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DOI : 10.14746/rie.2025.19.20

## European Contexts of Minority-Majority Relations in Upper Silesia

### Introductory remarks

A useful concept for analysing intergroup relations in Upper Silesia after 1989 is contestation – the act of opposing, undermining, or questioning existing norms, rules, authorities, or values. The term is most often applied in a social context, where it denotes distancing oneself from the established social order and rejecting prevailing norms. In the political sphere, it refers to criticism of those in power, the political system, or the ideology of the dominant group. Perhaps most importantly, from the perspective of the native inhabitants' growing distance from the Polish cultural framework, contestation also operates in the cultural dimension, typically expressed through the rejection of traditions, moral codes, lifestyles, and the dominant cultural model (Kontestacja, 2025).

The term contestation derives from the Latin *contestatio*, meaning opposition or dispute. In practice, contestation may take the form of demonstrations, public debate, activist art, or countercultural expression. When directed by national or ethnic minorities against a dominant group, contestation represents active resistance to the culture, social norms, state policies, or legal frameworks perceived as discriminatory or marginalising. Such opposition may manifest in protests and demonstrations, but also through legal activism – for instance, filing lawsuits to prevent discrimination or campaigning for legislative changes that enable minorities to preserve and promote their cultural distinctiveness. A concrete example is the advocacy for the inclusion of minority languages in education. Assimilation is also counteracted through cultural and artistic activities, such as organising music festivals, translating world literature into minority languages, or staging street happenings – spontaneous or semi-planned artistic events that engage passers-by, often using the element of surprise to highlight a specific idea or social issue. The most radical form of minority contestation against the majority takes the shape of separatist or autonomy movements, whose ultimate goal is to secure self-determination for the minority group.

This article assumes that contestation of the dominant group serves as a means for the subordinated group to preserve its distinct identity. The research hypothesis posits that the stronger the tendency of Upper Silesians to isolate themselves from the rest of Poland, the greater their chances of maintaining a distinct regional identity. The key



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to achieving this goal lies in engaging the “new” residents of Upper Silesia who have internalised the region’s cultural ethos. For the purposes of this study, I employed media discourse analysis and the institutional-legal method commonly used in political science to evaluate how legal frameworks influence the behaviour of social actors.

### **The European framework for the discussion on minority rights**

The transformations that occurred in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 reopened the debate on Upper Silesia’s place within Poland’s social, cultural, economic, and political landscape, as well as its position on the map of Europe – understood in the context of a “Europe of Regions.” From the outset, some participants in this debate advocated a return to the interwar arrangements, when the eastern part of Upper Silesia – constituting the Silesian Province within Poland – enjoyed a degree of autonomy. This line of reasoning thus recalled the ideas promoted by Silesian nationalists of the time, who had sought to establish an independent Upper Silesian state. The theoretical category underpinning this discussion was regionalism, understood as “[...] a form of social movement activity. It is a social movement *for the region and within the region*. This means that its purpose is not only to cultivate and develop cultural values, traditions, and similar elements, but also to stimulate the region itself by fostering broad initiatives for comprehensive economic development and by creating conditions that enable the population to participate fully in regional life through shared responsibility for the character of their own region” (Skorowski, 1998–1999, p. 38).

At the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, a phenomenon known as new regionalism emerged across Europe. It was linked to the rise of new forms of governance associated with paradigms that understood the state as a community of citizens (civil society) – paradigms suggesting that civic and even political activity could take place outside the formal structures and institutions of the state. In post-communist Europe, however, the situation was more complex. The regained agency of societies and states in this part of the continent often found expression in the strengthening of the nation-state and in renewed efforts to define or consolidate its cultural and identity boundaries. According to Keating, these developments gave rise to a new regionalism, “characterised by interlinked features: this regionalism goes beyond the framework of the nation-state and fosters competition between regions rather than the previous complementarity within the national division of labour. The new regionalism is modernised and future-oriented, in contrast to the older provincialism, which was marked by resistance to change and the defence of tradition. Yet both forms of regionalism – old and new – coexist in a difficult partnership, seeking a new model of synthesis between universalism and particularism” (Keating, 1998, p. 73).

