

Katarzyna Gmaj*
Krystyna Iglicka**

IMMIGRANT VOTERS IN POLAND – BEING JUST ‘RIGHT BEHIND THE CORNER’

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INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses challenges connected with the political participation of immigrants and/or third country nationals (TCNs) in Poland and provides both legal and policy information on its framework. Drawing on both official statistical data and research findings the paper reports empirical results from the comprehensive qualitative study DivPol¹. Taking into account the ethnic composition of contemporary European communities, within the scheme of

* Katarzyna Gmaj – Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Lazarski University in Warsaw, k.gmaj@lazarski.edu.pl

** Krystyna Iglicka – Professor, Ph.D., Lazarski University in Warsaw, k.iglicka@lazarski.edu.pl

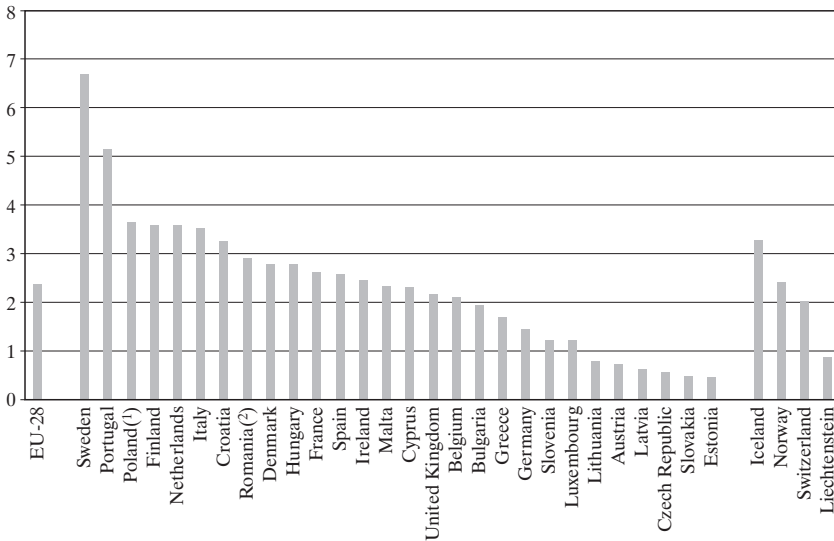
¹ DivPol was an EU-project designed to initiate, assess, support and evaluate diversity development processes with regard to ethnic diversity in political parties in eight EU Member States from 2012 to 2014. The project aimed to raise awareness and develop practical recommendations and tools to promote diversity development in parties and improve the chances of participation for third-country nationals. Research institutes, universities, NGOs and ministerial bodies, migrant organisations and political parties in eight EU Member States were involved. In the 20-month project run-time over 500 politicians of immigrant and autochthon backgrounds, representatives of migrant organisations and experts were interviewed, attended workshops or participated in dissemination events. The project was co-financed by the European Commission from the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals. Its findings regarding Poland in respect to other countries participating in the project are released in Polish (Iglicka, Gmaj 2015b) and English (Iglicka, Gmaj 2015a.).

the DivPol project the researchers assessed diversity in the composition and programmes of the European Union Member States’ main political parties and the ideas about immigrants’ participation.

In Poland the topic of political participation of immigrants is still waiting to find its place in the public debate in general, and within/among political parties specifically. There are some reasons explaining why the topic has not found its place in the public agenda yet. Firstly, according to the Constitution, Polish nationality is a precondition for active participation in political life in Poland. Secondly, however, and in fact a year after the DivPol project was accomplished some trends in settlement migration into Poland changed. Interestingly, as far as international comparisons are concerned, in 2015 Poland took the third place in the whole EU with regard to the ‘naturalisation rate’, i.e. acquisition of citizenship per 100 resident foreigners (see Figure 1). In Poland 3.7 per hundred non-national citizens were granted citizenship, while in the EU-28 as a whole just 2.4.

Figure 1

Naturalisation rate (acquisition of citizenship per 100 resident foreigners), 2015



Note: Data on the number of non-national residents refer to 1 January 2015

⁽¹⁾ provisional

⁽²⁾ estimated

Source: Eurostat 2017.

However, due to the legal limitation stemming from the Constitution rules for political participation of immigrants, research coverage on immigrants' political participation is rather weak in Poland. So far, examples of naturalised politicians in the public sphere who succeeded in Polish elections to the Lower Chamber of the Parliament are presented as proof of the openness of the Polish society as well as the political party to which the immigrant belongs. In the media their example is used to initiate a discussion about everyday relations between the vast Polish majority and those who have arrived in Poland from distant regions, or about the MPs' possible engagement in international relations between Poland and their countries of origin.

2. LEGAL PREREQUISITES AND REGULATIONS WITHIN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AND PARTIES

2.1. Legal prerequisites to vote (at the local, regional, national and EU level)

Until 2004 active and passive voting rights were restricted to Polish citizens. However, due to the requirements that Poland had to fulfil in order to join the European Union, amendments to the Law on local elections (2004) extended these rights in local council elections to citizens of the EU Member States residing permanently in the given district. The EU nationals residing in Poland can also take part in elections to the European Parliament. It is regulated by the Act on elections to the European Parliament (2004). However, in national elections, both active and passive rights are still restricted to Polish citizens exclusively. The rest of foreigners residing in Poland cannot benefit from any voting rights since Poland has not ratified the European Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at the Local Level.

2.2. Who is allowed to join a political party?

According to the literal wording of Article 11 of the Polish Constitution (1997), the freedom of association in political parties is reserved for Polish citizens.

'Article 11. Par. 1. The Republic of Poland shall ensure freedom for the creation and functioning of political parties. Political parties shall be founded on the principle of voluntariness and upon the equality of Polish citizens, and their purpose shall be to influence

the formulation of the policy of the State by democratic means’. (Constitution of the Republic of Poland 1997)

This limitation is also present in the Act on Political Parties (1997).

‘Article 2.1. Citizens of the Republic of Poland who have reached the age of 18 years may join a political party as its members’. (Act on Political Parties 1997)

Such an approach is justified by an interpretation *a contrario*. It is also indicated that the right of association in political parties belongs to the rights and freedoms inherently related to national sovereignty and independence, and it is unacceptable that foreigners benefit from them (Opinia z 14 września 2012 r. dot. interpretacji art. 11 Konstytucji Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej i możliwości ewentualnej nowelizacji ustawy z dnia 27 czerwca 1997 r. o partiach politycznych [Opinion of 14 September 2012 on the interpretation of Article 11 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland and the possibility of amending the Act of 27 June 1997 on political parties]).

