

Barbara Szczęch
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Cracow

Irmina Rostek
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Cracow

The Tolerance of Young, Well-Educated Poles

Tolerancja młodych,
wykształconych Polaków

ABSTRACT

Both local and international surveys show that Polish tolerance is increasing. Poles seem to prefer a fair and objective attitude towards others who differ from them in terms of beliefs, practices or origins, over xenophobic prejudices. Age and education are the two factors that are said to be correlated with the tolerance. The aim of the study was to gather the opinions of young well-educated Poles on the issues connected with tolerance. The research problem was the change in ethnic, personal and religious tolerance which was observed in the group of young, well-educated Poles over the last 7 years. The research was conducted at two of Cracow's universities: the University of Science and Technology (AGH) and the University of Agriculture (UR). It was conducted in two rounds, in 2009 and 2016. In total, 132 participants took part in the study. All the participants filled out the questionnaire, which consisted of 57 questions on various aspects of tolerance. The tolerance for young Poles means primarily acceptance. The increase of the tolerance is visibly connected with the increase of the indifference toward otherness, the level of activity seems to be quite low. The reasons

KEY WORDS

religious tolerance,
ethnic tolerance, personal tolerance, early adulthood, students

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

tolerancja religijna,
tolerancja etniczna,
tolerancja osobista,
wczesna dorosłość,
studenci

SPI Vol. 19, 2016/4
ISSN 2450-5358
e-ISSN 2450-5366
DOI: 10.12775/SPI.2016.4.011

Case reports

Raporty z badań



for the increase of the tolerance are greater experience and better knowledge about “others” and probably also smaller complexes in comparison to previous generations. The main reason for the decrease of the tolerance in some areas is fear. Although the majority of respondents seem to accept the ideas of tolerance, there is still a place for educators in reinforcing knowledge and courage of young Poles.

ABSTRAKT

Zarówno polskie, jak i międzynarodowe badania pokazują, że poziom tolerancji w Polsce wzrasta. Wydaje się, że Polaków charakteryzuje w większym stopniu uczciwa i obiektywna postawa wobec „innych”, czyli tych, którzy różnią się od nich przekonaniami, zachowaniem czy pochodzeniem, niż ksenofobiczne uprzedzenia. Dwoma czynnikami korelującymi silnie z tolerancją są wiek i poziom wykształcenia. Celem badań było zebranie opinii młodych, wykształconych Polaków na tematy związane z tolerancją. Problemem badawczym była zmiana w obszarze tolerancji etnicznej, osobistej i religijnej obserwowana w grupie młodych, dobrze wykształconych Polaków na przestrzeni 7 lat. Badanie przeprowadzono w dwóch krakowskich uczelniach: Akademii Górniczo-Hutniczej oraz Uniwersytecie Rolniczym. Badanie prowadzone było dwukrotnie, w latach 2009 i 2016. W sumie w badaniu wzięły udział 132 osoby. Wszyscy badani wypełniali składający się z 57 pytań kwestionariusz dotyczący różnych aspektów tolerancji. Tolerancja utożsamiana jest przez młodych Polaków przede wszystkim z akceptacją. Wzrost tolerancji wiąże się w sposób widoczny ze wzrostem obojętności wobec inności, poziom aktywnego zaangażowania wydaje się niższy. Czynnikiem powodującym wzrost tolerancji są większa wiedza i doświadczenie obcowania z „innymi” oraz prawdopodobnie mniejsze kompleksy niż miało to miejsce w przypadku poprzednich pokoleń. Główną przyczyną spadku tolerancji w niektórych obszarach jest lęk. Chociaż większość badanych młodych dorosłych wydaje się popierać ideę tolerancji, ciągle jeszcze istnieje przestrzeń dla nauczycieli i wychowawców, których zadaniem jest wzmacnianie wiedzy i odwagi młodych ludzi.

Introduction

The inevitable processes of globalization are changing the face of the world, such as it was in previous centuries. The mobility of people on a scale that was never observed before increases the degree of differentiation of societies. There is a constant debate on the limits

of tolerance in a situation in which both intolerance is a threat and excessive openness seems to be threatening as well.

