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## Myths and Facts about the Polish-Arabic Conflict of Cultures : Empirical Analysis of Cultural Differences

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Ziad Abou Saleh, Marek Bodziany

## **Myths and Facts about The Polish-Arabic Conflict of Cultures. Empirical Analysis of Cultural Differences**

### **Introduction**

The modern world trapped in ongoing social processes is full of paradoxes and contradictions of different scale and type. On the one hand, integration processes, migrations of populations and the relatively peaceful diffusion of cultures appear on „the scene of transformations”. On the other hand, there can be noticed re-emerging and still growing tendencies to secession and separatism, nations’ aspirations for emphasising their political and cultural autonomy, rebuilding the national identity „on the rubble” of tradition and history, many times forgotten due to the consumption and modernity and – what is very important – as a result of the existence of the enlarging cultural melting pot. If the origin of the turbulent changes – particularly in the context of the uncontrolled people’s movement all over the world – is explored, social processes occurring in the macro and mega scales can be seen. Undoubtedly, they include mass migrations that have had a direct influence, both in the past and at present, on building the multicultural reality as well as the culturally heterogeneous social system that has changed the social order to such a degree that culturally homogenous nations are becoming quite rare.

Under the introduction to the issues of the conflict of cultures, a question arises on the genesis of such dynamic changes in the modern world and the reasons for antagonisms between nations. This provokes reflections on the causes of those changes, especially apparent in the ethnic structure of modern states. If one takes a look at the source of those transitions from the perspective of history, the issue of „the artificial social order” developed through the integration of repeatedly conflicting nations in a single state appears at the forefront. While the Cold War and the influence of the superpowers were some kind of a guarantee for the relative political stability of entire regions, only after its end all artificially created

beings bursted at „the seams of ethnicity”<sup>1</sup> and caused chaos on an unprecedented scale. In this way, Yugoslavia and the USSR collapsed, ethnic tensions in Africa and other parts of the world intensified, which affected the migration and the creation of a new model of society – a multicultural society caught up in former and current social phenomena, natural ones or imposed by propaganda and politics. This situation shows that the euphoria of peace promoted by Francis Fukuyama in „The End of History” is distant from therejected in 1990s and, in a sense, confirmed today the theory of „the clash of civilizations” of Samuel Huntington, in which the conflict of cultures replace wars and conflicts understood in the classical terms and the world is divided into east and west with an imaginary line of antagonisms. The clash of civilisation taken up by Huntington gives the general context of the debate on the conflict between cultures, which involves old democracies (especially the US) against the Islamic world but not only. Therefore it can be assumed that the conflict of cultures understood in these terms has become a product of peace, the secondary effect of the disappearance of the dual division of the world from the times of the Cold War.

This is only a part of the truth, as conflicts between cultures are also dormant in „the depths of time” former historical events that revive in different parts of the world under the influence of the media and politics. Such conflicts have always existed and had their own nature – they have been the result of the anthropological differences between nations as well as differences in traditions, customs, ethnic languages and value systems. They constitute a foundation for conflicts at the micro level, mainly at the meeting point of interests of different nationalities. Together with historically rooted tensions and negative attitudes resulting from stereotypes and prejudices, those conflicts tend to spread to broader social groups and – under the influence of propaganda – even to the whole nations. That is the worst option that in favourable conditions can take the form of the ethnic conflict and even extermination.

### **The Poles *versus* the Arabs – Real or Media Conflict?**

The conflict of cultures is a phenomenon accompanying the Polish-Arab relations. In one of their article the Authors of this work used a symbolic metaphor describing these relationships by applying the distinction between „hot sand” and „cold snow” that seem to remain in a natural opposition. Although it directs our attention to the problem of the (im)possible coexistence, the facts prove that it

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<sup>1</sup> The metaphor of the disintegration of the post-Cold War world by Prof. Zdzisław Julian Winnicki.

does not have to be like that at all<sup>2</sup>. Not always vivid cultural differences lead to conflicts of cultures, especially when the two cultures have never shared common history. In the article entitled *The Clash or Complementarity of Cultures? The Research and Political Problem on The Example of Poland and The Arab Countries* the question was raised: *are in fact these two phenomena of nature so substantially different that together they cannot form a relatively consistent whole?* Referring to the idea from the perspective of the cultural diversity and the absence of any cultural analogies between the Arabs and the Poles, it can be assumed that the diffusion of both cultures and the full cultural assimilation is impossible. In theory, an attempt to hybridisation of the two cultures can lead to one of three effects, namely: over time a new culture will develop, named by F. Casmir „the third culture”<sup>3</sup>, the relations will have the nature of the apparent coexistence based on the mutual indifference devoid of antagonisms and confrontation or they will be marked by the conflict between cultures. The latter option remains unanswered, as the dynamics of social changes in the Arab countries and the risks resulting from the Arabs’ expansion on the European continent, including terrorism, are still the main source of the negative Arab stereotype in the perception of the Poles and other nationalities. What are the sources of such a profile of the Arabs in the stereotypical perception of the Poles? Its origin should be sought in effective creating in the public awareness the image of an Arab with a rifle, in an Arabic scarf and calling to „a holy war”. Such a duplication and copying the image of an Arab is the domain not only of the Poles, but most modern societies as well.

It is worth noting that the media and pop culture affect the Arab stereotype. Most strongly it is created by the cinema, where the Arabs are presented as a conglomerate of exclusively negative traits such as greed, falseness and cunningness as well as intolerance and fanaticism. For a long time the television has been building the image of an Arab – distorted and reminiscent of a caricature rather than of true nature. Consolidating the negative stereotype of an Arab is associated with dangers that are identified with this culture and generalized to all its representatives. Clothing and faces covering resemble a terrorist outfit, a beard indicates being a villain who rapes women. A distorted image of an Arab-terrorist in the perception of the Polish society was criticised by the prominent expert – Arabist, Professor Marek Dziekan – who in an interview on the identity of the Arabs living in Europe said:

<sup>2</sup> Z. Abou Saleh, M. Bodziany, *The Clash or Complementarity of Cultures? The Research And Political Problem On The Example of Poland And The Arab Countries*, London 2015 (a manuscript – in printing).

<sup>3</sup> See: F. Casmir, *Budowanie trzeciej kultury: zmiana paradygmatu*, [in:] *Komunikacja międzykulturowa. Zderzenia i spotkania*, A. Kapciak, L. Korporowicz, A. Tyszka (eds.), Warszawa 1996.

