



cilt  
2

BALKANLARDA  
İSLÂM  
MİADI DOLMAYAN UMUT

İSLAM IN THE BALKANS  
UNEXPIRED HOPE

TÜRKİSTAN'DAN BALKANLARA  
FROM TURKESTAN TO THE BALKANS

EDİTÖR  
MUHAMMET SAVAŞ KAFKASYALI



ANKARA - BELGRADE - BUCHAREST - BUDAPEST - CHISINAU - KIEV  
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*From Turkestan to the Balkans*

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# Muslims in Poland: Their Origin, History and Organization of Religious Life

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## Summary

Islam is one of Polish traditional religions and is officially recognized by the state. The first Muslims to emerge within the borders of Poland were Tatars who settled in Podlachia in the seventeenth century. However, they did not arrive from a Muslim state, they came from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania where they had started to settle as early as the fourteenth century and their place of origin had been the Muslim state of Golden Horde. Thanks to this long presence Islam was officially recognized by the Polish state as early as 1936 by a special act of Parliament recognizing the first Islamic organization, the Muslim Religious Union (MZR), the second oldest Islamic organization in Europe.

Muslim minority in Poland is not very sizeable. We have no exact data on the number of Muslims living in Poland, their population is estimated at 20-30 thousand, what amounts to 0,06-0,08 percent of the total population. However, the today's religious life of

Muslims in Poland is characterized by a peculiar transitional phase between the past (until the second 1980s), when almost all Muslims living in Poland were Tatars, and the present, with Tatars as a minority when compared to the immigrant Muslims. Along with the demographic changes in the Muslim minority in Poland, the organization of their religious life also underwent a transformation. Until late 1980s the MZR was the only Islamic organization in Poland. In 1980s students from Arab countries were welcomed by its members and allowed to join the religious activities. However tensioned between these two groups arose and in 1989, the students formed an association, the first Islamic organization since the establishment of the MZR, though of course with a different legal status. Since then more Islamic religious organizations were established, first as associations and later as denominational organizations. However, legislative means allowing and officially recognizing more than one Islamic organization may destroy the positive image and strong position of Muslims, which they have earned for centuries of their presence in Poland.

Thanks to the long tradition of Islamic presence in Poland, there are no special logistic problems and there exists a working religious infrastructure. There are four purpose built mosques and several prayer rooms, three traditional Muslim cemeteries and special sections in communal cemeteries are allotted to Muslims. Islamic religious instruction was introduced to public schools in 1992. However there is a lack of well trained local imams and Muslim theologians.

The Roman Catholic Church, the biggest Christian denomination in Poland, is more and more interested in an interreligious dialogue with Islam. Since 2000 the Day of Islam in the Roman Catholic Church in Poland has been celebrated sixteen times, and Muslims two years ago started to organize a Day of Christianity. Poland with its long tradition of Islamic presence, but still with a tiny Muslim minority is in a good position to learn from the experience of other European countries, whose history in the last years has been marked by a great influx of Muslim immigrants.

## Polonya'daki Müslümanlar: Kökenleri, Tarihleri ve Dinî Yaşamın Düzenlenmesi

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### Özet

İslam Polonya'da geleneksel dinlerden birisi ve devlet tarafından resmen tanınmaktadır. Polonya sınırları içine giren ilk Müslümanlar on yedinci yüzyılda Podlachia'ya yerleşen tatarlardı. Ancak bu Tatarlar Müslüman bir devletten gelmeyip Golden Horde Müslüman devletinden on dördüncü yüzyılda göç etmeye başladıkları ve yerleştikleri Litvanya Grandükalığı'ndan geldiler. Bu uzun süreli varlıkları nedeniyle İslam Polonya devleti tarafından 1936 gibi erken dönemde Parlamento'nun çıkardığı özel yasa ile ilk İslam kuruluşu ve Avrupa'da ikinci en eski İslam örgütü olan Müslüman Dini Birliği (MZR) resmen tanındı.

Polonya'daki Müslüman azınlık sayısal olarak fazla değildir. Polonya'da yaşayan Müslümanların sayısı ile ilgili kesin bilgi olmamakla birlikte nüfusları yaklaşık olarak 20-30 bin olarak tahmin edilmekte ve böylelikle toplum içindeki nüfusları yüzde 0,06-0,08 olarak öngörülmektedir. Ancak günümüzde Polonya'daki Müs-

lumanların dini hayatları Polonya'daki tüm Müslümanların Tatar olduğu geçmiş zamana göre (1980'li yılların ikinci yarısına kadar) ve Tatarların göçmen Müslümanlara nazaran azınlıkta olduğu günümüzdeki durum arasında kaldığı tuhaf bir geçiş dönemi ile özetlenebilir. Polonya'da Müslüman azınlığının geçirdiği demografik değişikliklerle birlikte dini hayatlarının düzeni de dönüşüme uğramış bulunmaktadır. 1980'li yılların sonuna kadar MZR Polonya'daki tek İslam örgütüydü. 1980'li yıllarda bu örgütün üyeleri Arap ülkelerinden gelen öğrencilere kucak açtılar ve dini faaliyetlerine katılmalarına izin verdiler. Ancak iki grup arasında çıkan gerilimden dolayı öğrenciler 1989 da MZR'nin kuruluşundan sonra kurulan ilk ancak farklı yasal statüsü olan İslam örgütü kurdular. O tarihten sonra başka dini İslam örgütleri önce dernek ve daha sonra mezhepsel örgütler olarak kuruldu. Ancak birden fazla İslam örgütünün varlığına izin verilmesi ve tanınmasına olanak sağlayan yasalardan dolayı yüzyıllarca Polonya'daki varlıkları ile Müslümanların elde ettikleri olumlu imaj ve güçlü pozisyona zarar verebilir.

Polonya'da uzun süreli İslam varlığından dolayı özel lojistik sorunları olmadığı gibi işleyen dini altyapı mevcuttur. Dört adet amaca uygun cami ve birkaç mescit, üç adet geleneksel Müslüman mezarlığı inşa edilmiş ve umumi mezarlıklarda Müslümanlara özel bölümleri tahsis edilmiştir. İslam din dersi 1992 yılında devlet okullarının müfredatına dâhil edilmiştir. Ancak iyi eğitilmiş yerel imamların ve Müslüman ilahiyatçıların eksikliği hissedilmektedir.