The system of human rights protection established within the framework of regional European international cooperation encompasses both general and more specific conventions. The first of these is the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted on 4 November 1950 and ratified by Poland in 1993. This Convention stipulates that the rights guaranteed therein must be enjoyed without discrimination on grounds such as race, language, religion, national or

social origin, or membership of a national minority. In the field of minority protection, two subsequent and more specific conventions are of particular significance. The first is the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, adopted on 5 November 1992 and ratified by Poland in 2008. The second is the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, signed on 1 February 1995 and ratified by Poland in 2000.

The European Union represents the most advanced form of international cooperation in Europe. It is an organisation that has developed its own Community legal order, encompassing a wide range of areas of social and economic life. The EU's *acquis communautaire* also includes legal instruments aimed at protecting human rights and safeguarding cultural diversity. The most important of these is the Treaty on European Union, which states: "The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities." This treaty was the first to introduce the concept of minorities into primary EU law. Another key document addressing, among other issues, minority rights, is the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The Charter contains an explicit anti-discrimination clause, which declares: "Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited" (*Karta...*, 2016).

The protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities does not fall within the competences of the European Union. As a result, the EU lacks the authority to develop a specific, coherent policy in this field. Nevertheless, the issue of minority rights did emerge in the context of the 2004 "eastern" enlargement of the European Union, through the Copenhagen criteria, which oblige candidate and Member States to safeguard the rights of minorities. Despite this framework, no EU legislation has been enacted that directly addresses the functioning or protection of minorities. This legal and political gap was one of the reasons behind the creation of the European citizens' initiative "Minority SafePack – one million signatures for diversity in Europe." Its objective was to urge the European Union to adopt a set of legislative measures aimed at enhancing the protection of national and linguistic minorities and at strengthening cultural and linguistic diversity across the Union. The proposed acts covered a wide range of areas, including regional and minority languages, education and culture, regional development, political participation, equality, media and audiovisual content, and support from national, regional and local authorities. The initiative also called for the establishment of a European Centre for Cultural Diversity. However, the European Commission, arguing that many of the proposals put forward under the Minority SafePack initiative fell outside the EU's competences, chose to implement only a limited number of measures, transforming few of the proposals into tangible actions.

When discussing the domestic framework within which Poland's ethnic and national minorities and groups using regional languages pursue their aspirations and rights, it is essential to refer to the key legal instrument in this field – the Act on National Minorities and Regional Languages, adopted in January 2005. In their justification for the adoption of this Act, the proposers pointed to several key factors. First,

there was a growing awareness of the existence and activity of various national and ethnic groups within Polish territory. Second, Poland had already ratified a number of international agreements regulating the rights of minorities, creating a need to align domestic legislation with these international commitments. Moreover, at that time, pan-European trends called for the introduction of state obligations towards minorities into national legal systems. It was also necessary to consider Poland's forthcoming accession to the European Union, where – although not explicitly stated – minority rights were implicitly recognised in both the Maastricht Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The adoption of the Act was therefore aimed at ensuring specific legal guarantees for national, ethnic, and linguistic minority groups, thereby enabling them to fully exercise their universal human rights. Finally, the Act was also needed to clarify and operationalise the mechanisms for protecting the rights of persons belonging to minorities as enshrined in the 1997 Constitution of the Republic of Poland.

