

II. NATIONAL IDENTITY

THE PROCESS OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NATIONAL IDENTITIES ON THE POLISH–LITHUANIAN–BELARUSIAN BORDERLAND

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In this article I will at least try to outline the necessary methodological assumptions for the future researches on the national identities of the inhabitants of the Polish – Belarusian – Lithuanian borderland. Then, using the results of the studies of the identities on the Polish – Belarusian borderland, I will attempt to prove the thesis, that in present conditions, the national identity should not be treated as only subjective reflection of someone’s national membership, described with the use of a given set of features on the different levels of objectification, but should be understood broader: declaration of the national identity also means taking of the certain position, defining of someone’s place and duties within the dynamic and changeable national structure. We can distinguish four types of the collective actors, which shape the national identities on the studied borderland: (1) ethnic minorities (with which certain categories of the citizens identify), (2) national majorities backed by the power of the state in which the representatives of the minorities live, (3) the “foreigner fatherlands” (R. Brubaker) and (4) international organizations which create certain legal regulations and who monitor (control) their realization. In the studies of the national identity of the Polish-Belarusian-Lithuanian borderlands some theoretical approaches can be distinguished. There is a need to define, at least for the use in the studies, the concepts of national minority and ethnic minority, and to create a new theoretical category – “the cultural nation”. The national (ethnic) minority can be distinguished in the specific minority situation, most frequently in the context of the other, dominant majority, as the community, which is less significant, subordinated and often discriminated. The notion of national-ethnic self-identification should be associated with the resourcefulness of the representatives of a given minority in certain environments.

Keywords: borderland, “cultural nation”, national identity, national (ethnic) minority.

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Introduction

The re-gaining of the political-state sovereignty by, on the one hand, Poles, Lithuanians and their choice of the path of the democratic societies integrated in the frames of the European Union, and, on the other one, the establishment of the Republic of Belarus as an independent country with the necessity for the farther transformations, point out at the fundamental differences in the processes of shaping the national identities.

However the neighboring spatial locations and common or at least similar histories justify the hypothesis of the similarity of the transformations of national identities in those countries. Democratic changes result in the fact that the identity ceases to be determined by the inborn conditions and it successively becomes the chosen identity, which means that mostly the individuals are obliged to determine their national identity by their own. In this context the following question arises: are the conditions for the citizens for self-defining of their national identities (on the discussed borderlands) provided? Whatever the question is, it is worth to point-out that the status of the social identities on borderlands, especially on national borderlands is an important “barometer” of the democracy on those territories.

Another important question would be: how to study the national identities of the inhabitants of Polish–Belarusian–Lithuanian borderland in the new conditions determined, on the one hand by the phenomena of gaining independence by Poland, Lithuania and the Republic of Belarus, while, on the other hand, shaped by the growing process of conscious choices of national identities by individuals? What ethnical and national resources are used by the inhabitants of the borderland to construct their identities? What is the role of the historical memory in those processes?

In search for the possible answers for the questions stated above, I will at least try to outline necessary methodological assumptions for the future researches on the national identities of the inhabitants of the Polish–Belarusian–Lithuanian borderland.

Then, using the results of the studies of the identities on the Polish–Belarusian borderland, I will attempt to prove the thesis that in the present conditions the national identity should not be treated as only subjective reflection of someone’s national membership, described with the use of a given set of features on different levels of objectification, but should be understood broader: the declaration of the national identity also means taking certain position, defining someone’s place and duties within the dynamic and changeable national structure.

It seems that, before the research, some kind of definition of the nation, functional to the subject of the research, should be asserted.

The nation and the national identity on borderlands

I propose to treat the nation as the institutionalized and pluralistic imagined community, with the distinct sense of the inner solidarity and autonomy from the others, with a certain territory, treated as the “motherland”, constructed mostly through the ascribing of the meaning to the certain space and certain cultural artifacts, usually aimed at the state, as a guarantee of the realization of goals and intentions.

The above definition requires closer explanation, but to specify it we should answer the question about what phenomena we mention, talking about the “nation” and farther about the “national identity”? The question about the nation (after Jerzy Szacki) is the question about the ideas, national ideologies, nationalism, and furthermore about the national institutions and national identities (national attitudes).