Polonya'nın en büyük Hıristiyan mezhebi olan Roma Katolik Kilisesi İslam ile dinler arası diyalog kurma konusunda gittikçe daha isteklidir. 2000 yılından beri İslam Günü Polonya Roma Katolik Kilisesi tarafından on altı defa kutlanmış ve iki yıl önce Müslümanlar Hıristiyanlık Günü düzenlemeye başlamışlar. Polonya uzun süreli İslam varlığının geleneği ve çok küçük Müslüman azınlığı olan bir ülke olarak yakın geçmişte önemli ölçüde Müslüman göçmen alan Avrupa ülkelerinin tarihinden ve deneyimlerinden yararlanabilir.

## 1. History of Islamic Presence in Poland – Overview

The documented history of bilateral contacts between Poland and the Islamic world goes back over a thousand years, to the tenth century. The first written mention of Mieszko's<sup>1</sup> country, the first Polish state known to the history, was made in a chronicle by Ibrahim ibn Ya'qub at-Turtusi, a traveler, probably a merchant, of Jewish origin sent by the Caliph Al-Hakam II to serve as an envoy (960-966) to the Holy Roman Emperor Otto I.<sup>2</sup> However, until the fourteenth century, Islamic presence in this part of Europe had been rather random and disorderly.

The history of Islamic presence in Poland and Lithuania (two states in a personal union, that is connected through the person of the ruler, since 1385) dates back to the fourteenth century and the first written mention of Muslims in Polish historiography goes back to the year 1397 and was made in *Roczniki, czyli Kroniki Królestwa Polskiego* ("The Annals of Jan Długosz") by Polish chronicler Jan Długosz.<sup>3</sup> It was only after the creation of a nominally Muslim state in Eastern Europe in the thirteenth century, i.e. the state of Golden Horde, that contact with Muslims intensified. Lithuanian princes fought against the Golden Horde to prevent its invasions of Lithuanian lands, but already in the fourteenth century the first Muslims, i.e. Tatars originating from this state, began to settle in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. They left their country and came to live in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania for various reasons.<sup>4</sup> Some of them were brought (as mercenaries) to help the Lithuanians defend their territories from enemies. Others were refugees, who fled for fear of disturbances within the Golden Horde engaged in civil wars.<sup>5</sup>

When the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Vytautas the Great, had Tatars settled systematically in the Trakai (Pol. Troki) area, it came to a significant increase in the number of Tatars within Lithuanian borders.<sup>6</sup> They were granted land in exchange for military service in the Lithuanian army and for helping sustain contact among Duke's garrisons.<sup>7</sup> They fought mainly against the Teutonic Order,<sup>8</sup>

1 Mieszko was the first historically known Polish sovereign, the founder of the first Polish state.

2 For more details see: T. Kowalski, *Relacja Ibrahima Ibn Ja'quba z podróży do krajów słowiańskich w przekładzie al-Bekriego*, foreword and commentary by T. Kowalski, edited by same, Kraków 1946.

3 J. Długosz, *Annales seu cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae (Roczniki czyli kroniki sławnego Królestwa Polskiego) sub anno 1397*, Warszawa 1981, book X, p. 288-289.

4 It is possible that first war prisoners from the Golden Horde were brought as early as the 13th century as a result of wars against Lithuania over Smolensk and Chernihiv provinces, but they did not settle for good; for more details see: J. Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii Tatarów polskich 1794-1944. Zbiór szkiców z anekсами źródłowymi*, Pułtusk 1998, p. 11ff.

5 P. Borawski, A. Dubiński, *Tatarzy polscy. Dzieje, obrzędy, legendy, tradycje*, Warszawa 1986, p. 18.

6 Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii Tatarów...*, p. 14 and on; P. Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1986, p. 6.

7 S. Kryczyński, *Tatarzy litewscy. Próba monografii historyczno-etnograficznej*, Gdańsk 2000 [1938], p. 4ff.

8 Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 31-32, 53-54.

e.g. a supplementary Tatar regiment was used in the Battle of Grunwald in 1410.<sup>9</sup> In addition to land they were also granted the right to practice their religion and erect mosques.<sup>10</sup>

The number of Muslim settlers, both mercenaries and refugees, as well as prisoners of war, kept increasing during the whole of the fifteenth century, but it was the two subsequent centuries that saw the most significant influx of Muslims to Polish territories.<sup>11</sup> Some historical sources assess the number of Muslims in Poland at that time at 40 000 people. Their legal status was defined in the sixteenth century.<sup>12</sup> The ones who served in Tatar military units were granted fief, just as those who served at royal courts as interpreters and translators from oriental languages.<sup>13</sup> There were also Tatars among city dwellers (tradesmen, cart drivers, gardeners) and servants on lordly estates.<sup>14</sup> Their settlements centred around Vilnius (Pol. Wilno), Trakai, Hrodna (Pol. Grodno) and Navahradak (Pol. Nowogródek)<sup>15</sup> and existed at least until the eighteenth century.<sup>16</sup> On the territories of the Crown of the Polish Kingdom, King John III Sobieski granted land to Tatars in Podlachia in 1679.<sup>17</sup>

Muslim Tatars were King's subjects, their superiors being military commanders, standard bearers (Pol. *chorągży*) and marshals, appointed by the King, who were also representatives of judicial power authorized to adjudicate in civil cases. Generally, Tatars served as soldiers, in separate units of light cavalry (called in Polish *chorągiew*), which possessed their own military chaplains (field imams) from the eighteenth century onwards.<sup>18</sup> They fought in all major battles of the time.<sup>19</sup> In the seventeenth century, the Tatar gentry in the Grand Duchy received almost all rights and privileges of the Polish *szlachta* (the noble class in Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania),<sup>20</sup> and in the second half of the eighteenth century

9 Borawski, Dubiński, *Tatarzy polscy. Dzieje...*, p. 27.

10 Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 159. For more details see: For more details see: A. S. Nalborczyk, 'Mosques in Poland. Past and present' in K. Górak-Sosnowska (ed.), *Muslims in Eastern Europe. Widening the European discourse on Islam*, Warsaw 2011, pp. 183-193; [www.orient.uw.edu.pl/MSZ/teksty/14\\_nalborczyk\\_MuslimsCEE.pdf](http://www.orient.uw.edu.pl/MSZ/teksty/14_nalborczyk_MuslimsCEE.pdf).

