



No. 91 / 2012
26'09'12

Institute for Western Affairs
Poznań

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Plan for the cooperation with the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad in 2013. Elaboration

Introduction

In September 2012, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented for consultation the outline of the plan for the cooperation with the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad in 2013. The Ministry tried to formulate the Polish diaspora policy for 2012 in a similar way, but because it was presented too late, it was not possible to have a serious discussion concerning its stipulations and take into consideration the major reservations. What makes the cooperation plan unique is the fact that it outlines the most important rules and areas of the actions to be undertaken in order to implement the Polish diaspora policy and subject them to public discussion. This is even more important because the framework for a new Polish diaspora policy is beginning to form right now and - as it may seem – it will be very different from the actions undertaken so far. The cooperation plan is not only a document created *ad acta*. It is supposed to serve as a guideline for the government administration implementing the individual actions within the Polish diaspora policy, but also for the institutions and organizations operating in Poland and abroad. It will serve as a basis for the allocation of funds for the “Cooperation with the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad” contest managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The document prepared by the Ministry will be composed of 6 parts:

1. The stipulations of the plan for the cooperation with the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad in 2013;
2. The implementation rules for the cooperation with the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad;
3. The areas of cooperation with the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad;
4. The division of funds within the dedicated reserve;
5. Methods of implementation;
6. Evaluation, information and administrative actions.

The version of the document presented for consultation contained only points 1-3, so it is only possible to talk about certain stipulations, not precise actions planned for 2013.

The stipulations, rules and areas of cooperation with the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad

While presenting the stipulations of the Cooperation Plan, its authors emphasize that its aim is to help implement the policy of the Polish state. This statement is very important, as it points to the direction of the new Polish diaspora policy. This direction can also be characterized by the statement that, when it comes to priorities, it moves from the area of values to the area of interests. The basic stipulation therefore includes the actions towards the Poles living abroad aimed at supporting the Polish reason of state. Secondly, it is stipulated that these actions will actively include these Poles themselves. It means, in some sense, the empowerment of the Polish diaspora - not only does it become the object of the Polish diaspora policy, but also - to some degree - its subject. At the same time, the authors of the plan emphasize that the cooperation with Poland cannot mean "a contest with the ethnic minority group integration policy". The purpose of this statement is to avoid suspicion that the activity of Poles and their organizations abroad supported by the diaspora policy implementation bodies is actually fifth column activity - which is especially important in those countries, in which the issue of ethnic minorities is a serious political problem.

The stipulations of the Cooperation Plan clearly point to the fact that the subject responsible both for establishing the goals the Polish diaspora policy and the coordination of the actions undertaken to implement it by the Polish administrative bodies and those "outside the public sector" is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This fact should be considered positively because, until recently, the Polish diaspora policy clearly lacked a common denominator.



The actions undertaken seemed uncoordinated despite the attempts to consolidate them. At the same time, the stipulations very strongly emphasize the willingness - if not necessity - to cooperate in the implementation of the Polish diaspora policy with other, generally defined subjects. The subjects from "outside the public sector" have to, according to the authors of the Cooperation Plan, be treated as autonomous. What is more, the Cooperation Plan also stipulates that - and this is especially important from the point of view of the division of funds devoted to the "Cooperation with the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad" contest - cooperation with larger subjects is preferred since they could act as mediators with smaller organizations.

The Cooperation Plan points to five thematic areas which are to be implemented. The first is the education of the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad, including the education of diaspora youth in Poland. This is undoubtedly one of the most important areas of action, rightly defined as a priority. The bond of the young generations of Poles living abroad with the Polish language and culture will be one of the fundamental links between them and their homeland in the future. It is therefore important to intensify the actions aimed at giving them access to the Polish schools and language - both as primary and secondary language.

The second area of cooperation is to encourage the promotion of Poland and the Polish identity in all areas of life in the countries in which Poles live. As expected, this area seems to be gaining importance in the plans of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The use of the Polish diaspora's potential to "promote Poland and improve its positive image in Europe and the world" seems to be justified, both from the point of view of the interests of Poland and stances of the Polish diaspora itself, the representatives of which are already engaged in activities within this area. Supporting them in these efforts and enabling the professionalization of these actions is an important task. Moreover, an important role in these actions will be played - in contrast to the previous situation - by the Polish diaspora elite, often related to different organizations, but also non-associated, which earlier was not engaged in the activities to promote Poland and the Polish identity. The authors of the Cooperation Plan point to a group which in many cases "gained high social standing", "credibility" or "authority in the local circle". There is also the idea to engage in the cooperation the people interested in Poland and the Polish identity, but not being Polish themselves.