At the core of the discussion is the question of what tolerance is since, despite being the basis of democratic societies, it still remains a fuzzy and ambiguous concept. The list of problems with tolerance begins with the paradox formulated by Karl Popper (“Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance”¹), but the attempt to capture its essence forces us to pose several other questions.

One of the questions that arises in the discussion on tolerance is whether it is passive or active in its nature. At the beginning, in the sixteenth century, the nature of tolerance was mainly passive, associated with refraining from the persecution of people of other religions.² Today, however, the tolerance in the version involving only passive acquiescence induces anxiety and opposition, as the straight path leads to listlessness and indifference. That is why in his essay Leszek Kołakowski warns against such a vision of tolerance in which no one believes in anything and no one cares, indifferently accepting everything.³ Tolerance demands of course the ability of to keep one’s distance, but it also demands activity.

The dimension of activity is also visible when we speak about the opposite phenomenon—intolerance. The mildest form of intolerance is passive—it means keeping one’s distance, which is connected with psychological rejection, but without a visible manifestation of this attitude. The level of activity increases when intolerance grows. The most rigid manifestation of intolerance is not only physical aggressive behavior and repression, but the permanent readiness to eliminate people and destroy certain values.⁴

In the case of tolerance, the dimension of activity is connected not only with physical action, but also, or above all, mental functioning. Tadeusz Pilch states that tolerance in its positive version must be rational, cognitively active and involved.⁵ In the Declaration of

¹ K. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 1: *The Age of Plato*, Notes to the Chapters, Note 4 to Chapter 7, London 1945.

² L. Kołakowski, *Mini wykłady o maxi sprawach*, Kraków 2005, p. 36.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ T. Pilch, „Polska nietolerancja, ustalenia pojęciowe i metodologiczne”, in: *Tolerancja*, ed. B. Karolczak-Biernacka, Warszawa 1992, p. 48–49.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 38–39.

Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed in 1995 by UNESCO, the value of activity is also underlined: “Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others.”⁶ Pilch mentions several key sources of intolerance: ignorance, fear, prejudices, personal attributes, and influence of external factors.⁷ It seems, therefore, that the greatest ally of tolerance is reason, and its enemy is ignorance or simply lack of knowledge and experience.

Is tolerance a duty or merely a recommendation for a citizen of modern society? Maria Ossowska mentions tolerance among “soft virtues”, which can be recommended, but it is difficult to order or prohibit them.⁸ Contrary to this assumption, the *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance* shows that it is not only a moral obligation but also a political and legal requirement.⁹ But if it is so, it has to be noted, that different social groups fulfill this commitment to varying degrees. Data obtained in the European Social Survey (ESS)¹⁰ show that Europe is selectively tolerant and one of the factors that influences the tolerance is age.¹¹

In developmental studies it was revealed that people shift from the relative intolerance of childhood to greater tolerance in early adolescence to highest levels of tolerance in late adolescence and early adulthood.¹² The phenomenon can be explained in terms of cognitive development and increased ability of relativistic thinking (the ability to take into account the subjective nature of knowledge). Relativistic

⁶ *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance*, General Conference at its twenty-eight session, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris 1995, Article 1.2.

⁷ T. Pilch, „Polska nietolerancja, ustalenia pojęciowe i metodologiczne”, op. cit., p. 43.

⁸ M. Ossowska, *Normy moralne. Próba systematyzacji*, Warszawa 1985, p. 182–189.

⁹ *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance*, op. cit., Article 1.1.

¹⁰ ESS is a cross-national survey that has been conducted every two years since 2002. In the survey different aspects of attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of citizens in more than 30 nations (including Poland) were measured. Available at: <<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>> (access: 26.07.2016).

¹¹ L. Dimova, M. Dimov, *Is Europe tolerant to “others”? ESS answers*, Available at: <<http://www.ess-bulgaria.org>> (access: 26.07.2016).