### **Upper Silesia – Bahlcke's dynamic “definition”**

In Poland, the most numerous ethnic (Silesians), national (Germans), and linguistic (Silesians, Wilamowice) minorities are concentrated in Upper Silesia, a region whose historical, linguistic, religious, and political boundaries have been defined and analysed by Joachim Bahlcke. Bahlcke's point of departure was an examination of how the transformations that took place in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 affected the political map of this part of the continent. He argues that Europe has never been solely a Europe of nations, but also a Europe of regions. According to Bahlcke, Upper Silesia is not merely a geographical entity that can be easily delineated on a map. It is, above all, a historical region whose political, ethnic, economic, religious, and cultural boundaries are inherently fluid and difficult to define unambiguously. These borders shift depending on the perspective adopted. The situation is further complicated by the national viewpoints – Polish, Czech, and German – from which these borders are drawn, resulting not only in different interpretations of where they lie, but also in divergent national historiographies. The narrative of Upper Silesia varies depending on who tells it – whether a historian, art historian, ethnographer, literary scholar, economist, sociologist, or, increasingly, a political scientist or politician (Bahlcke, 2011, p. 17).

Joachim Bahlcke poses a question: Where in Europe is Upper Silesia located? He immediately dismisses the seemingly obvious answer based solely on what maps suggest. According to Bahlcke, the issue is far more complex than simply drawing geographical boundaries – and, indeed, defining them is anything but straightforward. It is quite likely, he observes, that for many average citizens from Western Pomerania, Podlasie, or Warmia and Masuria, even Sosnowiec might appear to be part of Upper Silesia. In reality, the answer to such a question tends to confound most respondents, unless they are nationalists or chauvinists – individuals who often describe themselves as tolerant patriots, yet swiftly delineate boundaries whose observance becomes a condition for their tolerance of diversity.

Bahlcke's response to the question of how historical ideas about cultural and historical regions and the concept of space are formed is as follows: “The historical con-

cept of space that is Upper Silesia is not merely an invented tradition or a colloquial expression. It is rooted in specific characteristics that emerged during the Middle Ages, which simultaneously strengthened both identity and diversity. These elements created a distinct sense of community, which in turn gave rise to structures that allowed the region to be distinguished from the territories surrounding it. Geography alone cannot be used to define or justify the notion of a historical region, as such regions have evolved significantly over the centuries. What was understood by the term *Upper Silesia*, or what was perceived as typically Upper Silesian, has always varied across different historical periods. Moreover, the state dimension must also be taken into account, as political power has always played a lasting role in shaping concepts of historical space" (Bahlcke, 2011, p. 35). The nationalist drive to define the geographical, cultural, and political boundaries of Upper Silesia intensified following the discovery of hard coal deposits, which became the foundation for the region's intensive industrialisation from the second half of the nineteenth century through much of the twentieth century. Industrial development brought profound changes to the region's ethnic structure, resulting from the influx of people from outside Upper Silesia. Specialists in mining and metallurgy, as well as civil servants supporting the development of both existing and newly founded towns, arrived primarily from the western parts of Prussia and, later, Germany, contributing to the growing influence of German culture in the region. Another group arriving in Upper Silesia, "in search of bread," were Poles from Galicia and the former Congress Kingdom of Poland. Yet the most significant transformation in ethnic relations stemmed from internal migration within the region itself. The workforce for the rapidly developing Upper Silesian industry came largely from the local rural population, who moved to urban centres – where, in most cases, they assimilated into German nationality.

### **Discussion on the regional identity of the inhabitants of Upper Silesia after 1989**

Post-war migration processes brought about a radical transformation in the ethnic composition of the population inhabiting both the "Katowice" and "Opole" parts of Upper Silesia. The most significant factors behind this change were the influx of people from other regions of Poland – particularly in the 1970s – and the emigration of the indigenous population to both German states. According to data from the 2011 National Census of Population and Housing, a total of 3,783,207 people lived in the Upper Silesian counties of the Opole and Silesian provinces<sup>2</sup> – 880,524 in the former and 2,902,683 in the latter (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2011). During this census, 908,914 individuals declared non-Polish origin, representing 24% of the total population of the Upper Silesian counties across both provinces. In the Opole Province, there were 163,386 such declarations (approximately 18% of the total population of its Upper Silesian counties), while in the Silesian Province, the figure was 745,528 (around 26%). These declarations most frequently indicated Silesian or German national and ethnic identification (Trosiak, 2016, p. 182).