National identity, in a broad sense, consists of a group identification with the population treated as one’s own nation, feeling of the distinctness from the others, territorial identification (“my country”, “my land”, and “motherland”) and the cultural identification.

The new context, in which the processes of the constructing national identities emerge, should be clearly defined. The main context was a big change of the political system and joining EU by Poland and Lithuania. The two civilisational, political and mental orientations became the inevitable subject of the choice: Russia-directed eastern orientation and western orientation, directed at the European Union. Furthermore, the sovereign nations became the subject of identity choice: Polish, Lithuanian and Belarusian, but also others, which influenced national identities in the past.

It is worth to notice at this point, that on the discussed borderland, in the past as well as in present day, the national-ethnic identity did not apply to the identifications with the nations, but also (or only) with the societies of regional or local type, or with imagined “Ruthenians” (“Ruski”), “Orthodox”, “Catholics”, “Locals”, “Us” and which did not fully correspond to the present day state borders and the criteria of the national membership. The communities with which the respondents tend to identify were to be discovered through the process of the empirical research.

In my opinion, to give the correct diagnosis of the contemporary identity structure of the inhabitants of the studied borderland, we should first answer the question about what were the main nation-building activities performed by the nation-states on the one hand, while on the other by national (ethnic) minorities within the frames of the states.

We can distinguish four types of the collective actors, which shape the national identities on the studied borderland: (1) ethnic minorities (with which certain categories of the citizens identify), (2) national majorities backed by the power of the state in which the representatives of the minorities live, (3) the “foreigner fatherlands” (Rogers Brubaker) and (4) the international organizations which create certain legal regulations and who monitor (control) their realization.

The nations, dominant in the given country, when gaining the political and state sovereignty, usually attempt to strengthen and broaden the social-cultural space populated by their nation. Soon they realize that the political borders do not fully correspond to the national and ethnic borders. Facing this fact, they, of course to a different extent, ascribe themselves the right and the duty to be interested in the condition of the national minority living in the territory of the neighboring states.

What is the situation of the representatives of national-ethnic minorities? Do they experience the rise of feeling of safety, or opposite, they feel threatened due to the change of the rank and the status of the nations and national identities?

The real reactions will be generally described by the state of individual national (ethnic) minorities. The following four statuses (situations) of the national minorities can be distinguished:

- the significant separation from the outside world, internally consolidated, or even closed in the ghetto,
- integrated with the surrounding majority,
- integrated with the nation in the “foreigner fatherland”,
- dispersed minorities, diversified, divided by the desirable directions of the national-ethnic ties.

It is worth to assume, that the chosen strategies of each form of national identity will be determined by the character of the national policies of the states, the distinguished types of the relations of the national minorities and the relationship of the citizens towards the national minorities and majorities.

On the studied borderlands we can also speak about constructed, new national identities. The process of the formation of the Ukrainian minority in Podlaskie province might as a perfect example of such construction on Polish-Belarusian borderland serve. The process of the construction of the Ukrainian minority in Białystok province (since 1999–01–01 Podlaskie province) started circa 1980 when Poland went through the first, mass upheaval for freedom. One of the results of this process was the beginning of the construction of the Ukrainian minority on the basis of the Orthodox Christian community in the South-Eastern part of the province. The construction was achieved on the basis of the separate language, Orthodox religion, culture, which was partly rooted in the Ukrainian culture, the constructed historical memory, and as a consequence, intensive national mobilization of national leaders, both local and from Ukraine. The interesting process of the construction of the faction of the Ukrainian minority in the present-day Podlaskie province is now a subject of the autonomous sociological research.

In the studies of the national identity of the Polish–Belarusian–Lithuanian borderlands at least four theoretical approaches can be distinguished. Those approaches had already been pointed out in the studies on borderlands, including the researches in which I took part (Sadowski 2007: 533–558).

