethnic diversity of the Tatar tribes in Lithuania was connected with the different dialects they used. All the dialects belonged to the same group of the Kipchak language.³² As a result of the processes of acculturation and assimilation Tatars lost their knowledge of the native languages and began to use Polish (or Polish-Belarusian dialect) with elements of Turkish languages since early 18th century. However nowadays descendants of Tatars living in Poland use only Polish. They use the Arabic language only for religious purposes. At the beginning of 19th century Jan Sobolewski wrote: “It is difficult for us that we and our children praise God using language that is unfamiliar to

²⁹ Ibidem, pp. 227-228.

³⁰ Ibidem, [Interview No 29], p. 131.

³¹ J. Kulwicka-Kamińska, I. Kamiński, *Islam po polsku...*, p. 143.

³² Cz. Łapicz, *Kitab Tatarów litewsko-polskich...*, p. 49.

us and that we do not use the language spoken by our fathers for ages [...] We are unhappy because our texts, writings and service are written in a language we do not understand.”³³

It should be mentioned that taking the new language from local people was not the result of the forced assimilation. Łapicz emphasizes the minor rank of assimilation of mixed couples and military service, supporting rather the strong impact of the separation from the community, so-called the missing feeling of “the national unity” and the lack of “the national language.”³⁴ As history showed, knowledge of the native language was not necessary for survival of a community.

Organization

Muslims did not have their own religious organisation for centuries of their presence in Poland. They showed greater activity during the interwar period. Between 1918 and 1939 nineteen denominational communes operated in Poland that associated 6.000 Muslims. The first religious organisation of Polish Muslims was the Muslim Association of Capital Warsaw [Związek Muzułmanów Miasta Stołecznego Warszawy], which was established in 1923. Three years later Tatars founded the Cultural and Educational Association of Tatars of Republic of Poland [Związek Kulturalno-Oświatowy Tatarów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej] in Vilnius that led to popularize publishing scientific articles and books on the history and culture of Tatars.³⁵ However the most important Tatar organization was founded in 1925, which organized Polish Muslim Convention (Wszeczpolski Zjazd Muzułmański) in Vilnius. In the Polish Muslim Convention the autocephaly of Polish Islam was announced and the Muslim Religious Association of the Republic of Poland (Muzułmański Związek Religijny w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) was created. A separate muftiat for Polish and Lithuanian Muslims was established in Vilnius. Jakub Szynekiewicz (1884-1966) was chosen as the first mufti who was one of the most outstanding persons in the history of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars.³⁶ The Muslim Religious Association of the Republic of Poland was the only Muslim organisation in Poland for many years, which was reorganized after the Second World War. Nowadays 95 % of the members of this organization are Tatars. Polish citizens and the person who have the

³³ J. Sobolewski, Wykład wiary machometkańskiej czyli islamskiej, [Lecture of Muslim Religion], Wilno 1830, p. III.

³⁴ Cz. Łapicz, *Kitab Tatarów litewsko-polskich...*, Toruń 1986.

³⁵ M. M. Dziekan, *Historia i tradycje polskiego islamu...*, p. 204.

³⁶ Jakub Szynekiewicz (1884 – 1966) - doctor of oriental studies, since 1925 first Mufti in Poland. He translated some part of Koran from Arabic to Polish. Numerous contacts were entered with the Muslim world during his tenure eg. the Palestine, Egypt etc. Szynekiewicz as a Mufti led also for final regulating of Polish Muslims' legal status: Act on the relation between the state and the Muslim Religious Association in the Republic of Poland (established on 21 April 1936).

right for the permanent residence permit in the Republic of Poland can be member of the Muslim Religious Association.³⁷ The aims of the association are indicated as follows: Representing its members, disseminating of the idea of Islam, strengthening the principles of Islam, increasing of knowledge of the Muslim culture, protection of mosques, religious centres and Muslim cemeteries, the building of new mosques.³⁸ The Muslim Religious Association has its seat in Białystok, whose activity is based on the cooperation with seven Muslim communes located in Białystok, Bohoniki, Kruszyniany, Gdańsk, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Poznań and Warsaw. Tatars publish regularly three periodicals such 'Przegląd Islamski' (The Islamic Review), 'Rocznik Tatarski' (The Tatar Annals) and 'Życie Tatarskie' (The Tatar Life).