<sup>2</sup> It refers to those counties of the Silesian and Opole provinces that are located within the area of the historical Prussian Upper Silesia.

The most significant transformation to occur in Upper Silesia was the emergence and emancipation – particularly in the Katowice part of the region – of adjective-free Silesians, who neither identified as Polish nor German, but instead chose the stance: “We are Silesians.” In towns such as Rybnik and Mikołów, more than 40% of residents declared Silesian nationality, a development clearly reflected in the growing presence of ethno-regional organisations across the region. Silesian identity declarations are no longer a niche phenomenon or a form of cultural eccentricity, but have become increasingly conscious, self-assertive, and widespread. Votes “for Silesia,” expressed in the 2002, 2011, and 2021 national censuses, were also recorded outside the region – a testament to Upper Silesians who had left their homeland but continued to maintain a strong sense of attachment to it. In the political sphere, the most developed manifestation of this identity mobilisation is the Silesian Autonomy Movement (Ruch Autonomii Śląska), a classic example of a regional “proto-party” (Wódz, 2012, pp. 38–40). Such formations are characterised by their focus on representing the interests of groups with a distinct identity in relation to the broader national population. Crucially, these groups are territorially concentrated, and their political activity remains centred within the region where the movement originated – a region with which they explicitly associate their collective future (Sobolewska-Myślik, 2012, pp. 184–185).

In 2010, the Silesian Autonomy Movement became part of the ruling coalition in the Silesian Regional Assembly (Riedel, 2019). Initially, the organisation’s leaders envisaged membership as being limited exclusively to native inhabitants of the region. However, this approach soon evolved – the Movement transformed from an exclusive organisation into an inclusive one, open to all residents of Upper Silesia, including the so-called “Krzoki”<sup>3</sup>, who identified with its objectives. As a result, the “Silesian cause” began to attract not only the native population but also newcomers and their descendants – those who had settled in Upper Silesia from other regions of Poland, from the eastern borderlands of the former Second Republic, or as economic migrants in the 1970s. For many of them, this region has become, in Stanisław Ossowski’s terms, their “private homeland” – a place where, while remaining Polish, they also aspire to identify as Silesians. The region’s cultural distinctiveness continues to exert a strong appeal, and this ongoing process can aptly be described as the autochthonisation – or Silesianisation – of the immigrant population.

Małgorzata Myśliwiec, a political scientist specialising in Upper Silesian regionalism, argues that regionalisation is an external process – one imposed upon regional communities, over which they exercise only limited influence. Regionalism, by contrast, is an emanation of internal needs, most often articulated by the leaders of those communities. Myśliwiec identifies three forms of expressing such needs: “The first attitude is linked to the desire to make use of the legal opportunities available within a given state to act in the sphere of culture and tradition, without aspiring to political

<sup>3</sup> “Pnioki, Krzoki, and Ptoki are terms that describe different levels of *autochthonisation* among the inhabitants of Upper Silesia.” “Pnioki” refers to the indigenous population, whose roots in the region go back for generations. “Krzoki” are people, usually Poles, who settled in Upper Silesia after 1922 and have since permanently tied their lives to the region. “Ptoki” are residents who came to Upper Silesia but do not associate their future with it (Source: <https://gryfnie.com/kultura/pnioki-krzoki-ptoki/>, 12 October 2025).

representation in representative bodies. The second involves using the existing legal framework while simultaneously achieving political representation. The third form is associated with the aspiration to gain substantial political representation within representative bodies, coupled with efforts to change the existing legal status, which, in theory, would lead to the legal empowerment of a given regional community.” (Myśliwiec, 2014, p. 94).

