

Widely Open Closed Doors. Contemporary Repatriation Policy in Poland

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This article focuses on the repatriation policy of the Polish state toward co-ethnics residing in some post-Soviet countries. Its main goal is to answer the question: Why has this policy been unsuccessful? Based on the existing literature, legislation and official documents, the article draws upon the approach laid down by Olga Zeveleva (2014), exploring two spheres within the repatriation program: the ideological and the practical. The key argument is that the failure of the repatriation policy in Poland was due to its poorly developed practical component. At the same time, its ideological component was fully in place, contributing to the program's prolongation, even though it had not been bringing the expected results. In conclusion, it is argued that the persistence and strong ideological rooting of the idea of repatriation confirm an important aspect of the identity of the Polish state: the predominance of the ethnic concept of the nation. The analysis of the Polish case also shows the need for further development of Zeveleva's conceptualisation of the success (or lack thereof) of repatriation.

Keywords: political sociology, kin-state policies, repatriation, post-communist Poland.

Introduction

“Welcome home” – this is how the Polish prime minister, Beata Szydło, welcomed Polish repatriates on March 15th 2017 upon their arrival from Kazakhstan. The prime minister emphasised the importance of the Act on Repatriation of 2000², which she

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² <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20001061118> [accessed 30.10.2019].

described as the repatriates' "ticket to Poland", publicly proclaiming ethno-cultural solidarity with ethnic Poles in the East.

This article focuses on the repatriation policy of the Polish state toward co-ethnics without Polish citizenship living in post-Soviet countries. The issue of repatriation has been on the political agenda in Poland since the 1990s, becoming more legally defined through the years. The Act on Repatriation of 2000 seemed to be the culmination of this process, however, it was amended a few times (in 2001, 2003, and 2017), with the aim of increasing the effectiveness and speed of repatriation. There was also a political agreement among different political forces over the need for repatriation, which was strongly ideologically grounded and justified. Nevertheless, as of 2017³, repatriation was evaluated as unsuccessful both in academic literature and in political debates. The lack of success was manifested in the low numbers of repatriated people compared to the original estimates and the number of requests, as well as in the prolongation of the whole process: although planned as a short-term program, it was anything but. As of 2017, it had lasted for twenty years.

The main research question of this article is as follows: Why has the contemporary repatriation policy in Poland been unsuccessful? To answer this question, an analysis of the two spheres within the repatriation program – the ideological and the practical one – is provided. In order to better grasp the meaning of these two components, the metaphor of "widely open closed doors"⁴ is applied. At the ideological level (within political discourse and rhetoric), the door has been open to repatriates because of the conducive historical and cultural environment, the political agreement over repatriation, and the gradual development and improvement of appropriate legislation. At the same time, at the level of socio-political practice the door has remained closed, since the repatriation turned out to be impractical, failing to meet the strategic needs of the country (Zeveleva 2014). The key argument is that the failure of the repatriation program was due to its poorly developed practical component. At the same time, its ideological component was fully in place, contributing to the program's prolongation even though it had not been bringing the expected results.

The article begins with a presentation of the research framework and methodology, followed by a description of the notion of repatriation and its theoretical context. Then, the cultural and historical background is presented as conducive to the implementation of repatriation policy in Poland after the collapse of Communism. Subsequently, the contemporary stage of repatriation is discussed: the presence and the meaning of the issue of repatriation in Polish political discourse (since the 1990s), its "institutionalisation" in the appropriate legislation, as well as its outcomes. Finally, the practical aspect of repatriation is examined: to what extent this process has "fit" into

³ Significant amendments to the Act on Repatriation were introduced in 2017, but their impact on the repatriation process has not yet been analysed in the academic literature.

⁴ This phrase was first used by Sławomir Łodziński and Paweł Hut (2008: 99–115), but it is developed in greater detail here.

the strategic needs of the country. In conclusion, it is argued that the persistence and strong ideological rooting of the idea of repatriation confirm an important aspect of the identity of the Polish state: the predominance of the ethnic concept of nation. The analysis of the Polish case also shows the need for further development of the existing conceptualization of the success (or lack thereof) of repatriation (Zeveleva 2014).

Research framework and methodology

There are numerous studies focusing on the Polish case of repatriation; however, they explore repatriation in Poland mostly as a social process, referring to its political aspect (as a state policy) only in the background (Grzymała-Kazłowska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2014, Hut 2002, 2004, 2013, 2013a, Iglicka 1998, Kość-Ryżko 2014). Furthermore, the analysis of Polish repatriation policy is often limited to its statistical, demographic, or legal aspects (Kozłowski 2004, Łodziński, Hut 2008, Żołądek 2013). Comprehensive studies of the repatriation policy, including historical, cultural, and contemporary dimensions, are absent. This article hopes to fill this gap by providing a broad, macro-level analysis of contemporary repatriation policy in Poland, based on the existing literature and the Polish legislation on repatriation. The reports from the meetings of the parliamentary Commission for the Communication with Poles Abroad (1998–2017), as well as other official documents, are also used in order to illustrate the political discourse.

The article draws upon and criticises the approach laid down by Olga Zeveleva (2014), both at the conceptual-theoretical and empirical level. In her article, Zeveleva compares three cases of repatriation policy: Germany, Kazakhstan, and Russia. Although some of her concepts are applied here, her general theoretical framework for explaining repatriation policies is questioned.

Zeveleva (2014: 811) understands a successful repatriation program as being a sustainable program, which:

- (1) persists over time,
- (2) shows relative effectiveness, measured by:
 - (a) the numbers of people taking part in the program, and if they meet expected magnitudes;
 - (b) the political integration of repatriates into the receiving nation-states in the form of their naturalisation.

