

The Anguish of Repatriation: Immigration to Poland and Integration of Polish Descendants from Kazakhstan

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Repatriation remains an unsolved problem of Polish migration policy. To date, it has taken place on a small scale, mostly outside of the state's repatriation system. Thousands of people with a promised repatriation visa are still waiting to be repatriated. The majority of the repatriates come from Kazakhstan, home to the largest population of descendants of Poles in the Asian part of the former USSR. They come to Poland not only for sentimental reasons, but also in search of better living conditions. However, repatriates—in particular older ones—experience a number of problems with adaptation in Poland, dominated by financial and housing-related issues. A further source of difficulties for repatriates, alongside their spatial dispersion, insufficient linguistic and cultural competencies, and identity problems, is finding a place on and adapting to the Polish labor market. Despite their difficult situation and special needs, the repatriates in Poland are not sufficiently supported due to the inefficiency of administration and non-governmental institutions dealing with the task of repatriates' integration. It results in the anguish of repatriation.

Keywords: *repatriation; repatriates from Kazakhstan; Polish integration policy; immigration to Poland; Polish minority in the former USSR*

Introduction

Over two decades after the beginning of the transformation of the political and economic system in Poland, repatriation remains an unresolved issue. Thousands of people of Polish origin are waiting in the former Soviet Union with the promise of a repatriation visa that will allow them to move to “the homeland.” The existing legal and administrative solutions do not allow for the expected scale of repatriation or provide appropriate support for those repatriates who are already in Poland.

This article presents an analysis of the migration and integration of repatriates moving to Poland from the territory of the former USSR in the context of Polish migration and integration policy. The situation of the repatriates will be shown against the background of the historical events that led to the presence of Poles in the Asian part of the former Soviet Union and, subsequently—as part of the political

activities of the Polish state—the possibility of their return to Poland. The factors representing barriers to their adaptation in Poland will be outlined, as well as those influencing the integration of repatriates. The acculturation strategies adopted by the various generations will also be discussed. The article concentrates on Kazakhstan, in the Asian part of the former USSR, where the largest number of Poles live and from where most repatriates come, due to the tough living conditions there and the lack of any previous possibility for return.

The immigration of ethnic Poles from Kazakhstan is worthy of attention as it highlights the consequences of Stalin-era forced migrations and the example of a wider category of privileged ethnic migration to different, mainly Central and Eastern European, countries. In recent years, repatriates have been supported, for instance, in such states as Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, and, most of all, Germany where, from 1995 to 2005, 795,000 immigrants were admitted as repatriates.¹ Because of these high numbers and the efficient integration of repatriates, Germany constitutes the main point of reference for Polish repatriates, activists supporting repatriation to Poland, and Polish researchers.²

Repatriation also represents a larger type of post-Soviet migration. In the case of Poland, repatriation as privileged ethnic migration within an institutionalized system constitutes only a small part of an intensive ongoing post-Soviet migration to Poland, including the individual immigration of people of Polish origin. However, in contrast to repatriation, the majority of migration from the former USSR to Poland has a temporary (often even short-term) character.

Although, in general, statistics from the last two decades showed limited numbers of registered, long-term immigrants officially residing in Poland, post-Soviet migrants remained a major immigrant group. Of the approximately 93,000 foreigners with a permit for a fixed period of settlement in Poland included in the Register of the Office for Aliens at the end of 2009, the most numerous were Ukrainian nationals—almost 27,000 (29 percent), followed by 13,000 Russian citizens (half of them Chechen refugees), 8,500 Belarusians, and around 8,000 Vietnamese.

Our analysis of repatriation and the integration of repatriates in Poland will begin with some terminological remarks. Repatriation means arrivals in Poland covered by a special state policy, with the objective to settle people of Polish origin who, as a result of border changes and resettlement, lived prior to 2001 in the Asian part of the Soviet Union. In accordance with the binding Law on Repatriation from 2000, “A repatriate is a person of Polish origin who arrived in the Republic of Poland on the basis of an entrance visa with the objective of repatriation and the intention of permanent settlement” (Art. 1). Importantly, on crossing the Polish border, a repatriate obtains the status of Polish citizen.

However, the concept of “repatriation” has been the source of debate and doubt. For example, Robert Wyszynski³ notes that, with this category of immigrants, there is no return to their homeland in a literal sense, because it was “the homeland that left them.” As a result of politics and changes in border emplacements, Polish repatriates

do not return to the lands of their ancestors, but arrive in their historical and ideological homeland. Repatriates to Poland are the descendants of people resettled in the East, often those who were born far from Poland, which they do not know. But proposed alternative academic terms such as “return”⁴ or the “so-called repatriation” of Poles from the former Soviet Union⁵ or even “impatriation”⁶ in reference to the current phenomenon, have not been widely accepted.

Furthermore, in the media debate on the issue, the term “repatriates,” which is not well known in Polish society, is often replaced by “Poles from Kazakhstan.” However, the mental shortcut “Poles from Kazakhstan,” which stresses the proximity and similarity of repatriates, also has negative consequences for the situation of this community in Poland. This description evokes connotations related to the stereotypical perception of Kazakhstan as a distant, Eastern, backward, and poor country. It also triggers the expectation that the people of Polish origin will be very similar to the modern inhabitants of Poland and have a fluent knowledge of Polish language and culture, something that, in the majority of cases, is not fulfilled. Therefore, despite the terminological controversies, the concept of repatriation seems to be the most appropriate in the context of its reinforcement in public discourse and academic research.

