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CHANGES OF POLISH DEMOCRACY AND THEIR IMPACT ON POLISH BELARUSIANS¹

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Abstract

The Belarusian minority in Poland is the second largest national minority, almost entirely concentrated in Podlasie. Qualitative research conducted by our team in 2020 allowed diagnosis of the reasons for the “invisibility” of Belarusians. The Polish state’s policy has always influenced the mood of Belarusians who, despite being passive in creating their own political representation, are often identified as the electorate of left-wing parties. Currently, eight years after the 2015 elections won by the PiS party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, Law and Justice), Podlaskie Voivodeship is sometimes referred to as a “bastion of the right”, especially of extreme right-wing forces. The aim of the paper is to determine the impact of the current political situation on the sense of identity of the Belarusian minority by referring to the results of the National Census of 2002 and 2011, as well as the circumstances and results of the 2021 census. The analysis pays attention to factors such as historical policy, religion, and axiology, which determine the “borderland identity”. The research method used is primarily a comparative method, but we also applied the results of interviews based on scenarios, conducted in selected Podlasie municipalities with at least 50% of Polish Belarusians.

Keywords

Polish Belarusians, democracy, national minority, multi-layered identity, orthodox religion

¹ The project was carried out under the grant entitled Belarusian minority in Podlasie: Analysis of political activity; implementation period 2019-2020. Contractors: A. Kasińska-Metryka, R. Dudała, M. Cichosz, K. Mrozowicz. The result was the publication of a multi-author monograph entitled *Inni. Mniejszość białoruska na Podlasiu. Perspektywa Politologiczna*, ed. UJK, Kielce 2020. Within the framework of the above-mentioned research project carried out with the participation of the Authors in the years 2019-2020, interviews were conducted with local leaders of the Belarusian minority (village administrators, custodians of memory, creators of culture, artists, and clergy) and related to their current situation in Poland – social, political, and religious. All interviews have been archived.

Introduction

Changes within democratic systems are currently widely explored by social science researchers, but the review of achievements in this area indicates the repetition of the analysed determinants (economics, law, ideology) and the focus on two collective political actors, i.e., elites and society.

The following text is based on a different research perspective. It focuses considerations on Polish Belarusians who should be perceived as a minority group. Among the 9 national minorities in Poland, Belarusians are rarely studied in political science, nor do they exist in the social consciousness as a group defined by a clear identity (unlike Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Russians, or Germans). The 2021 census provided new material for analysis, but the circumstances of the prolonged preparation of data on nationality make some observers of political life believe that these are politicized procedures and correlated with the time before the elections.

Therefore, considering the changes in the Polish political system after 2015 and access to empirical material created after field research among Polish Belarusians, the main research question was formulated:

How did the changes in the Polish political system initiated by the victory of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość party affect the sense of national identity of Polish Belarusians?

Reaching for the data of the Central Statistical Office in the research (quantitative research) and supplementing them with conclusions from the interviews (qualitative research) eliminates the “Hamletian dilemma” and builds a broad cognitive perspective (Goczek 2010; Stemplewska-Żakowicz 2010).

The leading hypothesis was formulated in the work: The lack of a sense of security in the conditions of changing democracy in Poland causes the “blurring” of the identity of the Belarusian minority, the building of which is not supported by the ruling parties. In connection with the above thesis, it is necessary to find answers to two questions:

1. What determines the strengthening or weakening of the sense of national identity?
2. What determines the sense of security of a minority group in a democratic state?

Among the many definitional approaches to identity, the understanding of identity in accordance with the psychosocial perspective was selected for the purposes of this work. It considers identity as content and values, as well as the relations between them and the processes that shape them (Waszczyńska 2014, 64). Regarding social groups, the elements that construct identity come from social experiences that are integrated into a coherent system. It can therefore be concluded that the selected approach is the most adequate to the assumed goals and does not introduce restrictions in the scope of the considered components of identity. A proper definition of the identity framework is necessary in order not to succumb to “everythingism”, “too much”, “too little” or “does not mean anything at all” (because of its ambiguity) (Wichłacz 2013).