(...) I have never met anyone who even in the slightest degree would support radicalism or identify with them. Probably 99% of 1,5 billion of followers of Islam are ordinary people who are often referred to as the moderate Muslims. Even if we assume that there are thousands of radicals what does it mean towards the whole vast community?<sup>4</sup>

As a proof of the media manipulation it is worth citing a case encountered by one of the Authors – Ziad Abou Saleh. Due to his Arab origin an editor of one of newspapers asked for his view on the situation in the Arab States, that was intended to serve to write a newspaper article concerning terrorist threats in Wrocław. It should be noted that the situation occurred the day after the attack on the editorial office of „Charlie Hebdo” in Paris. She said: *I work for a newspaper and I want to write an article about terrorist threats in Wrocław. I know that the situation in the Arab countries is at the heart of your concerns. Could you have a comment on this subject?* There would be nothing unusual about that, if not for the fact that she suggested that his statement emphasised the existence of such risks. Among the questions she asked, there were the following ones: *Is there a risk of terrorist attacks in Wrocław? How should we defend ourselves against them? Should this happen where could terrorists attack in Wrocław?* Here is the extract from the Author’s response:

(...) My thoughts go out first of all to the families and friends of the victims. My compassion for them, however, is accompanied by an equally strong protest against crime. I am outraged and I feel an aversion towards motives of this act and, even more, his inspirers, organisers, performers. Notwithstanding political, religious or economic justification, such an occurrence undermines our common sense of humanity. In my life I have been looking for solutions free from violence and aggression. It is the mindset shared by all the Arabs and the Muslims I know. (...) When the media world influences functioning in the real world, monsters of emotions, half-truths and simplification wake up. Being susceptible to islamophobia, these days we can feel convinced that a terrorist threat may affect us all. And – of course – such an attack will be possible to be carried out in each country against any politician, organisation or social group. However, taking into account only technical and organisational matters is wrong. Implementing crazy ideas, terrorists are usually logical in their doings and objectives of their actions are not a random choice. (...) Do we have in Poland real grounds for concern? In my opinion launching any terrorist operations by Islamic extremists on the Polish territory is not politically, historically or culturally justified (...).

Later in the speech the Author drew attention to Poland’s cultural homogeneity and a low population rate of foreigners living in this country:

<sup>4</sup> [http://m.wyborcza.pl/wyborcza/1,132749,17958879,Obcy\\_islamu\\_nie\\_zrozumie.html](http://m.wyborcza.pl/wyborcza/1,132749,17958879,Obcy_islamu_nie_zrozumie.html) (12 V 2015).

(...) Even less likely is any threat from the Muslims living in Poland. We are not a country where immigrants from other countries, including those identified with Islam, settle massively. This religious minority in Poland is one of the least numerous. Problems associated with it are not a significant issue even from the sociological perspective, not to mention political. It would be hard to consider any attempts to indicate any real danger here as reasonable. Then we would be talking about the acts of social self-aggression. The Polish uniform national structure means that as a rule there is no phenomenon of multiculturalism observed, which with enormous power has been growing in other parts of Europe.

Referring to the content of the interview, one can assume that probably neither the Arab population nor their identity should be a source of any concern. The real problem is the media spiral of creating a false reality, which shows the image of the Arabs in „a distorting mirror”, imposes on them only negative features and brings them down to the common denominator – a terrorist. This is only a part of reality we face day by day. *Why do the media manipulate the news in such a deceitful manner creating the reality that by no means reflects the truth and give it to a mass audience?* Perfidy and mercantile interests of journalists are the two factors of the creation of negative stereotypes not only towards the Arabs, but to every nation that is media and becomes a product for sale.

The stereotype of an Arab also brings to mind certain cultural traits, such as covered women's faces, clumsy body shapes covered with long dresses, backwardness, submission to men and marginalisation of the female part of the population. A man, in turn, is associated with brutality, debauchery and aggression as well as the wealth of sheikhs or conservative terrorists<sup>5</sup>. Assigning the mentioned features to all the members of the Arab World has the same meaning as the identification of the Poles with drunkenness and thievery, the Russians with aggression and swagger and the Germans with racism<sup>6</sup>. Unfortunately, people „feed upon” stereotypes which affect all evil, from prejudice to nationalism, from intolerance to isolation and valuing into „better and worse”, from racism to national chauvinism.

The Arab stereotype in the perception of other nations is also the result of the lack of the cultural competence and unwillingness to acquire knowledge of that culture. These two factors probably shape the stereotype of other nations – including the Poles – in the perception of the Arabs. Our earlier studies conducted among the representatives of the Arab culture showed that just the cultural

<sup>5</sup> J. Shaheen, *Arab and Muslim stereotypes can be changed by the entertainment industry*, <http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/comment/arab-and-muslim-stereotypes-can-be-changed-by-the-entertainment-industry> (10 V 2015).

<sup>6</sup> A. Kotasińska, *Obecność Arabów w Europie jako element bezpieczeństwa kulturowego*, [in:] *Riadenie Bezpečnosti Zložitých Systémov 2015*, Liptovský Mikuláš 2015, p. 195.

competence (or rather the lack of it) was the most significant source of stereotypes about the Poles. However, it was nonetheless positive. Apart from this fact, it should be stressed that the most important method of minimising all negative phenomena arising at the meeting point of cultures will be mutual understanding of „each other” by acquiring „cold” knowledge (theoretical) and „hot” (empirical). Thus, the pro-cultural education is the key to the peaceful co-existence in one geographical environment. Whereas, the Poles are perceived rather positively by the Arabs as cheerful, hospitable and sociable, having no cultural reluctance and, like the Arabs, religious people. In the studies, there are many topics that describe the positive attributes of the Poles in the opinion of the Arabs that will be approximated in the following part of this article.

### **Platonic Islamophobia or Orphan Fear?**

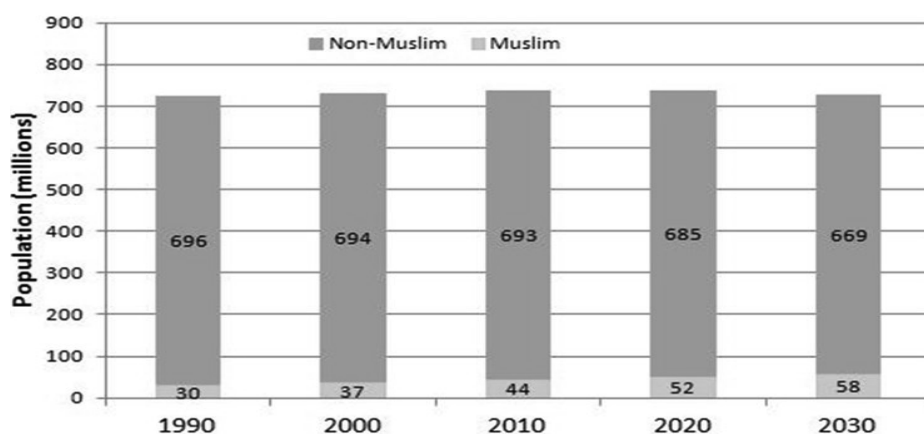
A crucial role in shaping the image of an Arab as a terrorist and an Islamic religion fanatic is played by the media, that almost every day bombard us with generalisations and repeatedly harmful slogans towards the specified culture. For a statistical inhabitant of Europe, an Arab and a Muslim constitute a unity, thus it must be emphasised that only 15-20% of the world's Muslims are the Arabs and about 70% of the Arabs are the Muslims. Religion is one thing and another is the cultural heterogeneity within the Arab States which altogether with the Palestine Liberation Organisation constitute the number of 22 countries which are associated in the organisation called the League of Arab States<sup>7</sup>. Every Arab country has its own distinct identity, culture and history. Almost each of them developed under the influence of specific factors related to the colonial past and each one is characterised by the economic, social and political specificity. Generalisations on the Arabs expose us to a serious error, probably heavier than those ones made in relation to the Europeans.