11 Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii Tatarów...*, p. 15ff.

12 Borawski, Dubiński, *Tatarzy polscy. Dzieje...*, p. 55ff.

13 Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 17.

14 L. Bohdanowicz, S. Chazbijewicz, J. Tyszkiewicz, *Tatarzy muzułmanie w Polsce*, Gdańsk 1997, p. 25ff.

15 Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii Tatarów...*, p. 14.

16 Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 19ff.

17 A. Miśkiewicz, *Tatarska legenda. Tatarzy polscy 1945-1990*, Białystok 1993, p. 25-26. In two of the granted villages Bohoniki and Kruszyniany, there are still Muslim communities, mosques and *mizars* (cemeteries). There are also Tatars living in Krynki and Sokółka to this day.

18 Kryczyński, *Tatarzy litewscy...*, p. 118. For more details on the participation of Tatar units and individual Tatar officers in battles of this period see: Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii Tatarów...*, p. 19ff.

19 For more details see: A. S. Nalborczyk, 'The political participation of Polish Muslim Tatars – the result of or the reason for integration? From Teutonic wars to the Danish cartoons affair' in J.S. Nielsen (ed.), *Muslim Political Participation in Europe*, Edinburgh 2013, p. 239-254.

20 Borawski, Dubiński, *Tatarzy polscy. Dzieje...*, p. 85-87.

the legal status of their land ownership was changed from fief to hereditary property.<sup>21</sup> The Constitution of 3 May 1791 finally granted them full political rights.<sup>22</sup>

Tatars as Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi School, enjoyed freedom of worship in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. They lived in Muslim religious communities headed by imams (called in Polish *molla*) elected by all members of the community. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, there could be even about 60 mosques in Poland.<sup>23</sup> Sources say nothing about any major Christianization of Muslim Tatars. However, during Counter-Reformation in 1609 an enraged crowd demolished a mosque in Trakai.<sup>24</sup> But the Tatars kept their religious beliefs, even though they lost their mother tongue in the sixteenth century and gradually started to speak one of the Polish/Belorussian spoken dialects.<sup>25</sup> At the same time they kept the Arabic alphabet, which they used not only to write down Koran passages or prayers in Arabic,<sup>26</sup> but also for Polish texts, in combination with which it made a very unique kind of writing. They used this script for handwriting *kitab*s (compilations of various texts: *hadith*, prayers, rituals, legends), *tafsirs* (passages of the Koran with a translation into Polish etc.)<sup>27</sup> Muslim Tatars have always practiced monogamy and their women have never veiled their faces.<sup>28</sup>

When the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth lost its independence at the end of the eighteenth century, the majority of Tatars got under Russian authority. Some fought in uprisings against the Tsarist Russia and fell victim to repression<sup>29</sup> – they were deprived of the *szlachta* status, and were subjected to Russification<sup>30</sup> (e.g. they were made to use Russian inscriptions on tombstones<sup>31</sup>).

Around that time, other Muslims started coming to Poland. They were the Crimean Tatars, the Cherkessians, the Chechens, the Azerbaijanis and other Muslims from the Caucasus and Central Asia, who served in the tsarist army.<sup>32</sup>

21 Kryczyński, *Tatarzy litewscy...*, p. 31ff.

22 Bohdanowicz, Chazbijewicz, Tyszkiewicz, *Tatarzy muzułmanie...*, p. 14.

23 Paşa Peçevi (1572–1650) noted in his *Tarihi Peçevi* that in the seventeenth century Tatars owned 60 mosques; L. Kryczyński, *Historia meczetu w Wilnie. Próba monografii*, Warszawa 1937, p. 17.

24 Borawski, Dubiński, *Tatarzy polscy. Dzieje...*, p. 73–74.

25 Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 199–202

26 For information on hand-written Koran in the culture of Polish Tatars see: N. Jord, *Koran rękopiśmienny w Polsce*, Lublin 1994.

27 For more details see: Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii Tatarów...*, p. 59 and on; Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 190ff. Further details on *kitab*s or *tefsirs* in: Cz. Łapicz, *Kitab Tatarów litewsko-polskich. Paleografia, grafia, język*, Toruń 1986; A. Drozd, M. M. Dziekan, T. Majda, *Piśmiennictwo i muhiry Tatarów polsko-litewskich*, Warszawa 2000; J. Kulwicka-Kamińska, Cz. Łapicz (ed.) *Tatarzy Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego w historii, języku i kulturze*, Toruń 2013; Cz. Łapicz, J. Kulwicka-Kamińska (ed.), *Tefsir Tatarów Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego. Teoria i praktyka badawcza*, Toruń 2015.

28 Kryczyński, *Tatarzy litewscy...*, p. 109 and 115; for the present-day situation see: K. Warmińska, *Tatarzy polscy. Tożsamość religijna i etniczna*, Kraków 1999, p. 130.

29 Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii Tatarów...*, p. 45 and on; Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 258ff.

30 A. Miśkiewicz, *Tatarzy polscy 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1990, p. 20–21; Kryczyński, *Tatarzy litewscy...*, p. 35, 38ff.

31 Borawski, Dubiński, *Tatarzy polscy. Dzieje...*, p. 135.

32 Bohdanowicz, Chazbijewicz, Tyszkiewicz, *Tatarzy muzułmanie...*, p. 40; A. Kołodziejczyk, *Rozprawy i studia z dziejów Tatarów litewsko-polskich i islamu w Polsce w XVII–XX w.*, Siedlce 1997, p. 22, 39ff.

