

No. 3 (3), July 2018

## Polish diaspora policy – directions of changes and fields of constants

Welcome to the third issue of CMR Spotlight. In July a number of CMR researchers participated in the IMISCOE conference in Barcelona and the conference of the International Association of Forced Migration in Thessaloniki (photo). Their papers focused on a range of issues, including Central and Eastern European refugee and diaspora policies.

In this issue we focus on diaspora policy. Two of CMR's researchers: dr Witold Nowak and dr Michał Nowosielski present their findings regarding how Poland's policies in this field have changed recently, in reaction to the large wave of post EU-accession emigration.

Also, please note that CMR is co-organizing a [COMPETITION FOR BEST MA/PHD THESIS ON MIGRATIONS TO/FROM POLAND AND POLISH DIASPORA](#). Deadline: September 30, 2018



CMR team at the conference of the International Association of Forced Migration in Thessaloniki.  
Left to right: Dominik Wach, Witold Klaus, Karolina Podgórska, Karolina Sobczak-Szelc, Marta Pachocka  
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# Polish diaspora policy – directions of changes and fields of constants

Witold Nowak and Michał Nowosielski

The post-accession intra-European migration flows and the resulting upsurge of diasporas have put into question the migration and diaspora policies of the Central and Eastern European countries of origin. These policies were either modified or – in the majority of the cases – formulated anew to address the latest concerns. It has only been recently that the majority of the new EU member states became aware of the diaspora issue and the potential benefits to be derived from diaspora relations. By and large, their diaspora policies are a relatively recent development.

Poland has a long-standing tradition of pursuing a diaspora policy, which it has traditionally referred to as the *“Polonia policy”* (polityka polonijna). The context makes observing the evolution of that policy over the last decade all the more interesting. We are of the opinion that the substantial rise in migration streams originating from Poland, mainly to other EU member states, has significantly affected Poland’s policy on the diaspora and, as a consequence, changed the circumstances of Polish immigrant organizations.

Although Poland’s diaspora policy has been evolving since as early as 1989, it was not until 2011 to 2015 that the process of change gained considerable momentum. In fact, a whole “new diaspora policy” can be said to have emerged during that time (Fiń, Legut, Nowak, Nowosielski, Schöll-Mazurek 2013).



Minister for Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski and senator Andrzej Person. A meeting of the graduates of the School for the Polish Leaders Abroad held in the Polish Senate in 2013 (source: [Senat Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej](http://Senat.Rzeczpospolitej.Polskiej))

Tenets of the “new” Polonia policy implemented in 2011-2015 might be described in 9 points;

## **1. Diaspora policy as an instrument for pursuing Poland’s policies and, in particular, its foreign policy and *raison d’état***

Being a public contract, the policy on the diaspora has always unmistakably formed an integral part of the policies of the Polish state. Never before has one reasserted so firmly the role of diaspora policy as an instrument of pursuing Poland’s national interests and policies with a particular focus on foreign policy. This can be contrasted with the precepts and practice of prior programs, which have suggested a more idealistic and less pragmatic approach to diaspora issues.

## 2. Shift of emphasis from Poland's responsibilities towards the diaspora to those of the diaspora towards its homeland

Although past programs have mentioned the diaspora's support for Poland, never before has so much emphasis been placed on presenting the links between Poles living abroad and their homeland as an obligation. Prior policies have focused on the duties of the Polish state and even referred to a debt towards the diaspora. The new policy, in its turn, has formulated expectations of support for the state to be provided by the diaspora.



„How to engage in cooperation with Poland? E-guide for Poles abroad” published by the Institute for Western Affairs as a result of the project „The practice of Polish diaspora policy” founded by Polish Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 2013 (source: [Instytut Zachodni](http://Instytut Zachodni))

## 3. Empowerment of the diaspora

The tenets of the new diaspora policy were a clear attempt to portray the diaspora as an empowered entity. The diaspora is no longer to be limited to the role of a subject of Poland's policies but is also to act as its empowered agent. The approach was Poland's response to the need to stimulate Poles living abroad and

drum up their backing for Poland's national interests.

## 4. Responsibility for pursuing diaspora policy to be delegated to the diaspora

To a certain extent, the responsibility for carrying out diaspora policy has in fact been shifted to the diaspora itself. Thus, the diaspora is expected to follow the lines of “state policies” and, in keeping with the mutuality of this relationship, revise their premises. The role of the state is to present policy goals, secure funding for their implementation and make any necessary adjustments by engaging with the diaspora.

## 5. Reorganization

Over the last 26 years of pursuing diaspora policy, various institutions in Poland have assumed the role of shouldering the primary responsibility for its formulation and implementation. These were the Senate, the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From 2011 to 2015, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs clearly moved to the forefront.

## 6. Breakdown of the collaboration model

Diaspora policy has invariably been pursued in collaboration with a variety of public administration bodies and specialized NGOs with a focus on relations with Poles living abroad<sup>1</sup>. Under the new diaspora policy, the non-state actors were to be selected mainly in open competitions.

One of the results of holding such competitions was to restrict the involvement of a few

<sup>1</sup> The key diaspora organizations were the “Wspólnota Polska” Association (“The Polish Commonwealth”), “Semper Polonia” Foundation, and “Pomoc Polakom na

Wschodzie” Foundation (“Support for Poles in the East”).

organizations that traditionally specialized in diaspora policy implementation while opening the field up for new organizations, many of which contributed expertise in developing and carrying out a range of projects.