It is important to look at the population indicators of the Arabs and the Muslims in Europe from the perspective of flashbacks, present and predictions of the future. After the collapse of the bipolar world, the cultural mosaicism has become a fact, the largest part of which in Europe is formed by the Arabs and the Muslims. Since 1990, a population rate continues to increase compared with other nationalities. It is expected that in the year 2020 there will be about 52 million Arabs and Muslims and 10 years later as many as 58 million. There are also views that

<sup>7</sup> See: T. Łoś-Nowak, *Organizacje w stosunkach międzynarodowych: istota – mechanizmy działania – zasięg*, Wrocław 1999, p. 196-198. At present, the area inhabited by the Arabs in North Africa and the Middle East bears the contractual name MENA derived from the abbreviation of *Middle East North Africa*. This is an area where there are twenty-one countries (exclusive of Palestine) inhabited by about 400 million people.

their number will be considerably bigger and, although, it will even more enrich the mosaic image of Europe, paradoxically it may prove to be a boon and a response to still decreasing population of the indigenous Europeans. Figure 1 shows population indicators in the years 1990-2030, where the time period 2015-2030 is the prediction based on the estimates. From 1990 to 2010 every ten years 7 million Arabs and Muslims came to Europe. Since 2011 their annual growth has remained at the similar level, even though the increased intensity of migration on our continent has been observed, that is due to the socio-political changes in the Arab states as well as the migration process.

**Figure 1.** The population of foreigners in Europe between 1990-2030



Source: <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/> (15 V 2015).

The analysis of the population of foreigners in Poland allows the conclusion that it is the country almost completely ethnically homogeneous. This is evidenced by both approx. 3% rate of national and ethnic minorities as well as 0,1% (47 thousand) of foreigners. Poland is a kind of „a national bastion” where it is difficult to settle legally and even harder to survive. The situation is similar only in Bulgaria where 0,5% of the population are foreigners as well as in Lithuania – 1% and Slovakia – 1,3%<sup>8</sup>.

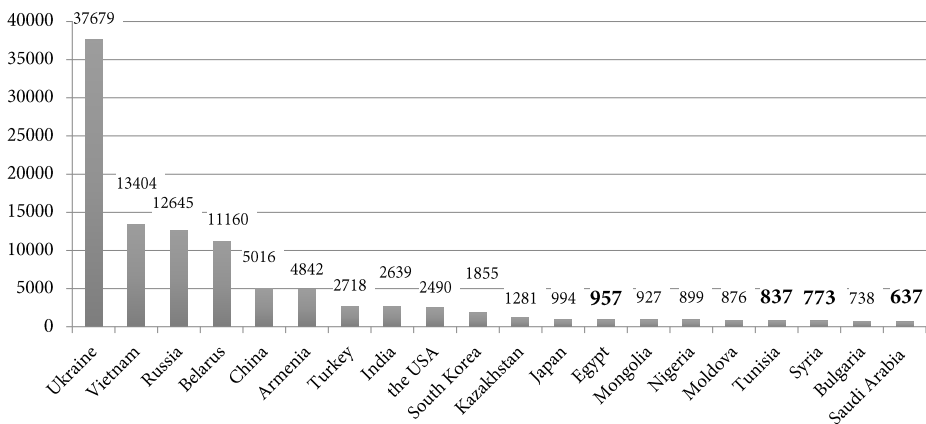
<sup>8</sup> Currently, the highest percentage of foreigners was recorded in 2011 in Luxembourg (43% of the population), Cyprus (20%) and Latvia (17%).



The analysis of the expansion scale and the Arabs and the Muslims' population size in Europe encourages to reflect upon the risks posed by the „clash” of both civilisations. While in France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and Spain the problem of migrants of Arab and Muslim origins is significant, in Poland it seems to be only the effect of the media verbiage which distorts the possibility of an objective assessment of fear of the Poles in relation to the Arabs. Taking into account the Arab population ratios in Poland, these fears may be questionable, as the scale of migration and the population size contradicts them. Is this state of affairs a positive phenomenon? It is hard to say, but the lack of the cultural melange does not give opportunities to explore own cultural identity, appreciate national values and other components of the culture. An Arab is not described as a man who wants to live in peace, who himself is a victim of terrorism, not much attention is paid to the attitude of the Arab society towards the pathology, that is Muslim terrorism.

The consequence of the analysis of the foreign population in Europe is the assessment of threats to Poland. In order to talk about that, it is necessary to analyse the number of the Arabs in Poland. Taking account of only the most numerous nationalities of the Arab origin, one can see that population indicators and their dispersal should not be a source of concern to the Poles. Figure 2 shows the quantitative indicators of foreigners residing in Poland.

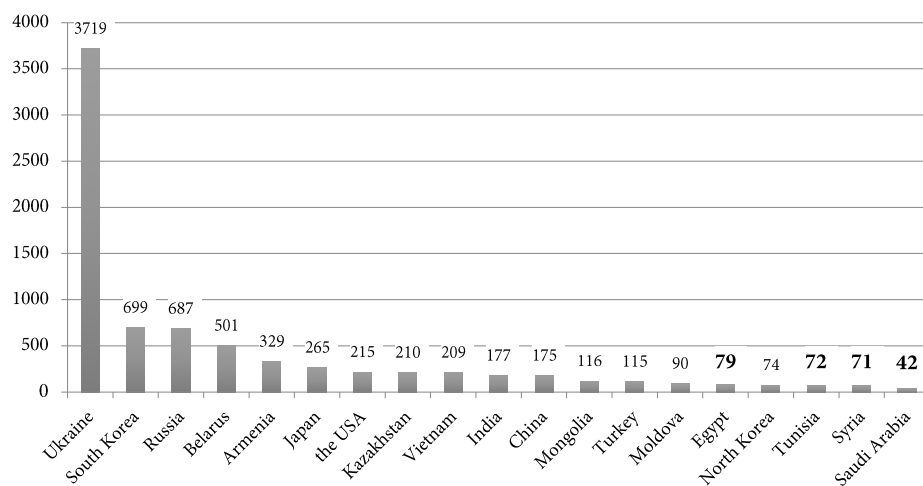
**Figure 2.** The number of people who hold valid residence permits in Poland (as at 12 IX 2013)



Source: Own study based on: [http://udsc.gov.pl/statystyki/raporty-okresowe/zestawienia-roczne/\(1 IX 2014\)](http://udsc.gov.pl/statystyki/raporty-okresowe/zestawienia-roczne/(1%20IX%202014)).