The main goal of Zeveleva's article is to "formulate the conditions under which a repatriation policy can be successful" (Zeveleva 2014: 810). She argues that for a repatriation program to succeed – to meet the above criteria – two components are required: the ideological and the practical. "The 'ideological component' of a repatriation program is an abstract set of political premises and ideas which permeate

many levels of the political life of a state. The ‘practical component’ of a repatriation program is the strategic relevance of an inflow of repatriates to a country’s demographic, economic, and labour market needs” (Zeveleva 2014: 811). In her study, Zeveleva demonstrated the various relationships between the two components, and, consequently, the different outcomes of the repatriation programs. In the case of Russia, the lack of an ideological component resulted in an unsuccessful repatriation. In the case of Germany, the gradual watering down of the ideological component led to the slow termination of the program (which had initially been successful). Finally, the case of Kazakhstan was an example of a successful repatriation, where a balance between the practical and ideological components was found.

The analysis presented in this article is partially complementary to Zeveleva’s research. Her distinction between the ideological and practical spheres is applied to the repatriation program in Poland, and how the two components relate to its lack of success is explored. The specificity of the Polish case lies in the fact that the Polish repatriation program has been strongly ideologically grounded, but impractical – contrary to the cases described by Zeveleva, when the ideological component alone was missing (or attenuating), or when both components were present. Therefore, in this aspect, the research on the Polish case supplements Zeveleva’s contribution.

Table 1

The examples of successful and unsuccessful repatriation programs

	Strong ideological component	Weak ideological component
Strong practical component	successful repatriation: Kazakhstan, Germany (post-war)	unsuccessful repatriation: Russia, Germany (since the 1990s)
Weak practical component	unsuccessful repatriation: Poland	

Source: author’s own summary based on Zeveleva (2014).

However, this article also critically examines Zeveleva’s theory on the success of a repatriation program, highlighting its limitations. With regard to persistence over time (1), Zeveleva claims that the two above-mentioned components are needed for a repatriation program to last. Consequently, when one is missing, the program ceases. “If a repatriation program lacks ideological backing (...), the repatriation program grinds to a halt. If a repatriation program has ideological backing but is rendered impractical (...) then the further development of the program stops” (Zeveleva 2014: 811). The Polish case undermines such a clear-cut theory. The neglect of the practical aspect has not led to the termination of the program: the “overgrowth” of the ideological component – as a result of the strong impact of the ethos of ethnicity

and the legal culture of ethnic preferentialism existing in Poland – has prevented the repatriation program from stopping. Furthermore, the persistence of the Polish repatriation program, which has lasted for more than 20 years – in Zeveleva’s terms, it has been relatively “sustainable” – cannot be treated here as an indicator of success, since it merely reflects the very slow operation of the program.

With regard to the political integration (2b), the naturalisation of Polish repatriates (who acquire Polish citizenship automatically upon entering Poland) cannot be treated as an indicator of a successful repatriation either. In the Polish case, granting the repatriates citizenship has a mostly symbolic meaning: it is a manifestation of a willingness to incorporate these ethnic Poles into the nation and to emphasise their high status. Such a symbolic political inclusion is not accompanied by the social integration of ethnic migrants (which is described later), and remains only a formal “gesture” on the part of the Polish state.

Therefore, for this article, a successful repatriation program:

1. is implemented and finished within a given (usually pre-planned) period of time,
2. shows relative effectiveness, measured by the numbers of people taking part in the program, and if they meet expected magnitudes (if people willing and/or estimated to repatriate are resettled).

The concept of repatriation and theoretical background

Repatriation is defined as “the process of return to one’s ‘place of origin’” (Zeveleva 2014: 808).⁵ It includes two types of cases. First, when countries involved in a conflict offer repatriation programs to prisoners of war or refugees; “the place of origin” is understood literally here, as the place of birth (Bantekas 1998, Long 2011). Second, when the repatriation policy is not a result of current conflicts but refers to later generations: the descendants of those who left their home country (usually involuntarily, as a result of deportation, exile, etc.) or found themselves within new polities (as a result of border changes). In this case, “the place of origin” is understood as the mythological “home”, where one’s ancestors were born, and such repatriates are generally people who had never lived in the given country (Hess 2010: 26). For the purpose of this article, only the second understanding of repatriation is employed. There are numerous case studies on such an issue of repatriation (Fox 2003, Hedberg 2009, Klekowski von Koppenfels 2009, Kuşçu 2013, Münz 2003, Semyonov, Lewin-Epstein 2003, Song 2009), as well as some comparative studies (Flynn 2003, Hess

⁵ With regard to the Polish case of repatriation, there are numerous terminological issues and controversies. For instance, Wojciech Marciniak (2017) traces different meanings and usages of the term “repatriation” (such as “return to Polish territories”, “arrival to Poland”, “resettlement”, etc.) throughout Polish history in political and legal contexts. On other controversies regarding the usage of the term see also Nowosielski, Stefańska (2018: 321–322), Żołądek (2013: 194).

2010, 2011, Joppke, Rosenhek 2009, Skrentny et al. 2007, Zeveleva 2014). A great amount of research is located within the post-Soviet context (Flynn 2003, Grzymała-Kazłowska and Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2014, Heleniak 2013, Kuşçu 2013, de Tinguy 2003, Vishnevsky 2003, Zeveleva 2014)

Repatriation has two important dimensions. First of all, it is a social process, which should be interpreted within the background of ethnic return migration (Münz, Ohliger 2003, Song 2009, Tsuda 2009, Vishnevsky 2003). As opposed to return migrants, who come back to their place of birth, “ethnic return migrants are later-generation diasporic descendants returning to their *ethnic* (or *ancestral*) homeland” (Tsuda 2009a: 5). Repatriation is not an easy social process. Numerous problems with the integration of the new-comers within the host societies often occur (Hedberg 2009, Hess 2010, 2011, Skrentny et al. 2007, Song 2009, de Tinguy 2003, Tsuda 2009a: 3–4, 8–9, Zeveleva 2014). Repatriates frequently experience difficulties in the job market and economic marginalisation (Cook-Matin, Viladrich 2009, Fox 2003). Other problematic issues are the complex double identity and identity reformulations typical for repatriates (Hedberg 2009, Kim 2009, Song 2009).

