

*The German minority in the integration process  
with the majority society in the Third Polish Republic  
(1989–2019)*

---

SUMMARY

The sovereign Third Polish Republic was the first in the history of Polish statehood after the end of World War II to officially recognise the existence of the German minority on its territory and create an unrestricted opportunity for Polish Germans to cultivate their national language and traditions. The new social and political conditions in Poland enabled the German minority to cultivate these, not only within the family, but also make them public. They can easily admit to be German and German minority organisations successfully implement their cultural and social goals.

The new national policy of the Polish state after 1989 has been based on the principle of integration (the creation of a new community as a result of the merging and peaceful coexistence of groups, while maintaining a certain difference and being able to freely participate in social life) of national and ethnic minority groups, and not on their assimilation with the majority society, that is, de-nationalisation (Polonisation). The German minority has obtained a relatively wide range of legal solutions enabling it, after years of forced assimilation in communist times, not only to preserve and cultivate its own identity and language, but also to develop the necessary culture in this matter and to participate in it. During the three decades of the existence of the German minority in Poland, the vast majority of its demands regarding social, cultural and political life have been fulfilled. The minority has its own cultural institutions, publishing houses, newspapers, access to mass media (radio, television and the internet), a minority education system and its own representation in the parliament and self-governments at various levels, primarily in the Opolskie Province, where its representatives play an important role.

This monograph is devoted to the analysis of the position of Germans in Poland in the Third Polish Republic from a political and sociological perspective. The subject of the work is to show the contemporary German minority, its socio-cultural and political life, problems and successes and the most important transformations that affect the process of integration of members of the German minority with the majority society not only in Upper Silesia, but also in other regions of the country during three decades of the official existence of the German minority in the Third Polish Republic. The main goal set by the author is to show and describe the conditions and dynamics of the German minority movement and the said integration process, while showing their social, cultural and political contexts. The author undertakes various threads and analyses various aspects of the functioning of this group in Polish society from the end of 1989 until the first months of 2019. At the same time, he primarily tries to show the latest phenomena and events of the last two decades that have not been analysed and described so far.

In this book, the author tries to answer the key questions: how is evolution progressing?; what does the state of integration of the German minority with the majority society look like in Poland?; and what affects it? To answer these, he asks numerous very significant additional questions. The most important of them are: what is the attitude of the majority society to the German minority?; how does it change over time and how is it conditioned?; how has the German minority movement evolved since 1989?; what factors cause changes in the environment of this minority?; why does the size of the German minority change?; do the Silesian movement and the ideas of Silesian organisations influence this number?; what determines the identity of members of the German minority?; does knowledge of the German language and religion influence the identity of this minority group?; how does it work and what problems does education for German minority children and youth face?; why have double (Polish-German) place names and the auxiliary language been introduced in offices?; how does this affect the integration of this national minority with the Polish environment?; what is the social, cultural and political activity of the German minority?; how does it affect the aforementioned integration?; what are the policies of the Polish and German states towards the German minority in Poland?; how do Polish and German (state and non-state) institutions support the German minority in Poland?; how can the future of the German minority be predicted?; and how will German minority organisations change?

Based on the author's analyses and research results, it can be stated that despite the disputes between the majority and the minority in the first years of the official existence of the German minority in the Third Polish Republic, the long period of forced assimilation of this national minority (and not only this) ended at the time

of the collapse of communism in Poland. Then the real process of its integration with the majority society began, which has been taking place at an increasingly advanced level for many years. It should be emphasised that disputes between the majority and minority groups primarily concerned historical memory, prejudices and marking their presence in a given area – in particular towns and municipalities. However, these disputes have never led to an open ethnic conflict, as happened several times between Poles and Roma. The author analyses various facts and events that contributed to the emergence of disputes that affected mutual relations.

Over the past decades, cultural differences and the distance between the majority society and the German minority have significantly decreased. This does not mean, however, that the sense of separateness among members of the German minority has disappeared. To some extent, there is still a division between ‘we’ and ‘they’, although it is not as clear as it once was. Getting to know each other and learning more about each other contributes to better understanding as well as the peaceful and normal coexistence of the majority and minority in one territory. All this is conducive to the development of a good and coherent civil society and helps members of the German minority to integrate with the society. The majority society has finally become accustomed to the existence and functioning of the German minority in Poland. Poles have basically got used to the fact that people of other nationalities, traditions and customs also live in Poland. For years, Poles have treated the Germans in Poland as a permanent element of the social, cultural and political landscape. When asked by the author about the integration of this national minority with the Polish majority, all respondents – representatives of the German minority – claimed that the minority is integrated with Polish society, which they considered to be a big advantage and success.

The analyses conducted and the research results obtained by the author indicate that the socio-cultural and political activities carried out by German minority organisations contribute to the integration of members of the German minority with general Polish society. Moreover, education for the German minority and the introduction of double place names indicates acceptance among Poles, which contributes to integration of members of the German minority with the majority society. In turn, economic trips abroad by members of this national minority have a significant impact on the functioning of this minority movement and disintegration within the minority community itself.

The German minority depends on considerable financial support from both countries: Germany and Poland. Thanks to this, the environment of this national minority has a greater opportunity to preserve and develop German culture, traditions, customs and language. Help from non-state organisations and institutions is also important here. Support is necessary to build mutual acceptance

and promote prosperity in local communities, as well as to implement the idea of European unity in diversity.

Nowadays, an important problem is the need to activate this environment, make the programmes of activities of German minority organisations more attractive – both in content and in form – and to adapt them to the needs of the young generation in particular. Without this, the German minority may cease to exist in the coming decades. However, will it be possible to activate this environment given that very many people come from mixed marriages (often for two or three generations) and have no German identity? In fact, both generations are well adapted in the Polish environment and more or less assimilated with the culture of the dominant society in which they have lived from birth. This is very evident in this environment.

It seems that the issue of mixed marriages and the assimilation of the German minority community occurring in the Łódź region, Lubusz region, Greater Poland, Lower Silesia, Western Pomerania and the Gdańsk region as well as in Warmia and Masuria has left a lasting mark and has already determined the disappearance of the German minority movement from these areas in the coming decades. In the case of historic Upper Silesia (primarily the Opolskie Province, where the largest clusters of the minority live), the phenomenon of assimilation and mixed marriages among minority members occurs to a lesser extent than in other areas. This will make it possible to preserve German national culture and traditions in this region among this minority.

In the final part of the book, the author predicts, from the perspective of a sociologist and political scientist, what the situation of the German minority will look like in the coming decades. Its existence will primarily be determined by: the attractiveness of the German minority movement, the national identity of this social group, the socio-political atmosphere in the country and the possible recognition of Silesians as an ethnic or national minority. In the long run, it is unlikely that the German minority movement will disappear completely. It will decrease to a dozen or so, not numerous yet thriving, groups that will form the German national minority in Poland. It will be a social group of several to several dozen thousand living primarily in historical Upper Silesia, which will maintain its German national identity out of conviction and strongly embedded German culture (thanks to which it will be structurally strong as a cultural community). At the same time, it will remain strongly associated with the region in which it has been living for generations. In the future, the main measure of the size of this group's movement will be national censuses and the number and size of this national minority's organisations. The indicator of integration will be primarily its presence, visibility and activity in local, regional and national life.