The innovativeness of the proposed approach is confirmed by the critical analysis of sources and in the field of updating the interdisciplinary study of national minorities. The existing scientific literature on the Belarusian minority in Poland is primarily focused on the historical perspective. Among the eminent historians and experts on the subject, such names as Eugeniusz Mironowicz (1993; 2004; 2007; 2011), Marcei Kosman (1979), Oleg Łatyszczek (2006; 2009; and with Mironowicz, 2004) and Ryszard Radzik (with Michał

Sajewicz, 2010) must be mentioned. A separate group consists of sociological studies, among others such fundamental ones as A. Kłosowska's "National Cultures at the Roots" (2012), or Z. Bukszański's book referred to in this study.

Publications that directly correspond to the subject of the Belarusian minority include A. Sadowski's "Narody wielkie i małe. Białorusini w Polsce" (1991), articles by e.i. M. Składanowski "The Cultural, National and Religious Identity of the Inhabitants of the Polish-Belarusian Borderland: Historical Experiences as a Factor in Shaping the Contemporary Podlasie Region" (2014) and works by M. Budyta-Budzyńska, such as "National Minorities – Wealth or Problem?" (2003).

The issue of the Belarusian minority in contemporary terms appears more often in scientific articles, but none of them examine the changes taking place in relation to the crisis of liberal democracy. Also, non-scientific sources, as well as ongoing discussions in the public space, reveal asymmetry in the treatment of the problems of individual nationalities. Paradoxically, most discussions concern the ethnic identity of the Silesians, who, according to the applicable law, are not an ethnic minority (they are Tatars, Roma, Lemkos, and Karaites). This example shows how much the current policy affects the status of citizens declaring a nationality other than Polish, and how different minorities have different levels of influence on the social awareness of Poles.

Changes of Polish democracy and the sense of identity of the Belarusian minority

The victory of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość in the 2015 parliamentary elections influenced several processes within the Polish political system. Democracy researchers pose the question, "To what extent the observed changes (fixed by the re-win in 2019) can be described as taking place 'within the system', and 'to what extent they are?'"

A partial answer is provided by comparative research on democracy. Democracy Index 2022 developed by The Economist's Intelligence shows changes within the 167 countries surveyed, based on such factors as "electoral process and pluralism", "functioning of government", "political participation", "political culture", and "civil liberties". It is worth recalling that on this basis the country is then put into one of four categories: "full democracy", "flawed democracy", "hybrid regime", or "authoritarian regime". Poland, with a score of 6.8, is on the edge of the "flawed democracy" range, i.e., just before hybrid democracies. According to the adopted methodology, a "flawed democracy" is characterized by the following features:

- Elections are fair and free,
- Basic liberties are honoured but may have issues,
- There are issues in the functioning of governance.

In the cited ranking, Belarus scored 2.41, i.e., it is qualified as an authoritarian state (political pluralism is non-existent or limited, the population is ruled by absolute monarchies or dictatorships, infringements and abuses of civil liberties are common, elections are not fair or free, media is state-owned or controlled directly or indirectly by the ruling regime, the judiciary system is not independent, criticism of the government is censored) (Desjardins 2022).

Comparing the results Poland have obtained since 2014, it is visible that the assessment of the quality of democracy is falling on a regular basis. In the cited year 2014, the result

was 7.47 (full democracies), but by 2019, Poland received a lower score than Hungary for the first time. What, then, contributed most to the decline in the quality of democracy and the approach to illiberal democracies? Limiting the independence of the judiciary, consolidating media ownership in Polish hands, and reducing citizens' participation in political processes are just some examples. At the same time, these instances should be considered as representative of the group of factors lowering the sense of security of minority groups. Without established rules of law, the asymmetry between minority groups and the majority threatens to absorb the former and force unification.

Institutional and legal transformations are accompanied by axiological changes, which in practice means, as described by Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann (2004), "reversing". Social attitudes and behaviours, which in the conditions of liberal democracy were not present in the public space or had a marginal character, appeared after 2015 in the political mainstream. A leading example is the growing strength of neo-national organizations and movements.