Secondly, repatriation is also an institutionalised process and a part of official state policy, which should be explored in the context of kin-state policies. Kin-states have a historical affinity with their kin minorities, based on ethnicity. While resident in other countries, kin minorities share the majority ethnicity of the kin-state. Kin-states represent the self-conception of a homeland for their kin minorities, regarding them “as ‘lost’ members of the nation to be recovered for the national community (...) even if they had never resided, or set foot, in the territory of the kin-state” (Pogonyi, Kovács, Körtvélyesi 2010: 17). The nation is understood here as an ethno-cultural community, existing across borders and embracing the kin minorities. Kin-states may attempt to incorporate the ethnic kin into the nation (symbolically or in fact), by offering them special economic, social, and cultural privileges, improving their status, encouraging their immigration, attracting the labour force, etc. (Csergő, Goldgeier 2013, Skrentny et al. 2007, Waterbury 2009, 2014). Specific policies toward co-ethnic minorities include, for instance, status law, external citizenship, preferential treatment in granting citizenship, or parliamentary seats for co-ethnics (Fowler 2004: 232, Lordachi 2004: 239–269, Pogonyi, Kovács, Körtvélyesi 2010, Waterbury 2014).

Repatriation is one possible form of such kin-state policies, when “(...) the host society and receiving institutions grant the newly arrived immediate and unconditional acceptance” (Semyonov, Lewin-Epstein 2003: 311–312), which is reflected in state support and assistance to repatriates in many spheres of life. Repatriation programs usually include three elements: a simplified immigration path (for example, no entry visas, the right to permanent settlement, etc.), a fast track to citizenship (sometimes conferred upon arrival), as well as social and financial support for repatriates after they settle in the kin-state (Zeveleva 2014: 810). Repatriates often constitute the most privileged group of immigrants (Hess 2010: 26, de Tinguy 2003: 100). The criteria for

acquiring the status of repatriate and being eligible for the benefits are ethno-cultural: the possession of ancestors of a particular ethnicity (“blood ties”) and sometimes cultural affiliation (Lesińska 2016: 94, Heleniak 2013)..

The presence of a repatriation policy in a given state may suggest a predominance of the ethnic understanding of nationhood. For instance, the programs of repatriation in Greece and Germany, directed to co-ethnics from Eastern Europe after the collapse of Communism, corresponded to the ethno-cultural character of the Greek and German nations (Hess 2010, 2011: 107). In Kazakhstan, different views on the policy toward ethnic migrants reflected the public debate on the identity of the state: whether it should be civic or ethnic (Kuşçu 2013). Furthermore, changes to the repatriation policy and the approach toward repatriates might indicate the transformation of the concept of the nation itself (Hess 2010: 28, Hess 2011, Zeveleva 2014: 822). An example of such an evolution is provided by post-war Germany, which, since the 1990s, has begun the transformation from an ethnicity-oriented to an immigration country; such a change in the discourse on national identity has been accompanied by an increasingly restrictive approach to repatriates (Levy 2003, Münz 2003, Zeveleva 2014: 813).⁶

Repatriation in Poland: the background

The Polish diaspora in the East

Poland has been an emigration country, with a global diaspora of about 18–20 million, referred to as “Polonia”⁷. Only a part of this is important for the repatriation issue, namely the Polish diaspora in the East, residing in some post-Soviet states. This constituted itself throughout the 20th century due to specific historical circumstances. It embraces mostly those people (and their descendants) who found themselves outside the Polish state as a result of deportations or post-war border changes. Nowadays, when the population of Poland is ca. 38 million people, it is estimated that about 1.2–2 million ethnic Poles live in the countries of the former Soviet Union (Fowler 2004: 194, Świdrowska 2016: 19). The Eastern Polonia is a subject of interest to the contemporary Polish state as they represent “lost” members of the nation, toward whom Poland has certain obligations.

⁶ Nevertheless, a repatriation policy should not be treated as a direct indicator of the dominant concept of the nation. Although there is often some form of relationship between these two, ethnically preferential immigration policies might have other justifications (Joppke, Rosenhek 2009: 97, Zeveleva 2014: 811).

⁷ <http://witrynawiejska.org.pl/o-nas/item/40280-emigracja-liczby-i-linki>, <http://www.wspolnota-polska.org.pl/> [accessed 30.10.2019]; see also Nowosielski, Stefańska (2018: 323).

The tradition of the ethnic nation and ethnicity-oriented legislation

In Poland, the ethnic understanding of the nation and the ethno-cultural concept of citizenship⁸ have traditionally been predominant (Kurczewska 1997, Górny et al. 2003, Zubrzycki 2001). This tradition goes back to the 19th century, when Poland disappeared from the political map of Europe, and was partitioned between the Russian, Prussian, and Austro-Hungarian empires. This led to the re-imagining of Poland along ethno-cultural and religious lines: the language, culture, common history, tradition, and the Catholic religion united Poles living under different political systems. After re-gaining independence in 1918, attempts were made for the construction of a religious and ethnic homogeneity of the nation, such as the forced Polonisation of populations in Eastern territories (Brubaker 1996). Historical events, such as the Holocaust and the redrawing of the borders after World War II, as well as the state's politics (population movements: repatriations and expulsions) reinforced the ethnic understanding of the Polish nation during the communist period. Since the collapse of Communism, the Polish society has remained ethnically homogenous, with ethnic minorities accounting for only a few percent of the population, and the level of immigration remaining low – all of which reinforces the image of ethnic unity⁹.

