

## POLAND

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### 1 MUSLIM POPULATIONS

The presence of Muslims in Poland goes back to the turn of fourteenth/fifteenth centuries when some Tatars (prisoners of war and refugees from the Golden Horde, officially Muslim from the thirteenth century)<sup>2</sup> were settled in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (at that time in a shared monarchy with Poland, later forming the Kingdom of Two Nations).<sup>3</sup> By the sixteenth century, they had lost their mother tongue, but they retained their religion and customs.<sup>4</sup> In the second part of the seventeenth century a new wave of Tatar settlers was given land in Podlachia (Polish Podlasie, present day north-east Poland).<sup>5</sup> When the Polish state regained independence after the World War I, only 19 Muslim religious communities with their mosques and cemeteries existed within its new borders. After World War II and the move of Polish state borders westward, only a tiny part (about 10%) of the Tatar settlement territories remained within the new Polish state. Post-war migrations dispersed the Tatars, resulting in small communities living in Gdańsk, or Gorzów Wielkopolski, places far from their original settlements in the Białystok district (north-east of the country) and Warsaw. The Communist regime did not formally revoke recognition

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<sup>2</sup> Borawski, Piotr and Aleksander Dubiński, *Tatarzy polscy: Dzieje, obrzędy, legendy, tradycje* (Polish Tatars: History, Rituals, Legends, Traditions) (Warsaw: Iskry, 1986), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Tyszkiewicz, Jan, *Z historii Tatarów polskich 1794–1944* (From the History of the Polish Tatars, 1794–1944) (Pułtusk: Wyższa Szkoła Humanistyczna, 2002), p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Borawski, Piotr, *Tatarzy w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej* (Tatars in the Erstwhile Commonwealth [of Poland and Lithuania]) (Warsaw: LSW, 1986), pp. 199–202.

<sup>5</sup> Sobczak, Jacek, *Położenie prawne ludności tatarskiej w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim* (Legal Situation of the Tatar Population in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) (Warsaw-Poznań: PWN, 1984), pp. 34–38.

of religions but in practice, in an atmosphere generally unfavourable to religion, Tatar communities kept a low profile.<sup>6</sup>

Muslim foreign students began to arrive in the 1970s. Some of them married locally and stayed in Poland. After the changes towards democracy of the late 1980s, they were joined by Muslim refugees, traders and professionals.<sup>7</sup> Some of the immigrants have become Polish citizens and some have residence permits. They come from the Arab world (Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Yemen) and the Balkans and live mainly in cities that are academic centres (Warsaw, Gdańsk, Lublin, Wrocław, Bydgoszcz, Kraków, Poznań, Opole, Łódź, Rzeszów). The refugees are mainly from Chechnya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Iraq.<sup>8</sup>

There are no official data on the total number of Muslims (the Constitution [sect. 7, art. 53] rules out asking a question about religious affiliation in the census). Estimates by various offices and organisations place the number within the range 15,000–30,000 (0.04%–0.08% of the total population). The latest firm figures on the Muslim Religious Union *Muzułmański Związek Religijny*, MZR) are from 2002 and give a membership of 5,123.<sup>9</sup> The Muslim League in the Republic of Poland (*Liga Muzułmańska w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, LM) claims about 120 registered members. There are also some Polish converts but no figures are available.

## 2 ISLAM AND THE STATE

The republic of Poland is a secular state and various acts of parliament regulate relations between the state and the main religions organisations.<sup>10</sup> Other religious organisations must be registered in the gov-

<sup>6</sup> Nalborczyk, Agata S., "Islam in Poland: The past and the present", *Islamochristiana*, vol. 32 (2006), pp. 229–230, 234.

<sup>7</sup> Nalborczyk, "Islam in Poland", p. 230.

<sup>8</sup> Settlers, people on contracts and refugees are categorised according to their former/present citizenship, not their religious affiliation.

<sup>9</sup> *Mały rocznik statystyczny 2003* (Small Statistical Yearbook) (Warsaw: GUS, 2003), pp. 135–137. The statistical yearbooks from 2004 on do not contain any data on MZR membership. In a television programme in early March 2009, the Mufti said that there were about 12,000 Muslim Polish citizens and official residents.