In the context of the considerations undertaken, the most interesting is the change that has taken place in relation to the so-called others or strangers. CBOS research from 2020 on the attitude of Poles to other nations shows that in relation to neighboring countries, the Czechs and Slovaks are the most liked (53 percent and 52 percent), while only 31 percent of the respondents spoke favorably of Belarusians and 25 percent chose the answer stating that they felt an aversion to this nation (Centrum Badnia Opinii Społecznej 2020). Zbigniew Bokszański, referring to the tendencies related to likes and dislikes, notices a certain regularity confirmed by research in subsequent years: low and very low marks (excluding Czechs and Slovaks) are given to the nations of the former Eastern Bloc countries, closer in terms of civilization and territory to the USSR. What is characteristic in their case is not so much the low level of sympathy declared by Poles towards them as a significant proportion (about 50 percent) of dislike. Possibly, it results from the desire to decisively manifest reserve towards the recent past and the superpower status of the USSR (Bokszański 2001, 31). Such motivation may be particularly crucial in relation to the older generation. Belarusians are still referred to as *kacaps* or *Ruskie*, which is the effect of identifying nationality with religion and including all nations of the former USSR into a common set. The mentioned factors, as well as the lack of a well-established tradition of one's own nation, are the reasons that weaken the building of the Belarusian identity.

When analysing the transformation of the Polish political system after 2015, it should be noted that the formal status of national minorities has not changed and is still regulated by the Act of 6 January 2005 on national and ethnic minorities and on regional language (Journal of Laws No. 17, item 141, as amended). Article 1 of the Act states:

The Act regulates matters related to the preservation and development of the cultural identity of national and ethnic minorities, the preservation and development of the regional language, civic and social integration of persons belonging to national and ethnic minorities, as well as the method of implementing the principle of equal treatment of persons regardless of ethnic origin and defines the tasks and competences of government administration bodies and local government units in these matters (The Minority Act, 2005).

For the practice of functioning of minority groups, Art. 2.1 is of key importance, because it indicates the characteristics and conditions that must be met by a group to be

considered a minority. A national minority, within the meaning of the Act, is a group of Polish citizens which jointly meets the following conditions:

- is less numerous than the rest of the population of the Republic of Poland,
- significantly differs from other citizens in language, culture, or tradition,
- strives to preserve its language, culture, or tradition,
- its members are aware of their own historical national community and are focused on its expression and protection,
- its ancestors have lived in the present territory of the Republic of Poland for at least 100 years,
- identifies itself with a nation organized in its own state.

The above legal definition is worth confronting with the theoretical approach to identity, in which distinguishing factors that determine being “the same” or “different” are most often indicated: language, religion, cultural patterns, and inhabited territory.

Regarding the Belarusian minority under study, it can be stated that not all the statutory prerequisites are met to the same extent. The Polonization activities indicated by the respondents during the qualitative research are in contradiction with “striving to preserve the language, culture or tradition” of Belarus. Language turned out to be an extremely important bond of identity for the respondents, but the problem of its use is complex. Rafał Dudała, analyzing this issue, stated, “Over the last century, the role of the Belarusian language in Podlasie has undergone visible transformations, inevitably announcing the process of weakening and disappearing” (Kasińska-Metryka, Dudała 2020, 159). In September 2020, the Ministry of National Education presented data on the teaching of the Belarusian language in Poland: “Teaching the Belarusian language is carried out in the province of Podlasie in 2 kindergartens, 25 primary schools and 2 general secondary schools as well as in inter-pre-school and inter-school complexes in Warsaw” (Starzyńska-Rosiecka 2020). The language teaching dimension is 3 hours per week, and these are additional classes.² In 2020, 2,730 students benefited from such classes, including 145 in kindergartens. The above data confirm the thesis formulated by the cited researcher about the shrinking of the Belarusian language and the lack of preventive measures (the problem with language textbooks). In addition, one should remember about the numerous dialectal varieties (the so-called speaking “our way”), which means that even in geographically close places, residents use different variants of the same language.