Furthermore, the Polish legislation on citizenship has always expressed a concern for ethnicity. It emphasised the importance of *jus sanguinis* over *jus soli* in the acquisition of Polish citizenship (Górny, Pudzianowska 2013: 3–4), and included easier conditions for acquiring citizenship by people of Polish descent (Pudzianowska 2013: 177–179). Throughout the 1990s, as well as into the next decade, the public and political debates on changes to citizenship and nationality legislation occurred mostly in the context of emigration (with a special focus on Eastern kin minorities), while immigration issues did not attract as much attention (Górny, Pudzianowska 2013: 4, Górny et al. 2003: 25). The subsequent governments' initiatives regarding ethnic Poles living abroad did not arouse much controversy (Lesińska 2016) and resulted in the introduction of three types of legislation regarding citizenship and nationality. The Act on Repatriation was passed in 2000; the Act on the Polish Chart – which is a type of status law, giving special entitlements to people of Polish descent without granting them full citizenship rights – was introduced in 2007. Finally, as late as in 2009, the new Act on Polish Citizenship was passed. It confirmed the predominance of the *jus sanguinis* principle: Polish citizenship is acquired through birth to parents who are Polish citizens¹⁰. The Act does not include any citizenship entitlements for

⁸ Despite the civic understanding of the nation adopted in the Constitution of Poland in the interwar period (1921) and after the demise of Communism (1993).

⁹ People with Polish citizenship born in Poland constitute about 98 percent of the population of Poland, whereas individuals declaring homogenous Polish national-ethnic identity constitute about 95 percent (*Ludność...* 2013: 83, 89).

¹⁰ It might also be acquired through naturalisation procedures, after fulfilling certain criteria (Pudzianowska 2013).

the children of immigrants born and/or educated in Poland (which has been the tendency in more and more countries in Europe¹¹). Therefore, the Polish legislation on citizenship remains strongly ethnicity-oriented.

Repatriation in the past

In the Polish context, repatriation has been a significant phenomenon because of involuntary movements of people and political decisions regarding shifts of borders. In the inter-war period there were deportations of Poles from the Polish autonomous regions created on the territories of Ukrainian and Belarussian Soviet Republics into the Asian republics (Świdrowska 2016: 16). The next waves of deportation took place in 1940 and 1941, when people of Polish descent were resettled from the Polish territories annexed in 1939 by the Soviet Union to the Kazakh SSR and the northern parts of the USSR (Grzymała-Kazłowska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2014: 5).

After the war and border changes, there were repatriation agreements with the Soviet Union (1944–45, 1957), which stated that people of Polish or Jewish descent, who were Polish citizens before September 17th, 1939, could return to Poland and regain Polish citizenship. However, people deported from Ukrainian and Belarussian Soviet Republics did not meet the criteria for repatriation, because they were deprived of their Polish citizenship in the 1930s, upon deportation (Grzymała-Kazłowska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2014: 4–6, Świdrowska 2016: 18). The first wave of repatriation from the Soviet Union took place between 1944 and 1950, and it embraced about 4,4 million people (2,1 million from the USSR, 2,1 from Germany, and 0,2 from other countries). The next wave of repatriation occurred in the second half of the 1950s; it included about 250 000 people of Polish nationality and Polish descent repatriated from the USSR, and 8 000 thousand people repatriated from other countries (Grzymała-Kazłowska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2014: 10, Kersten 1974). Although officially this stage of repatriation encompassed those deported to the Asian republics of the USSR, not many availed themselves of this opportunity. The Soviet Union blocked the information about such possibilities, and later prohibited it entirely (Pudzianowska 2013: 183–184, Świdrowska 2016: 18–19). In the 1960s, the processes of repatriation were finally stopped; although there were still formal possibilities, no one was using them. It is estimated that about 1 200 000 Poles remained in the USSR (Świdrowska 2016: 19).

All the Acts on Polish Citizenship granted special rights to people of Polish descent returning to Poland. The 1920 Act provided a fast-track path to Polish citizenship for such individuals. Based on the Acts of 1951 and 1962, repatriates were automatically deprived of their previous citizenship, and granted Polish citizenship *de jure*. They were the only category of foreigners to acquire citizenship not as a result of discretionary decisions but legal procedure (Pudzianowska 2013: 178–179).

¹¹ <http://www.mipex.eu/access-nationality> [accessed 30.10.2019].

Contemporary repatriation

The rationale

With the break-up of the Soviet Union, the issue of Polish co-ethnics living abroad became prominent once again. As the reports from the meetings of the parliamentary Commission for the Communication with Poles Abroad document show, the need to establish and, later, to improve the repatriation program in Poland was often raised in the political discourse. The moral obligation of the Polish state to compensate for past historical injustices by assisting and supporting co-ethnics abroad was frequently emphasised (Report 193/III: 5, 8, 24, 27, Report 1888/III: 2, Report 2145/IV: 2–3, Report 2083/VI: 10, Report 95/VII: 10,12). Other reasons for conducting the repatriation policy, such as the poor economic situation of ethnic Poles in post-Soviet countries, the demographic problems of Poland, the demand for labour force, etc., were discussed less frequently (Report 193/III: 5–7, 13, 29–30, 33, Report 2083/VI: 11). Pragmatic thinking about repatriation – the need to rationally consider its different economic, social, and financial aspects – was almost absent¹². The research (Świdrowska 2016: 41) also confirms that the moral obligation of the Polish state to support the co-ethnics was the main (sometimes the only) reason to run the repatriation program. This was true at the local level as well: those municipalities which decided to take part in the repatriation process did not see any positive, practical outcomes for themselves, but they followed the ideological rationale. Such motivation dominated both the political debates and the media's coverage of the issue. It was important in the 1990s, and it is present in the contemporary discourse.