<sup>10</sup> There are 15 of these: 12 Christian churches, the Union of Jewish Religious Groups, the Karaim Religious Union and the Muslim Religious Union (the last two on the basis of the law of 21 April 1936 governing recognition of religions).

ernment register of churches and religious associations. On the basis of the law of 21 April 1936, Islam gained official recognition by the Polish state with the MZR (established in 1925) as the only Muslim organisation representing Muslims in Poland.<sup>11</sup> This law stated that the Mufti (elected by democratic vote), imams and muezzins would receive their salaries from the state.<sup>12</sup> The act was not repealed by parliament after World War II or after the democratic changes of 1989, though the 1997 Constitution overruled some of its regulations (relating to financial support from the state, the official seat of the MZR (until this point still formally located in Vilnius), and the obligation for Muslims in Poland to belong to it).<sup>13</sup> The act still gives the MZR the right to conduct religious education in schools and provides for the teachers to be paid by the state. The state does not fund religious organisations, but they can obtain public funding for specific projects. For example, the MZR has reported on its webpage the acquisition of national and local government funding for cultural projects (e.g. workshops, social events for the general public on Muslim feast days, printing of calendars). The legal regulations created in consultations with Polish Muslims in 1936 made provision for only one official organisation to represent Muslims in Poland, i.e. the MZR. However, new legal regulations after 1989, made provision for the registration of new Muslim religious organisations; any religious group with at least 100 members can now register with the government. The MZR has thus ceased to have the monopoly, but has retained its privileged position.<sup>14</sup> Two small Shi'i groups were registered in 1990 and a new Sunni

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<sup>11</sup> *Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* (Monitor of the Acts of the Republic of Poland), vol. 30 (1936), point 240. Sobczak, Jacek, "Położenie prawne polskich wyznawców islamu (Legal situation of Polish Muslims)", in R. Baecker and Sh. Kitab (eds), *Islam a świat* (Islam and the World) (Toruń: Mado, 2004), pp. 186–197.

<sup>12</sup> *Archiwum Akt Nowych* (Archive of the New Acts), Ministerstwo Wyznań Religijnych i Oświecenia Publicznego (Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education) 1432, p. 80. The Mufti received a salary equal to that of a diocesan bishop.

<sup>13</sup> The Communist regime put an end to funding any religious body from the public purse. Vilnius, located within Polish state borders before World War II, was the official seat of the MZR. Compulsory membership of the MZR for Tatars was intended to ensure that there was only one Muslim organisation to represent Muslims vis-à-vis the state authorities.

<sup>14</sup> Borecki, Paweł, "Położenie prawne wyznawców islamu w Polsce (Legal status of Muslims in Poland)", *Państwo i Prawo*, vol. 63, no. 1 (January 2008), pp. 72–84 (73).

organisation called the Muslim League (*Liga Muzułmańska*, LM) was registered in 2004.<sup>15</sup>

In 2009, consultations took place between the MZR and representatives of the Ministry of the Interior and Administration on updating the regulations of the 1936 Act. This followed a petition submitted on 24 April 2007 by the MZR to the Polish government requesting new legislation to regulate the relationship between the state and the MZR.

### 3 MAIN MUSLIM ORGANISATIONS

Registered religious communities (*związki wyznaniowe*):

- The Muslim Religious Union in the Republic of Poland (*Muzułmański Związek Religijny w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, MZR, 15–052 Białystok, ul. Piastowska 13F, 42; tel: +48 85 664 3516, <http://www.mzr.pl>) is a Sunni organisation established in 1925. The Mufti and Chairman of the Highest Muslim Board is Tomasz Miśkiewicz, who was elected by the council of imams in March 2004 (the first council since World War II). Apart from his religious/legal functions, he assumes the role of the official representative of Muslims. Membership of the MZR is voluntary and open to Muslim Polish citizens and all Muslims who have permanent residence in Poland.<sup>16</sup>
- The Muslim League in the Republic of Poland (*Liga Muzułmańska w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, LM, 01–046 Warsaw, ul. Niska 25/43,

<sup>15</sup> Nalborczyk, "Islam in Poland", pp. 231–233; Nalborczyk, Agata S., "Status prawny muzułmanów w Polsce i jego wpływ na organizację ich życia religijnego (Legal status of Muslims in Poland and its influence on the organisation of their religious life)", in A. Parzymies (ed.), *Muzułmanie w Europie* (Muslims in Europe) (Warsaw: Wyd. Akademickie Dialog, 2005), pp. 232–233.