Adaptation and integration are two other concepts that need to be clarified before we present our analysis. The concept of adaptation is employed to refer to ways in which individuals deal with new sociocultural settings and the eventual outcomes that occur as a result of related changes. The analysis of adaptation among the repatriates from Kazakhstan in Poland draws on Berry’s⁷ classic fourfold typology, which includes the following acculturation strategies:

- *integration*—when immigrants both maintain their ethnic identity and establish relationships with the receiving society;
- *assimilation*—when immigrants reject their minority identity and maintain relationships with the dominant group;
- *separation*—when migrants maintain their cultural distinctiveness but not their contacts with the receiving society; and
- *marginalisation*—when immigrants reject both their culture of origin and contacts with the receiving society.

The concept of integration is generally used in relation to the participation of repatriates in the different life domains of Polish society. It includes not only relationships between immigrants and members of the receiving society, but also an adequate level of cultural competence and acceptance of the basic social values, norms, and institutions of the receiving society. As far as the social dimension of integration is concerned, Bosswick and Heckmann⁸ further differentiate between structural integration (in which the placement of immigrants in social structures related to their economic, professional, social, civic, and educational positions, etc. is taken into consideration) and interactional integration—that is, the formation of relationships

and networks by individuals who share a mutual orientation. The same authors also distinguish between cultural integration—the process by which an individual acquires the knowledge, cultural standards, and competencies needed to interact successfully in a society—and the identification aspect of integration, which refers to a feeling of belonging to the dominant society. It is also assumed that a state policy and the social attitudes prevailing in the receiving society influence the process of immigrant integration, and therefore special integration policies need to be developed and implemented.

Background, Estimates, and Description of the Population of Polish Origin in Kazakhstan

Before beginning our analysis of immigration to Poland and the integration of Polish descendants from Kazakhstan, some historical context for this immigration must be presented. The “blurred” boundaries of Poles in Kazakhstan and the political aspects of statistics on ethnicity make it extremely difficult to estimate the numbers of Polish descendants in Kazakhstan. However, it is worth quoting the estimates to get an impression of the scale of the phenomenon. According to census data, in 1989 Kazakhstan was home to 60,000 Polish nationals and, in 1999, to 47,297.⁹ Polish diaspora organizations and researchers place their estimates considerably higher. For example, according to data from the website of *Wspólnota Polska* [“Polish Community”], the most important Polish nongovernmental organization dealing with the Polish diaspora, there were 100,000 Poles in Kazakhstan in 2007. Marek Gawęcki,¹⁰ a researcher of Kazakh Poles and former ambassador of the Republic of Poland in Kazakhstan, also claimed that the official statistical data from the USSR need to be corrected by multiplying them by at least 2.0 to 2.5, giving an estimated number of Poles in Kazakhstan of between 120,000 and 150,000.

The inflow of Poles to the Asian part of the former Soviet Union began in the nineteenth century, when Poles started to be exiled following Russian partition and when Polish economic migrants, as well as explorers and scientists, also began to arrive in the East. They were joined after the First World War by Polish prisoners of war from the Austrian and German armies. But the majority of people of Polish origin who ended up in Kazakhstan were forcibly displaced persons from the 1920s to 1940s, due to the plans for Sovietization and collectivization.¹¹ In the 1930s, in particular, mass resettlement of the Polish population from the Ukrainian and Byelorussian SSRs (Soviet Socialist Republics) to Siberia and Kazakhstan took place. Deportations were mostly from the border areas of Ukraine (Kamyanyet, Zhytomyr, and Vinnytsia), to which Poland renounced its claims on the basis of the Riga Treaty of 1921. They therefore encompassed an ethnically indigenous population with a strong local identity, derived mostly from the lesser nobility and peasants, whose sense of distinctness was largely based on their Catholicism and a sense of

connection to the Second Polish Republic. The Soviet government's plans concerning the Russification of the population and the collectivization of arable farms led to the scrapping of the Polish administrative units established earlier and increased the repression of the population of Polish origin. As a result, it is estimated that, in the second half of the 1930s, a minimum of 250,000 people were resettled to Kazakhstan, of whom over 100,000 did not survive their first winter.¹²

The next great waves of deportation occurred in 1940 and 1941, when around 320,000 people of Polish origin were resettled from the Polish lands annexed in 1939 by the Soviet Union to the Kazakh SSR and the northern regions of the Soviet Union. From the Polish territories occupied by the Soviet armies at the beginning of the war, 102,000 Polish citizens were resettled, many of them women and children.¹³ It was possible to evacuate some of these people as a result of the establishment of General Anders's army, and then the Polish army, under the auspices of the Union of Polish Patriots.

However, the Polish population resettled in Kazakhstan before the war from the Byelorussian and Ukrainian SSRs were not entitled to benefit from the amnesty granted to Polish citizens on the power of the Sikorski-Mayski Agreement of July 1941. They were also unable to make use of postwar repatriation actions directed only at persons possessing Polish citizenship before the Soviet annexation.