## **7. Competition**

Both the competitions held by consulates and those organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs created rivalry among organizations. The organizations participating in the competitions arranged by consulates were to attract diaspora organizations. On the other hand, the main competition, organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was to bring together actors operating in Poland.

## **8. Rational use of funds**

One of the assumptions underpinning the new diaspora policy was that its principles and – in particular – the open competitions held by governmental institutions, would help make more reasonable use of the funds earmarked for collaboration with the diaspora and Poles living abroad.

## **9. Unclear role of diaspora organizations**

Although diaspora organizations formed a critical part of the new diaspora policy (they might have participate in the competitions organized by consulates and were expected to partner with the Poland-based organizations that participated in the main competition held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the recognized flaw of the previous policy was to focus on diaspora organizations, which had a limited appeal and whose memberships only accounted for a small percentage of the Polish community abroad. Hence, the need arose to create mechanisms for the engagement of

those Poles living abroad who were unwilling to get involved in the existing organizations in the past and still had no intention of getting involved.

Those fundamental tenets of the new diaspora policy may be summarized as a marketization of Poland's policy on emigrants. The approach appears to have begun with embracing the principles of New Public Management as formulated by Hood (1991), Schedler and Proeller (2002). Firstly, changes can be seen in the nature of the relationship between the sending state and the diaspora. These involve a shift of emphasis from the obligations of the Polish state towards the diaspora to the obligations of the diaspora towards their homeland and the benefits that Poland stands to derive from their fulfillment. As a consequence, diaspora policy tasks were being increasingly delegated to the diaspora itself. Secondly, steps had been taken to restructure the diaspora policy implementation system and dismantle the collaboration model to create competition among various relevant actors and marketize the performance of public tasks. Thirdly, the above-said features of the "new" diaspora policy were largely an attempt to make the utilization of public funds more effective. Any spending by the Polish state was to produce benefits (such benefits need not be necessarily financial). Meanwhile, non-governmental actors were expected to perform public work in the field more effectively and rationally.

In 2015 the ruling party changed. The Law and Justice was expected to modify the diaspora policy of 2011-2015. Although no official document or strategies of the Polonia policy have been published yet, one can notice several changes in the political practice. First of all, a



large pool of money designated for diaspora policy has been transferred back under the remit of the Senate. Second, the competition system has in practice been dismantled, and the distribution of funds has been concentrated again in a few organizations that are specialized in diaspora policy implementation.



Minister for Foreign Affairs Jacek Czaputowicz by Katyn Memorial in New Jersey in 2018 (source: [MSZ](#))

Third of all, a rhetoric shift has been observed. The new ruling party seems again to put more emphasis on the obligations of the Polish state towards the diaspora. At the same time, on many occasions representatives of government emphasized that Polonia has a great role to play in supporting Poland, especially in the execution of Polish remembrance policy and struggle with the so called antipolonism (a category politically used to describe attitudes that are supposed to be hostile towards Poles

and Poland). Taking that into consideration, it seems that the change of the priorities of Polish diaspora policy stems rather from the modification of the perception of the Polish *raison d'état* than from actual changes of its tenets. However, some time is required to diagnose how the discursive shift results in actual measures taken.

### Literature

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*The study forms part of the research project "Polish immigrant organizations in Europe" scheduled to be carried out by the Centre of Migration Studies, University of Warsaw, Poland in 2017-2018 (previously conducted the Institute for Western Affairs, Poznań, Poland in 2015-2016). The project is financed by the Kraków-based National Center for Science as a follow-up to the funding scheme SONATA BIS (no. 2014/14/E/HS6/00731).*

**Witold Nowak**

Sociologist (M.A., Ph.D.), researcher at the Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw graduated from the Institute of Sociology of Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań, Poland. Mr. Nowak has participated in numerous research projects in the field of social sciences. He specializes in sociological analyses of migration phenomena, the functioning of social minorities and the sociology of organization and management. His latest research concerns: immigrant organizations, diaspora policy and leisure activities and cultural participation of immigrants.

**Michał Nowosielski**

Sociologist, dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the State University of Applied Sciences in Płock, researcher in the Centre of Migration Research at University of Warsaw, former Director of the Poznań Institute for Western Affairs, member of the Committee for Migration Studies of Polish Academy of Sciences and the Centre for Migration Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. Manager and participant of numerous research projects. His academic interests concentrate on migration issues and, in particular, on immigrant organizations, Poles in Germany and diaspora policies.

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**Keywords:**

diaspora policy / polonia policy / new public management

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Suggested citation: Nowak, W., Nowosielski, M. 2018. Polish diaspora policy – directions of changes and fields of constants. CMR Spotlight, 3(3).

Editors of CMR Spotlight: Michał Nowosielski, Dominika Pszczółkowska

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MIGRATION  
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Pasteura street 7  
02-093 Warsaw  
Tel/fax +48 22 55 46 770  
e-mail: [migration.cmr@uw.edu.pl](mailto:migration.cmr@uw.edu.pl)  
[www.migracje.uw.edu.pl/en/](http://www.migracje.uw.edu.pl/en/)



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