However, the European Commission called on Poland to change the existing law (16 April 2012). The Commission’s request referred to membership but also to the right of establishing a political party. The Commission called on Poland to provide these opportunities to citizens of other EU Member States residing in Poland. The Ministry of Administration and Digitisation (currently the Ministry of Digitalisation) and the Ministry of the Interior (currently Ministry of the Interior and Administration) take two opposite positions on this call. The former is convinced that the European Commission’s request is legitimate and that amendments should be made to the Act on political parties. The Ministry of the Interior does not accept the EC’s criticism and suggests that further dialogue is necessary. Finally, the Government Legislation Centre (GLC) recommended ‘a modification of the Act on political parties’. It stated that extending the possibility of membership in political parties to EU citizens would ensure fuller implementation of their voting rights in Poland and a potential conflict between the national law and the EU law would be eliminated. Furthermore, according to the GLC, the modification of the Act on political parties does not affect the scope of Polish sovereignty since the national level is still an exclusive domain of Polish citizens. Other EU nationals associated in political parties will not be able to take active and passive part in elections to the Lower and Upper Chambers of the Parliament as well as in the Presidential election. They will not be able to run for positions such as the Ombudsman or the

President of the National Bank of Poland. What is more, it is inappropriate to claim that granting certain rights to Polish citizens is tantamount to banning non-citizens from exercising these rights. Therefore, on the basis of other constitutional values, it is possible to extend the opportunity of membership and establishing political parties for those who are not Polish citizens in order to allow them to influence local government policies and the policies of the European Union (Opinia z 14 września 2012 r. dot. interpretacji art. 11 Konstytucji Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej i możliwości ewentualnej nowelizacji ustawy z dnia 27 czerwca 1997 r. o partiach politycznych [Opinion of 14 September 2012 on the interpretation of Article 11 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland and the possibility of amending the Act of 27 June 1997 on political parties]). In conclusion, non-Polish citizens are currently excluded from the membership of any political party in Poland.

3. IMMIGRANT POPULATION IN POLAND – MAIN DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL FEATURES

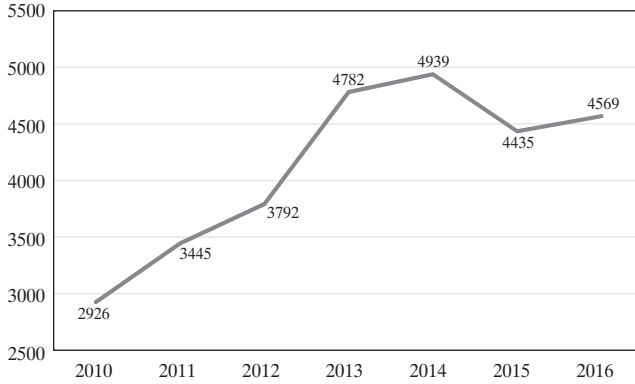
For centuries Poland has been continuously a country of net emigration. Until 1989 immigration was virtually non-existent. Since the collapse of communism the inflows of foreign nationals have been steadily growing, however, by European Union (EU) standards, both the stock and flows of foreign residents have remained relatively low because most of foreigners coming to Poland have been circular or short-term migrants whose propensity or ability to settle down has been low. Simultaneously, especially since 1 May 2004 when Poland accessed to the EU, the outflow of labour migrants has intensified and reached an unprecedented level. In the year 2015 there were about 2.5 million Poles engaged in migration (mostly for economic reasons), 80% of them stayed in foreign countries (mainly the UK and Germany) longer than a year (Iglicka 2001a, 2001b, 2002)

Although the number of persons granted Polish citizenships is rather low, the trend is increasing. In the years 1992–2016 Polish citizenship was granted to 51,121 foreigners (Central Statistical Office). However, it should be stressed that almost half of naturalised persons acquired Polish citizenship in the years 2011–2016.

During the last 25 years the main recipients were citizens of the former USSR: Ukrainians, Belarusians, Russians and Armenians. The Vietnamese and German citizens constituted further major groups.

Figure 2

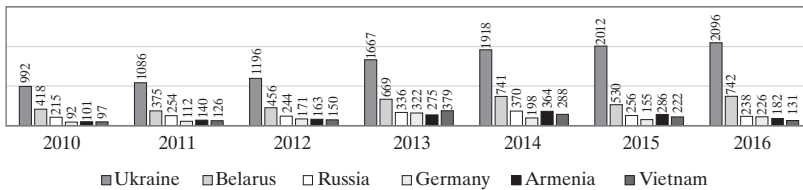
Acquisition of Polish citizenship (including acquisition of restored citizenship) in the years 2013–2016



Source: Own elaboration on the basis of the Central Statistical Office data (updated 31 January 2018a).

Figure 3

Acquisition of Polish citizenship (including acquisition of restored citizenship) in the years 2013–2016 by country of previous citizenship (five leading countries)



Source: Own elaboration on the basis of the Central Statistical Office data (updated 31 January 2018a).

Unfortunately, there are no data on the political participation of naturalised persons which could justify making sweeping statements regarding their entire population. Available information refers to the rare individual immigrants who are politically active at the local and national level.

The situation has changed dramatically quite recently. For the first time in a long history of migration, Poland has become a land of immigration rather than emigration. Poland, a country of 38 million, is already home to over one million Ukrainians. Most of them decided to emigrate after the military conflict erupted in eastern Ukraine in 2014. Most did not flee the war but its economic consequences: a recession that lasted two years, unemployment

and the plunging currency. Their community consists of migrants staying on the basis of permanent and temporary stay permits and a huge number of circular migrants staying in Poland up to six months in a year.