The majority of the Poles who remained in Kazakhstan were therefore the descendants of people forcibly resettled there in the 1930s. These people had experienced the trauma of deportation and the hardships of life in tough conditions. Those who had managed to reach Kazakhstan even after a murderous, several-week journey were left to settle in remote areas. They lived in makeshift shelters that they constructed themselves. The living conditions they faced were extremely hard owing to the climate (temperatures from -40°C in winter to $+40^{\circ}\text{C}$ in summer), the backbreaking work in *sovkhozes* and *kolkhozes* (state and so-called "cooperative farms"), for which the exiles only received a small portion of food and suffered permanent undernourishment and dreadful sanitary conditions. Displaced persons were not allowed to leave the designated territories without permission. They were under the constant control of the local authorities, which compelled them to register with the village councils.¹⁴

The constant sense of uncertainty and threat broke the exiles' psyche and left an imprint on subsequent generations as, in spite of the end of Stalinism, and even if the repressions eased, the supervision did not cease—the means of control simply changed.¹⁵ The freedom of the deportees and their descendants was still, to a certain extent, limited, a fact that was manifested by factors such as impeded access to employment and studies, especially in institutions of higher education.

The Soviet authorities also grappled with religion and the Catholic Church, aiming to eradicate any signs of the distinctiveness of the Polish ethnic group and enforce the assimilation of its members into Soviet society. Paradoxically, however, this led

to a strengthening of the Poles' faith, and religion became the major—and practically the sole—factor preserving the Polishness of exiles in Kazakhstan.¹⁶

Some exiles recollect that speaking Polish was forbidden even in private conversations. Others suggest that, although it was possible to speak Polish at home, they tended to gradually transfer usage of the Ukrainian and Russian languages from the public to the private sphere. Polish culture and language generated mistrust and harassment from the authorities. However, the exiles of the 1930s did not manifest particularly high linguistic and cultural competence in the Polish culture and language.¹⁷ In effect, the Poles in Kazakhstan have demonstrated a much lesser knowledge of their native language and culture than other national minorities in the country.¹⁸ In 1989, only 12.2 percent of people declaring Polish national affiliation spoke Polish (a considerably lower percentage than in the other largest ethnic groups in Kazakhstan).¹⁹ Apart from the complex “original” identity, this was also the effect of a policy of de-Polonisation and the natural processes of assimilation (Russification) of successive generations of people of Polish origin. Many Poles also married people from other ethnic and national groups (e.g., Germans), which led to the creation of complex ethnic identities in subsequent generations.

In spite of this “loss of Polish culture,” the Polish exiles preserved their identity, and their ethnic consciousness began to undergo a resurgence in the 1990s. As Wyszzyński²⁰ writes, Polish displaced persons in Kazakhstan retained their emotional tie to Polish culture, as this was connected with the need both to maintain the most primal identity and, more profoundly, to keep their human dignity. On many occasions the attachment to Polishness was brought about by the trauma of deportation, which affected entire families.²¹ In this case the basis of identity was self-definition and the will to participate in the community, only sometimes along with Catholicism, the practice of language, and the cultivation of Polish customs. Ewa Nowicka²² calls the identity of Poles in Kazakhstan “residual Polishness,” whereby individuals retained only the basic criterion of Polishness—the psychological feeling of being Polish, derived from their family histories.

Preservation of the culture was also hampered by the dispersion of Poles in northern Kazakhstan and near Almaty. In the north they lived mostly in the Kokshetau, Karagandy, Akmola (Tselinograd), and Kostanay districts. According to the 1970 census, 64 percent of Poles lived in the countryside although, by 1989, this figure was down to 55 percent.²³ Gawęcki²⁴ even claimed that at least 90 percent of Poles in Kazakhstan had worked in *kolkhozes* or *sovkhoses*. Relatively few descendants of the Poles living in Kazakhstan had received a higher education (working as teachers, doctors, engineers), and those who had achieved a high social and professional status had become more assimilated or Russified.²⁵ This led to the lack of an intellectual elite from which influential leaders involved in issues concerning the descendants of Polish exiles in both Kazakhstan and Poland could be recruited.²⁶

After Kazakhstan gained independence, the Polish minority—along with other minority groups living there—began to be affected by the enforced policy of

“Kazakhisation.” As at the threshold of independence, a large proportion of the inhabitants of Kazakhstan did not speak Kazakh at all, since Kazakhstan was the land of exiles, where intensive Russification took place. For example, under Stalin, tens of thousands of Germans, Chechens, Crimean Tatars, Koreans, Kalmyks, Ingush, Fins, Turks, Kurds, and others were deported to Kazakhstan.²⁷ Only after independence did Kazakhs begin to constitute a small majority in the country, as a result of the immigration of an ethnic Kazakh population from other CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries, China and Mongolia. According to Zayonchkovskaya,²⁸ in the period 1991–1997 Kazakhstan received 164,000 repatriates of Kazakh origin, among them 93,000 from CIS countries and 62,500 from Mongolia. The ethnic composition of Kazakhstan has been also influenced by the emigration of other ethnic groups with whom Poles traditionally maintained close contacts—for example, Germans.²⁹ “Kazakhization” also meant that people of ethnicities other than Kazakh were discriminated against, and that the Kazakh language became the binding state language. This was compounded by a growth in nationalism and attacks on “whites” in an attempt to force them to leave Kazakhstan. Although the economic level of the lives of urban and rural Poles in Kazakhstan did not diverge from the national average after the fall of the USSR, the Polish population clearly lost out.³⁰ For example, “Kazakhization” meant that their work situation suffered, since the preference of the authorities for the Kazakh population and language denied Poles the right to occupy certain positions, and sometimes even to perform certain professions. The tough living conditions in a country with an undemocratic political system and restricted civil liberties meant that many people of Polish origin wanted to leave the increasingly Asian and Muslim country and move, if not to Poland, then to Germany, or at least to the European part of Russia.

