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‘To Be a Minority or Not’

Multiculturalism in Poland Between Europe and the Past

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ABSTRACT

The concept ‘multiculturalism’, minority protection and universal human rights are linked on the basis of liberal democratic principles. Poland has a complicated history of extreme approaches towards minorities from peaceful coexistence and tolerance to forced assimilation. International and European standards of minority protection developed after communism, have served as external models for Poland’s domestic implementation of minority rights. EU membership, economic success and growing immigration including the revival of the Silesian identity have challenged Poland’s narrow definition of ‘minority’ as well as its ethnic homogeneity. Despite racist and xenophobic incidents, Polish society has been evolving to increasingly accept cultural diversity. Multiculturalism in Poland differs from Western Europe, since encounters with foreign cultures remain abstract, removed from social reality. While historical minorities are small and well assimilated, immigration and integration policies have not yet sparked major public debates, albeit the increasing awareness of policy-makers. The most probable future path of Poland will be the gradual extension of its existing framework for old minorities towards inclusion of new minorities to accommodate the needs of an ever-changing reality. This dissertation maps the issue of multiculturalism in Poland in terms of laws, policies and reality – adding the Polish perspective to the European discourse on multiculturalism.

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