Non-Tatar Islam in Poland- Muslim Imigrants and Refugees

The Office for Foreigners (Urząd do Spraw Cudzoziemców) oversees the matter related to refugees in Poland and grants them refugee status in the country.³⁹ Muslim refugees come to Poland mainly from the republics of former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Afghanistan Chechnya etc. Although 6.860 applications were received in 2005, only 335 people obtained the refugee status.⁴⁰ Applicants came from 50 different countries. However, more than 90 percent of them (6.244 people) came from Chechnya. Quite a large group of applicants came from Pakistan, Afghanistan and India. People applying for the refugee status in Poland are very young. Almost half of them (46%) is under 18, and 20 percent of them are children under the age of four.⁴¹

In Poland there are immigrants from the Middle East, North Africa and Asia as well. Most of them came to Poland in the 1970s and 1980s. They were students from the Arab countries who wanted to pursue their studies in the Polish universities. Subsequently businessmen and diplomats with their families joined the Islamic community of Poland.

³⁷The Statute of the Muslim Religious Association of the Republic of Poland, was passed on 20 March 2004 in Suchowola by the 15th extraordinary Congress of the Association [Online:] <http://www.mzr.pl/pl/info.php?id=7> (05 September 2007).

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ Its legal basis: Ustawa z dnia 13 czerwca 2003 r. o udzielaniu cudzoziemcom ochrony na terytorium Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej [Act on 13 June 2003 on giving protection to foreigners in the territory of the Republic of Poland], Dz. U. Nr 128, poz. 1176, z 2004 r. Nr 96, poz. 959, Nr 173, poz. 1808 i Nr 210, poz. 2135, z 2005 r. Nr 90, poz. 757 oraz Nr 94, poz. 788.

⁴⁰ Settlement permit, Office for Foreigners, [Online:] <http://www.udsc.gov.pl/Settlement,permit,272.html>. (20.09.2007).

⁴¹ The UN Refugee Agency, Statistics. [Online:] http://www.unhcr.pl/aktualnosci.php?news=252&wid=61¤t_section=statystyki (20 August 2007).

Table 1: Countries from where Muslims applied for the refugee status in Poland between 1992 and 2000

Countries from where Muslims applied for the refugee status in Poland between 1992 and 2000	
Countries	The Number of applications
Afghanistan	91
Georgia	60
Iraq	107
Russia	734
Total	992

Source: http://www.unhcr.pl/aktualnosci.php?news=252&wid=61¤t_section=statystyki, (20.05.2010).

Current Situation and Conclusion

Nowadays the Polish Muslims live in big cities. There are seven Muslim communes in Warsaw, Białymstok, Bohoniki, Kruszyniany, Gdańsk, Gorzów Wielkopolski and Poznań.⁴² Polish Muslims have three mosques. Two of them are wooden and historic buildings. The mosque in Kruszyniany was built in the 18th century and the mosque in Bohoniki exists since the 19th century. Both of them are situated in north-east of Poland. A very modern mosque was built in the 1990s in Gdańsk, where Selim Chazbijewicz, a famous Tatar poet works as an imam. In Poland there are some Muslim centres. One of them is Muslim Centrum (Centrum Muzułmańskie) under the patronage of the League of the Islamic World (Liga Świata Muzułmańskiego) in Warsaw. The others are Muslim Center for Education and Culture (Muzułmańskie Centrum Oświatowo-Kulturalne) in Wrocław and Islamic Center (Centrum Islamskie) in Białymstok. In the 1990s some other Islamic organizations were established such as the Muslim Religious Association of the Republic of Poland, the Muslim Students Association (Stowarzyszenie Studentów Muzułmańskich)⁴³ and the Cultural Muslim Association (Muzułmańskie Stowarzyszenie Kształcenia Kulturalnego).⁴⁴

⁴² Muzułmańskie Gminy Wyznaniowe w Polsce, [Muslim Confessional Communes in Poland]. [Online:] <http://www.mzr.pl/gminy/index.php?id=14> (13 July 2007).