The nationalization policy was not without influence on the operation of Polish diaspora organizations, which, in any case, worked in an anachronous, dispersed and limited manner.³¹ In Kazakhstan there are fourteen district Polish community organizations, concentrated around “*Związek Polaków w Kazachstanie*” (the Union of Poles in Kazakhstan), which has a total of around 3,650 members. However, this organization is mainly engaged in education and in documenting the life of the Polish diaspora. The political role of leaders of the Polish diaspora in Kazakhstan is too small for them to be able to effectively represent the interests of people of Polish origin in the country. Furthermore, the Polish community activists are hard for younger generations to replace. The three most important nongovernmental Polish organizations supporting Poles abroad also concentrate on nurturing Polish tradition and culture among Poles in Kazakhstan—these are the aforementioned “*Wspólnota Polska*” and the foundations “*Semper Polonia*” and “*Pomoc Polakom na Wschodzie*” (Aid to Poles in the East).

A particularly important role was played, both in the resurgence and formation of the Polish community in the East and in the daily lives of the Polish communities in Kazakhstan, by the Catholic Church, although it did not become actively involved in

the process of repatriation. The latest studies also show that the Catholic Church in Kazakhstan is abandoning ethnically oriented (pro-Polish) activity in favor of the construction of a religious and social parish community at a global level (referring to the universal teaching of the Church) and a local one (adjusted to local multiculturalism).³²

The Legal and Institutional Framework of Repatriation to Poland

Contemporary repatriation was preceded by the postwar repatriations, which lasted until the 1960s and were based on bilateral agreements, subject to particular regulations, and enforced by specialized institutions such as the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Repatriation.³³ The Law on Polish Citizenship from 1951 stated that people who had arrived in communist Poland as repatriates were Polish citizens. The Law on Citizenship of 1962 not only expressly stated that people arriving in Poland as repatriates acquire Polish citizenship by power of law but said, furthermore, that a repatriate can also be “a foreigner of Polish ethnicity or origin who arrived in Poland with the intention of settling permanently, obtaining permission for this from the appropriate Polish authority” (Art. 12, Sec. 2). However, this law did not specify the mode of repatriation and the work of the state bodies connected to this, and as a result, the acquisition of citizenship by means of repatriation in fact remained a “dead” article up until 1989.³⁴

Post-1989, there was increased interest in repatriation among political elites in Poland as well as Poles in the East and the immigrants of Polish origin arriving in Poland. At that time, too, the positive attitudes of most of Polish society to the settlement of Kazakhs of Polish ancestry dominated.³⁵ For example, a 1994 study by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) showed that 39 percent of Poles definitely and 43 percent somewhat supported the idea that “Every person of Polish origin, if he/she wants to, should receive Polish citizenship and the right to settle in Poland.”³⁶ This result was confirmed by research in 1994–1996 by the Centre of Migration Research at the Institute of Social Studies (University of Warsaw).³⁷

In effect under the pressure of the “spontaneous” repatriation in the mid-1990s, work began on the regulation of this issue, particularly as, at the time, society showed a relatively high interest in and support for repatriation. As Sławomir Łodziński notes, this was when the fundamental premises of the repatriation system in Poland were adopted, “that the nature of the repatriation realized would be individual (repatriation will be open to a family which will have essential living conditions assured by the commune (*gmina*), gradual (determined above all by the capacity of the commune budgets) and lasting (it will be a permanent element of the state policy towards the Polish diaspora).”³⁸ It was also at this point that work began on the preparation of specific legal solutions concerning repatriation, to appear in the first law on

foreigners, and which were being prepared at the time. Soon afterwards (in 1997), the parliament passed this first law on foreigners, which introduced a special repatriation visa (Art. 10) designated for foreigners of Polish ethnicity or Polish origin who were intending to settle permanently in Poland.

A major step in the repatriation system in Poland was the Law on Repatriation of 2000, which continues to be binding today. The law defines a repatriate as a person of Polish origin who arrived in the Republic of Poland with a national repatriation visa and the intention to settle permanently (Art. 1, Sec. 2). A person of Polish origin is perceived as someone who declares Polish nationality and demonstrates a connection with Polishness—in particular through cultivation of Polish language, traditions, and customs—and who has at least one parent or grandparent or both great-grandparents with (or had in the past) Polish nationality or citizenship. A person arriving in Poland with a repatriation visa acquires Polish citizenship through the power of the law at the moment of crossing the border of the Republic of Poland. The repatriation visa is also granted to minors under the parental supervision of a repatriate, while the spouse of an applicant who is not himself or herself of Polish origin but who intends to settle in Poland together with the applicant, also receives permission to settle. The geographical scope of repatriation was restricted to the territory of the Asian parts of the former USSR. Receipt of a repatriation visa was conditional on the repatriate having the guarantee of a home and source of revenue for a minimum of twelve months. Such guarantees could be given by the local commune or a relative of the repatriate. People without these guarantees (but fulfilling the other criteria) received a promise of a repatriation visa and were registered on the RODAK (lit. compatriot) database, which contains both the names of candidates for repatriation and declarations from local government districts on their readiness to receive repatriates.