<sup>16</sup> The MZR has traditionally been regarded as a mainly (at times almost exclusively) Tatar organisation, which in fact is not true—15% of members are non-Tatars (i.e. immigrants and converts). This fictitious exclusiveness led to the creation of other organisations and associations by non-Tatar Muslims, including Muslim students' cultural organisations. Formation of the new religious organisation, the Muslim League (LM), was a step further taken by Muslims (of mainly Arab origin and Polish converts associated with them) around the turn of the century. Separate cultural associations continue to exist. Officially, the relationship between the MZR and the LM is amicable. The Mufti takes part in events organised by the LM and some prayer rooms are used by members of both organisations. The emphasis on 'holding a residence permit' is intended to maintain an orderly relationship with the state authorities. Both organisations were brought into existence by the will of members of the Muslim community and not at the instigation of or under pressure from any state authorities.

<http://www.islam.info.pl>) is a Sunni organisation established in 2001 and registered on 6 January 2004. The chairman of the General Council is Samir Ismail. Membership is open to Polish Muslims, Muslims with Polish citizenship, and Muslims holding a permanent or temporary residence permit.

Two quite small registered Shi'i organisations:

- The Association of Muslim Unity (*Stowarzyszenie Jedności Muzułmańskiej*, 02–679 Warsaw, ul. Pieńkowskiego 4/91, <http://www.al-islam.org.pl>) was registered on 31 January 1990 and is led by Zbigniew Żuk.
- Ahl-ul-Bayt Islamic Assembly (*Islamskie Zgromadzenie Ahl-ul-Bayt*, 05–840 Brwinów, Moszna 4a, <http://www.abia.pl/>) was registered on 17 December 1990 and its chief imam is Ryszard Ahmed Rusnak.

Muslim cultural organisations:

- The Muslim Students Society in Poland (*Stowarzyszenie Studentów Muzułmańskich w Polsce*, 60–272 Poznań, ul. Biedrzyckiego 13, (contact address; headquarters are in Białystok), <http://www.islam.org.pl>) has branches in Białystok, Poznań and Wrocław.
- The Muslim Association for Cultural Formation (*Muzułmańskie Stowarzyszenie Kształtowania Kulturalnego*, <http://www.mskk-islam.8m.com>).
- The Tatar Union of the Republic of Poland (*Związek Tatarów Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej*, 16–100 Sokółka, Bohoniki 24,) was established in 1992. Its president is Stefan Korycki.

These organisations are involved in various ways in organising religious education for their members and for Muslim children, public lectures on various aspects of Islam, and publication of Polish translations of Muslim authors' works (mainly on 'religious' topics).

#### 4 MOSQUES AND PRAYER HOUSES

There are three mosques (in Bohoniki and Kruszyń in north-eastern Poland dating from the eighteenth-nineteenth century, and one in Gdańsk that opened in 1990). 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 (one running, and another under construction), Warsaw, Lublin, Wrocław, Poznań and Katowice. There are prayer houses in Białystok, Suchowola, Łódź, Katowice and Poznań,<sup>17</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.

## 5 CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

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 interschool group for Muslim religious instruction at primary school level for pupils from Mazowsze district (Warsaw area).

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.

There are no Muslim schools.

## 6 HIGHER AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

There are no facilities to train imams locally and no Muslim higher education institutions. Islam features in the academic curricula of several universities, but the courses are mainly run by non-Muslims. Courses on the history of the Muslim world, Arabic language, and

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.mzr.pl/pl/info.php?id=16>, accessed 4 May 2010.

some aspects of Islamic doctrine are taught. Muslim religious education teachers and imams have to acquire their formal Islamic education abroad (formerly in Sarajevo, but now elsewhere).