Since the beginning of the transformation to this day the most numerous nationalities living in our country have been the Egyptians – 957 people, the Tunisians – 837 people, the Syrians – 773 people and the Saudis – about 600 people. In majority they are people originating from social elites – academics, graduates of Polish universities, white-collar workers and businessmen. For comparison, the population of the Arabs living in Lower Silesia is relatively large compared to the whole population as well as other regions of Poland. It is inhabited by 79 Egyptians, 72 Tunisians, 71 Syrians, 42 citizens of Saudi Arabia and more than thirty Arabs originating from the following countries: Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, Iraq and Yemen. Figure 3 presents the population indicators of foreigners living in Lower Silesia.

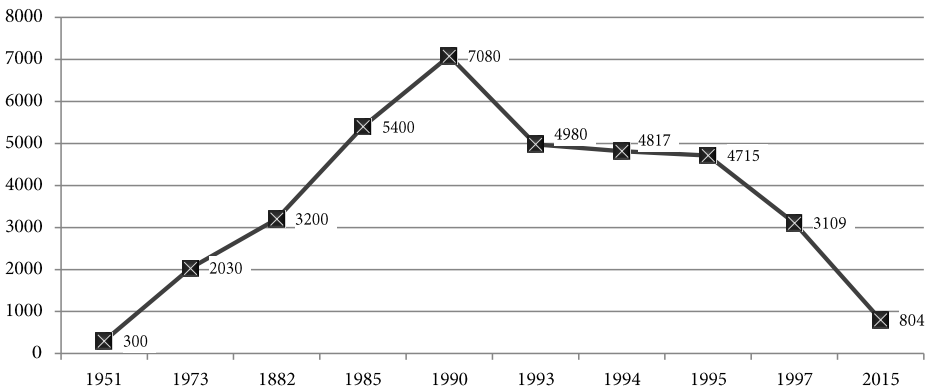
**Figure 3.** The population of foreigners in Lower Silesia in 2015



Source: own elaboration.

Not only should the Arab population size not raise any concern to the Poles, but also its gradual decrease since the beginning of the political transition period. It is a surprising phenomenon, since the 1950s the population of Arabs in Poland grew almost exponentially and the highest growth was recorded in 1990 when – after the Poland's opening to the Western world – 7080 citizens of Arab countries entered our territory. Figure 4 shows the change in the size of the Arab population in Poland in the years 1951-2015.

**Figure 4.** The change in the population of the Arabs and the Muslims in Poland in the years 1951-2015



Source: the Ministry of Education, Office of Foreign Education. Annual statistics from 1951 to 1997 and [http://londynek.net/wiadomosci/article?jdnews\\_id=28930](http://londynek.net/wiadomosci/article?jdnews_id=28930) (21 VI 2015).

*What justifies an increase in interest in Poland on the part of the Arabs in the 1990s?* The answer is simple. In the transition period (actually a result of unsealing borders) Poland was treated as a transit state – a transitional stage in the migration towards richer countries in Europe. A great deal of factors led to this situation, particularly the adverse refugee laws as well as the Poles' mentality and their attitude to foreigners, which was the result of the homogenous ethnic structure and restrictions for foreigners under the previous system. Noteworthy is the year 2014 when only 800 representatives of the Arab world arrived in Poland and in the year 2015 – 804 of them.

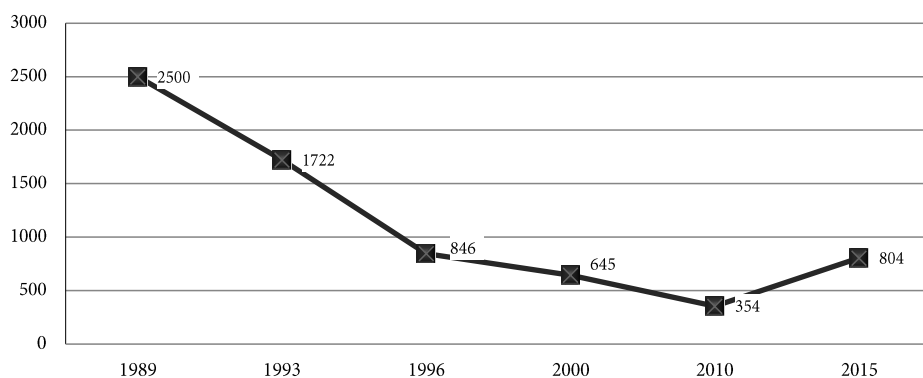
The analysis of the Arab population provokes reflections that Poland is an attractive country for foreigners, which also refers to the number of students from other countries. Although currently in Poland, there are 46 000 foreign students, it is still a low rate compared to other European countries. Figure 5 shows the change in the size of the foreign students population in Poland in the years 1989-2015.

International students account for only 2,3% of the total number of students in Poland, far from the average for OECD countries (6,9%). It is encouraging that since 2007 the number has increased by more than 20 000, with only 804 students coming from the Arab States.

The general characteristics of the Arab population in Poland are the basis for the analysis of empirical data on their existence. Before the review of selected results of own research takes place, it is worth asking a few questions by way of introduction. *Are the souls of a Pole and an Arab hostile towards each other? Is the hostility the only outcome of the media battle aimed to build dogmas and ste-*

reotypes? Finally, let us consider *who and what should be afraid of more – a Pole of Arab extremism or an Arab of consequences of media simplifications?* Today, these questions cannot be answered unambiguously, so one should treat them as rhetorical ones.

**Figure 5.** The change in the population of students from the Arab and Muslim states in Poland in the years 1989-2015



Source: the Ministry of Education, Office of Foreign Education. Annual statistics from 1951 to 1997 and [http://londynek.net/wiadomosci/article?jdnews\\_id=28930](http://londynek.net/wiadomosci/article?jdnews_id=28930) (21 VI 2015).

It is true that threats and conflicts are all the more real the less we know about the foreign culture. The lack of the cultural competence results in intolerance and avoidance of principles of cultural relativism, which in turn limit the cultural assimilation. The lack of the cultural competence of the Poles on the Arabs was largely confirmed by the CBOS study conducted on 5-11 II 2015 on the representative random sample of 1003 adult Polish citizens. A significant part of the respondents is characterised by the cool attitude to the Arabs (44%), which indicates the ethnic distance, while 23% of them express (despite the lack of personal contacts) the warm attitude, and the rest (33%) are indifferent. The research shows that the self-perception of Islam and its followers is not formed on the basis of direct contacts, but rather on the ground of information provided by the mass media, the consequence of which is the cool attitude to the Muslims and the Arabs perceived as terrorists. In addition, it has been shown that a serious conflict between the Islamic world and the West may be avoided, as reflected in answers of 43% of respondents. According to them, it is possible to find a common intercultural interface.