The Law on Repatriation of 2000 also made repatriate status obtainable both for people of Polish origin from the former USSR who had been living in the Republic of Poland before the law came into operation (Art. 41) and for students with Polish roots who, before the new law came into effect, were residents of the Asian part of the former USSR and who reside in Poland (Art. 16).

The next law allowing people of Polish origin in the territory of the former USSR or those who are stateless in these countries to come to Poland is the *Karta Polaka* (officially called the Card of the Pole) from 2007. This card can be awarded to a person who either declares Polish national affiliation, demonstrates a connection with Polishness through at least a rudimentary familiarity with the Polish language and a knowledge and cultivation of traditions and customs, who has parents/grandparents/great-grandparents of Polish nationality or citizenship, or who can demonstrate his or her active involvement in the promotion of the Polish language and culture. Among its benefits are a long-term residence visa, the right to take up employment and economic activity in Poland, and access to the free education and healthcare system.

Foreigners of Polish origin can also apply for permission to settle in Poland on the basis of Art. 52, Sec. 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland. Holders of the

Karta Polaka can also benefit from Art. 52, which gives them a wide range of rights similar to those of Polish citizens, with the exception of voting rights. This path is sometimes called “hidden” repatriation.³⁹

In 2010, a widely announced civic law bill was submitted to enable the faster and easier return to Poland of people of Polish origin deported and exiled by the authorities of the USSR; the bill earned a negative response from the Council of Ministers due its high costs. More limited proposals for changes in the repatriation procedure are contained in the document adopted by the government in 2012 entitled *Polityka Migracyjna Polski* (Poland’s migration policy),⁴⁰ among whose postulates are changes aimed at accelerating the process of repatriation and increasing its scale (for example, by creating stronger incentives for communes to take in repatriates).

The Inflow and Characteristics of Repatriates in Poland

From a historical point of view, the largest postwar wave of repatriation occurred immediately after the Second World War on the strength of repatriation agreements with the Ukrainian, Byelorussian, and Lithuanian SSRs (in 1944) and the government of the USSR (in 1945).⁴¹ These agreements permitted the repatriation of some ethnic Poles and other citizens of Poland who had possessed Polish citizenship before WWII and were in the USSR as a result of the war. According to various estimates, from 1944 to 1950 between 1.5 and 2 million people returned from the USSR to Poland, most of whom came from the Ukrainian SSR. Since only half of the people entitled to return did so, the thaw in relations in 1957 brought about a further repatriation agreement with the Soviet Union, which led to the return of over 250,000 Poles, arriving by 1962, again mostly from Poland’s neighboring republics.⁴²

The present third wave of repatriation began with the transformation of the political system in 1989, limited in scale by its institutional and legal framework. The first stage of repatriation, lasting to the mid-1990s, can be termed “spontaneous repatriation,” as it was mainly based on informal individual or social initiatives.⁴³ The second period, from around 1996 to 2000, was the laying of the foundations of an institutional repatriation system in Poland. In its first phase, from September 1996 to the end of December 1997, 334 repatriate families were invited to settle in Poland—around 1,290 people in total. Between 1997 and 2010, only 6,223 people overall arrived in Poland as a result of repatriation. In the same years, 297 people were recognized as repatriates on the basis of Art. 109 of the Law on Foreigners of 25 June 1997; based on Articles 16 and 41 of the Law on Repatriation of 2000, the regional authorities recognized a further 734 people as repatriates.⁴⁴ In total, then, in the period 1997 to 2010, some 7,079 people went to live in Poland thanks to repatriation. Nevertheless, statistics show a clearly declining trend in repatriation immigration since 2001.

Repatriation via the RODAK system can be deemed a failure. Since the introduction of the RODAK register in 2001, the number of invitations from communes has not exceeded 30 invitations annually nationwide. A combined total of just 190 offers from communes and 40 offers from authorities running care homes have been made since the regulations guaranteeing subsidies for communes from the state budget came into effect.⁴⁵ In 2010, just twenty invitations were recorded in RODAK. A comparison of the number of repatriates settled thanks to this system and the number of people who repatriated of their own accord shows that repatriation to Poland has a largely individual character. The people who went to Poland on the basis of anonymous invitations from the RODAK database (that is, arriving on the basis of the individual invitations of a commune) constitute only a minority of the repatriates in Poland. In 2005–2009, for example, just 360 repatriates who arrived in Poland did so within the framework of the RODAK system, out of a total of 1,411 arrivals during this period. According to the RODAK, 1,690 families—over 2,800 people (data from August 2013)—are still waiting to settle in Poland, most of them from Kazakhstan (55 percent), Uzbekistan (10 percent), and Russia (8 percent), as well as a few families from Georgia and Kirgizstan.⁴⁶

The hitherto low scale of repatriation has mostly been the result of the inefficiency of a system that dumps on communes the responsibility for implementing the law. To date, local administrative districts have not had sufficient motivation and support in realizing this task. Communes have been discouraged from taking part in repatriation by administrative problems, the lack of sufficient financial incentives, delays in transferring funds, difficulties in the local labor market, and potential problems with the integration of immigrants.⁴⁷

Since 2002, the number of permissions to settle granted on the basis of Art. 52, Sec. 5 of the 1997 Constitution of the Republic of Poland has risen dramatically. Since 2004, this type of permission has increasingly begun to dominate over the number of repatriation visas, and in 2010, the difference was more than eightfold. Such permissions are granted the most often to people of Polish origin from Kazakhstan and Russia, followed by Belarus and Ukraine.