The third area of cooperation is the support for Polish circles, especially when it comes to the issues of Polish minorities, the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad. It is supposed to be based on advocacy, both in relation to minority rights and - what is more important in the case of post-accession migrants searching for work - labor laws. The implementation of this area will include not only reactive actions, but also the promotion of



proper stances among the Poles living abroad. It is mainly about prodemocratic stances, civic engagement and active participation in social, cultural, economic and political life in the country of residence.

The engagement of the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad in the economic cooperation of their countries of residence with Poland is another area included in the Cooperation Plan. In this area it assigns a special role to the Ministry of Economy. Moreover, the actions included are described - in comparison to the actions outlined in the previous areas - in the greatest detail. For example: "the organization of annual meetings of the Polish Business Forum by the Department of Trade Promotion and Investment, which will be attended by representatives of the Ministry, in order to evaluate the activities of the Polish business environments in selected EU countries." Other examples of such actions are the organization of "Polish Business Leader" contests or creation of local Polish Professionals Clubs. What is more, attempts will be made to reach Poles and people of Polish origin working for large corporations. The aim of such actions is to engage them in the promotion of Polish business. Also in this case the Cooperation Plan mentions the support for the establishment of such organizations as the "Polish Diaspora Business Club" or "Polish Entrepreneur Club".

The last of the cooperation areas is the support for the Poles returning to their homeland. The necessity to implement this area is a result of the Polish demographic situation and the additional danger of emigration. The facilitation of returns may be one of the few tools available to the administration battling the detrimental effects of excessive emigration. It may be one of the most complex and difficult areas of action - it requires the cooperation of several ministries. Moreover, it stipulates multidirectional actions aimed at, on the one hand, making the bonds of the migrants with Poland stronger (also by teaching their children the Polish language), on the other, supporting those returning to Poland with trainings and other benefits for the kinds of migrants starting education in Polish schools. Additionally, the return migration process dynamics monitoring system is supposed to be improved.

The last parts of the cooperation plan made available for assessment are the geographical areas of support. There are 14 areas distinguished, inhabited by a large Polish diaspora and differing when it comes to the specifics of their situation and its characteristics resulting from the historically conditioned migration processes. These areas are:

1. Belarus
2. Lithuania
3. Germany and Austria



4. USA, Canada
5. Great Britain, Ireland
6. Ukraine
7. Russia, Kazakhstan, Moldavia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kirgistan
8. Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden
9. Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, Belgium, Luxemburg, Switzerland, Malta
10. Brazil and Argentina
11. Czech Republic, Romania, Latvia, Estonia
12. Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo, Slovenia, Macedonia, Cyprus
13. Australia, South Africa, New Zealand
14. Remaining countries of: Latin America, Africa, Asia (including Turkey and Israel), Oceania.

Summary and evaluation

The plan for the cooperation with the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad in 2013 is a document, which has no strategic meaning - it is concerned with the actions to be undertaken in 2013 only - but it outlines the framework for a new philosophy in the Poland's policy towards the Polish diaspora to be implemented in the coming years. It defines the rules and areas (both substantial and geographic) of the cooperation with the Poles living abroad, but also indirectly the actors responsible for this cooperation. It is undoubtedly positive that in this context the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is of primary importance, as it takes the responsibility not only for the designation of the direction of the Polish diaspora policy, but also its coordination. It is implemented by several ministries, among others: Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. Moreover, because the financial means from the Senate Office and Ministry of Foreign Affairs devoted to the cooperation with the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad were reallocated at the beginning of 2012, it became the main administrator of these means and, at the same time, the grant giver in the "Cooperation with the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad" contests.



The main advantage of the Cooperation Plan is the fact that such a document was created and submitted for consultation. It is a proof that finally the policy related to the Polish diaspora is leaving the area of general and high-flown aims and heading towards a fairly precise plan of action based on a set of rules and stipulations. Apart from that, it also outlines the areas of activity and the geographical areas of support. It seems that it is a step forward towards a change in the way of thinking about the diaspora policy. The analysis of the rules, stipulations and support areas shows that the primary aim of this policy is the realization of the Polish interests and reason of state. To a large degree, this way of thinking is new - previously the dominant approach was based on values (mainly solidarity with compatriots) and the resulting willingness to help the Polish diaspora. The new approach emphasizes the interest of the Polish state and the cooperation with the Poles abroad in order to realize them. Even though such a change may be painful for some, it seems that this approach better fits the changing reality and may therefore prove more effective.