However, since the immigrant population now constitutes the majority across the entire region of Upper Silesia, the demands of Upper Silesian regionalists continue to meet with strong resistance from nationalist circles. The Silesian Autonomy Movement (RAŚ) advocates greater regional independence within the Polish state, a postulate perceived by some segments of the public as a threat to Poland’s territorial integrity. The movement’s leaders firmly reject accusations of separatism, stressing that their goal is decentralisation and the restoration of autonomy – modelled on the status enjoyed by the Silesian Province during the interwar period, when it functioned within the borders of Poland. A similar degree of resistance accompanies efforts to secure official recognition of Silesian (godka) as a regional language, despite the fact that over 140,000 signatures have been collected in support of this initiative. In April 2024, the Sejm adopted a bill to this effect, yet it has remained unsigned by the President ever since. The likelihood of the incumbent head of state approving the bill is minimal, as he represents a political camp strongly opposed to meeting the identity aspirations of a substantial proportion of Upper Silesians – frequently dismissed by that camp’s leaders as the so-called “hidden German option.”

### **Why do Silesians not want to be Poles?**

Maria Szmei’s analysis offers a perceptive and convincing diagnosis of the reasons behind the Silesians’ contestation of Polish cultural offerings. According to the researcher, the primary source of this contestation lies in the confrontation between the Silesian identity model and the model of Polishness that emerged in Upper Silesia after 1922 and again after 1945 – two moments of profound political and cultural transformation. These models, she argues, were fundamentally different. “Generally speaking, they (the Silesians – note by C.T.) are of plebeian origin, which is, among other things, the result of Prussian policy in the nineteenth century, aimed at unifying the social structure across all the lands of the state, so that class divisions corresponded directly to material status. Consequently, the remnants of the Polish social elites were absorbed into the upper echelons of the Prussian state, losing their national character. What remained were the Polish lower classes, because those who attained education or wealth automatically entered a different social and national sphere. For this reason, belonging to the Polish state might have seemed attractive to Silesians. [...] However, that was not the case. One of the reasons may lie in the model of the modern Polish nation, which is culturally derived from the noble nation, a ‘social elite nation’. [...] The values underpinning the modern Polish nation have, therefore, noble or at least elitist roots. They were not shaped by the nation as a whole, but by its social elites. Hence, the values expressed in Polish national culture are alien to plebeian Silesians.

This sense of alienation within the Polish nation was already pronounced during the Second Polish Republic and continues to endure. [...] Silesians have often reproached newcomers from Poland for their so-called lordly attitude in dealing with people of lower social status – for their sense of superiority.<sup>4</sup> (Szmeja, 1997, p. 198).

Between 1945 and 1989, expressing any sense of distinctiveness from Polish identity – particularly in Upper Silesia – was effectively impossible without risking various forms of repression: loss of employment, blocked opportunities for promotion, limited access to education, or denial of permission to travel to the Federal Republic of Germany. This last restriction applied especially to those areas of Upper Silesia that had belonged to Germany before the war. The sole exception permitted by the authorities was the promotion of those elements of Silesian identity that directly challenged German narratives about Upper Silesia and served to legitimise the Silesian uprisings, presented unambiguously as an expression of the region's alleged desire to “return” to Poland and to hold an “Upper Silesian plebiscite.” This carefully controlled narrative, however, obscured a crucial fact: nearly 90% of the inhabitants of the pre-war Silesian Province signed the Volksliste (Trosiak, 2016, p. 124). Any attempts to demand greater representation of Silesians in the authorities of either Silesian province, or to see them appointed to managerial positions in industry or education, were interpreted as signs of disloyalty to the Polish state. Maintaining family ties with relatives in West Germany, speaking German at home, emphasising linguistic distinctiveness by using Silesian (*godka*) within the family or local community, and keeping a distance from the post-1945 Polish newcomers to Upper Silesia were all viewed with deep suspicion by the authorities. As a result, Upper Silesians gradually withdrew from “Polish affairs.” During periods of social protest, they were criticised for their supposedly privileged economic position compared to other regions of Poland. This narrative served to justify their limited participation in struggles against the regime aimed at improving living conditions. Miners, in particular, were branded as favourites of the authorities, and stories about the exclusive “miners’ shops” – special retail outlets for mine workers and their families – only fuelled resentment and deepened social divisions.