Since 2014 the number of foreigners willing to legalise their stay in Poland has been increasing steadily. At the end of 2017 about 325,000 foreigners held documents entitling them to stay in Poland. Temporary stay (up to 3 years) is still a dominating form. In 2017 it constituted 88% of all applications. Remaining 10% referred to permanent stay and 2% to a long-term UE resident permit. Almost 65% of all applications were submitted by 20–39 year old persons (Office for Foreigners) that indicates that labour migration predominates. On the one hand, it is a response to labour force shortages experienced by the Polish economy due to the post-2004 increase in emigration of Poles to Western Europe and, on the other hand, as it was hinted above, economic downturn and political instability in Ukraine. Ukrainian citizens have always been prevailing among other immigrants to Poland. This phenomenon has been already described in the literature from the migratory system perspective, see e.g. (Iglicka, and Weiner 2008). However the strength of Ukrainians' dominance has been rising significantly since 2014. The increase in the immigrant stock in Poland is also mainly due to Ukrainians, although other groups are visible as well.

The above mentioned statistics do not cover short-term migrants, mainly Ukrainians, who worked in Poland on the basis of the employers' declaration, both officially and in a shadow economy, for less than 6 months in a year. In 2017 Labour Offices registered about 1,800,000 of such declarations (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy).

Indeed, as the Polish economy experiences a dynamic growth (4,6% annual growth in 2017 »estimation by the Central Statistical Office 2018b«) and unemployment has never been so low since the transition to the market economy in the early 1990s (registered unemployment rate at the end of 2017 was 6.6% »Central Statistical Office 2018c«), the labour shortage is real in many sectors and regions and is exacerbated by the emigration of around two million Poles, usually young ones. Even if the trend is now towards the return of emigrants, this movement is still modest and is not sufficient to solve the problem.

4. ACTUAL STATE OF REPRESENTATION IN MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES

Although individual parties do not present information about the number of their members on official websites, it is justified to claim that in Poland, there are no mass-scale parties, except the biggest one – PSL (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe/Polish Peasants’ Party) – that has approximately 140,000² members. The currently ruling PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość/Law and Justice) has about 30,000 members. PO (Platforma Obywatelska/Civic Platform) and SLD (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej/Democratic Left Alliance) have about 17,000 and 20,000 members respectively. Other existing parties are much smaller, e.g. Solidarna Polska (Solidarity Poland) has 5,000 or Twój Ruch (Your Move) has 3,000 members.

Such low numbers of people participating in political parties in a country with the population of approximately 38 million can be explained as the heritage of 45 years of the post-war communist period.

In the case of Poland, due to popular reluctance to join parties, it seems that political parties are focused on attracting potential voters rather than potential party members. As a result, ‘in practice, political parties act as pressure groups rather than mass structures and this is a weakness of our political life. Well, there are massive structures, representing mass membership and treating it more seriously, for example PSL and SLD’. (E1) However, as opinion polls show, parties are perceived as primarily living their own lives, their own problems and struggles which have nothing to do with citizens’ everyday life concerns (Public Opinion Research Centre »CBOS« 2013).

Summing up, party membership is rather rare in Poland. People registered in political parties, apart from active members, do not make up even one per cent of eligible voters. Except one or two parties, it is also difficult to talk about mass-scale parties having a longer history.

4.1. Current data on how many migrants and/or TCNs are sitting in the Parliament as representatives of their parties

Since membership in political parties is restricted to Polish nationals, in this paper we refer to naturalised immigrants only. So far, three naturalised TCNs have been elected to the Polish Parliament³. The first one is Hubert

² All data on the number of members are quoted from the mass media: Skomra (2016), Zespół wPolityce.pl (2016), Polish Press Agency from polskieradio.pl (2012) and Sikora (2017).

³ It is worth mentioning another case of a naturalised MP – Nelli Rokita – who sat in the Polish Parliament; she is German, and moved as a child from the USSR to Germany (1976). In 1994 she married a Polish politician – Jan Rokita.

Ranjan Costa (elected as a member of Self-Defence/Samoobrona in 2005), who originated from Bangladesh. The second one is John Abraham Godson, originating from Nigeria (a former member of Civic Platform/Platforma Obywatelska and later Poland Together/PolskaRazem), first (2010) he replaced another MP, who was elected for President of one of Polish cities, and then he was re-elected in 2011. The third one – Killion Munyama originating from Zambia – is a member of Civic Platform/Platforma Obywatelska. He was elected in 2011 and then re-elected in 2015. All the three politicians had been working as councillors at the local level.

These MPs do not raise claims on behalf of immigrants and do not refer to immigrants as potential supporters, because immigrants' votes cannot provide political success to naturalised candidates. To be elected, they have to appeal to the Polish electorate for their support. Hubert Ranjan Costa, John Abraham Godson and Killion Munyama entered the Parliament as representatives of mainstream parties⁴. They do not perform as representatives of immigrants but rather as representatives of their party and/or region.

As far as regional and local parliaments are concerned there have been only a few cases of naturalised councillors and even a commune leader (a village leader). The latter originated from Yemen; before being elected a commune leader he had been offered to run for the councillor position, but he refused. 'I have never imagined myself in the role of a politician. A commune leader is different. He has to act and not to conduct public debates' (Bziuk 2007).

5. EXISTING RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Until now no in-depth study has been conducted in Poland that could show how immigrants benefit from political freedom. Available studies concentrate on different ethnic groups or categories of immigrants and, furthermore, the issue of their associations is only a part of each research project. In this context,

⁴ Representatives of historical minorities follow a similar strategy. They enter the Parliament as members of mainstream parties. Germans are the only minority representatives of which successfully enter the Parliament thanks to: (1) their spatial/regional concentration, and (2) the special regulation for national minorities (they do not have to achieve a 5 per cent threshold that is obligatory in the elections to the Polish Parliament). Other minorities are too territorially dispersed.

it is worth recalling the results of the surveys on participation in associations⁵ and organisations, conducted among Ukrainians and the Vietnamese settled in Poland. It turned out that only 15 per cent of Ukrainians belong to any organisations. Among them, most were members of trade unions⁶ (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2007). This can be interpreted in terms of individualistic attitudes dominating among Ukrainians: they are rarely members of any organisations and if they are, it is to protect their individual interests. Such a tendency was confirmed by establishing the first Trade Union of Ukrainian Workers in Poland (Międzyzakładowy Związek Zawodowy Pracowników Ukraińskich w Polsce [Inter-enterprise Trade Union of Ukrainian Workers in Poland]) in 2016⁷. Probably, due to the short linguistic and cultural distance to the Polish majority, Ukrainians settled in Poland do not need support of ethnic organisations (Stefańska 2008). On the contrary, the Vietnamese settled in Poland are much more likely to get organised, as they experience a sense of alienation, which is the result of both cultural and linguistic distance and a different appearance in the very homogenous Polish society. More than a third of the respondents belonged to Vietnamese associations, nearly half of them to more than one. Three-quarters of the respondents said that they had participated in events offered by Vietnamese organisations during the last 12 months preceding the survey (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2007).