## 7 BURIAL AND CEMETERIES

Three Muslim cemeteries are currently in use (at Bohoniki, established in the second half of the eighteenth century; at Kruszyniany, established in the seventeenth/eighteenth century; and in Tatarska St, Warsaw, opened in 1868). Two more that existed from the late seventeenth century have been closed (Lebiedziew after World War I and Studzianka after World War II). Two other disused cemeteries still exist at Bohoniki (from the late seventeenth century in the village—the Bohoniki cemetery that is in use is located outside the village) and Młynarska St, Warsaw (in use from 1838 to 1868).<sup>18</sup> Separate sections are reserved for Muslims in communal cemeteries in Gdańsk.

## 8 'CHAPLAINCY' IN STATE INSTITUTIONS

There are no Muslim 'chaplaincies'. This is due to the fact that numbers of Muslims are small and their needs can be met informally through the community, rather than to any official obstacles.

## 9 RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

Muslim religious festivals are not public holidays. Muslims can take a day off provided they make the time missed. *Qurban Bayram* ('Id al-Adha) is celebrated by MZR members in one of the north-eastern locations and is a public event. Sometimes non-Muslims are invited as guests. *Ramadan Bayram* ('Id al-Fitr) has generally been celebrated more privately, though the LM has started the a practice of organising a so-called *Wieczór ramadanowy* (Ramadan evening), an *iftar* for representatives of Muslim communities and invited non-Muslims.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.mzr.pl/pl/info.php?id=18>, accessed 4 May 2010.

## 10 HALAL FOOD

An Act of 17 May 1989 (art. 2, act 9) allows for exceptions from the approved method of animal slaughter (i.e. permits for not stunning animals prior to slaughter). Under the 1936 Act, the council of imams and the Mufti of the MZR had the sole right to issue halal certificates for food products in Poland. An agreement with the Chief Veterinary Officer in 2006 was based on that Act; see <http://www.halalpoland.pl>). This agreement was challenged by the LM as incompatible with freedom of religious practice and was recently revoked. At present, the LM also has the right to issue halal certificates, for which the food producers pay a fee.

## 11 DRESS CODES

There are no regulations restricting the wearing of hijab or *niqab*. Some young Muslim women (mainly converts of Polish origin) wear hijab in public. Tatar women wear hijab only during prayers.<sup>19</sup>

## 12 PUBLICATION AND MEDIA

Muslim periodicals cover various aspects of Muslim culture and religious matters. Those listed here are all in Polish:

- *Rocznik Tatarów Polskich* is published by the Polish Tatar Union. It is academic in character and covers treats topics on Islam in general and particularly in eastern-central Europe;
- *Życie Tatarskie* is published by the local action group *Szlak Tatarski* (Tatar Trail). It is a socio-cultural periodical and covers ethnic topics. There have been 96 issues since 1934, including 19 of the new edition since 1998. *Przegląd Tatarski* is similar in character and is published with financial support from the Ministry of the Interior and Administration.

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<sup>19</sup> Agata S. Nalborczyk, "Muslim women in Poland and Lithuania: Tatar tradition, religious practice, hijab and marriage", in E. Adamiak et al. (eds), *Gender and Religion in Central and Eastern Europe* (Poznań: Wydział Teologiczny Uniwersytetu Adama Mickiewicza, 2009), p. 66.



- *As-Salam* (<http://www.as-salam.pl>) is published by the LM and 16 issues have appeared between 2004 and 2009. It addresses general and local socio-political and religious issues and is aimed at the general reader. *Al-Hikmah* is older but is distributed mainly among Muslims.