The confirmation of the lack of cultural competence among the Poles can be found in previous studies conducted on research samples ranging from 1200 to 2400 respondents of various Arab countries and the Poles. Similarly to the CSO

(the Central Statistical Office) survey, it has also shown that knowledge of the Poles about the culture and Arab countries is negligible or almost non-existent. It is no surprise that only very few respondents were able to mention at least some of the Arab countries and those who showed any knowledge had a contact with a representative of the Arab world.

Corresponding results were obtained from the research carried out on the Arabs who know almost nothing about Poland and its culture, with the exception of those who lived or live in our country. Regardless of the country of origin (Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia or Syria) the Arabs use the fragmentary knowledge based on stereotypes and information from the media. Considering the lack of the cultural competence among the Poles and the Arabs, the hypothesis that contacts of both these cultures will contain the risk of the cultural aversion and sometimes a conflict of cultures seems to be rational<sup>9</sup>.

### **The Analysis of the Coexistence of the Arabs and the Poles in Light of Own Studies**

The origins of interest in issues describing the existence of the Arabs in Poland are fairly remote and associated with work on Ziad Abou Saleh's doctoral dissertation. In 1994 he conducted research on the general sample of 945 students from various levels of study – citizens of the Arab States residing in Poland, which was a good turnout – 65%, including 436 students and 174 doctoral students. For the study, purposeful sampling was used due to the criterion of more than a two-year-long residence period in Poland. As a result, 610 respondents were accepted to the analysis. They were representatives of Algeria (26 persons), Egypt (3 persons), Iraq (8 persons), Yemen (86 persons), Jordan (31 persons), Lebanon (11 persons), Libya (52 persons), Morocco (33 persons), Palestine (82 persons), Tunisia (31 persons), Sudan (51 persons), Syria (194 persons) and the United Arab Emirates (2 persons). For the purpose of the comparative analysis after nearly 20 years, re-testing was performed on the sample of 132 respondents out of the 610 ones surveyed in 1994. They were the people who remained in Poland (72 persons) or living in Arab countries and in other ones – 60 persons. The comparative study was based on the same as in 1994 questionnaire. This aimed to make a comparative analysis of changes in the attitudes of the Arabs towards the Poles and evaluate the effectiveness of the cultural assimilation after 20 years of their stay in Poland. The very fact that some of them have stayed in Poland (72 persons) leads to the thesis that the process of cultural assimilation succeeded to some extent. The detailed socio-demographic traits of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

<sup>9</sup> A. Kotasińska, *op.cit.*, p. 195.

**Table 1.** The research sample characteristics – socio-demographic traits

	Year 1994 (m – man, f – female)	Year 2015 (m – man, f – female)	
		Group I (part of the original group of 1994)	Group II (students, manual workers and white- collar workers)
<b>The number of men in the researched group</b>	98,4% 610 (600m+10f)	98% 132 (129m+3f)	80% 65 (52m+13f)
<b>The average age (in years)</b>	27,2	46,3	25,4
<b>Respondents of single status</b>	76,7% (475 persons)	4% (5 persons)	97%(63 persons)
<b>Marriages (a wife of Polish origin)</b>	12,6% (17 persons)	25% (33 persons)	1 person
<b>The average number of children</b>	2,8 children	2,7 children	None
<b>Education</b>	35,1% (214 master's degree)	65,1% (89% – doctor's and doctor habilitatus' degree)	62% (40 higher)
<b>The residence time in Poland (in years)</b>	5,29	28,1	3,4
<b>Ownership of a flat</b>	0,8%	89,6%	2,7%
<b>Respondents from Syria</b>	31,8%	37,2%	12% (8 persons)
<b>Respondents holding Polish citizenship</b>	None	26% (34 persons)	10% (6 persons)

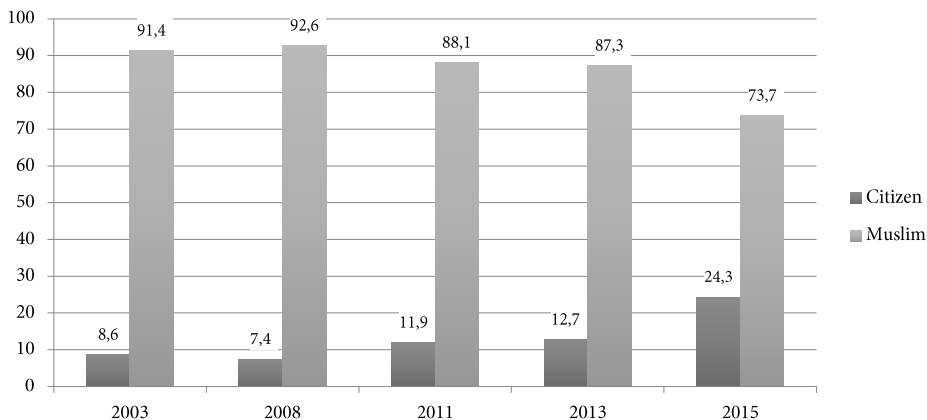
Source: own elaboration (studies of the years 1994 and 2015).

In order to supplement the findings, in 2015 there was also carried out a survey on the sample of 65 respondents representing the environment of Arab students in Poland and employees of various sectors.

Noteworthy is also the fact that the existence of the Arabs in a foreign cultural environment and the process of the cultural assimilation cause a kind of re-evaluation of the approach to religion. While previously the Arabs, above all, identified themselves with Islam, in the process of the cultural assimilation they tend to express their national identity. The cultural assimilation is one of the reasons for the change of identification, because such a change is a type of the defensive

reaction to the media propaganda, generalising the Arabs as terrorists. In fact, the Arabs living in Western countries and beyond them do not consider themselves terrorists, but on the contrary – sometimes their victims. Figure 6 shows the level of the Arabs' identification with religion and nationality.

**Figure 6.** The level of religious and national identification of the Arab respondents\*)

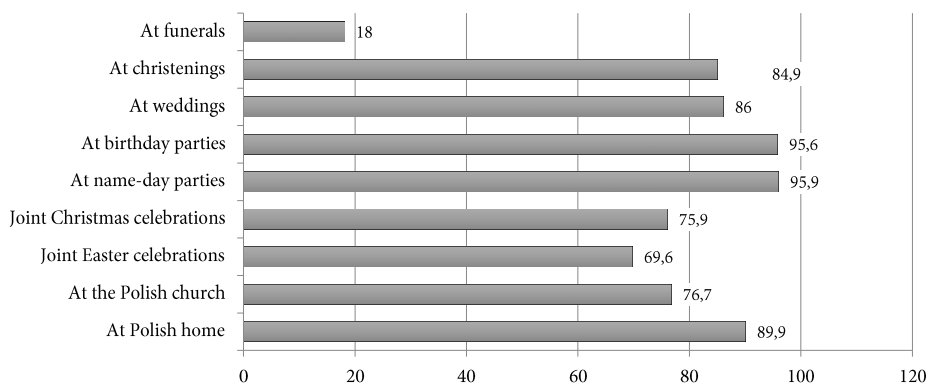


Source: own elaboration.