¹² B. Bradford Brown, “Tolerance”, in: *Encyclopedia of Adolescence*, eds. B. Bradford Brown, M.J. Prinstein, Cambridge (MA) 2011, p. 22–23.

thinking is an important tool in solving social problems, because it allows them to take into account the different perspectives and positions.¹³ By late adolescence people may believe that a behavior is unfair or unjust, but if they recognize that it is in accordance with cultural norms or beliefs, they will be relatively tolerant of the person and the behavior. The ability of relativistic thinking is associated with the experience or the training in this field. Different studies prove that the tolerance in early adulthood is the highest, but it is worth stressing that the development in this aspect is not gradual. Tolerance appears to be domain-specific and depend on which, what and when young people are asked to tolerate dissenting beliefs and practices.¹⁴

Tolerance in Poland

In a 2014 study conducted by CBOS¹⁵ in which Poles were asked to assess the changes that had occurred over 25 years, the respondents stated that over that time the level of tolerance towards dissent had increased. The European Values Survey (EVS) supported this observation, showing that between 1998 and 2008 in two of three dimensions of tolerance, a significant change had occurred indeed. The level of “political tolerance” was in 2008 extremely high in Poland in comparison with other European countries, of “ethnic tolerance” fairly high, and of “personal tolerance” relatively low. It should be also noted, that political and ethnic tolerance increased over the mentioned decade, and personal tolerance decreased.¹⁶

One of the measures of tolerance can be a tendency to accept people belonging to different social categories as potential neighbors. The

¹³ E. Gurba, “Wczesna dorosłość”, in: *Psychologia rozwojowa*, ed. J. Trempała, Warszawa 2011, p. 299.

¹⁴ M. Verkuyten, L. Slooter, “Tolerance of Muslim beliefs and practices: Age related differences and context effect”, *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 2007, vol. 31, no 5, p. 467.

¹⁵ R. Boguszewski, *Od końca lat osiemdziesiątych do dziś – oceny zmian w różnych wymiarach życia społecznego i politycznego w Polsce po roku 1989. Komunikat z badań CBOS*, Warszawa 2014, Available at: <http://www.cbos.pl/SPI-SKOM.POL/2014/K_062_14.PDF> (access: 25.07.2016).

¹⁶ A. Grzymała-Kazłowska, A. Jasińska-Kania, “Tolerance in Poland”, *Academia* 2011, no. 1(29), p. 28.

vast majority of respondents in another CBOS study¹⁷ declared that they would not mind if their neighbor was a representative of a different race or nationality (91%), a person of different religion (88%), a lonely old man (87%), follower of a radical political party (84%) or gay (77%). “Personal tolerance” (toward people regarded as deviants or threatening) is indeed lower: for respondents it would be harder to accept a prostitute (57%) or a mentally ill person (54%). The vast group of respondents would be afraid to live next to a strange cult member (62% negative answers). It seems, therefore, that although selective, the tolerance of Poles is relatively high.

One of the answers given by ESS is that the level of tolerance correlates with social distance—the closer others are to us, the higher the tolerance.¹⁸ Therefore it is not surprising that in most studies conducted over years the same religious preferences of Poles were observed.¹⁹ We like Catholics most, followed by adherents of the Orthodox and Protestant faiths, in other words, Poles prefer people who are representatives of one of the Christian religions. At the end of the list are Jehovah’s Witnesses and Muslims. A current report shows that low level of the resemblance of Islam to the dominant religion in Poland, and also the identification of Islam with a reluctance to assimilate, intolerance, violence and terrorism result in the negative attitudes toward Muslims.²⁰ But although the Polish religious tolerance is selective, the researchers claim that tolerance and openness in this area are more frequent than distance and xenophobia.

The EVS study conducted in 1999 identified Poland as having one of the highest levels of xenophobia in Europe, while when it was repeated in 2008 it showed Poland to be one of the least xenophobic

¹⁷ N. Hipsz, *Granice tolerancji – stosunek do wybranych grup mniejszościowych. Komunikat z badań CBOS*, Warszawa 2014, Available at: <http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2014/K_149_14.PDF> (access: 26.07.2016).

¹⁸ L. Dimova, M. Dimov, *Is Europe tolerant to „others”? ESS answers*, op. cit.

¹⁹ B. Wciórka, *Dystans społeczny czy tolerancja i otwartość? Postawy wobec wyznawców prawosławia, protestantyzmu, judaizmu i islamu. Komunikat z badań CBOS*, Warszawa 2001, Available at: <http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2001/K_080_01.PDF> (access: 24.07.2016).