There is a need to define, at least for the use in the studies, the concepts of national minority and ethnic minority, and to create a new theoretical category to signify the ethnic group, which in general fulfils all the national criteria, but which does not aspire to establish a separate, national state. In my opinion, the most suitable term would be “the cultural nation”. It is a fact that in sociological literature there are real problems with theoretical and empirical qualification of national minority and the ethnic group. The sociological attempts to present the modes of understanding of the terms “national” and “ethnic minority” are usually concluded by the statement that “there is no commonly accepted definition of them” (Łodziński 2005: 24; Paleczny 1999: 259–263; Bojar 2000). Besides numerous, well known and obviously important standpoints in the literature, there are two that are worth of special attention. The national minorities are the dynamic communities, which include the plurality of subjects, acting in the specific “minority situation” (Nowicka 1989) or, using Brubaker’s term, the ethnic

minorities become “fluid and changeable concepts” what makes them difficult to precisely and unambiguously define.

The needs of new theoretical and methodological settlements

Firstly, I agree with the standpoint of Brubaker, who refers to Pierre Bourdieu and states that “we can describe the national minority (...) in terms of the field with the diversified and competitive positions and ranks taken by different organizations, parties, movements or individual politicians who tend to “represent” this minority towards its own supposed members, the country of inhabitation and the outside world (for example towards the “foreigner fatherland” – A. S.); everyone strives for the monopoly to legally represent this group” (Brubaker 1998: 77–78). If we admit, simplifying our opinion, that the national minority is the field of diversified ranks and positions occupied by different individual and plural actors, we should determine the borders of this field, where the specific game is played – a game of the minority and a game for the (national) minority. In my opinion, the field is determined by objective and subjective criteria of national-ethnic membership and their cultural and spatial ranges.

Secondly, the national (ethnic) minority can be distinguished in the specific minority situation, mostly in the context of the other, dominant majority as the community, which is less significant, subordinated and often discriminated. According to Tadeusz Paleczny, “each ethnic group can be the minority in sociological sense as long as it is located in the social structure with one clearly visible, dominant category or community”(Paleczny 1999:263). Acceptance of this standpoint leads to the assumption that the postulated change of the non-based-on-partnership minority situation can cause the change from the minority status of the community to: the emergence of the different forms of the integration of minorities with the majority in the country (Łodziński 2005: 262–277); evolving towards the separate national community within the state; strengthening the cultural ties with the other part of the national community, organized in the separate state; or finally, evolutionary inclusion into another national community, treated as desirable (usually with the assimilative tendencies. – A. S.). In this perspective, the designate of the term “national (ethnic) minority” would have dynamic, gradual and temporal character.

To precisely distinguish between the national minority and the ethnic minority, using commonly accepted and convincing criteria, is in my opinion, a very difficult task. Naturally, we can use criteria such as: the presence or the absence of the majority, organized in the state, aspiration for the own state, the level of the consciousness of the own distinctiveness, the presence of a few or of “all” national features, more or less developed character of the ethnic group. It is common knowledge that it is hard to build the typology of ethnic communities, to distinguish those more or less developed or even more or less civilized, without building evaluative hierarchies of societies, which should not take place in the democratic societies. It is worth to quote the statement of Sławomir Łodziński who refers to Stanisław Ossowski when saying that “persons, who belong to ethnic minority locate their “private fatherland” and “ideological fatherland”

on the territory of the state they live in and their national choices usually correspond with the choices of the majority in a given country” (Łodziński 2005: 27). The most frequent distinction between national and ethnic minorities is biased, usually rooted in the political standpoint and depends on the worldview of the author of the distinction due to its social and especially political consequences (Łodziński 2005: 27).

The second theoretical approach can be linked to the negation of the assumption that in the researches on the national-ethnic membership each respondent has fixed national-ethnic identity, knows which national or ethnic community he/she belongs to, and that in natural (laboratory) conditions he/she should express this identity as a certain national-ethnic identification. In practice, on the territories of the borderland in study, one question about the national self-identification not always leads to the clear unambiguous answer about the national-ethnic membership. Finding it out with the certain level of probability (of the just constructed national identity) requires the parallel use of at least five opened indicators: direct question about the national self-identification, the question about the religion (confession), the question about the territorial identity (fatherland), about the language identity and the national-ethnic origin. Besides, it is extremely important how the questions were formulated and what method of the interpretation of the received answers was used.