Apart from soldiers there were also merchants, craftsmen (mainly bakers and confectioners) and clerks among the new immigrants.<sup>33</sup> It was for them that Muslim cemeteries were founded in Warsaw, one of which is still open. It is situated in Tatarska Street and is itself called the Tatar Cemetery.<sup>34</sup>

The World War I thinned the number of Tatars, the majority of whom were resettled deep in Russia. Many mosques, houses and cemeteries were demolished.<sup>35</sup>

There were about 5000 Polish-Lithuanian Tatars living in Poland and 19 Muslim religious communities operating after the World War I until 1939. Polish Muslims enjoyed full freedom of worship but they did not have their all-Polish organization. Before 1918 they were under the authority of the Mufti of Simferopol (Crimea) – head of Taurida Muslim Spiritual Board,<sup>36</sup> otherwise closed down after the Soviet army conquered Crimea in 1920. In such circumstances, two organizations: Union of Muslims in Warsaw (Pol. *Związek Muzułmanów m.st. Warszawy*) and Muslim Religious Community in Vilnius (Pol. *Muzułmańska Gmina Wyznaniowa z Wilna*), made efforts to appoint one superior body for all Polish Muslims – one that would be acknowledged by the Polish government.<sup>37</sup> They were successful in their attempts. In 1925, with the consent of the Ministry of Interior and with the financial support from the Ministry of Denominations and Public Enlightenment, an all-Polish Convention of Delegates from Muslim Communities (Pol. *Wszechpolski Zjazd Delegatów Gmin Muzułmańskich*) took place in Vilnius. Delegates to the convention set up the Muslim Religious Union in the Republic of Poland (Pol. *Muzułmański Związek Religijny w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, henceforward MZR) and elected the mufti – an orientalist Jakub Szynkiewicz (1884-1966),<sup>38</sup> with the seat in Vilnius. However, it was only in 1936 that Islam was finally officially recognized by the Polish Parliament in the Act of 21 April 1936, which defined the relationship between the State and the MZR (see below).<sup>39</sup> The Union was independent of any clerical or secular authorities, it gained legal entity. All historical buildings belonging to the communities were taken care of by the state, and *waqfs*, i.e. religious foundations, were exempt from taxation and other payments.

In 1926, another Tatar organization called Tatar Association for Culture and Education of the Republic of Poland (Pol. *Związek Kulturalno-Oświatowy Tatarów*

33 Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii Tatarów...*, p. 113.

34 It was opened in 1867, an older one, called Caucasian, founded in 1839, is no longer open; for more details see: Kołodziejczyk, *Rozprawy i studia...*, p. 86ff.

35 Kryczyński, *Tatarzy litewscy...*, p. 44.

36 Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii Tatarów...*, p. 77-78.

37 Miśkiewicz, *Tatarzy polscy...*, p. 35ff.

38 For more information about Szynkiewicz see: Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii Tatarów...*, p. 146.

39 For the circumstances of passing the bill see J. Sobczak, 'Położenie prawne polskich wyznawców islamu' in R. Baecker, Sh. Kitab (ed.), *Islam a świat*, Toruń 2004, p. 173ff.

*Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*) was founded in Vilnius.<sup>40</sup> It carried out cultural, scientific and publishing activities (e.g. „Rocznik Tatarski” – a yearly publication<sup>41</sup>). As part of its activity, they established the Tatar National Museum (1929), and the Tatar National Archive (1931), both in Vilnius.<sup>42</sup> In 1928, the Mosque Building Committee was formed in Warsaw, but even though it was given a piece of land in Ochota the mosque was never erected.<sup>43</sup>

Polish-Lithuanian Tatars were also willing to serve in the Polish army in the Interwar Period. Already in 1919, the Tatar Uhlan Regiment was formed.<sup>44</sup> Polish Tatars also fought in the World War II; in 1939 they served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron of the 13<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Vilnius Uhlans (formed in 1936, all Muslims enlisted in military service served in this regiment),<sup>45</sup> and then in the underground forces of the Polish underground forces called Home Army (Pol. *Armia Krajowa*), in the Vilnius Area.

After World War II, 90 percent of the territories formerly inhabited by Tatars were incorporated into the USSR.<sup>46</sup> The only three pre-war religious communities that remained within Polish lands were in Warsaw, Bohoniki and Kruszyniany. Many Tatars had to leave their homes and were subjected to repatriation to Western territories, that belonged to Germany before the war,<sup>47</sup> where they formed two Muslim communities – in Gdańsk and Gorzów Wielkopolski.<sup>48</sup> However, due to postwar migrations, the Islamic population was dispersed. There weren't enough clergymen, places of worship or religion teachers. The level of religious education wasn't high either, which was partly a result of the isolation of Poland from other countries, where there existed centres of education in Muslim theology.<sup>49</sup> Although ethnically distinct, Tatars are united by Islam and they think of themselves as Muslim Poles.

## 2. Muslim Minority in Poland Today – Its Size and Ethnic Composition

Muslim minority in Poland is not very sizeable. Neither had it been very diverse ethnically before the twentieth century, when newcomers from Islamic countries started to join the ranks of Muslims in Poland, side by side with Tatars. They were mostly students from the Arab countries, but also from Iran or Afghanistan. During the communist era in Poland many of them kept their faith secret, as it

40 Miśkiewicz, *Tatarzy polscy...*, p. 47.

41 For more details see: Miśkiewicz, *Tatarzy polscy...*, p. 125ff; Kołodziejczyk, *Rozprawy i studia...*, p. 75ff.

42 Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 299-300, J. Tyszkiewicz, op. cit., p. 142.

43 For more details see: Nalborczyk, 'Mosques in Poland...', p. 184-186.

44 The word 'uhlan' (Pol. 'ułań', Tur.-Osm. *oghlan*) has a Tatar-Turkish origin.

45 Miśkiewicz, *Tatarzy polscy...*, p. 155-159.

46 Kołodziejczyk, *Rozprawy i studia...*, p. 29.

47 Bohdanowicz, Chazbijewicz, Tyszkiewicz, *Tatarzy muzułmanie...*, p. 80ff.

48 Miśkiewicz, *Tatarska legenda...*, p. 11ff.

49 Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 307-308.

wasn't approved of; and some were actually communists, e.g. members of the Iranian party *Tudeh*.