²⁰ M. Feliksiak, *Postawy wobec islamu i Muzułmanów. Komunikat z badań CBOS*, Warszawa 2015, Available at: <http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2015/K_037_15.PDF> (access: 26.07.2016).

nations in Eastern Europe.²¹ The current “fairly high” level of ethnic tolerance was confirmed in both the ESS and CBOS studies. The answers obtained in ESS showed that Poles think that the country is made rather a better than worse place by people coming from other countries. In Europe, only citizens of Sweden, Germany and Norway are more optimistic in this aspect.²² CBOS survey conducted in 2005²³ showed that in comparison with other countries of the Visegrad Group, Poland is characterized by a greater openness towards foreigners. 62% of Poles declared that the Polish border should be open to all comers. The increasing level of tolerance is associated undoubtedly with the Europeanization of Poland and the fact that the image of the immigrant often takes the form of self-portrait. There are of course groups that Poles like more and those that we like less. The most liked nations of Poles are: Czechs, Slovaks, Italians and Spaniards. In the CBOS survey, about 50% of respondents chose these nations as those which are liked. Less liked nations are Roma, Romanians and Russians. During the last two decades, two general trends can be observed: decreasing antipathy towards our traditional enemies (e.g. Germans—from 53% in 1993 to 22% in 2015), but also the weakening of enthusiasm for the most popular. There are of course exceptions in the general trends, e.g. first declining (from 56% in 1993 to 39% in 2013) and then increasing (up to 50% in 2015) antipathy towards Russians. Current events in Ukraine seem to activate potential intolerance towards Russians.²⁴

The category of “personal tolerance” is somewhat controversial because it lumps together criminals, heavy drinkers, drug addicts, people with AIDS, homosexuals (as “people regarded as deviants,

²¹ A. Grzymała-Kazłowska, A. Jasińska-Kania, “Tolerance in Poland”, op. cit., p. 30.

²² L. Dimova, M. Dimov, *Is Europe tolerant to „others”?* ESS answers, op. cit.

²³ M. Wenzel, *Opinie ludności z krajów Europy Środkowej o imigrantach i uchodźcach. Komunikat z badań CBOS*, Warszawa 2005, Available at: <<http://www.bezuprzedzen.org>> (access: 22.07.2016).

²⁴ A. Roguska, *Stosunek Polaków do innych narodów. Komunikat z badań CBOS*, Warszawa 2013, Available at: <http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2013/K_012_13.PDF> (access: 26.07.2016); M. Omyła-Rudzka, *Stosunek do innych narodów. Komunikat z badań CBOS*, Warszawa 2015, Available at: <http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2015/K_014_15.PDF> (access: 26.07.2016).

or groups deemed troublesome or threatening”²⁵). Such a categorization is eminently stigmatizing, however the actual existence of such a category is proven in the statements of the respondents. The majority of Polish respondents²⁶ considered homosexuality a deviation from the norm. In this group more than half believed that it should be tolerated, and fourth quarter did not. The scope of the lack of acceptance of homosexuality is large—two-thirds of Poles believe that homosexual behaviors should not be shown, the same group is against gay marriage, and nearly 90% against adoption by homosexual people. At the same time, there is a big scope for the acceptance of social solutions such as the possibility of inheritance, decision about burial or joint insurance. From a longer perspective, a certain increase in tolerance towards homosexuals is observed, although it is still limited. In comparison to other European countries, the level of tolerance to homosexuals in Poland is quite low. The ESS question “Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own lives as they wish” brings more negative answers than positive. In Europe more radical answers are given only in Estonia, Slovakia, Kosovo and the Russian Federation.²⁷

Polish tolerance increases, and most of the cited studies confirmed the regularity observed also in the ESS—factors favoring tolerance are age and education. Younger, better educated Poles seem to embody the bright side of Polish tolerance.

The tolerance of young, well-educated Poles—the research

The survey was part of the thesis prepared by the first of the authors at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Cracow. The research was conducted at two of Cracow’s universities: the University of Science and Technology (AGH) and the University of Agriculture (UR). The survey was conducted in two rounds—in 2009 and 2016. In the first round the respondents filled out questionnaires on paper,

²⁵ A. Grzymała-Kazłowska, A. Jasińska-Kania, “Tolerance in Poland”, op. cit., p. 28.