⁵ Freedom of association is a constitutional guarantee. It is regulated by the Law on Associations (1989), which defines an association as a ‘voluntary, self-governed and permanent organisation, set up for non-profit purposes’ (Article 2(1)). Unless the statute of an association states otherwise, all foreigners may join existing associations. However, only permanent residents of Poland may set up such associations. This restriction does not apply to foundations, which may be formed by all persons, regardless of their residence status, but they have to be located in Poland.

⁶ Article 59 of the Polish Constitution (1997) guarantees the freedom of membership in trade unions and employers’ associations. Statutory law other than in cases dictated by international commitments must not limit the scope of this guarantee. Another act regulating membership in trade unions is the Act on Trade Unions (1991).

⁷ In May this year the Inter-Enterprise Trade Union of Ukrainian Workers was established in Poland, with the primary objective to ‘protect dignity, rights and interests related to paid employment’. The union was established under the auspices of the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych – OPZZ), which coordinated and provided guidance in the process of its establishment. Representative of OPZZ say that in this way, as a Polish Trade Union, they pay back a debt to their Western colleagues, who had helped to organise Poles after 2004 (European Migration Network, n.d.).

Political challenges arising from migration-related diversity were covered by one of the working packages of the EMILIE research project⁸. The analysis focused on voting rights and civic participation. Taking into account the fact that voting rights are limited to Polish nationals, five models of immigrants' political participation were elaborated. The first one refers to immigrants' cooperation with historical ethnic/national minorities. Those immigrants who are co-ethnics of old minorities recognised in Poland might rely on the support of old minorities, including also political channels such as old-minority representatives who are, e.g. members of mainstream parties. The second model refers to Muslim immigrants, who are a religious and not ethnic/national minority. In this case, we observe a process following the Western pattern of political representation. It is embodied by the Muslim League, which relies on the support of converts who seem to replace the old minority Muslims. The third model is based on seeking allies among Polish politicians in order to create a platform consisting of immigrants different in appearance from the Polish majority. The aim is to present a vision of integration from the perspective of a person who stands out among the Polish homogeneous majority. The fourth model is represented by the arrivals from socialist Vietnam. They try to be invisible in the political sphere. They focus their activities on self-support and maintaining their ethnic identity and culture. Finally, the fifth model is characteristic of immigrants focused on the political situation in the country of their origin. It refers to Chechen, Belarusian and Vietnamese dissidents or the Palestinians (Gmaj 2011).

The report 'Political participation of third country nationals on a national and local level' (Kaźmierkiewicz, and Frelak 2011) is based on secondary data and small-scale research – seven interviews with both politicians and immigrants. It concentrates on the institutional framework (opportunities and constrains) for immigrants' civic and political participation. Among its main findings is the tendency noted by the interviewees to perceive immigrants as guests. This tendency is especially strong among local-level politicians and officials. Another crucial conclusion is the opinion the representatives of migrant organisations have on Polish authorities, which, according to the immigrants, do not have the will to promote immigrants' activism. In their opinion, the authorities are not interested in issues related to integration but in controlling access to the labour market and the Polish territory.

⁸ A European Approach to Multicultural Citizenship: Legal, political and educational challenges – EMILIE was a three-year research project funded by the European Commission Research DG, Sixth Framework Programme (2006–2009).

6. DIVPOL RESEARCH FINDINGS

6.1. Description of the empirical phase – methodology and general information on the interviews and interviewees

In the case of Poland materials were collected in April–July 2013. They were mainly face-to-face interviews; only two were conducted on Skype. All of them were recorded. There were two focused interviews with migrant organisations (NGO1; NGO2⁹), with four and five people respectively. 18 members of seven political parties¹⁰, one former party member¹¹ and two non-party councillors¹² were reached individually. Furthermore, three experts – Professors of Law were interviewed¹³. All, except the last three above-mentioned interviews, were based on the list of questions designed for the DivPol project and adjusted to the Polish situation and to the situation of a particular interview. Only one interview with a migrant organisation was in English, all the others were in Polish. All in all, 33 persons were interviewed (see table x in the Annex).

It was an extremely challenging task to encourage politicians to discuss the topic of immigrants’ political participation in Poland. Because of that, whenever it was possible, we asked questions designed for different modules during one interview. For example, an interviewee first responded to questions designed for an outreach, campaign or lobbying staff within the party, and then he answered questions for the module for a politician without an immigrant background. As a result, five categories of interviewees were established:

- Politicians with a migrant background (individual interviews with four persons, including three party members and one non-associated councillor)
- Politicians without an immigrant background (thirteen individual interviews)

⁹ The abbreviations are used when we quote interviewees.

¹⁰ We label them PP1_1 – PP7_1, which can be explained as: the first party, the first interviewee; the seventh party, the first interviewee. The list of parties: PJN (Polska jest Najważniejsza/ Poland Comes First); PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość/Law and Justice); PO (Platforma Obywatelska/Civic Platform); PSL (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe/Polish People’s Party); SLD (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej/Democratic Left Alliance); PPP (Polska Partia Pracy/Polish Labour Party); Ruch Palikota (Palikot’s Movement)

¹¹ Labelled FP_1

¹² Labelled NP_1 and NP_2. The NP_2 used to be a party member.

¹³ Labelled: E1, E2, E3 respectively.

- Outreach, campaign or lobbying staff within the party (six individual interviews)
- Inner-party gate-keeping personnel (three individual interviews)
- Migrant organisation representatives (two organisation focus groups, nine persons interviewed)

It should be also pointed out that between collecting interviews (2013) and writing this article (2018) some changes occurred in the Polish political landscape. They affected our interviewees' affiliation. In short, one of the parties changed its name; another one was incorporated into a newly emerged party¹⁴. One of our interviewees was excluded from his former party and later became one of the founders of a newly emerged formation. In order to avoid confusion, the authors have decided to recall the current state of the phase of collecting interviews.