Ever since Polish borders were re-opened in 1989, new waves of Muslim immigrants have made their home in Poland. The majority of them are not migrant workers, but former students, mostly Arabs and their families. Turkish citizens come rather to open a business. There are also political refugees among Muslims in Poland. Statistics show that most of them come from Iraq (10 percent of all the refugees in 1997), other nationalities: from Afghanistan (4 percent) and from Bosnia and Herzegovina (5 percent)<sup>50</sup>. Next a sizeable group of refugees arrived from Chechnya, but many of them moved to Germany after receiving the refugee status.

We have no exact data on the number of Muslims living in Poland, as people are not asked about denomination in the national census. Estimated numbers differ depending on the source. The population of Tatars in Poland is estimated at 5-6 thousand, and the number of immigrant Muslims at 20-30 thousand<sup>51</sup>. These two numbers amount to 0,06-0,08 percent of the total population of Poland.

### 3. Organization of Religious Life of Muslims in Poland

Religious life of Muslims in Poland is characterized by a peculiar transitional phase between the past, when almost all Muslims living in Poland were Tatars, and the present, with Tatars as a minority when compared to the immigrant Muslims. Along with the demographic changes in the Muslim minority in Poland, their organizations also underwent a transformation. Until late 1980s the MZR was the only Islamic organization in Poland. In 1980s students from Arab countries were welcomed by its members and allowed to join the religious activities. However tensioned between these two groups arose and in 1989, the students formed the Muslim Students Association in Poland, the first Islamic organization since the establishment of the MZR, though of course with a different legal status. Since then more Islamic organizations were established, first as associations and later as denominational organizations.

#### 3.1. Legal Status

Muslim denominational organizations in Poland fall into two separate categories: religious organizations acting on the basis of separate legal acts, and the remaining religious communities entered in the register of churches and other denominational organizations, functioning under the Act of 17 May 1989 on the Guarantees of Freedom of Conscience and Religion.

50 *Migracje zagraniczne ludności w Polsce w latach 1988-1997*, GUS (<http://www.stat.gov.pl>), <http://www.stat.gov.pl/publikacje/demogr/migracje.htm>; 20.12.2003, 17:23.

51 According to representatives of Muslim organizations like MZR, SSM or Muslim League, the number is 30.000.

The MZR is one of the latter group and is the only Islamic religious organization which operates on the basis of a special legal act, because the Polish Parliament has not revoked the Act of 21 April 1936 defining the relationship between the state and the MZR. Art. 1 of the Act states:

*Wyznawcy islamu na obszarze Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, pozostając w łączności religijno-moralnej ze związkami religijnymi muzułmańskimi zagranicznymi, tworzą Muzułmański Związek Religijny w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, niezależny od jakichkolwiek obcokrajowych władz duchownych i świeckich.*<sup>52</sup>

[Eng.: Muslims in the Republic of Poland, remaining in a religious-ethical contact with foreign religious communities, form Muslim Religious Union in the Republic of Poland, independent of any foreign authorities – neither clerical nor secular.]

According to the Act, which is still legally binding, as the Sejm has never repealed it, the only religious organization for Polish Muslims is MZR, established in 1925.<sup>53</sup>

Apart from delineating the relationship between Muslims represented by MZR and the State, the Act defines the procedure of electing the Mufti, the Highest College of Muslims, imams (leaders of communities) and muezzins. It is stated that candidates should have a Polish citizenship and have both passive and active knowledge of Polish, as it is also the official language of MZR. High officials of MZR enjoy special rights that legislature grants to the clergy of all officially recognized denominations. The Act quotes the oath that leaders of MZR are obliged to take on Koran, in which they pledge to be loyal citizens of Poland, contribute to her wellbeing and obey the Constitution.

The Act regulating the relation between the state and MZR, important as it is for rendering Islam an official denomination in Poland, is rather outdated in certain aspects (e.g. it states that imams are entitled to keep parish registers) and it needs amendment.<sup>54</sup> This issue is being negotiated between MZR authorities and government representatives.

In March 2004, the position of Mufti of Poland was filled for the first time since World War II. At the 15<sup>th</sup> All-Polish Congress of MZR, the imam of Białystok and former President of the Council of Imams – Tomasz Miśkiewicz, was elected the Mufti of the Republic of Poland.

Following the democratic breakthrough, a new Act of 17 May 1989 on the Guarantees of Freedom of Conscience and Religion (Pol. *Ustawa o gwarancjach*

52 Original spelling.

53 After World War II, a new Mufti was not elected, because the post was perpetual and Jakub Szynekiewicz lived abroad (he died in 1966). Then there was no competent candidate.

54 For more details see: A. Nalborczyk, P. Borecki, 'Relations between Islam and the state in Poland: the legal position of Polish Muslims', *Islam and Christian Muslim Relations*, 22:3, 2011, p. 343-359.

*wolności sumienia i wyznania*) facilitated easy registration of new denominational communities. In present day Poland people can freely establish religious organizations. If they wish to receive legal entity, as well as rights and privileges envisioned by the state law for denominational organizations, they must register the organization in the register of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration (Pol. *Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji*) based on the Act of 17 May 1989. To register a religious organization in the registry of churches and other denominational organizations there have to be at least 100 petitioners who are Polish citizens.<sup>55</sup> The denominational organizations have the right to make their internal law and be self-governing, and the authorities cannot interfere in these processes.

There are three orthodox organizations among those registered according to the Act of 1989 on the Guarantees of Freedom of Conscience and Religion: one Sunni – the Muslim League in the Republic of Poland (Pol. *Liga Muzułmańska w RP* – reg. 2004; LM), two Shi'a – the Muslim Unity Society (Pol. *Stowarzyszenie Jedności Muzułmańskiej* – reg. 1989), the Ahl-ul-Bayt Islamic Assembly (Pol. *Islamskie Zgromadzenie Ahl-ul-Bayt* – reg. 1990) and one unorthodox – the “Ahmadiyya” Muslim Association (Pol. *Stowarzyszenie Muzułmańskie “Ahmadiyya”* – reg. 1990).