Above all, though, the *Karta Polaka* fulfils the function of a useful migration resource for the inhabitants of those countries neighboring Poland (not only Poles). According to data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, up till the end of 2011 the number of people receiving the *Karta Polaka* was 79,684, among whom most (88 percent) were inhabitants of Ukraine and Belarus. In the Asian parts of the former Soviet Union, only 1,693 people received the *Karta Polaka*—2 percent of all recipients. The reasons for this are both an insufficient knowledge of the Polish language, a lack of information about the *Karta Polaka*, and difficulties gaining access to consular posts (the descendants of Poles are dispersed and live in vast and somewhat inaccessible spaces, whereas the submission of an application requires a personal meeting with a consul).⁴⁸

Sociodemographic Characteristics and the Distribution of Repatriates from Kazakhstan in Poland

The majority of repatriates came to Poland from Kazakhstan (after 2005 they constituted over 60 percent of all repatriates). The size of the next largest groups of repatriates—from Ukraine and Belarus—decreased steadily until the final applications submitted before the law of 2000 came into effect. Repatriation was therefore restricted to the inhabitants of the Asian parts of the former USSR. It was only after this law was passed that small groups of immigrants from Uzbekistan and Georgia began to benefit from the repatriation program. Since this time, the number of Polish immigrants from the Asian part of Russia has remained at a similar level (around 20–30 people annually).

A large proportion of the repatriates in Poland are of working age. According to 2001 data from the Ministry of the Interior and Administration, out of the 3,120 repatriates or those awaiting repatriation, some 67 percent were of working age (of whom 41 percent were people aged under 40). The percentage both of the elderly and of children and young people was lower than for Polish society as a whole—12 and 21 percent, respectively. In all age groups (and especially among older people), women outnumbered men, in total representing 55 percent of all repatriates.

Based on analysis of Ministry of the Interior and Administration data, Paweł Hut⁴⁹ indicated that the repatriates arriving in Poland between 1996 and 2001 were a relatively well-educated group, in which a quarter had received higher education and a further 42 percent had at least some form of secondary education. The most numerous professional categories which can be distinguished on the basis of declarations in the applications for a repatriation visa were students and school pupils (17 percent), artists, specialists (doctors, engineers), and school head teachers (16 percent) and manual workers (15 percent). There were around 6 percent each of pensioners and unemployed people or those with no pension. Analyses of people registered on the RODAK database show that potential repatriates are characterized by their diverse education. The most well-educated are young people (partly thanks to Polish scholarships in Poland or Kazakhstan), and the least educated are the oldest (who were often unable to study as a result of limited access to education and a lack of funds). Official data also confirm generally weak Polish language skills among potential repatriates—familiarity with the language was good or very good in fewer than a quarter of cases. Most people on the RODAK database come from the areas with the largest centers and level of organization of Poles. The majority of those on the database were members of multigenerational families. However, repatriate families often differ from the typical family in Poland because of their diversified ethnic origins and identities.

Considerable selectivity among the repatriates coming to Poland, accompanied by a drain of the elites in the Polish diaspora in the East, can be discerned.⁵⁰ This is partly the result of the policy of the Polish state to support the diaspora and create

opportunities for students from the former USSR to settle in Poland. Repatriates arriving in Poland are also, above all, those who are able to afford and to organize resettlement and help for themselves. Therefore, repatriation, while constituting social and demographic potential for Poland, at the same time weakens the Polish communities in the East.

The available data indicate a spatial dispersion of repatriates in Poland. Between 1998 and 2010 the greatest number of repatriates settled in the Mazowieckie (988 repatriates), Dolnośląskie (774), and Małopolskie (550) voivodeships (high-level administrative division). This results both from the number of invitations from communes in the various regions and the preferences of the people organizing their repatriation themselves (e.g. repatriate students tend to settle in the places where they studied). However, the majority of invitations in the current repatriation system come from small places struggling with demographic problems.⁵¹ For example, 53 percent of the repatriates from Kazakhstan who took part in Hut's⁵² postal survey in 2000 were living in small towns or villages in Poland. The spatial dispersion of repatriates and the tendency for them to settle in peripheral locations have an unfavorable effect on their adaptation in the country.

The Adaptation Difficulties of Repatriates from Kazakhstan in Poland

Bronisław Kozłowski⁵³ distinguished the following main types of adaptation problem for repatriates in Poland: sociocultural, administrative, living standards, and professional. A similar typology was proposed by Hut⁵⁴ on the basis of studies of repatriates between 1992 and 2000, with a division of problems into formal/legal, professional, material/living, sociocultural and climate-related. These results continue to accurately reveal the main areas of difficulty for repatriates.

Hut⁵⁵ stressed the role of administrative and legal barriers in the adaptation of repatriates in Poland. These difficulties comprise a lack of information and knowledge of regulations by repatriates, and the incompetence of officials, lengthened bureaucratic procedures, and problems with implementing repatriation legislation. A further problem is the lack of adequate support from state offices and institutions for people with insufficient command of Polish. The question of pensions is extremely difficult in repatriate families. Owing to the lack of social-insurance agreements between Poland and most of the countries of the former USSR, repatriates draw a pension from the Polish social insurance institution (ZUS), at the lowest possible rate, irrespective of their entitlements in the previous country of residence. Even worse is the situation for the non-Polish spouses of repatriates, since they are not entitled to any pension benefits in Poland.