The legal framework

The contemporary, third wave of repatriation can be divided into three stages. The first stage of "spontaneous repatriation" lasted until the mid-1990s and was mainly based on informal initiatives (Grzymała-Każłowska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2014: 10). If a person of Polish descent wished to acquire Polish citizenship, they had to follow the general provisions for all foreigners. During the second stage of repatriation (1996–2000), the institutional foundations for the repatriation system were built, based on a special governmental program (Iglicka 1998: 1007–1008, Świdrowska 2016: 19–20). Furthermore, the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, passed in 1997, provided the most general framework for repatriation by guaranteeing (in Art. 52, Sec. 5) the possibility of permanent settlement in Poland to people of Polish descent. The Act on Aliens of 1997 established that ethnic Poles could be granted a repatriation visa, acquiring Polish citizenship upon entering Poland. The applicant's possession of the means of subsistence in Poland could be confirmed not only through an invitation from a municipality (as before), but also through other documents issued

¹² In the analysed reports, it was mentioned only once (Report 572/VI: 11).

by private persons or institutions. However, from the beginning these regulations were described as problematic; for instance, they failed to provide clear criteria for establishing Polish descent (Report 1519/III: 7), and did not guarantee that the declarations of support, included in the invitations, would be realised (Report 193/III: 14–15, Report 572/VI: 4). Therefore, the need to change the legal provisions and formulate a separate law on repatriation was stressed (Report 193/III: 15).

The political debates eventually resulted in the Act on Repatriation, passed in 2000, which has symbolically started the third stage of the contemporary repatriation process (Górny et al. 2003: 12). The unanimous passing of the Act (there were no votes against it, and only two abstaining¹³) reflected the political consensus on the issue of repatriation. In 2017, it was also confirmed by the vote on the amendments to the Act, broadening the scope of the state's support to the repatriates. This vote was unanimous as well¹⁴. Repatriation was not perceived as controversial; the issue of privileging one ethnicity over others, typical for public debates on repatriation in other countries (Kuşçu 2013: 180), was absent from the public discourse in Poland.

The Preamble to the Act provides that the Polish state has a duty to enable the repatriation of Poles who remained in the East (in the Asian parts of the former Soviet Union), and, as a result of deportation, exile or other persecutions on national or political grounds, could never settle in Poland. Only the permanent inhabitants of some successor states of the Soviet Union Republics in Asia (prior to 2000) are eligible for the repatriation procedure (Art. 9). These states are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and the Asian part of the Russian Federation. The limited geographical scope of the Act reflects the fear of too many applicants coming from countries neighbouring Poland, where Polish minorities are extensive (such as Ukraine and Belarus)¹⁵. The preference given to people of Polish descent residing only in Asian republics is also attributed to the fact that they did not have a chance to repatriate earlier (Świdrowska 2016: 20–21). They were usually isolated from Polish culture and deprived of contact with people living in Poland (Hut 2013: 132, 135, Report 193/III: 28, Report 1519/III: 4, 9, Report 2145/IV: 1, Report 572/VI: 9–10, Report 2083/VI: 12).

¹³ <http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/SQL.nsf/glosowania?OpenAgent&3&83&30> [accessed 30.10.2019].

¹⁴ <http://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm8.nsf/agent.xsp?symbol=glosowania&NrKadencji=8&NrPosiedzenia=50&NrGlosowania=68> [accessed 30.10.2019].

¹⁵ Addressing the issue of not covering all ethnic Poles by the Act on Repatriation, in 2007 the Act on the Polish Chart (*Karta Polaka*) was introduced. It supplements the processes of repatriation by offering special economic, cultural, and educational benefits to people of Polish decent, without granting them citizenship, but with fast track measures for its acquisition. Initially, the Polish Chart covered only the citizens of the 15 former Soviet Union states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Latvia, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Since these countries do not offer dual citizenship, the special standing was offered to those who couldn't or didn't want to repatriate, without them having to relinquish their current citizenship (Górny et al. 2003: 27). At present, as a result of the amendments introduced in 2019, the Act on the Polish Chart covers all co-ethnics, irrespective of their place of residence.

Art. 1.2 of the Act on Repatriation defines a repatriate as a person of Polish descent, arriving in Poland on the basis of a national visa for repatriation with the intention of permanent residence¹⁶. Such a person acquires Polish citizenship automatically when crossing the Polish state border, which emphasises the high status of repatriates. Establishing the Polish descent of an applicant is based on a few criteria. An applicant must declare Polish nationality (Art. 5.1), and have Polish ancestors (Art. 5.1.1), which has to be proved by the submission of certain documents. An applicant must also demonstrate their links with Polishness, especially by cultivating the Polish language, traditions and customs (Art. 5.1.2). This reduced the number of applicants to those who were able to pass the Polish language exam. Since the 2017 amendments, command of the language is no longer a condition for being recognised as a person of Polish descent.

An applicant can be invited to Poland by a municipal council, an institution or a private person (Art. 12). The invitation must confirm the possession or assurance of accommodation and living support in Poland in the form of a legal agreement for at least 12 months, and for 24 months after the 2017 amendments. These amendments also established the office of the Plenipotentiary for Repatriation, who can make decisions on placing a repatriate in an adaptation centre. Such centres organise courses on Polish language and culture, professional training, etc. Other forms of support for repatriates (Art. 17 and Art. 23) include, for example, the partial refund for the costs of adapting and renovating an apartment and different forms of assistance with finding employment (Żołądek 2013: 202). Municipalities receive money from the central government for the professional activation of repatriates (Art. 28). The 2017 amendments to the Acts introduced additional financial support to repatriates (for instance, for buying or renting an apartment).

In 2001, the *Rodak* (“Co-national”) database was introduced. It is designed for people who were promised a repatriation visa by the consul, but who have not secured their income and accommodation. The goal of this database is to match those who were issued a visa promise with municipalities offering apartments and employment opportunities.