## 3.2. Polish Muslim Denominational Organizations

### 3.2.1. Sunni

- The Muslim Religious Union in the Republic of Poland [MZR]

Established in 1925, this organization was reactivated after WW II in 1947 and has functioned ever since. Until the 1990s, it consisted exclusively of Tatars, who still constitute 95% of all members. Recently, a campaign has been launched aimed at promoting membership among persons of foreign origin, following an amendment to the MZR's statute. The amended statute extended the right to be associated in the organization to all persons with permanent residency in the country.

The Union's goals include representing its members' interests before the state authorities, and representing Polish followers of Islam before Muslim centers abroad, as well as spreading the message of Islam, teaching and preserving principles of the faith, promoting the knowledge of Muslim teaching and culture, looking after mosques, religious centers and cemeteries, constructing new religious buildings and charity. The Union's activities can be subdivided into those that are aimed at organizing the religious life of Polish Muslims, e.g. by arranging prayers and religious instruction, as well as cultural and publishing activity. It also participates in interfaith dialogue initiatives<sup>56</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> Their signatures attached to an application for registration have to be certified by a notary public.

<sup>56</sup> The Mufti, as well as other MZR members, including community leaders and members of the Highest Muslim Board, belong to the Common Council of Catholics and Muslims.

The Union acts through six Muslim communities: in Białystok, Bohoniki, Gdańsk, Kruszyńniany, and two communities in Warsaw (the newest one, *Al-Fatih*, was established by persons of Turkish origin). Various Muslim associations can function within the Union's structure. The MZR is in possession of only three purpose-built mosques: one in Kruszyńniany, dating back to the eighteenth century, one in Bohoniki from the nineteenth century, and one in Gdańsk (opened in 1990), as well as a handful of Muslim cemeteries, e.g. in Kruszyńniany, Bohoniki, Warsaw, and in the Muslim quarter in Gdańsk. The organization is in charge of religious instruction in state schools and used to have the right to issue *halal* slaughter certificates for meat products.

The Union is headed by the All-Polish Congress of the MZR, called every five years, and on a daily basis – the Highest Board of the MZR (6 members<sup>57</sup>, with the Mufti<sup>58</sup> as President). The MZR President is Mufti Tomasz Miśkiewicz<sup>59</sup>. The post of the Mufti is for life title. The seat of the Union and Mufti is a local prayer house in Białystok.

The cultural side of the Union's activity includes running educational workshops about Tatars, organizing youth camps, managing the dance and song ensemble "Buńczuk", organizing embroidery and cooking courses and competitions, e.g. Quran recitation. The organization maintains its own website at: <http://www.mzr.pl>, and publishes two journals: "Muzułmanie Rzeczypospolitej" [Muslims of the Republic of Poland] and "Przegląd Tatarski" [Tatar review].

According to the MZR authorities, the number of members is about five thousand. However, it is estimated that about one thousand members actively participate in the Union's initiatives.

#### - The Muslim League in Poland [*Liga Muzułmańska w RP* or LM]

This Sunni denominational community and the second largest Muslim religious organization in Poland with a seat in Warsaw was established in 2001. Three years later, it was granted the status of legal personality and was entered into the record of churches and denominational communities. It was founded on the basis of the Muslim Students Association in Poland (website: <http://islam.org.pl/>) and the Muslim Cultural Formation Muslim Society. Its first president and the person who registered the organization was a Polish woman converted to Islam (Polish law states that a denominational community can only be registered by a Polish citizen). The League is governed by the General Congress, the Governing Board and the Supervisory Board. The organization is now headed by Ali

57 Requirements: Polish citizenship, a minimum age of 25, second-level education or higher, no functions in another religious organization in Poland. Since 2009, the official title is "the Mufti of the Republic of Poland", while in the past it used to be "Mufti of the MZR".

58 Requirements: Polish citizenship, impeccable reputation, a degree in theological studies in Islam, a minimum age of 25.

59 Tomasz Miśkiewicz was born in Suchowola. He is in his thirties, holds a higher degree in Muslim theology earned in Saudi Arabia. He has a fluent command of Arabic.

Abi Issa. The League has its own Mufti, Nidal Abu Tabaq. The Mufti and imams form the Council of Imams<sup>60</sup>. Among the LM members are Muslims with Polish citizenship as well as those with the right of permanent or temporary residency in Poland. According to the Polish Central Statistics Office, the number of LM members amounts to one and a half thousand. It seems, however, that the number is highly overestimated, and an estimate of two hundred up to three hundred and fifty would be more accurate.

Among Muslim organizations in Poland, it is the LM and the MZR that have the most complex structure. Apart from the clearly defined duties and functions of the authorities, the League has developed the following divisions to focus on particular areas of activity: the Department for Representing Islam, the Women's Department, the Children's Department and the Department for Education and Culture. The League has local divisions in eight Polish cities. The League belongs to the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE). Its official website is: <http://www.islam.info.pl/>.

The League was among the founders of the Institute for Islamic Studies, which is a "research and communication forum" and a platform for exchanging ideas between Islam scholars in Poland and beyond. The Institute's main activities are publishing and organizing academic conferences and discussion panels (most recently, the 2011 international conference "Academic Forum for Peace"). Its activity is focused on the Muslim community, all members of Polish society interested in Islam, Polish institutions participating in the interfaith and intercultural dialogue, as well as representatives of local government and mass media. The Institute's website can be found at: <http://isni.pl>.

One of the League's major achievements is the construction of the Muslim Culture Centre in Warsaw, which features a lecture hall and a prayer room for about one hundred people. This initiative has brought publicity to the LM and raised considerable controversy. The main goals of the organization include: spreading the message of Islam, teaching and preserving the principles of the faith (the League provides religion instruction in a state school), performing religious services, building and managing centers of worship and representing its members in Poland and abroad. It enjoyed the right to issue *halal* certificates.

The organization promotes integration with Polish society, while preserving Muslim identity at the same time, and seeks to foster interfaith dialogue. The LM can boast extensive publishing activity, an example of which is a socio-cultural quarterly "As-Salam" (<http://www.as-salam.pl>) and a number of books on Muslim theology and law. Some of these, however, are officially the publications of the Muslim Students Association and The Qualification Muslim Cultural Society.

<sup>60</sup> Council of Imams publishes *Al-Umma* "Journal of New Muslims".