6.2. Access and entry into a party

6.2.1. Reasons for joining and ways of entering a political party

Four interviewees classified as politicians with a migrant background were asked about the motivation for their political engagement in Poland. It should be stressed that all of them are very well educated. They are graduates of Polish universities, although they also have some academic experience from abroad. One can find academics among them. That makes them outstanding. Yet, before having started their political career and having been later elected representatives, they had already been well established (including professional and family life) in Poland and recognised in their local communities.

What is interesting, political party membership was not the reason of their success in communal/municipal elections. Some current members of the Lower Chamber of the Parliament (the Sejm) were elected at the municipal level before joining a political party. It is also worth noting that there exists a village councillor who consciously avoids entering any political party. He is convinced that at the commune level political affiliation can be a disadvantage, adversely influencing relationships with his neighbours:

¹⁴ Ruch Palikota (Palikot's Movement) became Twój Ruch (Your Move) and PjN (Polska jest Najważniejsza/Poland Comes First) was incorporated into Polska Razem Jarosława Gowina (Jarosław Gowin's Poland Together) currently Porozumienie Jarosława Gowina (Jarosław Gowin's Accord).

‘[It is important that] politics does not dominate relations [at the local level] because it may cause disagreements between neighbours and (...), let’s say, crises between a councillor and the residents’.(NP_1)

A non-migrant councillor raised concerns of a different nature:

‘I’ve really seen people being raked over the coals, having their conscience violated. I saw councillors who got a sudden stomach pain just because they wanted to leave the session, because they knew that they could not vote for something, and they were forced to do so. They were late hoping that something had been already voted on. They did not want to participate in the session because they were afraid of different types of sanctions for their lack of subordination to the party. They were forced to vote against their beliefs and against the people they represented. This is a huge drawback in the way of functioning of a local government. A local government is closest to citizens and it should represent their interests, the expectations of residents. (...) However, I observe that it is not a rare case that councillors vote against the interests of their constituents because they follow their party line. Unfortunately, partisanship prevails over self-government in Poland. The idea of self-government is brought up on the occasion of local elections every fourth year’.
(NP_2)

The above-mentioned arguments point out some reasons why interviewees have resisted joining a political party although they work for their local communities’ benefit. Some people who are active at the local level do not accept the idea of transferring the national-level conflicts to their local communities. Their diagnosis of the contemporary Polish self-governance system is not positive. It can be described in short – too much politics, too little care about the needs of the constituency. One of the interviewees, labelling himself ‘an idealist’, explained:

‘And despite various proposals, I have decided to become an independent councillor (...) Having no connections with the opposition or the coalition reduces the chance of implementing various motions. It is obvious. But on the other hand, it is a very big comfort – firstly, psychological, and secondly, you can actually represent the interests of residents, your constituency’.(NP_2)

What are the reasons for joining a political party pointed out by migrant interviewees? They joined a political party when they realised that in order to make their social visions come true, it is better to be a part of a bigger structure.

‘Without politics and engagement in a party that has a real impact on social life I would be just one of many doctors who are not heard. Thanks to politics, I manage to implement at least a tiny part of my plan’.(PP5_3)

'Already in 2001, I wanted to join [the name of the party] but my application was not treated seriously (...) they did not respond so I left that idea aside for the moment. Then, [the name of the party] turned to me. They wanted me to run for a county councillor. But at that moment, I was not convinced that this was what I really wanted to do'. (PP3_1)

Finally, he came to the conclusion that as a member of a political party, he could achieve more of his social aims. He submitted his application to the Civic Platform and it was accepted.

A decision on joining a political party can be undertaken when a politician thinks about political career at a higher level.

'I became a party member before Regional Assembly elections. I made the decision then as it is much more difficult to be elected at this level being outside a party'. (PP3_2)

In the case of a person who has already been experienced as a councillor in a county, joining a party half a year before an election is reasonable both from his point of view and for the political party efficiency.

'I cannot deny that they were looking for a potential candidate to the Regional Assembly, a candidate who can overcome other candidates. So it was also a political party initiative'. (PP3_2)

To conclude, in the case of so-called elected politicians with a migration background, the motivation for becoming politically active in a party appeared when they were recognised by local communities due to their professional position and social activities. Joining a political party was just another step in their mature life. The politicians discussed above belong to the first-generation immigrants. They were naturalised in Poland. What is also characteristic – they did not arrive in Poland as typical labour or settlement migrants. They came to Poland for educational reasons; there is also a missionary among them. All of them met their wives in Poland and started a family here.

Being recognised due to their professional position, engaging in social life and local community before becoming a party member is not unique for politicians with a migrant background. The same is also observable among other politicians.

'I was non-party, independent, active in the local government structures (...) Local governments are strong. If they are as cohesive and unitary as in [the name of the city], people do not fight against each other, you know, there is a competition... but... in short, local circles decided that I should be an MP. And they took care of that and finally, I became an MP'. (PP3_4)

However, it seems that in the case of politicians without a migration background, a more typical political career starts after graduating from secondary school, usually at university, therefore still at the beginning of their professional life.

‘At university, I was always interested in politics. It was an interesting time (...) I wanted to take part in these changes. For a young man, engagement in politics is a way to observe and to change the reality. (...) I made a calculation – which party programme suited me best (...). (FP_1)

‘The moment I decided to work in the public or political domain or in general in this area of activity was after secondary school graduation. So it was the period between finishing school and beginning studies at university’. (PP2_2)

‘I began to observe my own hometown. More and more things began to bother me (...) in fact most of the people of the older generation assumed that it was no use bothering and acting since it would bring no good result anyway. It is such a typical stereotypical way of thinking. I started my adventure with politics from creating a youth branch of one of the small opposition parties. I was too young to join a political party. (...) With first successes (...) I became even more motivated. And then in 2006, I think, one of the MPs asked me to be a candidate in local elections. At the beginning, I was very sceptical, but then I realised that it could be the next step to getting these very small or bigger things for my local community. I was a candidate as a member of the party’. (NP_2)