The outcomes

As mentioned before, the previous waves of repatriation were *en masse*, state-organised actions, which embraced hundreds of thousands of Poles. Nowadays repatriation is focused on establishing connections between municipalities and individual

¹⁶ There are also other ways to be granted the status of a repatriate and Polish citizenship: a person of Polish descent may find the means of subsistence by themselves; within 12 months after graduating from a Polish higher-education institution, a person of Polish ethnicity may apply for the recognition procedure (*uznanie za repatrianta*); there is also a special procedure of recognition for ethnic Poles coming from countries not listed in the Act on Repatriation (Świdrowska 2016: 86–87).

families, and its scale is much more limited compared to the previous waves (Nowosielski, Stefańska 2018: 325). Before passing the Act on Repatriation, the estimations were that about 25–50,000 people of Polish descent would be eligible for and interested in repatriation (Hut 2002: 60, Hut 2014: 175, Łodziński, Hut 2008: 110, Report 1888/III: 1). Repatriation was seen as a temporary process, which should be completed within a given period of time, by the end of the 20th century at the latest (Report 193/III: 9). None of these goals has been met. Between 1997 and 2017 less than 10,000 persons settled in Poland within the repatriation program¹⁷. The further part of the repatriation is planned for 2017–2026, when about 12,000 persons are estimated to resettle. If this goal was met, altogether the repatriation of ethnic Poles to Poland would take at least 40 years.

Over the years, the decreasing number of invitations from municipalities has resulted in declining numbers of repatriates (*Statistics...* 2018: 450). At the same time, the number of people waiting for the invitation in the *Rodak* system has grown; in 2013, it was over 2,800 persons (Grzymała-Kazłowska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2014: 11, Report 2083/VI: 4–5, Report 78/VII: 23, Interpellation nr 17933, 2010). The average wait time for obtaining the repatriation visa is long, at between 6 and 10 years (Świdrowska 2016: 70). Waiting for the invitation for an unspecified period means that individuals have to renew their documents every year (Report 80/VII: 19). All of this could discourage some people from repatriation (and sometimes make them choose other strategies for emigration), even if initially they wished to take part in the program. Therefore, the number of individuals who would like to repatriate is probably higher in practice. This is indirectly confirmed by the growing number of permissions to settle for ethnic Poles (granted on the basis of Art. 52, Sec. 5 of the 1997 Constitution of the Republic of Poland) in contrast to the number of repatriation visas issued (Grzymała-Kazłowska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2014: 11).

The Act on Repatriation was strongly criticised by scholars as ineffective and for not corresponding to existing needs (Świdrowska 2016: 21, Żołądek 2013: 194). In the political discourse, the Act was evaluated as unsuccessful, and the whole repatriation system as a systemic failure¹⁸. Especially strong criticism was expressed after the publication of the Report of the Supreme Chamber of Control (*Najwyższa Izba Kontroli*) in 2013 (*Realizacja...* 2014). The need to amend or fully change the law was often raised (Report 572/VI: 6, Report 2083/VI: 6–8, *Polityka...* 2011: 81–82). The 2017 amendments to the Act were seen as a tool to accelerate the whole process (Report 120/VIII: 5).

¹⁷ This includes: 8,026 individuals who came to Poland on the basis of the Act on Repatriation, 297 individuals acknowledged as repatriates on the basis of Art. 109 of the 1997 Act on Aliens, and 772 persons acknowledged as repatriates by voivodes, on the basis of Art. 16 and 41 of the Act on Repatriation (*Statistics...* 2018: 450).

¹⁸ “It is a shame for Poland that the issue of repatriation has not been solved” (Report 95/VII: 12). “Practically, there is no repatriation, it exists only in a residual form” (Report 78/VII 2014: 23). See also: Report 572/VI: 6–7. Report 2083/VI: 8, Report 78/VII: 22–25).

Table 2

The outcomes of repatriation, 1997–2017

Population of Poland (2017)	Approximate number of ethnic Poles willing to repatriate (before the Act on Repatriation)	Number of people who repatriated (1997–2017)	Number of people waiting in the <i>Rodak</i> system to be repatriated (2013)	Repatriates as percentage of the total population
38,424,000	25–50,000	9,095	ca. 2,800	0.03%

Source: Grzymała-Kazłowska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2014: 11, Łodziński, Hut 2008: 110, *Statistics...* 2018: 450, author's own calculation.

Impracticality of the repatriation

In contrast to some other countries¹⁹, the processes of contemporary repatriation to Poland have been impractical: they fail to correspond to the country's strategic economic, demographic, and labour market needs. The five arguments below support this thesis.

First, there is no program for the repatriates' allocation, and their settlement is often determined through historical, not practical justifications (Hut 2004: 96). This results in a mismatch between the qualifications of repatriates and the needs of the labour market in Poland. There is no comprehensive data on who is needed where (Report 193/III: 13, 29–30, 33, Report 2083/VI: 11). Desirable skills are usually mentioned on the invitations issued by municipalities, but in practice, the match is only rarely possible (Świdrowska 2016: 43, Report 193/III: 42, Report 52/VIII: 4–5). Specialists such as teachers or doctors dominate among the repatriates; such professionals (without an education in engineering) have the greatest difficulties finding employment (Hut 2004: 102). While the repatriates are "relatively well-educated" (Hut 2004: 99), the job offers available usually regard manual labour (Świdrowska 2016: 100). Although in the beginning of the repatriation people of working age