### 3.2.2. Shi'a

- The Muslim Unity Society [*Stowarzyszenie Jedności Muzułmańskiej*].

Although its Polish name contains the word “association”, the Muslim Unity Society is formally a denominational organization. Its beginnings go back to 1937, when Poland was visited by Ayaz Khan, an Islamic missionary from India connected with the Ahmadiyya movement. Khan’s aim was to create an organization for Polish Muslims, but his plan had to be abandoned due to the outbreak of the war. In the mid-1970s, the Society was reactivated by Mahmud Taha Żuk, a Pole without any Tatar background, but serving as imam in one of the MZR’s Muslim communities in Warsaw. The first decade after the reactivation can be described as a period of “identity search”. In that time, the Union maintained contact with many Muslim organizations around the world, including the Ahmadiyya movement. Eventually, it was registered as a Shi’a organization, seated in Warsaw and headed by the Chief Imamate composed of three imams. Today, it has about fifty members.

The Muslim Unity Society recognizes the authority of and follows the example and guidelines set by the Twelve Shi’a Imams. It cooperates with the international Shia organization Ahl-ul-Bayt World Assembly and various Shi’a organizations in the UK, such as the Al-Mahdi Institute. It has its divisions (communities) in several Polish cities and in the UK, the place of residence of one of its imams, a Pole named Tareq Salik. Members of the Society are not only Polish Shiites, but also persons without Polish citizenship. Embracing the latter group is a manifestation of a change which took place in this organization. Its mission is to promote knowledge about Islam and integrate the Polish Muslim community. The Society is open for interreligious dialogue. It has called to life and coordinates the work of the Muslim Institute, which gathers reference literature and documents concerning Islam in Poland. The organization is also an active publisher (“Al-Islam” quarterly, [al-islam.org.pl](http://al-islam.org.pl)). Its official website is: <http://www.shiapoland.com/SJM.html>.

- The Ahl-ul-Bayt Islamic Assembly [*Islamskie Zgromadzenie Ahl-ul-Bayt*]

Founded in 1979 in Pruszków and was registered as a denominational community in 1990. Until 2001, it functioned under the name of “the Association of Muslim Brothers”, which could indicate connections with Hassan al-Banna’s Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. According to Ryszard Ahmed Rusnak, the founder and religious leader of the Assembly, the similarity of names was merely a coincidence. The change of name can be treated as the end of the Assembly’s doctrinal and ideological search.

The religious doctrine of the Assembly is Shi’a Islam, recognizing the Twelve Imams and the Ahl-ul-Bayt school. The Assembly is part of the worldwide Shi’a community and a member of the Ahl-ul-Bayt Assembly in Europe, the Ahl-ul-Bayt World Assembly, and the World Ahl-ul-Bayt Islamic League. It follows these organizations with respect to doctrinal and ideological matters, as well as religious

practice<sup>61</sup>. The Assembly gathers Shi'ites in Poland, regardless of their citizenship. It has about fifty active members.

The main mission of the Assembly is to organize religious life as well as to “promote the teachings of old Islam of Prophet Muhammad”. The Assembly puts emphasis on the integration and activation of Muslim communities in the religious, political, cultural and economic life of the country. It provides religious care to Polish Shi'ites and foreigners, and represents their interests before public administration bodies. It directs its attention to assist foreigners in a “harmonious integration and assimilation” with Polish society. The statutory goals of the Assembly include ecumenical, social, scientific and research, educational and charity activities. As of now, the Assembly does not have an official journal. However, it has plans to publish books. Its official website is: <http://www.abia.pl/>.

### 3.2.3 Unorthodox

- The “Ahmadiyya” Muslim Association [*Stowarzyszenie Muzułmańskie “Ahmadiyya”*]

Registered as a denominational community in 1990, it is based in Warsaw, where it has a prayer room and a plot of ground where a mosque is to be constructed in the. Several months ago, the leadership of the “Ahmadiyya” was assumed by Mashhood Ahmad Zafar, who had lived and worked in Germany for many years.

The organization belongs to the Qadian group, which recognizes Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as a prophet. Hence, the classification of the “Ahmadiyya” as a Muslim organization is a gross simplification. While such categorization is obvious as far as the group's self-identification (as Shia Muslims) is concerned, other Muslim organizations do not see “Ahmadiyya” as one of them [as indicated in interviews with representatives of other Muslim organizations]. Although many reference sources still perceive it as one of Muslim religious organizations, it should be treated as an unorthodox religious movement. “Ahmadiyya” undertakes missionary and publishing activity, having prepared a number of leaflets and brochures presenting the movement. Its official website is: <http://www.alislam.pl/>. Its greatest publishing achievement is the Polish version of the Quran, published in 1990<sup>62</sup>. The organization has about fifty members.

### 3.3. Mosques, Imams and Cemeteries

There are three mosques that belong to MZR (in Bohoniki and Kruszyniany in north-eastern Poland dating from the eighteenth-nineteenth century, and one

61 Source: the statute of the Ahl-ul-Bayt Islamic Assembly.

62 A scholarly translation of the Quran into Polish, considered the best, was prepared by an Arabist, Professor Józef Bielawski, and published in 1986.

in Gdańsk that opened in 1990).<sup>63</sup> In Poland Muslims distinguish between so-called Islamic centres (places for prayer, plus offices, libraries, meeting halls) and small 'prayer houses' (places for prayer), which are almost unnoticeable from the outside. There are Islamic centres in Białystok (Muslim Cultural Centre, ul. Piaszowska 13f and another under construction), Warsaw, Lublin, Wrocław, Poznań, Katowice and Kraków. There are prayer houses in Białystok, Suchowola, Łódź, Katowice and Poznań,<sup>64</sup> but the total number of them is not known. Some of the Islamic centres and prayer houses named on the official websites of the MZR and LM are used by members of both organisations, or used by one but listed by both. A new Centre of Islamic Culture with a mosque was constructed by the LM in Warsaw and opened in 2015. Another new Islamic Centre was opened in Katowice in May 2013. Representatives of the MZR Kruszyńscy community in 2015 opened the Education and Muslim Culture Centre of the Polish Tatars.