In contemporary researches on the national-ethnic diversity of the society the following assumptions that the person can be a member of only one national or ethnic community, that the ethnic membership is unambiguous in a sense that belonging to one ethnic group excludes membership in another group, become gradually less useful. The socio-cultural reality becomes more complicated. The phenomena of a double and especially of a partial national membership emerge. Relatively frequently the researches suggest that there are clear divisions between the national and cultural identification and that there are attitudes of distance or evident reluctance towards the expectations to define a person’s national belonging, however that does not mean lack of any developed national identity.

National minorities can have partial or permanent sense of autonomy towards the dominant nation in the country, they can have ties to the other nation, they can have partial or permanent sense of unity with another “fatherland” (the level of the experienced unity or autonomy is a process, which can be empirically measured) and, last but not least, they can experience the sense of the unity or autonomy towards two nations: dominant in the country or dominant in the neighboring country. Furthermore, ethnic minorities can experience the sense of being the component of the dominant nation in the country, they can feel partially united and autonomous towards the dominant nation or might feel autonomous towards the dominant nation in the country while at the same time experiencing the lack of ties with other nations, or this feeling of unity with other nations does not have an institutionalized character.

Furthermore, the national self-identification should not be treated as only subjective reflection of one’s communal or cultural membership (apart from the minority situation), but should be perceived in a broader sense, as taking a certain standpoint to describe one’s position and alternatively to specify the tasks towards opening (or already opened) national structure.

Recently the scholars often speak about the human capital in a form of gaining features like education and skills, which are beneficial at the labor market. The individual strategies also apply to investing in one's own identity, including the national identity (especially when it is not fixed), in order to achieve the most optimal conversion of the national identity to other profits (like position, power or money, etc.). Naturally, those identity choices diversify or even erode the prior identity structures.

The need to construct one's own national identity intensifies when the person leaves his/her own community, when her prior identity is not supported by the community any more, and the new need to adjust to a new national context appears.

In this context, the notion of national-ethnic self-identification should be associated with the resourcefulness of the representatives of a given minority in certain environments. To determine one's national self-identification means to express it, to come out in public with that choice, to reveal one's world views (stereotypes) and choices connected with national self-identification.

In general, the expression of one's own national self-identification by the national minorities is usually accompanied by some sort of aware ethnic mobilization, usually based on the sense of harm, the protection of ethnic values and the tendency to build the inner bonds or even the tendency to dominate. For example, if the respondent in the Polish National Census in 2002 described himself as Belarusian, it was accompanied by some form of resourcefulness towards the environment. The in-depth interpretation of the answers can include such forms of identity as being Belarusian and Polish (or as also Polish); Polish-Belarusian (being Belarusian is located in Polish political space and to a large extent in Polish cultural space); Belarusian (most of all Belarusian), in spite of the pressures of polonisation from the side of the environment, in spite of not infrequently negative image of Belarusian in Polish society; Belarusian, because (in a process of a looking-glass self) he/she should describe oneself as such, due to the objective criteria, ascribed by the community (nominal Belarusian); Belarusian with a specific attitude towards the Republic of Belarus (who supports the democratization process, who is neutral or who accepts the *status quo*), but also with a certain attitude towards the division lines inside the minority. All the cases of too far standardization of the questions and answers create the enforced situations, which make the respondent to choose "smaller evil" or to express the part of the identity, which is the most expected in the situation of the interview.

The image of the national structure includes the main re-evaluation of the used criteria and indicators of the national membership. All the empirically used criteria can be placed on the continuum from the traditional criteria of ascription to the gradually growing criteria of choice. In the light of this continuum the presentation of the national structure requires much more than just a revealing of the quantitative dimension, but furthermore it needs to answer the question of qualitative character: what lays behind the diversity of choices in the communal, cultural and identity sphere, who is honored and who is discriminated, what are the basis and the consequences of the selected choices?

At last, the relations between distinguished national (ethnic) communities should be determined. Are those relations vertical (hierarchical) or horizontal (parallel)?