¹⁹ Zeveleva (2014: 815, 821–822) analyses this issue with regard to the three cases. In the case of Kazakhstan, the arrangement and the settlement of repatriates were regulated by regional quotas reflecting the financial, demographic, and economic needs of each region of the country. Repatriates who followed the quotas received full financial support, and therefore there was an incentive for them to do so. In Germany, "Integration programs for repatriates were aimed at effective and painless insertion of repatriate migrants into the economy and into the society of Germany, and prescribing the settlement of repatriates in specific regions of Germany also reflected a strategic approach to utilising these migrant flows" (Zeveleva 2014: 820). In the case of Russia, the repatriation had an exclusively pragmatic nature; it practically meant importing the labour force, and securing a place of employment for each person was required before resettlement.

dominated among the repatriates (Świdrowska 2016: 93), this has been changing with time: in 2017, it was estimated that such cases constitute only about 30–35 percent of the repatriates (Report 52/VIII: 10). The ethnic migrants are frequently placed in peripheral locations, no matter their qualifications and previous experience (Grzymała-Kazłowska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2014: 13). They often encounter difficulties with entering and navigating the labour market. The level of state support with regard to language courses and searching for employment, which could help repatriates establish a better position, is very low (Świdrowska 2016: 75–82). There are also formal barriers regarding the acceptance of the education and professional experience of repatriates (for example, the lack of any clear rules for the recognition of diplomas; Świdrowska 2016: 85, 101).

As a consequence, the professional and intellectual potential of repatriates is not utilised, which often leads to the degradation of their social position (Hut 2013: 143, Report 572/VI: 11, Świdrowska 2016: 102). “Forced” to lower their aspirations (Świdrowska 2016: 101), they often experience dissatisfaction from the repatriation because of their decreased socio-economic status (compared to the situation in the countries they came from; Gorbaniuk 2004: 111–112). Furthermore, repatriates are often treated as competitors for social support and material resources, since the majority of invitations come from small towns or villages struggling with their own economic and social problems (Brzozowska 2013: 238–249, Świdrowska 2016: 121). Municipal officials are often afraid to support the repatriates when many issues regarding their own local populations remain unsolved (such as unemployment; Świdrowska 2016: 41, Report 193/III: 18, 27). One socially sensitive topic is the assurance of accommodation for repatriates, when many other people will have been waiting for subsidized housing (Świdrowska 2016: 88).

Second, municipalities are expected to take part in repatriation exclusively on ideological grounds, and the repatriation does not provide a response to their practical problems. As the research shows (Świdrowska 2016), the main incentive for municipalities to issue invitations for repatriates is the moral duty of the Polish state to take care of its co-ethnics; at the same time, “Motivation based on the possibility of seeing the repatriates as potential workers (...), although this did occur during the research, was of marginal importance” (Świdrowska 2016: 43). Municipalities do not profit financially from inviting repatriates; support from the government has to be spent specifically on the repatriates’ needs, so this alone does not provide sufficient economic motivation. The amendments to the Act on Repatriation in 2001 and 2003 were supposed to guarantee that inviting repatriates would be profitable for a municipality (which could spend part of the government resources on, for example, social support benefiting the entire local community). However, these provisions were interpreted in a different way, and, as a result, the state’s funds can still be spent only on the repatriates’ direct expenses (Report 2083/VI: 15–16, Response... 2010). An increased allocation from the state budget is perceived as

the most important encouragement to invite more co-ethnics from abroad (Świdrowska 2016: 45).

Third, the demographic potential of the repatriation has not been utilised. “Demographic policy considerations began to appear in the repatriation debate from the end of 2003” (Łodziński, Hut 2008: 113; see also Report 78/VIII, 5–7). The repatriation program was interpreted as one of the possible solutions to the current demographic problems of Poland, such as the growing number of people of retirement age²⁰ and the fall in the birth rate. It was recognised that countries with significant Polish minorities could be used for programs of controlled immigration (Paradysz 2004: 26, *Polityka...* 2011: 83–84). The resettlement of ethnic Poles – culturally closer to the Polish population, compared to immigrants from different cultural circles – could also balance the outflow of about two million Poles who have emigrated to the countries of the European Union (Kość-Ryżko 2014: 38). However, “[t]he government of the Republic of Poland has not fully used the chance created by the possibility for the settlement of the descendants of Polish citizens in Poland” (Kość-Ryżko 2014: 38). A strategic, comprehensive approach to repatriation as a possible solution to demographic issues does not exist. There is no settlement program which could be considered a response to the depopulation problems of some regions, or as “a way to decrease the median population age in ‘ageing’ voivodships” (Hut 2004: 104).

Fourth, the acquisition of Polish citizenship within the repatriation procedure is sometimes overused by repatriates as a means of securing citizenship of the European Union. When they become disappointed with living conditions in Poland, they increasingly decide to emigrate to Western European countries (Hut 2013: 233–235). The number of such decisions has been growing over time (when comparing the respondents’ declarations from 2000 and 2011, Hut 2013: 145). Therefore, in this aspect, the repatriation does not correspond to the country’s strategic needs.

Fifth, the Polish state does not provide the repatriates with adequate integration programs. Following the above-mentioned ideological rationale, the main focus in the political and media discourse is on the national-historical rhetoric, presenting co-ethnics as wronged “brothers”. Practical issues relating to the repatriates’ everyday lives are vaguely present, while in fact, repatriates frequently encounter numerous difficulties (Brzozowska 2013, Hut 2013, Iglicka 1998: 1009–1010, Świdrowska 2016: 44–45, Żołądek 2013: 205–206). After their arrival in Poland, they often experience civilizational shock, including linguistic, cultural, and organisational dimensions (Hut 2002: 216), as well as psychological problems (identity crises, alienation, isolation, etc.). “Within the spheres of language and job search, the support for the repatriates is the least” (Świdrowska 2016: 75, see also 76, 82) – and these are the two spheres which are crucial for their integration within society. One of the biggest issues is their weak knowledge of the Polish language, which in most cases is inadequate

for communication in Polish (Grzymała-Kazłowska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2014: 12, Report 193/III: 18, 23, Report 1888/III: 3–6, 13, Świdrowska 2016: 107).