Almost 95 percent of people attending Friday prayers and prayers during the week in Warsaw are of foreign origin. A similar situation is in Gdansk. In Podlachia, the majority of the congregation is of Tatar origin.

Most imams in the Podlachia region are of Tatar origin and so is the Mufti of MZR – Tomasz Miśkiewicz. Young people are being trained to become imams. Like teachers of religion, imams are required to be Polish citizen, but if a need occurs a person with a different citizenship can become an imam, as long as they have a permanent residence permit and have been accepted by the appropriate ministry.<sup>65</sup> Other imams serving both biggest organizations are of foreign origin – Turks and Arabs in the case of MZR and Arabs in the case of LM.

Polish Muslims often come to pray on Sundays (it is allowed by the *fatwa* made by the Mufti of Poland), as only few of them can take a day off on Friday. There haven't been any cases of discrimination against Muslims on the part of the employers, but there is simply no written regulation that could settle this issue.

There are three traditional Muslim cemeteries still open:<sup>66</sup> in Kruszyńscy, Bohoniki and in Warsaw (the Tatar Cemetery). Moreover, special sections in communal cemeteries are allotted to Muslims. Unlike in many Western European countries, Muslim burial is not a problem in Poland, mainly because Polish Muslims use coffins. Coffin-less burial would contravene sanitary-epidemiological regulations.<sup>67</sup>

63 For more details see: A. S. Nalborczyk, 'Mosques in Poland. Past and present' in Górak-Sosnowska K. (ed.), *Muslims in Eastern Europe. Widening the European discourse on Islam*, Warsaw 2011, pp. 183-193; [www.orient.uw.edu.pl/MSZ/teksty/14\\_nalborczyk\\_MuslimsCEE.pdf](http://www.orient.uw.edu.pl/MSZ/teksty/14_nalborczyk_MuslimsCEE.pdf)

64 [www.mzr.pl/pl/info.php?id=16](http://www.mzr.pl/pl/info.php?id=16), accessed 24 February 2014.

65 If there is no person in a given community who would possess appropriate education and have Polish citizenship or at least a permanent stay permit, MZR approves someone with a temporary stay permit to act as imam, but the person is not appointed imam.

66 Cf. A. Drozd, M. M. Dziekan, T. Majda, *Meczety i cmentarze Tatarów polsko-litewskich*, Warszawa 1999; A. Kołodziejczyk, *Cmentarze muzułmańskie w Polsce*, Warszawa 1998. There are also cemeteries in Studzianki and Lebidzewo, but they are no longer open; for more details see: A. Kołodziejczyk, *Rozprawy i studia...*, p. 144ff.

67 E.g. it infringes regulations concerning groundwater.

### 3.4. Religious instruction

The MZR, as a religious organisation operating under an act of Parliament, has the right to teach religion in public schools and its teachers are paid by the state. The ministerial regulation of 1992 states that a minimum of seven pupils having a particular religious affiliation in the same school is required in order for separate religious education classes to be provided. In 2004, the Ministry of Education approved a school curriculum for Muslim religious instruction prepared by the MZR. In Białystok and in nearby Sokółka, Islamic religious instruction is provided for Muslim children in public schools. In Warsaw, the LM runs an inter-school group for Muslim religious instruction at primary school level for pupils from Mazowsze district (Warsaw area).<sup>68</sup>

In other parts of the country, religious education for Muslim children is provided by the local Muslim communities independently of the school system (weekend classes). At school, these children attend ethics classes together with all the others who do not wish to attend Roman Catholic or other religious instruction classes.

## 4. Conclusions

Islam is one of Polish traditional religions and is officially recognized by the state. MZR, the second oldest Islamic religious organization in Europe is also recognized by the state and had its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2015. Muslims have their places of worship, Islam is taught in state schools, and there are Muslim cemeteries. On the other hand, however, due to lack of contact with the outside world there aren't enough Muslim scholars and theologians in Poland.

The Roman Catholic Church, the biggest Christian denomination in Poland, is more and more interested in an interreligious dialogue with Islam or even the so-called triologue between Christianity, Islam and Judaism, as it is judged the best way to avoid misunderstandings and hostility among the followers of these three religions. In 1997 the Common Council of Catholics and Muslims (Pol. *Rada Wspólna Katolików i Muzułmanów*) was established. Its members, on the part of the Muslim Tatars, include the Mufti of MZR - Tomasz Miśkiewicz. The Council is lead jointly by a Catholic and a Muslim. It organizes conferences that help increase general knowledge about the Islamic presence in the Mid-Eastern Europe and promote the idea of interreligious dialogue in Poland.

One of the joint initiatives of the Council and the Committee for Dialogue with Non-Christian Religions in Polish Bishop's Conference is an annual Day of Islam in the Catholic Church in Poland, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January. In 2016 the sixteenth Day of Islam was celebrated.

68 For more details see: A.S. Nalborczyk, 'Islamic religious education in Poland – curricula and textbooks' in E. Aslan (ed.), *Islamic textbooks and curricula in Europe*, Frankfurt 2011, p. 183-184.

MZR invites people of various denominations to pray together for peace and justice in the world – the last such meeting took place in Bohoniki in May 2015. In 2015 LM organized in Katowice the second Day of Christianity among Muslims in Poland.

Therefore, it seems that the prospective influx of Muslims to Poland, especially now with so many refugees from Syria, should not yield any logistic problems and the incomers will be glad to find an existing religious infrastructure. However, we should be aware that a different ethnic origin of the newcomers and their attitude to numerous religious issues different than that of the Tatars may cause and causes misunderstandings between the two groups.<sup>69</sup> Such misunderstandings have already ended up in establishing a separate Sunni religious organization, the LM. However, legislative means allowing and officially recognizing more than one Islamic organization may destroy the positive image and strong position of Muslims, which they have earned for centuries of their presence in Poland. It may lead to a similar confusion that can be observed in numerous Western European countries, where multiplicity of religious organizations (often of different ethnic origin) renders the dialogue between the state and Muslims very difficult.

Poland is in a good position to learn from the experience of other European countries, whose history in the last years has been marked by a great influx of Muslim immigrants.

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69 For more details see: Warمیńska, *Tatarzy polscy...*, p. 136ff.

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