There are at least a few reasons to become politically active in a party, as it has been already shown above. Firstly, our interviewees pointed out a desire to make a real impact on social life at different levels, starting at the commune and finishing at the national one. Secondly, they mentioned the pragmatic conclusion that outside the party system it was much more difficult to have such an impact. Therefore, they chose a membership in a party even though ‘politics [was] only a tool to implement [their] plans and aims’. Thirdly, the interviewees mentioned that during their previous activities they had cooperated tightly with a party so their decision to formally access seemed to be a simple confirmation of the fact and a kind of manifestation of their loyalty, e.g.:

‘I was not a party member and I was invited to run from the PO ticket (the list of candidates). I became an MP, I was a member of the party club in the Parliament, so after a year I came to the conclusion that formal accession to the party was in good taste and it was a manifestation of loyalty. Especially as I was a candidate of the party and I share its views’. (PP3_4)

Fourthly, activities undertaken in a party can be an area where creative potential of interviewees is employed: ‘Everything was so fresh and spontaneous. It was just cool. We had a great time establishing this party. At the beginning, we had a great time. We made friends’. (PP7_1) Earlier,

our interviewee made an attempt to join one of the already existing parties. However, she was deterred by its ‘numbness’. A new party appearance was the best moment for her to start her activities in a political party.

This list of motivations is for sure neither exhaustive nor complete. First of all, we managed to reach a limited number of interlocutors. Secondly, from a psychological point of view, it is not astonishing that interviewees wanted to make a good impression on the researchers both as individuals and as party members. Nevertheless, it is also worth presenting a more general picture shown by one of former party members who decided to continue his activities at the local level, but without any party affiliation:

‘In the last few years I have seen many motivations to be a candidate in local elections. People were motivated because their wives could lose a job or “I have to because I got fired” or because “I need money”. I started with the assumption that I did not have to, but I could and I wanted to. So when it is possible, I am engaged in the local government. But I also have other options in my life – I can work as a scientist’. (NP_2)

None of our interviewees could point out any particular programme or procedure that introduces new party members into the political party activities. They were convinced that new members get accustomed to party activities thanks to the existing structures and interpersonal relations.

‘Political parties have different kinds of sub-groups or units within the organisation, more or less formal ones, that group people who share particular problems. I mean youth groups of political parties, groupings of certain professions or focused on certain topics. They function very well. They help to adapt more consciously to the party’s activities and to find one’s own place in a given formation. It is based on personal contacts and exchange of ideas with people who are in a similar situation or who face similar problems. People share experiences and jointly develop some models of cooperation or even patterns of action. They design common goals’. (PP4_2)

‘If there is a need, we run special courses. We offer a great range of such activities. These classes are designed, for example, with regard to age. We run a summer school for leaders; each year about 100 people who want to be political activists participate in it. (...) Secondly, before local elections, we always conduct a regional training [to teach them] how candidates should prepare for these local elections. We present information about legal issues, but also we train them in ... social engineering or marketing, which gives them chances to win in the elections’. (PP5_1)

‘I was made a member [of an academic group]. I preferred the Widzew Łódź group – linked to the district of the city I am residing in, but (...) there were different factions within the party and the faction [of the person who recommended me] didn’t belong to the Widzew Łódź group, and he wanted to have me on his side. So he recommended me for the academic group. At that time, I didn’t realise that... I realised that later’. (PP3_1)

6.2.2. Topics of interest of TCN politicians/politicians with a migrant background

On the basis of our interviews, it can be said that in the case of politicians with a migrant background, their topics of interest in the party are determined by their professional profile, e.g.:

‘I have seen the effects of a lack of medical care or its low quality. Therefore, this area of activity is the most important for me’. (PP5_3)

‘First of all, I am an economist and I specialise in international finance. I have always been interested in finance and public finance in general, including local government finance. This was the area that interested me most. Besides, there is also international cooperation, economic cooperation between a region in Poland and regions abroad. (...) The party utilises this potential’. (PP3_2)

Since citizenship is a precondition for party membership, immigrants who joined political parties had a good position in their professional domain. They did not start their activities in a party as young people who are at the earliest stages of their professional career. They had been already recognised in their communities as specialists, active in the public domain. Nevertheless, even in the case of new party members who are highly skilled professionals, some obstacles may appear. These obstacles are related to the resistance of senior party members to newcomers.

‘When it comes to obstacles, these are little things, mainly based on the fact that despite his knowledge, a new member is treated as not very qualified just because he is new in the party or he is new in certain party activities. (...) Older members think that a new member knows less and his opinion is disregarded. (...) In my case, it did not take long to change this attitude. I knew what I wanted and I said it, which is obviously important for the functioning of any organisation and I think... I do not know, it took three months, six months...’. (PP3_2)

6.2.3. Links between parties and migrant organisations

Any discussion about links between parties and migrant organisations is rather impossible in the case of Poland. None of our interviewees could point out any examples of such connections. It is better to talk about cooperation of individual politicians with migrants, as it is in the case of one of our interviewees who keeps more or less formal relations with Vietnamese and Syrian groups living in Poland; or in the case of a representative of the old

Ukrainian minority¹⁵, who is more aware of immigrants' problems since he has an affection for his co-ethnics arriving in Poland from Ukraine. One can also observe some attempts of African immigrants to initiate some kind of cooperation with politicians; however, the results are still far from satisfactory, as we learned from the representatives of a migrant organisation.

One should be aware that migrants' organisations are still very new in Poland and they are not strong enough to be recognised as partners by political parties. However, growing dynamics of their development cannot escape the researchers' notice. Especially, Ukrainians' students organisations deserve attention¹⁶. One should take into consideration the fact that one of the unintended consequences of Russia's actions in Crimea will be the reinvigoration of the Ukrainian diaspora's interest in and support for Ukraine from abroad – and putting to the test their ability to leverage their global presence for the benefit of those in the country itself. It means, e.g. that a part of Ukrainians in Poland may be more focused on their ethnic/national issues, which may be used for various political reasons not necessarily conducive to Polish interests.