²⁶ M. Feliksiak, *Stosunek do praw gejów i lesbijek oraz związków partnerskich. Komunikat z badań CBOS*, Warszawa 2013, Available at: <http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2013/K_024_13.PDF> (access: 27.07.2016).

²⁷ L. Dimova, M. Dimov, *Is Europe tolerant to “others”? ESS answers*, op. cit.

in the second through electronic means (web portal: www.interankiety.pl). Questionnaires were filled out by the students of the first two years. In the case of AGH in the first round there was 32 participants and in the second round 40 participants. At the UR in the first round there were 30 participants, in the second 40 participants. In total, the study involved 132 people. The questionnaire consisted of 57 questions on various aspects of tolerance.

Results

In the study, participants were asked to express general opinions concerning their own tolerance, and formulate statements on the acceptance of specific manifestations of “otherness”.

The vast majority of the students asked to rate their degree of tolerance declared themselves to be tolerant. Both in 2009 and 2016, more than 50% of respondents declared that they were “rather tolerant”. The answers “yes” and “rather yes” in total were given by 78% of participants in 2009 and by 85% in 2016. The level of (self-perceived) tolerance seems to be increasing, which may be confirmed by a decrease in the number of negative indications (“rather not”) from 20% to 11%.

What is “tolerance” in the opinion of students? The most important component of tolerance seemed to be “acceptance”. About half of the respondents (52% in 2009 and 48% in 2016) used these two terms synonymously. Other components were: “respect” (29% and 28%), “consent to otherness” (11% and 15%) and “understanding otherness” (5% and 7%). It is interesting that, despite some changes in the manifestations of tolerance, its understanding did not significantly change over time.

In view of the fact that a key barrier to tolerance are stereotypes and prejudices, students were asked to assess their tendency to use stereotypes (“Do you ever judge people using stereotypes?”). The increase in the amount of answers “rather not” and “no” (from 51% to 59%) seems to indicate either the increase in the actual tendency to avoid stereotypical perception of others, or (more probably) an increase in the negative assessment of such practices. On the other hand, a relatively large number of indications “rather yes” (30% in both trials) may be evidence of students’ awareness of the



limitations of the functioning of cognitive system in the context of social relations.

Tolerance is manifested both in forbearance or the inhibition of the negative assessment of the “other”, and in the actual action in the face of the violation of the limits of tolerance. Respondents who were asked: “Have you ever stood up for a person who was discriminated against?” in most cases declared that such a situation had taken place in their lives. Answers “yes” and “rather yes” were given by 68% of respondents in 2009 and 75% in 2016. The increase over the period is associated with an almost double increase in the amount of answers “rather yes”.

The students were also asked to assess the validity of the basic premise of tolerance: equality of rights of all people. This assumption was assessed as “right” and “normal” by the majority of respondents (61% in 2009 and 60% in 2016). An interesting change was observed in the case of negative evaluations of this assumption: the number of indications “impossible” significantly decreased (from 23% to 8%) and of indications “bad” increased (from 16% to 27%) in time.

In response to an open question regarding people who are the least tolerated in their local communities, the participants indicated those areas in which mostly ethnic and personal (in)tolerance was revealed. Young people declared that in their local communities the least tolerated were sexual minorities and people of other nationalities. Over the seven years, the number of indications of sexual minorities significantly increased (from 22% to 35%) and of people of other nationalities decreased (from 37% to 23%). However, in 2016 there emerged a new response category “immigrants” (6% of answers), and also the number of indications of a different skin color/appearance has more than doubled (from 8% to 18%). It seems therefore that the level of “ethnic tolerance” has not clearly changed. There was a visible change in the sphere of religious tolerance—the level of rejection of people of other religions significantly decreased over seven years (from 22% to 10%).

Religious tolerance

Firstly, the respondents were asked to assess their own religion in comparison with other religions. 60% of respondents in both studies who were asked to answer the question, “Is your religion the best one?”

gave the answer “no”, but the belief in the supremacy of their own religion was characteristic for an impressive group of 40% of respondents.

When asked to complete the sentence “In comparison to my religion, other religions are...” the respondents answered mostly: “equal” and “other”. However, the first of these answers was the most common in 2009 (52% of respondents compared to 25% of respondents in 2016), whereas 7 years later the most common was the answer “other” (19% of respondents in 2009, 30% in 2016). The number of indications “worse” decreased significantly (from 23% to 12%), but significantly increased the number of answers, “I am an atheist” (from 4% to 19%).