Another serious problem is the entry and maintenance of repatriates on the labor market in Poland, especially in the context of both working conditions in

Poland—high unemployment, limited workers' rights, and low earnings in many professions in comparison to the cost of living—and of the frequently low professional capital of repatriates.⁵⁶ The work placements offered by communes often become invalid or do not live up to promises or the repatriates' qualifications. Another reason for this mismatch is the considerable time gap between the issuing of an invitation by the commune and the actual arrivals of repatriates, a gap which might be as long as one to two years. Many repatriates, especially the elderly, often experience considerable financial problems and extremely poor housing conditions (small flats, damaged infrastructure, location in the vicinity of other socially excluded people).

According to Kozłowski,⁵⁷ cultural and social problems are also very important—that is, repatriates' low linguistic and cultural competence, and the receiving society's lack of awareness and knowledge of repatriates and the history of the Polish diaspora in the East. It should be pointed out that many repatriates have problems not only in making themselves understood in Poland due to their foreign accent, but also with their lack of general competence in the Polish language and culture. Kość-Ryżko⁵⁸ claims that, although the first generation (i.e., the people deported to Kazakhstan) usually spoke or at least understood Polish, the second generation, that is, the children of exiles, were often not taught the language by their parents out of concern to prevent potential discrimination and even penalties for the presentation of a “non-Soviet” ethnic identity. For the second and third generations of repatriates, Russian was the main language used during childhood—a language that built an image of the world and the relations there. The young third generation of repatriates had the opportunity to learn Polish either during a holiday camp in Poland organized by *Wspólnota Polska* or during the year preceding the beginning of a degree program in Poland. However, in the case of the second generation, the lack of acceptance which they experienced in Poland brought them further problems and distress, prompting those who did not cope successfully with life in Poland to return to Kazakhstan.

Among repatriates encountering discrimination and stereotyping—being called “Russkies,” for example—the validity of their national identity is undermined.⁵⁹ The deficit in the social support needed, particularly, in small local communities is an important factor making returnees' adaptation in Poland more difficult. Since the 1990s there has been less interest in the state's activities geared towards inviting and supporting repatriates, who are sometimes not perceived by local communities to be legitimate Poles, their Eastern accents and lack of cultural competence and the fact that they receive aid from the Polish taxpayer's pocket, are all pointed out as reasons for the lack of interest.⁶⁰ The disparity between, on the one hand, the expectation that repatriates are people who are linguistically and culturally like other Poles and, on the other, their “otherness” in terms of culture, mentality, and identity, engenders a certain dissonance in the receiving society and can lead to a lack of acceptance of repatriates or a questioning of their Polishness.

The lack of broad social acceptance in Poland means that repatriates cannot easily integrate into local communities, which deepens their sense of rejection, loneliness, resentment, and yearning for the past (including life in Kazakhstan). They do not feel understood but, at the same time, do not take active steps to adapt, integrate and search for employment. A further complex issue is that of the repatriates' identity, as they have an awareness of their Polish roots but are somehow lacking a real identity shaped under the influence of contact with and immersion in Polish culture.⁶¹ In addition, the separation of repatriate families and the dispersion of repatriates around the country means that, even if they do have relatives or acquaintances in Poland, contact with them is rendered more difficult, and they may not be able to provide strong support for repatriates. It should be added that repatriates also complain about difficulties in bringing the members of their families from Kazakhstan to Poland. In addition, repatriates' expectation that their religious similarity and belonging to the Roman Catholic Church would serve as a bridge in their contacts with Poles is usually hampered by the huge size of parishes in Poland and the subsequent anonymity of the individual members of parish communities, as well as the mistrust of many Poles of everything associated with Russia, including repatriates' Russian accent. This is particularly consequential considering the insufficient state and nongovernmental institutional support system for repatriates.

Apart from this lack of adequate social and institutional support, the preferred adaptation strategy expected of repatriates by the receiving society has been one of assimilation—that is, the expectation that repatriates would assume the role of people returning to their homeland.⁶² The vast majority of repatriates from Kazakhstan, however, were born and raised in a “foreign country.” In fact, they are *immigrating* to Poland, not returning. Assimilation would therefore require a renouncing of their past and their connections to Russianness, both important elements of their own identity. It therefore seems that this pressure to assimilate in no way helps repatriates to find their place or feel “at home” in Poland.

In spite of Polish society's pro-assimilation attitude, repatriates' most commonly chosen strategy was integration, which allowed them to preserve their previous culture and language, maintain an emotional connection to the culture of the country of origin and, at the same time, acquire knowledge about how to function effectively in Poland. Such a strategy appeared all the more often the longer a given person had been in Poland. However, integration often led to questioning, by the Polish host society, of the authenticity of the repatriate's Polishness and the legitimacy of their being deemed to be a Pole. Such difficulties were particularly clear when people from Kazakhstan used Russian on a daily basis and spoke sentimentally of the beauty of the places where they had lived in Kazakhstan and of their lives before coming to Poland. Clashes between repatriates' emotions and the attitudes of Polish society led some repatriates to adopt a strategy of separation. As a result, they reinforced their identification as emigrants from Kazakhstan or people with a Russian identity (in terms of culture and Russian language).⁶³ In the case of young people—mostly

students—who, in spite of their best efforts, do not feel accepted in Poland but who, at the same time, wish to stop being recognized as coming from Kazakhstan, there is also a visible process of entrance into the group of international students, thus creating a third culture that is neither that of the country of origin nor that of the country of settlement.⁶⁴

Final Remarks

The repatriation of people of Polish origin from Kazakhstan continues to be an unsolved problem by Polish immigration policy. The existing legal and administrative solutions are not sufficient for the anticipated scale of repatriation nor do they provide appropriate support for repatriates in Poland. The current repatriation system is ineffective because of the insufficient activity of the communes on which it was supposed to be based. As a result, the scale of repatriation is very limited, and the majority of repatriates arrive in Poland individually, outside of the official repatriation system. However, only some are able to afford such an undertaking. Meanwhile, thousands of people are awaiting the opportunity of moving to Poland, among them 2,800 who have already received the promise of a repatriation visa.

