

New policy premises concerning Polish communities abroad

As an emigrant country, Poland needs to undertake measures allowing the Polish diaspora to use its vast social, economic and political potential. The previously adopted policy concerning the Polish community abroad failed to establish satisfactory relations among Poles living outside of the country. The new premises, however, show that there is a chance to make the pro-Polish community policy more effective.

Emigration is still one of the most important processes shaping present-day Poland. It has had an impact on the demographic and employment structures as well as the labour market, and in the future it will also influence the social insurance system. Statistics published by the Central Statistical Office in October 2011 indicate, that as compared to 2009, the number of Polish emigrants increased by 120 thousand in 2010. Thus, the drop, or at least the decrease, of migration flow predicted by some economists and researchers did not prove correct. Despite good financial ratios, the social evaluation of the economic situation and above all labour market opportunities, drive many Polish citizens out of the country. The situation is likely to continue in the next few years. The forecast has been corroborated by the research carried out by the Western Institute in the first half of 2011, which revealed that among the employee population of eight selected branches of the economy of Wielkopolska, more than 11% of respondents declared their wish to emigrate. Moreover, other analyses of attitudes shared by the people who have been living abroad (research on the ING Bank customer group), show a shrinking willingness to return to the country.

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These observations provoke reflection on how the Polish state should react to the increasing risk of emigration and the growing number of Poles living abroad. It should be mentioned straight away, however, that emigration as a phenomenon, especially at the time of free cross-border flow of labour force within the EU, is practically beyond control. What is feasible, if difficult, is the use of incentives encouraging potential emigrants to remain in their country, and motivating the ones who have already left, to return.

Poland has been using two basic policy tools against migration. The first one is the Polish Migration Policy, adopted on July 20, 2011 by the Inter-ministerial Committee on Migration, coordinated by the Minister of the Interior and Administration. Even though it hasn't been approved by the government yet, the document states the main premises of the immigration policy. Its reference to emigration from Poland, however, is limited, indicating that the migration policy in this respect should be restricted to actions promoting "strengthening of the bond between migrants and Poland and thus giving them the opportunity to participate in the economic, social, cultural and political affairs of the country". It postulates, moreover, that it is essential to monitor not only the processes of emigration from Poland alone, but also their social and economic consequences.

The second tool against migration, which refers directly to Poles living abroad, is the policy concerning Polish communities. Its premises are contained in Cooperation with Polish Diaspora Programme, the valid version which was established in 2007. The document does not only refer to the "old Polish community", but it also takes into account the new waves of emigration, triggered off by the opening of labour markets by some EU countries. Apart from expanding the target groups, the premises of the Polish community policy have also been modified. Protecting the rights of the Polish diaspora and preserving the identity of its members has remained the top priority. However, a new goal has been set, namely "facilitating the return to the country", especially for the new-wave migrants. Last but not least, "establishing a pro-Polish lobby and promoting Poland abroad" was mentioned in the document.

Due to the ineffectiveness of the previous programme, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is currently working on new principles of the Polish community policy. The tenets of the Polish state's policy towards the Polish community abroad and migrants are bound to change. The main ideas concentrate on achieving a strategic goal, i.e. "gaining understanding and effective support for the Polish reason of State and Polish foreign policy from the members of the Polish diaspora, and making use of the



community's potential for promoting and developing a realistic and positive image of Poland in the world".

Prior to adopting the new premises of the policy concerning Polish communities, one question ought to be answered: for what reasons, other than the affinity with the fellow countrymen living abroad, is it worth supporting them? The answer to this kind of question is sought not only by Poland, but also by many of the host countries. In 2009 the American-based Migration Policy Institute drew up a report on forms of intergovernmental cooperation between particular countries and their diasporas. The findings of the report revealed that whenever there is a dominance of economic emigrants within a given diaspora, there is a deeper concern for the rights of its members and efforts are made to encourage them to invest a part of their income in their native countries. However, in cases when the diaspora is constituted mostly of migrants permanently settled in a foreign country, who have been granted its citizenship, and who are integrated with the host society and hold high social positions, it is essential to maintain the bond between them and their homeland, so that they can become an important lobby for shaping bilateral relations between the native country and the host country. Achieving both goals is considered a strategic action, while the expenditure on their realisation an investment. Both types of migration are applicable to Poland, and therefore the country should aim at both: taking care of the situation of economic emigrants and cultivating the relationship between the old Polish communities abroad and their homeland.

Considering the new migration flow particularly to the member states of the European Union, other emigration-related problems ought to be taken into account. Protecting employment rights, or if need be basic human rights, is of utmost importance. The necessity of undertaking such actions was most glaringly exemplified by the situation of Polish workers in Apulia, Italy, who were treated like slaves by their employers. Social security of migrants is yet another important issue. Great Britain has been recently reprimanded by the European Committee for the discrimination of migrants, including Poles, concerning granting certain benefits. Dealing with such matters is a responsibility of the host country. However, it is still necessary to monitor the situation and support Polish institutions, particularly non-governmental organisations such as Barka Foundation located in Great Britain, which have taken action in situations of this kind. Furthermore, what should not be overlooked is providing opportunities to teach the Polish language to the children of migrants. Apart from supporting the new-wave Polish migrants, efforts should be made to encourage them to maintain close, also economic, relations with Poland.



The situation becomes slightly more complex in the case of the representatives of the old emigration. The most important responsibility of national institutions has been striving to cultivate national identity by the members of the Polish community abroad and providing them with access to Polish language and culture. Polish community organisations specialising in this kind of activity can be found in many foreign countries. As research on Polish organisations functioning in Germany conducted by the Western Institute showed, the majority of associations concentrate on the propagation of Polish culture, teaching the Polish language and maintaining Polish identity. Their efforts are supported by Polish institutions, both governmental (particularly consulates) and non-governmental (such as Wspólnota Polska Association). The intended shift of emphasis in the policy concerning Polish communities from supporting Polish identity to developing relations with Poland which might result in backing the Polish reason of State and lobbying to its benefit, requires a new kind of action and finding new partners. Currently, organisations often lack even a conceptual support in these areas from Polish institutions responsible for the promotion of Poland.

The newly-formulated tenets of the policy concerning Polish communities show that Polish diplomacy has finally began to notice the squandered potential of a dozen or so million people living in different corners of the world, but still emotionally attached to Poland. Such an attitude shifts perspective. Cooperation with Polish migrants should not result from a moral obligation to support them, but it should rise out of more utilitarian foundations. The policy concerning Polish communities should yield benefits – not necessarily financial, but rather social and political. To a certain extent it ought to be involved in the actions of public diplomacy. In the long run this new way of thinking might give Poland measureable results. Three problems, however, need to be taken into consideration:

- even if establishing a Polish community lobby becomes a real priority of the policy concerning Polish communities, we cannot forget about those Poles living abroad, who on account of their social position cannot actively support Poland. It refers particularly to our compatriots living in the East;
- none of the set goals can be achieved without the consolidation of the policy concerning Polish communities, which at the moment is carried out by many ministries, e.g. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, etc. It does not contribute to the effectiveness of undertaken actions;
- if the new policy is meant to yield measurable effects, we must invest in it. The means which used to be dedicated to the Polish communities are already insufficient,



while it would be essential to establish an institution in charge of managing relations with Poles living abroad. The currently functioning institutions are focused more on distributing financial means, and thus are unable to become active players, capable of gaining support of Polish migrants.

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