Internet sites include:

- <http://www.mzr.pl>—the website of the MZR
- <http://www.islam.info.pl>—the website of the LM (contains links to local centres)
- <http://rada-imamow.pl>—run by the LM imams and includes legal advice
- <http://www.tatarzy.tkb.pl/> or <http://www.tataria.pl>—a Polish Tatar site about Tatar history, religion and culture
- [www.muzulmanie.com](http://www.muzulmanie.com)—ownership not stated, but probably run by the members of the LM
- <http://poland-muslims.de.tl/Home.htm>—a site on a German server providing information about Muslims in Poland; ownership not stated
- <http://sites.google.com/site/oislamie>—a private independent initiative by a group of Polish Muslim women providing information on Islam using high quality translations and sources
- [www.arabia.pl](http://www.arabia.pl)—run by an association of alumni and staff of the Oriental Institute (now Faculty), University of Warsaw
- [www.islamweuropie.info](http://www.islamweuropie.info)—a private site about Islam in Europe administered by a doctoral candidate in the Department for European Islam Studies, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw
- [www.islamic.org.uk/polish](http://www.islamic.org.uk/polish)—Polish version of the UK site

Internet fora include:

- <http://www.islam.fora.pl>
- <http://www.muslima.fora.pl>

### 13 FAMILY LAW

Only marriages conducted in a state civil ceremony at a state registry office can be registered, so Muslims usually follow the civil ceremony

with a Muslim ceremony on Muslim premises. Marriages of couples who are not Polish citizens are valid under international private law, but polygamy is illegal.

#### 14 INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

The Joint Council of Catholics and Muslims (*Rada Wspólna Kato-lików i Muzułmanów*, <http://www.rwkm.pl>) was established in 1997 with the aim of fostering friendly relations between Christians and Muslims, and disseminating reliable information about Christianity and Islam and their mutual contacts. The Council is headed by two co-chairpersons (a Christian and a Muslim). Its main achievement has been the introduction of the Islam Day in the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, which is celebrated on 26 January. This initiative was met by a positive response from the Polish Bishops' Conference and has been incorporated into the church calendar of events. It is celebrated locally, especially in places where there is a Muslim community, but it is gradually receiving a wider acceptance. During the celebrations in 2009, the Council named Maciej Musa Konopacki 'Person of Dialogue'; he is a senior member of the Tatar community and a long term active supporter of friendly Muslim-Christian relations. In November 2009, the Council, together with the Muslim community in Białystok and the Centre for Dialogue between Cultures and Religions, and in cooperation with the *Groupe d'Amitié Islamo-Chrétienne* (see [www.semaineseric.eu](http://www.semaineseric.eu)) organised a session on "Festivals in Islam and Christianity".

"Assisi in Gdańsk", an interreligious meeting held for the fourth time to commemorate the original event of 1986, gathers representatives of various religions for prayer and discussion on an agreed theme, which in 2009 was "Religions on wealth and poverty").

The MZR and LM often include an interreligious element in events they organise. Pictures from interreligious encounters feature on their websites and in their publications (e.g. the 2008 MZR leaflet, *Przegląd Tatarski* 1/2009).

#### 15 PUBLIC OPINION AND DEBATE

Coverage of matters concerning Muslims is scarce. Instances of local reporting on Islam in Poland are often linked to interreligious encoun-

ters (e.g. the Day of Islam in the Roman Catholic Church in Poland on 26 January). In February 2009, the media highlighted a statement by the LM condemning the killing of a Polish engineer held hostage in Pakistan.

There was controversy in Poznań and the national media in June 2009, when a non-Muslim artist proposed the remodelling of an old factory chimney as a minaret for the annual theatre festival “Malta 2010” (which has the theme ‘cultural differences’). It has not yet been finally decided whether the installation will go ahead.

## 16 MAJOR CULTURAL EVENTS

“Muslim Culture Days” (*Dni Kultury Muzułmańskiej*)—a series of occasional cultural events have been organised in various cities (Gdańsk, Białystok, Wrocław). They have included:

- *Sabantuj*—an annual Tatar gathering (with songs, dance, games and sports);
- *Podlaskie Dni Bajramowe* (Bayram Days in Podlasie Region-Białystok region);

In 2009, the 330th anniversary of Tatar settlement in Podlasie (north-eastern Poland) was celebrated in Białystok in May. The Regional Museum in Sokółka (near Białystok) added a temporary exhibition: “The bow—a weapon or ritual object” to its permanent exhibits on the Tatar presence in the region. An International Summer Symposium of Knowledge about Polish Tatars was held on 7–9 August and the second Festival of Polish Tatar Culture and Traditions took place in Kruszyniany on 15 August.