The repatriation system in Poland therefore needs to change. Not only is repatriation a historical moral obligation for the Polish state, but it also represents Poland's best interests in view of the country's efforts to curb depopulation of the country due to demographic processes. Therefore repatriation to Poland should be streamlined and extended. It is particularly important to enable both people who already have the promise of a repatriation visa, and the oldest generation of Polish exiles, to come to Poland as quickly as possible. The last study by CBOS in 2012⁶⁵ showed that the direction which this policy development is taking is generally supported by the majority of Poles, who perceive that the Polish government is not sufficiently active in this field. Over 78 percent of respondents felt that Poland should allow Polish compatriots from the former Soviet Union to work and settle in Poland.

In addition to repatriation, greater support is also needed for the Polish diaspora in Kazakhstan in the field of education (through educational programs and scholarships), economic and professional activity, defense of the rights of the Polish minority, and development of Polish associations in the East. The introduction of pre-integration activities preparing repatriates for life in Poland must also be developed.

Polish integration policy also requires major changes—to date, it could best be described as incorporation “via abandonment.”⁶⁶ The limited institutional support from the state and NGOs, together with the poorly developed immigrant communities (with rare exceptions), make difficult the adjustment of immigrants to life in Poland, especially for those coming from non-European countries. The integration

system has been very selective and small-scale—repatriates, together with people with refugee (or temporary protection) status, are the only two chosen groups to benefit from short-term and fragmentary integration programs. Such negligence of integration policy seems to result from the failure by policy-makers to recognize emerging ethno-cultural diversity in Polish society and from the conviction that Poland is a transit country with a very limited scale of settlement immigration and the “unproblematic” immigration of migrants of European origin (mainly from European post-Soviet countries and Western Europe). The new integration initiatives funded by the European Union and the latest legal developments are not directed at repatriates.

Whereas, in spite of their beneficial legal situation (possession of Polish citizenship) and relative cultural similarity (in reality often not translating into practical cultural and linguistic competence), repatriates from Kazakhstan are a group requiring special support, particularly in terms of their sociocultural and professional adaptation in Poland. Repatriates should be assured that they will be given at least the basic living conditions, including appropriate integration programs and social insurance for them and their families. The creation of conditions to facilitate repatriates’ acceptance by the rest of society, the training of people working with repatriates and mobilization of the repatriate community in Poland are also recommended.

The various age groups of repatriates display different needs and necessitate different support. Children and young people starting at Polish schools need psychological support to help them to cope with culture shock, adaptation problems, and even, sometimes, a lack of understanding and acceptance by their peer group. For young people beginning their academic education in Poland, an important consideration is career counseling to help with the appropriate selection of a degree program with realistic job prospects. Effective support—especially job-related and sociocultural—is a particular need of the middle generation of repatriates, who experience both problems on the labor market and difficulties in their social and cultural adaptation in Poland. This is because they are often culturally different from Poland’s contemporary inhabitants, have varying competence in the Polish language, are characterized by a complex ethnic identity and live in ethnically diverse families. Problems of a formal/legal nature—often concerning financial and housing-related matters, although they concern the whole group of repatriates—affect the oldest people in particular (e.g., the problem of repatriate pensions). A barely discernible yet important problem, especially for the oldest generation, is their sociocultural recognition and appreciation in Poland.

On the whole, for thousands of Polish descendants from Kazakhstan still waiting for repatriation to Poland and for those who had been repatriated but had failed to gain acceptance and sufficient support, and thus to integrate into Polish society, repatriation is, instead, associated with disappointment, regret, mortification, and anguish. Polish repatriates compare their situation both to that of ethnic Germans—who have been repatriated and supported in Germany in great numbers—and to

that of the Polish spouses of ethnic Germans who have been repatriated with their families to Germany. Ethnic Poles from Kazakhstan, who find living in this Asian and Muslim country too difficult but who cannot repatriate to Poland, acquire Russian citizenship and escape to Russia. For example, a substantial number of ethnic Poles from Kazakhstan who felt that they could no longer wait to be repatriated, moved to the Kaliningrad *oblast* (an administrative division which is an enclave of Russia surrounded by Poland, Lithuania, and the Baltic Sea) on the borders with Poland and lived there in tough conditions, as did the former residents of the two typical Polish villages of *Jasna Polana* and *Zielony Gaj* in Kazakhstan, who settled down in a former *kolkhoz* in Ozyorsk.⁶⁷ This contributes to the even greater bitterness of Polish repatriates and people of Polish origin who wait for repatriation.

Funding

Analyses included in the article were financed from the funds for science in Poland in years 2009–2012 as a part of the research grant N N116 209236. The Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw has supported the preparation of this text. The authors want to thank the members of the Research Committee on Human Migrations and Polish Diaspora at the Polish Academy of Science.

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