In addition to education, cultural events are very important in strengthening the sense of national identity. Regarding young Belarusians, who are most exposed to the processes of Polonization, the most important has undoubtedly been the Basowiszczka Music Festival of Young Belarus, organized since 1990 by the Belarusian Student Association. The 30th and last edition of the festival was organized in 2019. The described event, called “Belarusian Jarocin”, also played an important political role, as it was the place and time that they could present their “freedom” works, e.g., Belarusian bands opposed to Alexander

2 An interesting case of “manual control” of the education of children belonging to a national minority was the amendment to the regulation of the Ministry of Education and Science on the method of dividing the educational part of the general subsidy for local government units in 2022. Regarding the German minority, the subsidy was reduced by approximately PLN 40 million, which translates into reducing the hours of learning German from 3 to 1 per week. This decision was protested not only by minority circles, but also by the Ombudsman, prof. Marcin Wiącek, who assessed it as likely to raise concerns about the compliance of the imposed restrictions with the Constitution.

Lukashenko's regime. The Belarusian Students' Union cited "lack of sufficient financial support" as the reason for the termination of the event. Over the years, the festival has grown so much organizationally that without professional and financial support from the Polish state, the safety of its participants could not be guaranteed.

The cited example is only one of the activities that are part of the PiS government's policy of limiting financial outlays aimed at maintaining the separateness of national minorities (Chołódowski 2019). Summing up this part of the considerations, it can be said that the policy initiated by PiS's first victory based a large part of its message on a narrative that was unwelcoming to "strangers". In the narration conducted in this way, the figure of the stranger means both a refugee and a representative of any other minority (sexual, national, religious). Polish Belarusians, as a nationally and religiously different group, are thus doubly stigmatized.

Belarusian minority – self-identification in the census?

The 2011 National Census was often referred to in qualitative research, but mainly by pointing out its weaknesses by its respondents. Attention was paid to the research methodology and the fact that not all interested parties (especially the elderly) could declare their national identity. From the results obtained at that time, it can be concluded that the Belarusian nationality is the second largest national minority in Poland: 43,880 people declared their membership (in 2011), of which 38,358 live in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. In Podlasie, the largest concentrations of people of Belarusian nationality are in the south-eastern districts of the voivodeship: Hajnowski and Bielski. It is very important to point out the changes that have taken place since 2002, when the number of the Belarusian minority amounted to 47,640 people, and thus, until 2011, there was a very significant decrease. The largest decline was recorded in the Podlaskie Voivodeship (from 46,041 to 38,358), while the number of people of Belarusian nationality increased in the Mazowieckie and Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeships. In the period 2002–2011, the facts that the Hajnowski district had the largest number of Polish citizens of Belarusian nationality (in 2002, 39.1%), followed by the Bielski district (in 2002, 19.8%) were not subject to change.

Ethnic and national diversity of Podlasie was confirmed in the 2011 census. In the 9 communes of the Podlaskie Voivodeship, representatives of the Belarusian minority constituted over 20% of the commune's inhabitants, including 4, or over 50%. At the level of nomenclature, there are bilingual markings of villages in the municipality of Orla (Belarusian minority) and in the municipality of Puńsk (Lithuanian minority).³

The mentioned quantitative data are not sufficient for a full understanding of the complexity of the functioning of a national minority among majority groups (national, religious). Only supplementing quantitative research with qualitative research brings us closer to understanding the multi-layered identity, so characteristic of the borderland. It consists of elements of the identity of one's own nation, the national identity of the inhab-

3 The first commune in Podlasie that introduced bilingual boards with the name of the place was Orla. This commune is made up of 22 village councils, about 70% of the inhabitants declare Belarusian nationality and in total over 100 plaques have been erected on its territory, including the so-called direction boards (informing about the distance and direction to a given town). Earlier, i.e., from mid-2009, bilingual signs (Polish Lithuanian) existed only in the Puńsk commune, which, however, led to acts of vandalism and destruction by painting red and white over Lithuanian names (and as a result prompted the decision to dismantle the boards).

ited state, as well as elements specific only to minority groups, i.e., a sense of uprooting, suspension, and alienation. The political and social marginalization of Polish Belarusians (e.g., in promotion procedures) causes a sense of stigmatization. Elżbieta Czykwin (2000), a researcher of the sociological aspects of the functioning of the Belarusian minority in Podlasie, describes these mechanisms in her work under the meaningful title *Belarusian national minority as a stigmatized group*. The research conducted by the author in the 1990s was largely confirmed by interviews carried out by the authors of this paper over 30 years later. Young representatives of the Belarusian minority, striving to obtain education, leave their towns, stop using the Belarusian language, and often also give up religious practices. In this way, they become like Polish youths, i.e., a national conversion takes place. Polish culture, the Catholic religion, and language are obviously dominant and, in the past, associated with the figure of a “Polish man”. The agreeableness of Belarusians, the mental attitude of subordination, a kind of withdrawal, and a historically rooted fear translate into social passivity, especially of the older generation.