\*) The students of Year III of Sociology came from Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Tunisia. In 2003, they were 322 persons, in 2008 – 345 persons, in 2011 – 289 persons, in 2013 – 417 persons, in 2015 – 394 persons.

Another problem subjected to the research were forms of contacts of the Arabs with the Poles during their stay in Poland. Respondents had the opportunity to select several variants of answers. The distribution is fairly even, but those which relate to close contacts deserve further attention. This is evidenced by visits to the Poles' homes, the participation in social events as well as in church ceremonies. Figure 7 shows the forms of contacts with the Poles.

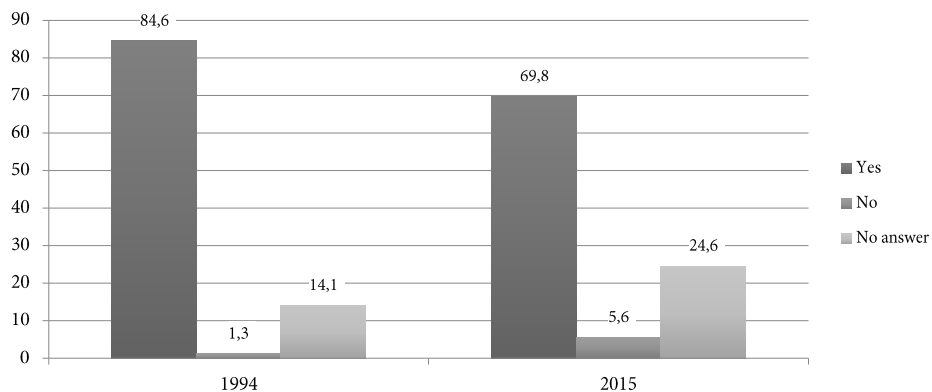
Based on the results it can be stated that the process of the cultural assimilation in the Arab world ran successfully for both parties. Mutual relations are the evidence of the impact of the acquisition of cultural competences („hot knowledge”) on blurring of cultural reluctance, which in relation to the Poles repeatedly let us know about itself. When analysing responses to subsequent questions, the Authors noticed the Arabs' willingness to continue the contacts in the future. As many as 83,8% of them would definitely choose Poland again as a country to study, 63,1% would like to stay in Poland after graduation and 91% of respondents were satisfied with the arrival in Poland for studies.

**Figure 7.** The forms of contacts of the Arabs with the Poles in Poland (%) N=610

Source: own elaboration, 1994.

Noteworthy is the high percentage (84,6%) of answers concerning willingness to represent the Polish culture and economy in their country of the year 1994. Figure 8 shows the tendency to represent the Polish culture in the home country in the years 1994 and 2015.

Compared to the year 1994 the willingness to represent the Polish culture in the home country declined in 2015 to the level of 69,8%. At the same time the index of people unwilling to do so increased from 1,3% in 1994 to 5,6% in 2015. The reason for this might be the Polish involvement in the Iraq and the Afghan conflicts and activity within NATO.

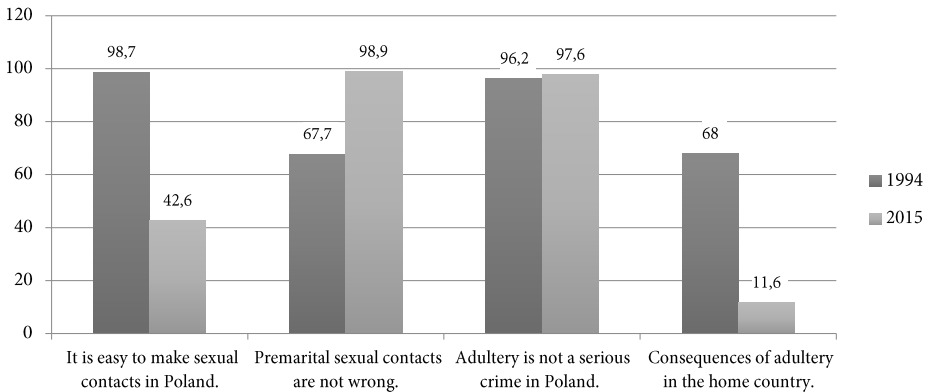
**Figure 8.** The willingness to represent the Polish culture and economy in the home country (%) N=610, N=132

Source: own elaboration, 1994 and 2015.



Another question in comparative studies aimed at assessing the degree of cultural assimilation was the attitude towards sexual contacts and marital infidelity. While in 1994, sex was a taboo subject for the Arabs, so after 20 years, some changes are being felt. Knowledge about the Poles from the beginning of the Arabs' stay was rather based on stereotypes, as evidenced by responses claiming that in Poland it is easy to have sexual relations. As many as 98,7% of respondents confirmed this stereotype in their answers. As a result of better understanding of the Poles and their culture the rate dropped to 42%. At the same time the index of liberalism towards extramarital sexual relations increased from 67,7% in 1994 to 98,9% in 2015. Figure 9 shows the results describing the change in attitudes towards sex in Poland.

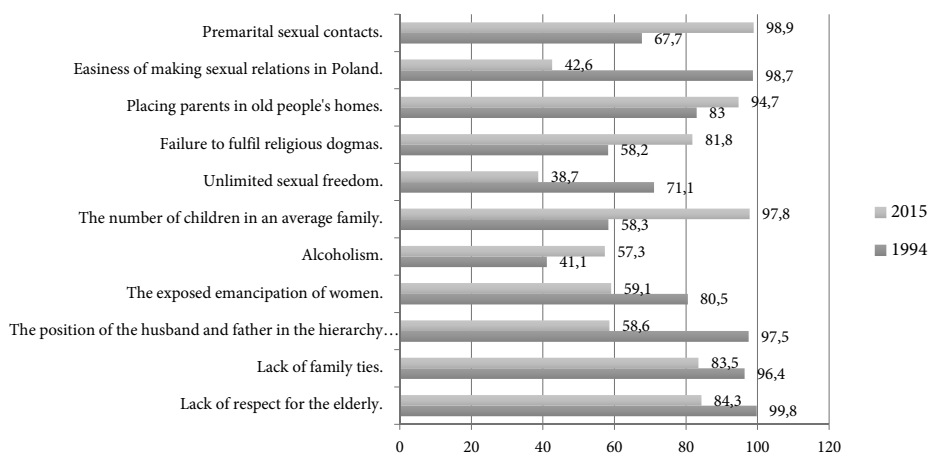
**Figure 9.** The attitudes of the Arabs towards sexual relations in Poland N=610, N=132



Source: own elaboration, 1994 and 2015.