6.3. Immigrants as elected/appointed representatives of political parties (representation and participation)

When we discuss the issue of political involvement of migrants in the narrow context used in the DivPol project, as membership in political parties and passive and active participation in elections, we should stress once again that in Poland it is limited to holders of Polish citizenship. Unfortunately, there is no definite data on the political participation of naturalised persons. However, due to the changes in immigration trends to Poland the potential is growing. Political parties reached in our research do not collect data on their members or candidates for membership that could constitute a party's immigrant database. Therefore, the DivPol research did not provide hard data in this area. Our interviewees were of the opinion that questions about one's immigration background are not crucial compared to sharing political

¹⁵ Old national and ethnic minorities recognised by the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Languages of 2005 are as follows: national minorities: Armenian, Belarusian, Czech, German, Jewish, Lithuanian, Russian, Slovak, and Ukrainian; ethnic minorities: Karaim, Lemko, Roma and Tatar.

¹⁶ Congresses of the Polish League of Ukrainian Students (Liga Ukraińskich Studentów w Polsce) were organized twice in 2016 and 2017.

attitudes or party convictions. What is more, questions about one’s confession or ethnic belonging are treated as confidential and should not be asked.

On the one hand, the method of gathering and elaborating socio-demographic data on candidates and party members employed by political parties can be labelled as an ‘HR approach’. Let us recall the concise words of a politician and inner party employee: ‘these are rather basic data on age, education and profession. We try to treat members as potential staff, so we can turn to them for assistance in creating our political programmes. Therefore, we rather concentrate on their interests, professions and educational attainments’. (PP5_2) ‘On the other hand, these data are elaborated for organisational issues like mailing, meetings, etc. They are also the basis for assessments of potential preferences, trends, problems or challenges shared by people engaged in a given political party. Finally, they are collected ‘in order to know what party we are’ (PP1_1), in other words, to find out who supports a given party in terms of age, sex, level of education and place of residence, which is especially important in the case of small-scale parties that have been established in the few recent years.

The interviewed politicians agree that political participation of immigrants is influenced by an attitude prevailing in the Polish society:

‘The majority [of Poles] would like to be an adherent to a party, not its direct actor, meaning a party member. (...) The reluctance to engage directly, not in political, but in party life; this is the reason why in many communities we observe the development of electoral, but non-political, committees. It is better not to be perceived as someone associated with a particular political party (...) unfortunately, party membership, sometimes helpful, can also be disadvantageous. Just to be on the safe side, it is better to be outside a party but have precise political preferences. So if the Polish society is so wary, immigrants are even more wary’. (PP3_3)

The wariness can be interpreted from a very down-to-earth perspective, particularly at the local community level. It is related to the development and successful implementation of very concrete solutions to problems experienced by residents in their everyday life. Let us recall the words of a naturalised independent (non-party) councillor:

‘At this level, stressing one’s political affiliation, political language is not good because these are local issues and they don’t need big politics; (...) national level politics to dominate these relations; because it can usually lead to disagreements in neighbourhood relations, or further problems in contacts between a councillor and local residents. Yes. Therefore, when I speak to people, I do not stress my political opinions’. (NP_1)

Regrettably, it seems that at least some of the immigrants share not only the wariness but also disapproval of Polish politicians:

‘They shout at each other, they criticise and waste their time. That is why I say I hate politics. Because a politician is supposed to do something for the people who elected him, who support him. So he must do something for the people and I do not think that Polish MPs (...) do something good for the people. Even the Polish people are already fed up with these politicians in the government (...) because they do not see any improvements (...) They have the same mentality, in all parties they have the same mentalities, even if they have a lot of, as they call it, intellectuals, but most are not intellectuals and do not even want to improve (...) to consult other people’. (NGO_1)

CONCLUSIONS

‘Many political parties in Europe face a shrinking membership base because of general disenchantment with politics. With globalisation and worldwide migration European societies are becoming increasingly diverse. This is posing new challenges to European democracies, which need to engage each new generation in their political systems. Political parties play a key role in this process. As organisations holding legislative and governing powers, parties need to reflect diversity within their ranks. The participation of immigrants in party politics is crucial for both immigrants and the long-term cohesion of these democracies. However, parties are still struggling with this’. (CJD Hamburg + Eutin 2014: 7)

As for Poland the issue of political participation of immigrants is not yet on the agenda. The issue of immigration to Poland has been placed so far only in an economic and demographic context. Quite recently politicians and policy makers have become more aware of the nation’s difficult demographic situation stemming mainly from low birth rates, huge emigration and aging trends. This is the reason why the question of immigration started to be perceived in a public discourse as one of the means to reduce the above mentioned problems. Such an approach puts emphasis on the Polish economic and demographic interests mainly. However, political parties’ interest in attracting people with an migration background in order to entice more supporters thanks to the migrants’ votes, although neglected, seems to be just ‘right behind the corner’. One can find some signs of potential party openness in the future if/when the law is changed, which can be labelled as informal favourable factors supporting political participation of immigrants:

‘There is no such a category as citizen/non-citizen in discussions, simply because all the members of the party are Polish citizens, but ... we are a party tightly related to self-government. We are a mass party. The crucial thing for us is the role, the function that

local communities could have in the country. And consequently, for someone who does good and useful things and feels related to their local community, there is always a place in PSL. (PP4_2)

Immigrants do not put forward demands for political rights understood in a narrow sense as party-political participation and voting rights. It seems to be related to the economic character of migration and quite harsh, in comparison to other EU countries, economic situation in Poland. Immigrants focus on earning a living rather than on party-political participation. They do not differ from Poles, who are passive in political life. Reluctance to active party membership characteristic of them might have an impact on immigrants' behaviours. Moreover, the majority of settlement migrants in Poland originate from the former USSR countries, where politicians and political parties, similarly to Poland, do not gain broad social respect. Another significant group originates from Vietnam and in general they do not want to be engaged in politics. They concentrate on other issues, e.g. earning money – as much as possible, children's education, etc. They search for ways of expressing and satisfying their interests through other than political channels.

Political profiles of interviewees with a migrants' background were determined by their professional interests. They did not perform as representatives of immigrants but rather as representatives of their party and/or region. It seems that citizenship is generally treated as a prerequisite for full political participation. And it is not only an opinion of politicians without a migration background but also those who are naturalised in Poland. Therefore, it seems that one cannot expect politicians with a migration background to devote their attention to the topic.

It should be taken into consideration that Polish society might be unprepared for broadening political rights for immigrants, e.g. in the context of historical experiences. Therefore, even residents who are interested in politics in Poland and who would like to vote at a local level have mixed feelings about that. Undoubtedly, the introduction of a broader scope of political rights for non-citizens in Poland should be preceded by a social campaign.