Furthermore, there are certain barriers on the side of the Polish society.²¹ Before the repatriates settle in Poland, they are usually pictured as similar in terms of language and culture; such expectations must later be confronted with the repatriates' "otherness" and only "relative cultural similarity" (Grzymała-Kazłowska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2014: 17). They often experience the stigma of people of the East (Russians – *Ruskie*; Hut 2013: 147)²², which leads to social exclusion and discrimination. The 2017 amendments to the Act on Repatriation introduced new solutions which are supposed to help better integrate the repatriates into Polish society. The municipality might assign an assistant to a repatriate in a difficult situation (caused by age, health problems, low level of Polish, etc.) after their arrival in Poland. Furthermore, a repatriate might be placed in an adaptation center where different forms of support are offered (including language and cultural courses). However, with only two such centers providing a limited number of places, the likely impact of such solutions on improving the integration of Polish ethnic migrants remains debatable.

Conclusions

The historical and cultural background in Poland have been conducive to the development of the contemporary repatriation policy. With a large Eastern diaspora whose fate has constantly been the subject of historical and moral reflection in the public discourse, the Polish state – as a kin-state – has had a demographic and ethical justification for putting into practice the idea of an ethnic nation (typical of the Polish tradition), attempting to include co-ethnics living abroad into the national community (symbolically and practically). This has been manifested in the legislation on nationality and citizenship, which, since the 20th century, has been strongly ethnicity-oriented, giving preference to people of Polish descent. Poland also has a post-war tradition of repatriations, with legal preferentialism for ethnic Poles moving to the country of their origin.

The contemporary wave of repatriation – “a logical consequence of return policies enacted during the 1940s and 1950s” (de Tinguy 2003: 105) – has been strongly ideologically grounded. It has been supported by the Polish state (at both central and local levels) as a moral duty and as compensation for the past suffering and historical

²¹ The social reception and the attitudes of the Polish society toward repatriates are presented in Sokółowska, Wróbel (2018: 24–31). As the research shows, 57 percent of the respondents agree that the Polish state should bring the repatriates back to the country, whereas 24 percent are against this idea. At the same time, about half of the respondents declare that they do not mind having a repatriate as a neighbour, while 29 percent oppose it.

²² This has been weakening over the years (Brzozowska 2013: 239, 243, Świdrowska 2016: 121–122).

injustice toward co-ethnics in the East. The issue of repatriation has been present in political and academic discourse since the 1990s. Its persistence is also reflected in the long process of institutional and legal preparations for the implementation of the Act on Repatriation of 2000 (when the temporary solutions were adopted), and later on in the prolonged discussions on the need to amend the Act. Furthermore, there was a strong political consensus over the moral obligation of the Polish state to design and conduct the repatriation policy; although political opponents debated certain details regarding the organisation of the process, no political force questioned its very need. The Act on Repatriation and its 2017 amendments were adopted with near unanimity. This legislation confirms the high status of repatriates by granting them Polish citizenship upon their arrival in Poland and by treating them as “lost” members of the nation, deserving of all forms of assistance.

The persistence and strong ideological rooting of the idea of repatriation confirm an important aspect of the identity of the Polish state. As explained before, ethnic preferentialism in legislation, including legislation on repatriation, may indicate the dominance of the ethnic understanding of nation. The Polish case might be interpreted as following this framework. The political consensus over the need for repatriation, unchanging over time, shows that ethnic preferentialism is not a controversial issue among the Polish political elites, and reflects the importance and the persistence of the ethnic idiom. Such a strong ideological grounding allows for the repatriation to last – even if it is ineffective. Therefore, in this aspect, the door has been held widely open to repatriates.

Nevertheless, opening the door to repatriates at the ideological level has been accompanied by closing it at the practical level. The repatriation policy lacks practicality: it does not fit into the strategic needs of the country. Such impracticality has been manifested in, for instance, the lack of a settlement program for repatriates, which could connect their allocation with the demographic, economic, and labour market requirements of particular regions of Poland. The repatriates are not integrated into Polish society, and state support in this aspect is limited. As a result of the economic and social marginalisation of ethnic migrants, “(...) resettlements (...) become a more and more significant social problem, and the repatriates become a part of the Polish underclass” (Hut 2004: 104), frequently perceived as “competing” for social assistance. Dissatisfied with life conditions in Poland, the repatriates increasingly often leave for other European Union states, taking advantage of their Polish citizenship. At the same time, municipalities do not have incentives to invite repatriates; they are expected to fulfil a “mission”, without taking into consideration the practical and economic aspects. This makes the whole process even more ideological.

As a result of the discrepancy between the two spheres – the “overgrowth” of the ideological component and the deficiency of the practical component – the repatriation program in Poland has been a failure. The criteria of a successful repatriation program defined before have not been met: the number of repatriates has

been low, compared to the initial estimates and to the number of individuals willing to repatriate, and the whole process of repatriation has been excessively stretched out over time.

The analysis of the Polish repatriation program shows that the country-specific historical and cultural conditions might limit Olga Zeveleva's (2014) explanation of the success (or lack thereof) of a repatriation program. The strong presence of the issue of repatriation in Polish history and culture, as well as in the contemporary political discourse and legislation, grounded in the tradition of ethnic nation and ethnic preferentialism, have made it impossible for any political elites to question it and opt for the suspension of the repatriation program. The Polish case shows that repatriation may last because of the strength of the ideological component – even if the whole process is not practical. Consequently, this case does not follow the theoretical assumption that the lack of one of the two components brings the repatriation program to a stop. It calls for the development of Zeveleva's conceptualisation, which should be supplemented with an additional category for the trajectory of the repatriation process.

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