The analysis of the results leads to the conclusion that the process of the cultural assimilation significantly contributed to the slight change in the assessment of negative characteristics of the Poles. What negatives have the Arabs seen in the Poles and to what extent have they changed? The next diagram shows that there has been a change in the attitudes of the Arabs in terms of characteristics resulting from the traditional model of Arab societies. While in 1994 the majority of respondents perceived the negative attitude towards older people, having lost autotelic values such as relationships with a family and non-compliance with the Catholic faith, as early as in 2015 negative attitudes toward these characteristics significantly changed. Figure 10 shows the comparison of the negative traits of the Poles in 1994 and 2015.

**Figure 10.** The comparison of the negative traits of the Poles in the Arabs' perception  
N=610 and N=132



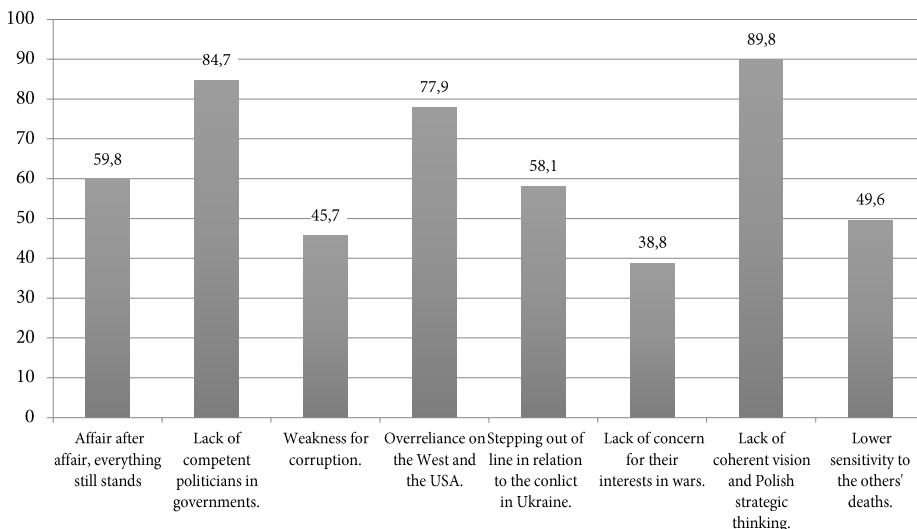
Source: own elaboration, 1994 and 2015.

Noteworthy is also that the Arabs have changed their attitudes towards the roles of men in the social hierarchy and the role of women in society has increased. Not only do the Arabs see the growth in the trend towards gender egalitarianism in Poland, but after 20 years they are beginning to accept it. This is a crucial conclusion as in traditional social systems such a situation is unacceptable and – as is well known – the position of a man is an essential element of the Arab culture. The increase in negative attitudes occurred in the case of alcohol abuse and the decline in the number of children in a family, which is the result of the disappearance of values associated with tradition and family as well as the growth in the consumption. These two features manifestly differentiate between the Poles and the Arabs. Interestingly, the indicator of people perceiving sexual freedom as negative decreased, which is related to the liberal approach to extramarital sexual contacts.

The analysis of negative traits of the Poles also found its place in the study of 65 respondents from a complementary group in Wrocław. In the opinion of the Arab respondents, who relatively recently arrived in Poland, the Poles' negative personality traits include: defeatism and complaining, the lack of mutual trust, spoofing, social anomie and dysfunction of the state: the low level of the health care, the falling birth rates, low wages, the excessively powerful position of the Church, the lack of objectivity of the media, hypocrisy and insensitivity. The Arabs also drew attention to the lack of knowledge about the cultures of other nationalities, including them. In addition, respondents expressed astonishment

to such aspects as: economic and political scandals – 59,8%, the incompetence of politicians – 84,7%, overreliance on the USA – 77,9% and the lack of solidarity in the implementation of objectives strategic for the state.

**Figure 11.** What surprises the Arabs in Poland? N=65



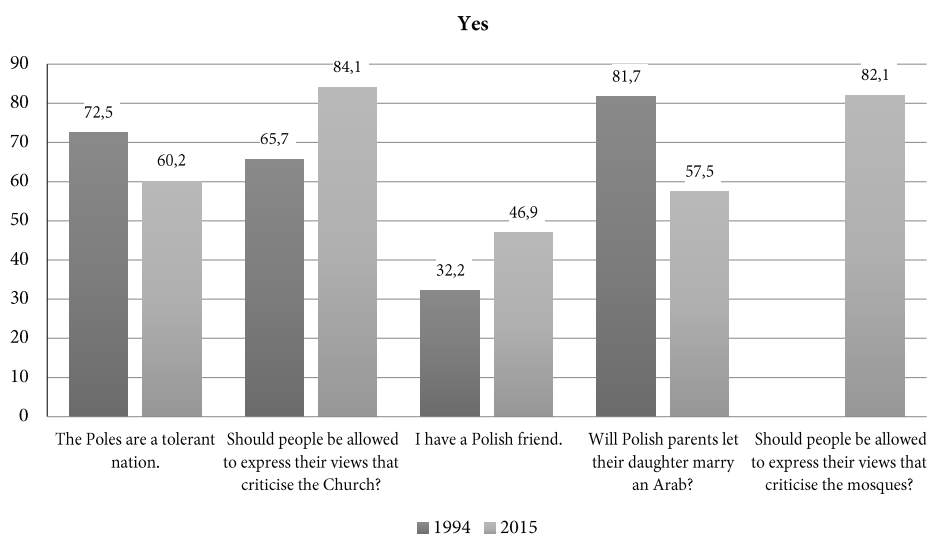
Source: own elaboration, 2015.

Although the stereotype of the Pole in the Arabs' perception in many cases has not changed even under the acquisition of the cultural competence, not all features are viewed negatively. The Arabs appreciate the Poles' commitment to their own culture and traditions and the lack of tendency to impose their own cultural characteristics on other nationalities. The positive feature of the Poles is also their intellectual potential, knowledge of foreign languages and the lack of demand in Poland for „dirty goods” (among the Arabs known as „the abomination”), that is human organs from areas covered by wars and conflicts. It is worth stressing that Poland is the only country which illegally obtained human organs from people killed, among others, in the civil war in Syria are not sent to. The Poles' cordiality and the sense of humor are the traits which considerably allow to avoid the conflict of cultures and build positive relationships.