‘They will think Ukrainian immigrants constitute the largest group in fact. So who would get the political rights? Ukrainians – those who came from Volhyn, who killed our people, and now they get political rights. I am not saying that this will be the main theme of the whole campaign, but it might appear’. (NGO_2)

‘Radicalisation can be quite a danger. Foreigners living in Poland now do not have voting rights or political rights and Poles tolerate them as those who live and work here and pay taxes. However, political parties may use foreigners to radicalise voters, to make them

feel unsafe, pointing out that immigrants with political rights might be dangerous. Such a situation may change positive attitudes of Poles to hostile ones towards immigrants just because of the perception of such a threat'. (NGO_2)

As for institutions one should be aware that migrants' organisations, although still new in Poland and not strong enough, are developing rapidly as, e.g. Ukrainian Trade Unions or Ukrainian Student Associations. They may be recognised as partners by various political parties searching for voters or support. Some students originating from Eastern neighbouring countries show interest in the Polish political and legal order and they search for opportunities for collaboration with organisations involved in the public domain like foundations, think-tank organisation and universities:

'I can see that my students from the East know how the Polish state institutions work better than their Polish peers (...) It is proof of their determination and their thirst for knowledge. They are interested in these issues'. (NP_2)

The authors do hope that DivPol findings as a pioneering study on political participation will stimulate further, in-depth research. What barriers need to be overcome to increase the participation of immigrants in Poland? And what arguments, if any, are there to make the case for the diversity and long-term cohesion of democracy?

Annex Table 1

List of interviews

Abbreviation/ Label	Political Party/Organisation	Migration background	Type of interview
PP1_1	PJN (Polska jest Najważniejsza/ Poland Comes First)	No	Individual interview
PP1_2	PJN (Polska jest Najważniejsza/ Poland Comes First)	No	Individual interview
PP1_3	PJN (Polska jest Najważniejsza/ Poland Comes First)	No	Individual interview
PP2_1	PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość/Peace and Justice)	No	Individual interview
PP2_2	PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość/Peace and Justice)	No	Individual interview
PP3_1	PO (Platforma Obywatelska/ Civic Platform)	Yes	Individual interview
PP3_2	PO (Platforma Obywatelska/ Civic Platform)	Yes	Individual interview

Abbreviation/ Label	Political Party/Organisation	Migration background	Type of interview
PP3_3	PO (Platforma Obywatelska/ Civic Platform)	No	Individual interview
PP3_4	PO (Platforma Obywatelska/ Civic Platform)	No	Individual interview
PP3_5	PO (Platforma Obywatelska/ Civic Platform)	No	Individual interview
PP4_1	PSL (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe/ Polish People’s Party);	No	Individual interview
PP4_2	PSL (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe/ Polish People’s Party);	No	Individual interview
PP5_1	SLD (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej/Democratic Left Alliance)	No	Individual interview
PP5_2	SLD (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej/ Democratic Left Alliance)	No	Individual interview
PP5_3	SLD (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej/Democratic Left Alliance)	Yes	Individual interview
PP5_4	SLD (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej/Democratic Left Alliance)	No	Individual interview
PP6_1	PPP (Polska Partia Pracy/ Polish Labour Party)	No	Individual interview
PP7_1	Ruch Palikota (Palikot’s Movement).	No	Individual interview
FP_1	Former party’s member	No	Individual interview
NP_1	Non-party councillor	Yes	Individual interview
NP_2	Non-party councillor (Former party member)	No	Individual interview
E_1	Expert	No	Individual interview
E_2	Expert	No	Individual interview
E_3	Expert	No	Individual interview
NGO_1	Fundacja dla Somalii (Foundation for Somalia)	Yes	Focused interview – 4 persons
NGO_2	Fundacja Nasz Wybór (‘Our Choice’ Foundation)	Yes	Focused interview – 5 persons

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IMMIGRANT VOTERS IN POLAND – BEING JUST ‘RIGHT BEHIND THE CORNER’

Summary

This paper addresses challenges related to political participation of immigrants and/or third country nationals (TCNs) in Poland and provides both legal and policy information on its framework. Drawing on both official statistical data and research findings the paper reports empirical results from the comprehensive qualitative study DivPol. The authors do hope its findings will stimulate further, in-depth research on barriers that need to be overcome

in order to increase the participation of immigrants in Poland, and support discussion on arguments, if there are any, to make the case for the diversity and long-term cohesion of democracy.

Key words: immigration, political participation, Poland

IMIGRANCI WYBORCY W POLSCE – BĘDĄC „TUŻ ZA ROGIEM”

Streszczenie

Artykuł porusza wyzwania związane z polityczną partycypacją imigrantów i/lub obywateli państw trzecich w Polsce. Autorki przedstawiają prawny i polityczny kontekst, oficjalne statystyki oraz wyniki badania DivPol, mając nadzieję, że przyczynią się one do dalszych badań nad barierami, które trzeba pokonać, aby zwiększyć zaangażowanie imigrantów w Polsce w sferze politycznej. Chciałyby również przyczynić się do dyskusji, w której argumenty dotyczyć będą z jednej strony różnorodności, a z drugiej długoterminowej spójności społeczeństwa w ramach demokracji.

Słowa kluczowe: imigracja, partycypacja polityczna, Polska

ИММИГРАНТЫ В КАЧЕСТВЕ ИЗБИРАТЕЛЕЙ В ПОЛЬШЕ – НАХОДЯСЬ «УЖЕ ЗА УГЛОМ»

Резюме

В статье затронуты проблемы, связанные с политическим участием иммигрантов и/или граждан третьих стран в Польше. Авторы представляют юридический и политический контекст, официальную статистику и результаты исследования DivPol, надеясь, что они будут способствовать дальнейшему исследованию барьеров, которые необходимо преодолеть, чтобы увеличить вовлеченность иммигрантов в политическую жизнь Польши; а также дальнейшему развитию дискуссии, аргументы в ходе которой будут связаны с многообразием, а, с другой стороны, с долговременным сплочением общества в рамках демократии.

Ключевые слова: иммиграция, политическое участие, Польша

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