Another scholar examining identity transformations in Upper Silesia after 1989, in response to the question “Why do Silesians need a nation?”, cites the words of Jerzy Gorzelik, leader of the Silesian Autonomy Movement, who explained: “Why do we

<sup>4</sup> In his research conducted in the 1930s in the Silesian Province, Józef Chałasiński described this type of attitude among the Polish population who had arrived in the province after 1922: “Silesia is treated as if it were a colony,” a local Polish activist told me, “which was conquered against the will of its inhabitants, as if we ourselves did not want to join Poland. The officials are all strangers, there is a complete lack of contact between the people and the officials: the teachers are also mostly strangers, and their attitude towards Silesians is external. Those who come here consider us to be half-Poles. An Upper Silesian is not fit for office: it is obvious that an Upper Silesian speaks broken Polish. And we want to have our own people in the offices and schools here. When it happens that they give us a Silesian, it is often a Silesian who is not respected by his own people. We want Silesians in offices in Silesia, but that does not mean that every worst one should go to the offices. We want places for our talented people. The worst of the newcomers are those from Lesser Poland. When one of them arrives, he brings his whole family with him and gives them jobs. They bring with them a different way of life, a love of cafés and cabarets, and they destroy our family life in Silesia” (Chałasiński, 1935, p. 243).

need Silesian nationality? Firstly, achieving the status of a nation would significantly enhance our prestige within Europe and strengthen the legal protection granted to such communities. In practice, this would mean more Silesia in schools, culture, and the media. [...] Autonomy – which does not mean independence – benefits both wealthy regions, by allowing them to retain and use the majority of the funds they generate locally, and those facing serious economic difficulties, by enabling them to use aid from Brussels independently and effectively. A third, extremely important benefit is the ability to mobilise Silesians around the idea of national distinctiveness, inspiring collective effort to \*lift Silesia out of the decline caused by several decades of colonial rule.” (Sekuła, 2009, pp. 399–400).

### Final remarks

The main challenge facing Upper Silesian leaders today is the decline in electoral support for regional movements. In the 2018 local elections, not a single representative of the Silesian Regional Party – which brings together the Silesian Autonomy Movement, the Upper Silesian Union, the Union of Silesians, and the Silesian Alliance – was elected to the Silesian Regional Assembly. During the same elections, two other groups seeking to represent Silesian interests, Ślązoki Razem and the Civic Movement “Polski Śląsk”, also failed to cross the electoral threshold.

The German minority likewise experienced a significant setback. For the first time since 1991 – when the community succeeded in electing seven MPs to the Sejm and three senators to the Senate – not a single representative of the German minority won a seat in parliament during the autumn 2023 elections.

However, despite these setbacks, grassroots work aimed at implementing the goals of Upper Silesian regionalists is becoming increasingly visible. Their activities to preserve regional identity focus above all on promoting the Silesian language, a key component of local distinctiveness. The University of Silesia supports the publication of works in Silesian, thereby contributing to regional education and the preservation of linguistic heritage. Another important area is the cultivation of collective memory. This is reflected, for instance, in the commemoration of successive anniversaries of the “Upper Silesian Tragedy.<sup>5</sup>” Cultural events such as festivals, concerts, and exhibitions are organised to promote local traditions and strengthen community ties. The most prominent of these initiatives is the March of Autonomy, held every July since 2007 by the Silesian Autonomy Movement, which serves as a public demonstration of support for restoring Upper Silesia’s pre-war autonomous status. These activities aim to reinforce social cohesion and foster pride in regional belonging. Upper Silesian regionalists also place great emphasis on education, with research conducted by the University of Silesia documenting the complexity of Silesian identity and supporting

<sup>5</sup> The Upper Silesian Tragedy is a collective term for the dramatic events that took place in Upper Silesia in the first months of 1945, immediately after the Red Army entered the region. Although the term does not have a precise historical definition, it encompasses a range of repressions, crimes, and persecutions suffered by the civilian population of the region at the hands of both the Soviet and Polish communist authorities.

related educational efforts (Kijonka, 2017). In Poland, Upper Silesia is often recognised as a model of cultural revitalisation – from handicrafts to regional cuisine – actively promoted by local initiatives and institutions.