The category of fear is one of the keys to understanding the identity of the Belarusian minority. The non-genic fear memory described in medical science means inheritance of trauma in humans. Parents affected by traumatic experiences make their children sensitive to stress factors. In the case of Polish Belarusians, the threats most often mentioned in the interviews refer to historical events, especially the post-war activities of Romuald Rajs (“Bury”) and even earlier *bieżenstwo* (1915). Memories of crimes committed in Belarus are often not passed on to children or grandchildren, precisely because of the fear of burdening them with that knowledge, which may be dangerous from the perspective of a minority group. Fear is therefore an important determinant in self-definition.

All the above-mentioned circumstances found their expression in the declarations for the needs of the National Census. The report on national minorities was published on 28 September 2023.

In the end, however, the following results were obtained regarding the Belarusian minority, which, in our opinion, should be compared with the results of the previous census (2011) to obtain a comparative perspective.⁴

Table 1. Belarusian minority according to the order of national and ethnic identification

	First identification (<i>answer to the first question</i>)		Second identification (<i>answer to the second question</i>)	Identifications – together (<i>answers to the first or second question</i>)	
	together	the only one in this		together	including the Polish one
2011	36,399	30,195	10,388	46,787	15,562
2021	43,693	35,370	12,914	56,607	19,997

Source: Główny Urząd Statystyczny. Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2011 i 2021 [National Population and Housing Census 2011 and 2021], <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2011/>; <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2021/>

4 Nationality, i.e., national, or ethnic affiliation, should not be confused with citizenship. The census provides for the possibility of freely determining nationality, both single and composite. You can provide two national identifications, which also allows you to express your complex identity, rooted in two different national or ethnic groups. After answering the first question about nationality, the second question arises about the feeling of belonging also to another nation or ethnic community.

Table 2. Belarusian minority according to the three most populous voivodeships

	Total	Podlaskie	Masovian	Warmian-Masurian	Lower Silesian
in absolute numbers (combination of answers from two questions)					
2011	46,787	39,105	2,299	694	X
2021	56,607	23,242	9,271	X	3,072
in percentage (vertical structure)					
2011	100	83.6	4.9	1.5	X
2021	100	41.1	16.4	X	5.4

Source: Główny Urząd Statystyczny. Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2011 i 2021 [National Population and Housing Census 2011 and 2021], <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechnie/nsp-2011/>; <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechnie/nsp-2021/>

The census also asks about the language usually spoken at home. If a Polish and non-Polish answer option was selected, a different language was indicated. Here it is Belarusian.

Table 3. Belarusian minority by type and number of languages spoken at home

	Total	Home users:		
		only one language	more than one language	including Polish
2011	26,448	3,950	22,498	22,419
2021	17,325	1,654	15,671	15,238

Source: Główny Urząd Statystyczny. Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2011 i 2021 [National Population and Housing Census 2011 and 2021], <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechnie/nsp-2011/>; <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechnie/nsp-2021/>

Table 4. Belarusian minority by language spoken at home in the three most populous voivodeships

	Total	Podlaskie	Masovian	Lublin	Lower Silesian
in absolute numbers (combination of answers from two questions)					
2011	26,448	25,549	353	152	X
2021	17,325	13,089	1,805	X	468
in percentage (vertical structure)					
2011	100	96.6	1.3	0.6	X
2021	100	75.5	10.4	X	2.7

Source: Główny Urząd Statystyczny. Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2011 i 2021 [National Population and Housing Census 2011 and 2021], <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechnie/nsp-2011/>; <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechnie/nsp-2021/>

Summary

After conducting research on the situation of the Belarusian minority in Poland, it is hard to disagree with the opinion that national identity, such as:

Individual identity, is constructed in two ways: by emphasizing its difference from the environment and by cultivating a sense of continuity and permanence. Different groups, depending on the situation and specific characteristics, place more emphasis on the first or second dimension of identity. The coherent national identity of the members of a nation is manifested in national self-determination, i. e. a conscious declaration of national affiliation (Budzyńska-Budyta 2010, 13).