The respondents were also asked to indicate the religion towards which they have negative attitude. The answers revealed an increase in negative attitudes towards Islam. In comparison with 2009 the number of indications has increased from 11% to 67%. In no other question of the questionnaire was such huge change registered. Additionally, the number of answers “none” decreased (from 48% to 22%). There were single indications of Taoism, Judaism, Buddhism or “every religion”.

The negative assessment of Islam made Jehovah’s Witnesses (which in 2009 was the least tolerated group, 24%) less rejected. Nevertheless, when the respondents were asked to assess sympathy towards this religious group, symptoms of negative attitude were clearly visible. In case of the question: “Do Jehovah’s Witnesses walking from house to house arouse aversion in you?” 75% of the respondents in both trials replied “yes” or “rather yes”. Hostility to the missionary activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses has not decreased, but it is no longer the group first thought of while declaring hostility towards other religions.

Ethnic tolerance

The respondents were asked to indicate nations which are disliked and liked the most. In 2009, the greatest aversion was declared to Germans (20%), Russians (12%) and Roma (12%). In 2016: Arabs (32% compared to 11% seven years earlier), the indications of Germans, Russians and Roma were similar to the previous measurement (15%, 13% and 14%). It seems, therefore, that to the list of historically and socially established prejudices new one was added in response to current events in Europe. The most liked nations in 2009 were: Italians (17%), Spaniards (12%) and Slovaks (10%). The same

preferences were observed 7 years later, as well as an increased level of liking Hungarians (from 6% to 16%), Czechs (from 4% to 11%) and Norwegians (from 4% to 9%). The number of answers “none” was significantly reduced (from 13% to 5%).

Specific questions were also asked to the respondents about these ethnic groups, which in Poland are most often the victims of racist acts: Jews, Roma and people of African origins.

It seems that over the seven years the prejudices towards Jews reduced. In response to the question “Would you mind if your employer was a Jew?” answers “rather not” or “no” were given in 2009 by 65% of respondents, and in 2016 by 87%. In an open question, “I believe that Jews are...” the number of responses “normal people” increased (from 52% to 64%), and the number of indications of negative feelings decreased (from 36% to 13%).

In the same period of time the prejudices towards Roma slightly decreased as well. In response to the question “Would you mind having Roma as a neighbor?” in 2009 55% and in 2016 60% respondents answered “no” or “rather not”. While answering the question: “Roma should only live in the settlements intended for them”—55% in 2009 and 63% in 2016 were against such a solution. At the same time the number of people declaring experiencing negative feelings at the sight of begging Roma decreased (from 97% to 83%). Of course, it should be emphasized that this aspect of the functioning of the Roma minority still arouses strongly negative connotations.

Poles are slowly getting used to the presence of people of other races in our homogeneous country. In response to the question, “When I see a dark-skinned person on the street...” the respondents most often wrote “I do not react”. It is worth noting that there was an increase in the number of such responses from 57% in 2009 to 76% in 2016. The desire to observe “other” (from 23% to 11%) or avoid (from 10% to 6%) decreased but so also was the reaction to smile (from 10% to 7%). The respondents recognized, however, that people of other races have a harder life in Poland than white. However, this rating improved over seven years (from 71% to 51%).

Ethnic tolerance increases, however, only in case of “our others”, those with whom we had time to get used to. Answers to the question “Should foreigners who illegally cross the border be granted asylum?” showed a certain change in radicalization of opinions about “others”.

In 2009, the answers “rather not” or “no” were given by 56%, and in 2016 by 81% of the respondents.

Tolerance towards sexual minorities

Over the seven years an increase in tolerance towards homosexuals was observed. Apparently, it can be seen in the context of consent to the presence of homosexuals in the immediate vicinity of subjects. To the question “Would you mind working in the same room with someone who is gay?” answers “rather not” and “no” were given by 60% in 2009 and 81% of respondents in 2016.

Increased acceptance for the adoption of children or for treating homosexual in the same way as heterosexual relationships, was also observed, but generally remained at an extremely low level. In response to the question: “Should same-sex couples be allowed to adopt children?” the answer “no” was given by 88% of respondents in 2009 and 79% in 2016. Doubts about giving the same rights to homosexual couples as to heterosexual marriages were raised in 2009 by 73% and in 2016 by 68% of respondents.