Will all this be enough to preserve Upper Silesia's cultural distinctiveness? The contexts in which Upper Silesian regionalists operate have changed – and continue to evolve. This shift is marked by a rise in nationalist and xenophobic sentiments, which poses a serious challenge, as nationalism rarely tolerates regionalism. “The change in the conditions under which the process of defining – and at times redefining – identity takes place lies in the fact that, in Upper Silesia, its native inhabitants now constitute a minority within the overall population of the region. This is the result of the intense industrialisation that occurred during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The immigrant population, when confronted with the region's complex history – particularly that of the Second World War – and with the cultural distinctiveness of the Upper Silesians, initially treated them with distance, and often with aversion or hostility. This attitude, however, began to change after 1989, when the “new” Upper Silesians (Chadziale and Gorole) started to draw upon Silesian cultural canons as reference points in defining their own identity. Many of them became actively involved in the work of Silesian regional organisations, alongside native Upper Silesians. Silesian identity ceased to be seen as crude or shameful and gradually became attractive. This shift was accompanied by a change in the attitude of native Silesians towards the so-called “Krzoki.” It is important to note the growing presence of the so-called krojcioki – Upper Silesians from mixed families. In the early period of contact between the two groups, the number of mixed marriages was relatively small, particularly in the western part of Upper Silesia. The process of assimilation was difficult, burdened by mutual prejudice and feelings of injustice. After 1989, however, a gradual rapprochement between the two communities became possible (Trosiak, 2016, pp. 199–200). The key to realising the identity aspirations of Upper Silesians lies in including as many people as possible in this process – especially those for whom Upper Silesia became a small homeland after 1945.

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## Summary

In the first part of the article, the author introduces the concept of contestation. He then outlines the key legal frameworks arising from Poland's membership in the Council of Europe and the European Union, which Upper Silesian regionalists may invoke in their efforts to preserve, strengthen, and develop the region's socio-cultural identity. The migration processes that unfolded after 1945 had a profound impact on the transformations within Upper Silesia. However, it was only after 1989 that Poles, Germans, and Silesians were able to engage freely in a public discussion about the region's multicultural character. The preservation of Upper Silesia's distinctiveness ultimately depends on whether regionalists succeed in engaging the new residents, who now form the majority population, in pursuing this shared goal.

**Key words:** Upper Silesia, regionalism, contestation, regional identity

## Europejskie konteksty stosunków – mniejszość–większość na Górnym Śląsku

### Streszczenie

Autor, w pierwszej części artykułu przybliża pojęcie kontestacja. Następnie prezentuje najważniejsze ramy prawne, wynikające z członkostwa Polski w Radzie Europy i Unii Europejskiej, do których mogą się odwołać górnouściacy regionaliści w dążeniu do zachowania, wzmacniania i rozwoju tożsamości społeczno-kulturowej regionu. Procesy migracyjne, które miały miejsce po roku 1945 mają znaczący wpływ na zmiany zachodzące w tym regionie. Jednak

dopiero po roku 1989 zarówno Polacy, Niemcy, Ślązacy mogą prowadzić swobodną dyskusję na temat wielokulturowości Górnego Śląska. To czy uda się zachować specyfikę regionu zależy od tego czy górnosłascy regionaliści włączą do realizacji tego celu nowych mieszkańców, którzy dominują w regionie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Górnny Śląsk, regionalizm, kontestacja, tożsamość regionalna

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Data curation (Zestawienie danych): Cezary Trosiak

Formal analysis (Analiza formalna): Cezary Trosiak

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Competing interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist  
(Sprzeczne interesy: Autor oświadczył, że nie istnieją żadne sprzeczne interesy):  
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