One of the keywords of the plan is cooperation. The bonds of cooperation are not only supposed to connect Poland and the Poles living abroad, but also the actors implementing the diaspora policy - the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, other ministries and - what is really important - other subjects, including extra-governmental organizations. This stipulation is also undoubtedly positive. It is not possible to implement solutions so complex and comprehensive - both substantially and geographically - only by means of government bodies. Cooperation with other institutions, often possessing deeper knowledge or experience in the implementation of similar tasks, may have a positive influence on the realization of the plan.

The areas of cooperation are outlined properly. Even though, at the first glance, it may seem that their scope is at times too narrow, but their description and especially the details of individual areas of cooperation seem to encompass all possible directions and forms of cooperation. The fact that the issue of regional, local and transborder cooperation is rarely mentioned can be considered a disadvantage.

It is also worth emphasizing that the cooperation plan stipulates support for the research of migration processes (including return migration) and the position and transformation of the Polish diaspora. This is especially important taking into consideration the current problems with the funding of research used in social studies.

The main disadvantage of the plan is that it is still in a vacuum. The major stipulations of the Polish diaspora policy have not yet been announced, which may cause one to think that the Cooperation Plan is just a temporary document, a part of a larger plan. The lack of the Polish diaspora policy stipulations may also make long-term actions more difficult.



Also the scope of the actions outlined by the Plan may raise certain doubts, as well as the question of who exactly is responsible for their implementation. In the section containing the descriptions of cooperation areas, in several places there are references to specific actors, for example the Ministry of National Education or Ministry of Economy. In many cases, however, such references are missing. The scope of actions undertaken by the Polish diplomacy is not specified. It is known that some actions included in the Plan will be realized by grant recipients from the “Cooperation with the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad” contest, but it is not always possible to say what part of all the tasks they constitute. This created the danger of not implementing certain points of the Plan.

Because of the many aspects it contains, the plan partially overlaps with other initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, not directly related to the Polish diaspora policy, such as public diplomacy or the support mechanism for the civic and self-government dimension of the Polish foreign policy. However, the evaluated document lacks any relation to these policies. Therefore, there exists a possibility of duplicating certain actions.

It is difficult to completely agree with the stipulations related to educating the Poles living abroad in Polish schools, especially when it comes to higher education. It is undoubtedly important to maintain their bonds with Poland and support talented young Poles in their attempts to gain higher education, but at the same time one should take into consideration certain negative consequences of the stipulation that the studying should take place in Poland. Graduating from a university in Poland may improve the opportunities of some young Poles, for example from the East, but for others it may not be so attractive. Moreover, it is easy to imagine a situation, in which a graduate of a Polish university decides to stay in Poland. It would be related to the realization of the area concerned with the help to return to the homeland, but at the same time would be contradictory to the creation of public diplomacy. It seems that it is worth to consider a greater diversification of possibilities in this aspect and support the education of talented young Poles abroad and enrich their curriculum with scholarships in Poland.

Even though the cooperation plan rightly stipulates the activation of the “new circles of non-associated Polish intelligentsia, authorities in local circles, people not speaking Polish”, not much space was devoted to the specific methods of reaching these people. In reality, the dominant Polish diaspora organizations - important as they are - have often not been able to reach wide social masses. It seems to be a good idea to use the deeply assimilated and socially respectable people, but it is by no means easy to do. Hence, it is necessary to conduct an analysis of the possibility of its implementation and specify the possible methods of action.



Even though the implementation rules of the Plan for the cooperation with the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad in 2013 do not significantly go beyond the framework outlined in the stipulations, certain points may suggest that the Polish diaspora policy becomes dominated by the issue of spending money. They talk about “spending funds in accordance with the state policy stipulations related to the cooperation with the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad and the strategic plans of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs”, “maximizing the effects of the actions financed from public means and reducing the costs of the subjects realizing these actions”, “rational, diligent, disciplined and maximally effective management of public means”, “openness and transparency of spending”, “impartiality and objectivity in the division of funds”. There is nothing wrong with these stipulations - on the contrary, they may prove that the funds are cared for - it is worth emphasizing, however, that they constitute almost a half of all the tasks presented in the Plan. This emphasis on financial matters would mean that the implementation of the Polish diaspora policy may soon be restricted - to the detriment of its implementation - to the organization of its funding system.

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The article was prepared during a research project "Poles in Germany. Social, political, economic and legal aspects" NN116 31639 founded by the National Science Centre.