Following Antonina Kłoskowska I make another assumption, that the nation can be ethnically complex only in vertical, hierarchical way (Kłoskowska 1996: 32–41). If the nation may be ethnically complex only in the vertical way, this feature should also apply (or not apply) to the national minorities. In this light, within individual national minorities it is possible to distinguish other ethnic groups as a component of a given national minority. Until now we do not have a broad knowledge about the ethnic structure of the individual national minorities in Poland.

National and ethnic minorities treated as both: theoretical constructions and real communities are internally much diversified. In the processes of qualitative transformations, in which the national minorities in borderland participate, and broader, in the process of the emerging of the democratic society, beside the other processes, including assimilation, we face the processes of the formation of the new forms of chosen, national membership and a self-identification of the ideological character.

The estimations concerning the number of minorities, or the public statements about the minorities done so far, had a hidden assumption that the individual national-ethnic minorities are very compact groups, almost organizational, cultural and political monoliths. Definitely less frequent were the attempts to show the diversity within the communities or on the contacts with other communities (usually with the dominant group). The complex picture of this diversity is not an effect of hiding one's identity (however there were such cases. – A. S.), of a specific “going to the underground” but most frequently (motivated by the democratic and freedom values) it is an effect of more or less skillful expression of one's place in the socio-cultural structure of the society. It includes one's self-image and one's relationship with others.

Conclusions

As an effect of the transformations within the minorities we face the process of the emergence of the category of “new” Germans, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, but also Kaszubs, Romanians, Silesians and others, ideologically and organizationally prepared not only to strengthen the national-ethnic status of minorities in Poland, but also to the activities directed on winning the assimilated, “lost” part of the national and ethnic minorities. To find out what is the range of the potential re-birth of the national and ethnic minorities there is a need for the knowledge about the indirect (potential) criteria of the ethnic membership, to which the minority leaders might address, such as the confession, the ethnic origin, the language, the territorial bond and the cultural identification.

In my opinion, a clear reference to the situation of Polish-Belarusian-Lithuanian borderland can be done quoting the standpoint of the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, who stresses that the contemporary identity has particularly political character. Taylor points out, that the social identity of formerly marginalized groups “is focused on the demand to recognize the group identities that is to publicly confirm the dignity of the formerly marginalized groups”.¹

¹ *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 3–4 February 2007.

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TAUTINIO TAPATUMO FORMAVIMOSI PROCESAS LENKIJOS, LIETUVOS IR BALTARUSIJOS PASIENYJE

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Santrauka

Bandoma apibrėžti metodologines prielaidas, būtinias Lenkijos, Baltarusijos ir Lietuvos pasienio tautinio tapatumo ateities tyrinėjimams. Remiantis Lenkijos ir Baltarusijos pasienio tapatumų tyrinėjimų rezultatais, bandoma įrodyti, kad mūsų gyvenamuoju laikotarpiu nacionalinio identiteto samprata neturėtų būti traktuojama tik kaip tam tikros tautinės narystės, kuriai būdingi vienokie ar kитokie bruožai, subjektyvių apmąstymų vaisius. Kur kas tiksliau būtų sakyti, kad šiuolaikinis tautinio tapatumo konceptas kaip toks reiškia tam tikros vietos ir tam tikrų pareigų aiškiai apibrėžtą junginį dinamiškoje ir sparčiai kintančioje nūdienėje nacionalinėje struktūroje. Galima išskirti keturias grupes, apibrėžiančias tautinį tapatumą pasienio ruožuose: 1) etninės mažumos; 2) tautinė dauguma; 3) „svetimšalių tėvynė“ (R. Brubakeris); 4) tarptautinės organizacijos. Būtina apibrėžti tautinės ir etninės mažumų sąvokas bei įtvirtinti naująją teorinę „kultūrinės tautos“ kategoriją. Tautinių mažumų situacija visada yra specifinio pobūdžio, nes jos yra neišvengiamai priklausomos ir diskriminuojamos dominuojančios daugumos. Todėl tautinės-etninės saviidentifikacijos samprata, pasak šio straipsnio autoriaus, negali būti atsieta nuo tam tikros tautinės mažumos atstovų išradinumo.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: tautinis tapatumas, tautinė (etninė) mažuma, „kultūrinė tauta“, pasienio ruožas.

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