The last National Population and Housing Census lasted for 6 months, was mandatory, and was finally completed on September 30, 2021. The need to participate in the census resulted from the Act on the National Population and Housing Census of August 9, 2019, and its questions about the nationality and language spoken by census takers. The information provided by the Central Statistical Office provides in-depth instructions and explanations of the rules for determining nationality. In the census, the possibility of freely determining nationality, both single and complex, was ensured. The first question about nationality was provided with a short list and a long expandable dictionary of ethnonyms, i.e., names describing nations and ethnic communities (groups). If the respondent decides that neither the short list nor the expandable dictionary contains the nationality to which they feel they belong, they may provide their national and ethnic identification by selecting the entry "other" from the dictionary, and then entering it manually in the text box. Next, there is information about the possibility of providing two national identifications, which allows the respondent to also express their complex identity, rooted in two different national or ethnic groups.

Questions about the language spoken by the respondents at home are also provided with a comment, i.e. "If we choose the Polish and non-Polish answer option, we choose a different language from the attached language dictionary, but we also have the option of entering the language in an open text entry. Also, when choosing a language other than Polish, we can use the dictionary of languages and the possibility of open text entry" (Główny Urząd Statystyczny. Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2021 [National Population and Housing Census 2021]). In practice, the above-mentioned issues still cause perturbations, i.e., it happens relatively often that people forming one family give different national identifications, and the language used daily (Polish) does not fit into the catalogue of suggested variants. Even more sensitive is the question of religion. One of the questions asked in the census was "What religious denomination (church or religious association) do you belong to?" As part of the choice of answers, it was possible to indicate a specific denomination, no denomination, or choose to not answer the question. The latter option is particularly important in the studied cultural conditions and is based on Art. 53 sec. 7 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, according to which "no one may be obliged by public authorities to disclose their worldview, religious beliefs or beliefs".

The already mentioned concern of representatives of national minorities resulted from the fact that, after more than a year of the end of the census, data on the national and ethnic affiliation of the inhabitants were still not available. Referring to the extended data processing time, the Central Statistical Office spokesman pointed out that data on national and ethnic affiliation and the language spoken at home are the most time-consuming in the process of preparing census results. This is due to the large scope of respondents' free statements provided in open text records, which require special processing operations (Osadnik 2022).

The tables clearly show that over the last decade the number of people declaring Belarusian national and ethnic identification in each of the declared variants has been increasing – as the first, second, only and treated together. The voivodeship where the Belarusian minority is most represented is still the Podlaskie Voivodeship, although the number of representatives is significantly decreasing. The number of representatives of the discussed minority living in the Masovian Voivodeship has increased threefold. The Lower Silesian Voivodeship overtook the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship for the third position (with an increase of over threefold).

The number of people using the Belarusian language at home in each of the declared variants is also decreasing significantly – either as one language or as one of many languages (including Polish). The Podlaskie Voivodeship is still the voivodeship where the largest number of people declare using the Belarusian language, but there has been a significant decline. The number of people using the Belarusian language living in the Masovian Voivodeship increased as much as seven times. Another change took place for the third position: the Lublin Voivodeship was replaced by the Lower Silesian Voivodeship (with an increase of over three times).

To emphasize the importance of multiculturalism for democratic systems, it is worth concluding the considerations with the words of Francis Fukuyama (2019, 61): “People often rely on unification within larger cultures, especially when they were not born into them. They want their concrete self to be recognized and praised, not suppressed. They want to feel a connection with their ancestors and know where they come from [...], they want to preserve indigenous languages and traditional practices that are rapidly disappearing in the world and resemble earlier ways of life”.

Therefore, it seems correct to say that liberal democracy in its axiological layer responded positively to these expectations. An illiberal democracy, tainted by populism and xenophobia, poses a threat to minority groups, thus contradicting the “genetic code” of democracy *per se*.

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