⁴³ Główne cele Stowarzyszenia Studentów Muzułmańskich w Polsce [The main aims of the Muslim Students Associations in Poland]. [Online:] <http://www.islam.org.pl/cele%20ssm.htm> (11 August 2007).

⁴⁴ Muzułmańskie Stowarzyszenie Kształcenia i Kultury [Muslim Association of Educating and Culture]. [Online:] <http://www.islam.com.pl/page2.html> (12 August 2007).

It is to be noted that during recent years even some organizations of Islamic character were founded in Poland by Chechen and Algerian fanatics. For this reason there were some instances of crackdown against Algerian fighters by the Polish Intelligence Service in Warsaw. The same situation concerns some groups connected with the 'Black Islam' from the USA or the Pakistanis from Great Britain.⁴⁵ Luckily, these types of organizations are not very common in Poland. Serious Muslim organizations in Poland have nothing to do with illegal Islamic activities of the fanatics.

An organization called Muslim League [Liga Muzułmańska] got itself registered in 2004 in Warsaw in the Department of Denominations and National and Ethnic Minorities of the Ministry of Interior and Administration. The Muslims who obtain Polish citizenship and the temporary right to live in Poland can be members of the Muslim League. Therefore people of foreign origin constitute a high percentage under the members of this organization. It is questionable whether the foundation of Muslim League contributed to the tensions between the Tatars of Poland and immigrants from the Arab countries. The latter ones practise Islam in somehow different way as Tatars do. Agata Nalborczyk, Polish Arabist from the Warsaw University, believes that registration of the Muslim League was a mistake of the Polish authorities. They did not control exactly the relationship between the Polish state and the Muslims. So they acted against the regulations of the Act from 1936.⁴⁶

The history of Polish Tatars is the perfect example of the coexistence of different religions and cultures with each other. Religion was the strongest element of identification of Tatars as Poles, which remained unchanged throughout the history. Tatars regard Poland as their homeland after 600 years of their residence in this country. One Tatar says in this context: 'Since I was born I am a Pole and I still will be, but I am Muslim and I will remain so'.⁴⁷ Another one claims: "Here is my homeland, because Poland gave everything to me. But I am a Tatar-Muslim".⁴⁸ And the next one: "I am a Polish Tatar-Muslim. All these three terms are important for us. First is Muslim, second is Pole, and then Tatar."⁴⁹ According to Katarzyna Warmińska, Polish sociologist, it is not possible to attain stagnation, where Tatars give up their manners for the account of orthodox and normative Islam. Apart from this, Tatars belonging to the minority groups in the Polish society are continuously forced to create

⁴⁵ Muzułmanie w Polsce, [Muslims in Poland]. [Online:] www.arabia.pl (15 February 2005).

⁴⁶ A.S. Nalborczyk, Status prawny muzułmanów w Polsce..., p. 233.

⁴⁷ K. Warmińska, Tatarzy polscy. Tożsamość religijna..., p. 93, [Interview No 7].

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 194, [Interview No 15].

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 201, [Interview No 12].

the image of their own group in various contexts – not only in the religious one but ethnic and national too.⁵⁰

The history of Polish Tatars can help contemporary Europe to answer the question about the limits of acculturation and assimilation of religious groups that could help build a new society in Western Europe and in Poland as well. However Poland is a different country than it was fifteen years ago. It is also different in many senses than other Central-Eastern European countries. After the restoration of democracy in 1989 new opportunities appeared for ethnic, national, religious and confessional groups. The enlargement of the EU on 1st May 2004 can be seen as a new challenge and a new chance for all national and ethnic minorities in Europe. The number of Muslims living in Western European countries is increasing. Polish Tatars can be regarded as an example of the development of minorities in culturally different regions. It is possible that in future those groups will lose knowledge of their native language in favour of English, German or French. Moreover, they will probably take over many external elements of life style and western culture. However as indicated below, Tatars will remain as Muslims in the Polish society. Islam is a religion that builds the cultural identity of Tatars and this religion will still contribute to the integration of these people in the Polish life that should be taken into account.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 141.

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