Replies shown in Figure 12 refer to the cultural assimilation and the change of the stereotype of the Pole. The assimilation is confirmed by, for example, the increased rate of the Arabs who declare friendship with a Pole from 32,2% in 1994

to 46,9% in 2015. It is very meaningful that friendship is declared even „at a distance”, despite the fact that some of the respondents have left Poland. The results of research on the tolerance level of the Poles are surprising. The index of respondents claiming that the Poles are tolerant fell from 72,5% in 1994 to 60,2% in 2015. This means that the Arabs at the beginning of their stay, not knowing Polish people well, followed the positive stereotype, but as a result of the acquisition of the cultural competence they have slightly changed their views. This intolerance of the Poles also applies to answers about the Polish parents' acceptance of marrying the Arabs. While in 1994 the matter was referred to pretty optimistically – 81,7% claimed that parents agreed to the marriage to an Arab, so 20 years later the optimism declined to 57,5% of positive responses. A situation is different in the case of the attitudes towards the Church. In 1994, 65,7% of the Arabs accepted criticism of the church, while in 2015 this figure increased to 84,1%. For the purposes of the assessment of the return situation in 2015 the survey question concerning the acceptance of criticism of mosques arose. And here is an interesting fact: as many as 82,1% of the Arabs accept criticism of the Muslim places of worship. This is probably a result of the cultural assimilation and the increase of the level of objectivity among the Arabs. Figure 12 illustrates some of the factors affecting the cultural assimilation.

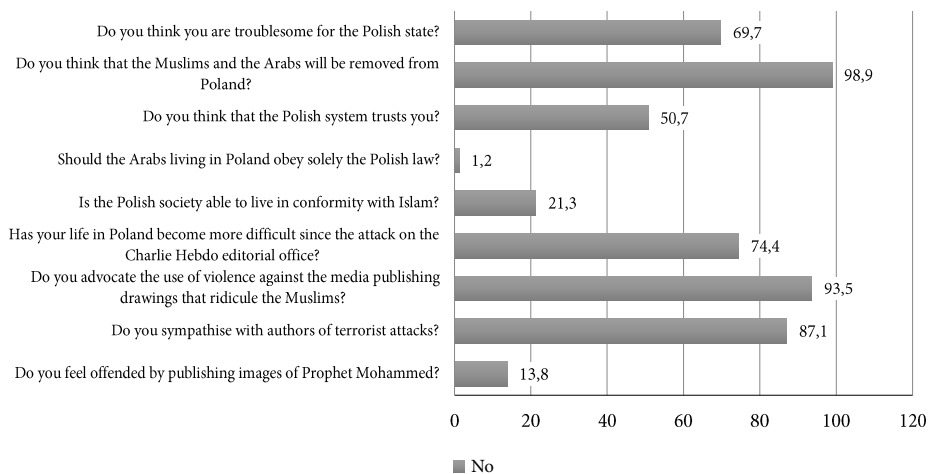
**Figure 12.** Selected elements of the cultural assimilation of the Arabs in Poland, N=610, N=132



Source: own elaboration, 1994 and 2015.

Further study was carried out only on a group of the „new” Arabs – students and people working in Poland. The general observation justifies the conclusion that the Arabs feel comfortable in this country. Neither they feel troublesome for the state – 69,7% of answers nor are afraid of deportation – 98,9% of answers. Almost half of them – 50,7% – claim that they do not enjoy trust on the part of the state or society, but only 21,3% believe that the Poles are not able to live in conformity with Islam. Both this observation and 1,2% of responses denying life in Poland under the national law confirm the cultural assimilation.

**Figure 13.** The Arabs’ self-assessment of their existence in Poland N=65



Source: own elaboration, 2015.

Interestingly, their situation has not changed even after the terrorist attacks. As many as 74,4% of respondents do not think that these incidents aggravated their life situation in Poland. They do not feel any considerable change in attitudes on the part of the society. The majority of respondents do not identify themselves with the authors of the attacks – 87,1% and do not approve of the aggression towards the media publishing drawings that ridicule the Muslims and Islam – 93,5%. At the same time, respondents personally treat the mockery of Muhammad and only 13,8% of respondents do not feel offended for this reason.

## Conclusions

The issues presented in this article are just a small part of the social reality accompanying the coexistence of the Poles and the Arabs in Poland. The research that were conducted for almost 20 years shows that the negligible population of Arabs do not pose a threat to the Poles and there is no way to talk about the conflict between cultures on such a scale which is ubiquitous in Western European countries. If there is a conflict, it is a natural consequence of cultural differences, particularly systems of values, customs and traditions as well as anthropological differentiation. But it does not entail any indication of marginalisation, valuation or racism. There are of course cases of drastic consequences of conflicts and they probably cannot be avoided, but they do not take on the universal nature. Perhaps the greater population of the Arabs in Poland would create conflicts of another, heavier nature and filling the landscape with mosques would constitute a problem. However, today only a few thousand Arabs live in Poland, most of whom are the social elites who tend to the cultural assimilation. They neither identify themselves with terrorist groups nor approve of violence and terror, this is why the conflict of cultures is rather symbolic and incidental. The fear of the Arabs is solely due to the lack of knowledge about their culture, the lack of contact with them as well as duplication of stereotypes disseminated by the media.

It is worth considering *why do the Arabs feel so good in Poland, despite unfavourable legal conditions for migrants and refugees, despite the relative intolerance and national chauvinism of the Poles?* In the Arabs' opinion, the willingness to remain in Poland results from the following issues: there are no ethnic ghettos and refugee camps, if any exist, are of good quality, there is no aggression on the part of the Poles and they themselves are likeable and open, it is easy to become a member of society, be absorbed by the society. In numerous studies there also recurred responses suggesting that the Arabs to such an extent have assimilated with the Poles and got attached to Poland that they show a bivalent attitude towards nationality, that means that they identify partially with Poland and partially with their home states.

Avoiding the conflict at the meeting point of Polish and Arab cultures is possible only when the process of the cultural assimilation is encouraged by the acquisition of mutual cultural competences. Only the full and comprehensive cognition of the two cultures can lead to bilateral understanding, can make the tolerance be not a mere theory, and treating each other with respect will become socially universal. The real key to the coexistence of both these cultures in a symbiotic relationship is reaping the positives of their achievements, bringing what is good to their lives instead of seeking evil where it does not exist and generalizing negatives on the overall population as well as the incitement to hatred to ordinary people, repeatedly sentenced to exile from their native countries by poverty, wars,

corruption and the lack of opportunities for a decent life. The Poles should be aware of this, because in the recent past they experienced the effects of migration, living away from families and humiliation in foreign countries.

It appears from the studies performed that the conflict of cultures in relations between the Poles and the Arabs, despite the obvious cultural disparities, does not exist, it is the creation of the media and consolidating the stereotype of an Arab-terrorist. There is a chance for the agreement between the two cultures through mutual education – „learning each other” – and exploring the unknown.

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