On the other hand, the level of indifference in the case of observing homosexual couples showing affection increased significantly. In the case of being an observer of a pair of women showing each other affection, the number of both negative and positive feelings decreased (from 39% to 13% in case of negative and from 29% to 12% in case of positive). The observer’s indifference increased (from 32% to 75%). In the case of a male couple, the number of negative feelings decreased two-fold (from 62% to 30%), and the level of positive feelings remained the same (10%). The observer’s indifference increased (from 28% to 50%).

Conclusions

The level of tolerance of Poles is increasing. It is proven by the results of CBOS surveys and also by the European research. This formerly xenophobic country is becoming a leader in the region in terms of openness to others. We are proud of being Europeans, and we realize that tolerance is one of the key values of this community. The level of self-declaration of tolerance increases, because by declaring ourselves to be tolerant we enter into the humanist community of our civilization. It was also proven in the results of the presented

study—in 2016 85% of participants declared themselves to be tolerant, which means a significant increase in comparison with 2009 (78%).

In the definition of tolerance included in the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance it is identified with “respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human.”²⁸ Young Poles identify tolerance primarily with acceptance. About half of participants in both rounds of the study gave such definition, and only some of the respondents (about 30%) recognized in it an element of respect. That tolerance is not only a gift which is granted by majority to those who belong to minority, but also the ability to see the potential of minorities for building a better community, remains underestimated. It seems to us that the profits of tolerance are gained only by those who are being tolerated, while in fact we all can benefit from “the harmony in difference.”²⁹

The tolerance of young Poles primarily means indifference. 76% of respondents in 2016 saw no reason to react in any way while seeing people of different race, 64% treated Jews as “normal people”, 81% could work with a homosexual person, 75% did not care if homosexual women showed their feelings to each other. The policy of “who cares” wins with both positive and negative attitudes. Of course it is progress in a way, because in all of the mentioned above situations the amount of tolerant answers increased in comparison with 2009, nevertheless, the next step in the development of Polish tolerance is connected with higher levels of activity. In other words, similarly to the levels of intolerance described by Pilch, the levels of tolerance can be characterized—from a distance to an active fight in the name of equality. It is worth noting, that during the World Youth Days 2016 Pope Francis, called for greater activity on the part of young people, for further-reaching tolerance. He reminded us also of the words of Saint John Paul II: “Have no fear” (“Nie lękajcie się”), showing that fear is the greatest enemy of activity.

As it was mentioned, the biggest enemy of tolerance, beside fear, is the lack of knowledge and experience. With the increased mobility of Poles, the experience of contact with others increased, we also tamed “our others”—for instance, tolerance towards homosexuals increased.

²⁸ *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance*, op. cit., Article 1.1.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

Open admitting to being homosexual by people from the world of entertainment and politics, tames these “others”, showing that they are not a threat. However, in the case of the fear of Muslims, which is reinforced by the lack of knowledge—CBOS research shows that only a small percentage of Poles have ever had direct contact with a Muslim, which reminds similar cases of anti-Semitism in a country where there are almost no Jews—dramatically enhances the potential of intolerance.

The CBOS research shows that we like those who are better than us, those that we would like to be alike. However, with the process of the maturing of our democracy, this affirmation is decreasing, which proves that our complexes are probably decreasing as well. Paradoxically, these complexes came to the fore in the opinions of young Poles who claimed that their religion is better (40% of respondents in both rounds of the study), that the assumption of equal rights for all is wrong or impossible (39% in 2009 and 35% in 2016), and Roma should be isolated from society (45% in 2009 and 37% in 2016). Of course, such statements are formulated by a minority of young Poles, however, this is a group which represents more than one-third of the population.

We are starting to adopt such a perception of otherness which recognizes the harmony that comes from differences, which is reinforced by the knowledge, experience, courage and a lack of complexes. The process of this development can be captured in studies such as the one presented in this article.

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ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE:

Barbara Szczęch
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Cracow
barbara.szczzech@gmail.com

Dr Irmina Rostek
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Cracow
irmina.rostek@ignatianum.edu.pl