

# POLAND

## Silesians

Activity: 1990-2020

### General notes

- The Silesian movement is best described as a regionalist movement of people who identify as Silesians. According to Dembinska (2013), Silesians do not identify with a single ethnicity (narrowly defined): sometimes they feel more Polish and under other circumstances more German.

### Movement start and end dates

- Silesian separatism has historical roots. The first self-determination movement started in the 1870s and continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Separatism remained present throughout the interwar period (Musialik & Schreiber-Kurpiers 2015: 131). During the Nazi occupation, 157,000 supporters of the former Silesian People's Party in Cieszyn Silesia declared themselves "Slonzaken Volk" (Silesian) in a census. The Nazis generally supported and promoted Silesian nationalism (Szmeja 2022).
- Silesian separatism entered a period of dormancy after WWII, but re-emerged after the fall of Communism in Poland. The Silesian Autonomy Movement was founded in 1990, hence the start date of the movement. Since then it has been active in campaigning for greater autonomy. Roth (2015) as well as news sources indicate an ongoing movement as of 2020 (Lexis Nexis; Pidd 2011; RT 2013; UPI 2013; Notes from Poland 2021). [start date: 1990; end date: ongoing]

### Dominant claim

- The Silesian Autonomy Movement (Ruch Autonomii Śląska, or RAS), founded in 1990, is the main representative of the Silesian self-determination movement. There are more radical organizations such as the Silesian Separatist Movement (Śląski Ruch Separatystyczny), the Association of People of Silesian Nationality (Związek Ludności Narodowości Śląskiej) or the Silesian National Movement (Śląski Ruch Narodowy) which seek full independence, the RAS however is by far the more important organization. In the local elections of 2010, the RAS won 8.5% of the vote and three seats in the Silesian local parliament (The Guardian 2011). All sources (Kamusella 2012; Pędziwiatr 2014; RT 2009; The Guardian 2011; VOX Europe 2011) agree on the claim of the RAS, which is increased autonomy within Poland. According to Kamusella (2012), the aim of the party is to transform Upper Silesia into an autonomous region of Poland similar to the status enjoyed by Upper Silesia in the interwar period. [1990-2020: autonomy claim]

### Independence claims

- The oldest post-WWII group we could identify which made claims for independence is the Association of People of Silesian Nationality (Związek Ludności Narodowości Śląskiej), which was established in 1996. Members of the PSN were often also members of RAS. While generally autonomist, RAS has been involved in controversy regarding whether their claims go beyond autonomy (Ryszardczarnecki 2010), with occasional articles calling openly for a "sovereign, independent Silesian state" (ZPKA 2002).

- Between 2007 and 2010 the Śląski Ruch Separatystyczny (Silesian Separatist Movement) operated which made independence claims (KRS 2010).
- In 2010, Jerzy Gorzelik – head of the Silesian Autonomy Movement (RAS) gave an interview in which he verified that RAS is moderate and not secessionist, but that he felt “anxious” about the presence of radical secessionist Silesian groups such as the Silesian Separatist Movement, and the Association of People of Silesian Nationality (Związek Ludności Narodowości Śląskiej) (Minorczyk-Cichy 2010).
- Roth (2015: 120f) suggests that contention for independence was ongoing as of his writing.
- We could not find evidence of secessionist claims beyond 2015, but code the movement as ongoing based on the ten-year of inactivity rule. [start date: 1996; end date: ongoing]

### **Irredentist claims**

- While occasionally historically linked to Germany and while Silesian and German identity are often (inaccurately) equated/treated as the same, we found no evidence for irredentist claims. [no irredentist claims]

### **Claimed territory**

- The Silesian Autonomy Movement claims it is striving for the civilisation and cultural revival of upper Silesia (RAS 2022). Musialik & Schreiber (2015: 156ff) confirm that claims are focused on Upper Silesia. We hence code upper Silesia as the claimed territory (and not the whole Silesia region!).
- The Polish Upper Silesian territory covers most of the Opole Voivodeship, except for the Lower Silesian counties of Brzeg and Namysłów, and the western half of the Silesian Voivodeship (except for the Lesser Polish counties of Będzin, Bielsko-Biała, Częstochowa with the city of Częstochowa, Kłobuck, Myszków, Zawiercie and Żywiec, as well as the cities of Dąbrowa Górnicza, Jaworzno and Sosnowiec). We use GIS data from GADM for polygon definition.

### **Sovereignty declarations**

NA

### **Separatist armed conflict**

- We found no reports of separatist violence, hence a Nviolsd classification. [Nviolsd]

### **Historical context**

- Originally a Polish province, Silesia became part of the Bohemian/Czech crown in 1335 within the frontiers of the Holy Roman Empire. The Silesian princes however remained relatively autonomous and continued to rule their individual principalities. As a part of the Bohemian Crown, Silesia was passed to the Habsburg Monarchy of Austria in 1526 (Encyclopedia Britannica; Kamusella 2012).
- In 1742, almost all of Silesia was taken by King Frederick the Great of Prussia. The territory became the Province of Silesia and in 1871 part of the newly-proclaimed German Empire. The three Silesian districts of Krnov, Opava and Cieszyn that remained part of Austria in 1742 were united to Moravia until 1849, when it was made a separate crown land of the Austrian Empire (Encyclopedia Britannica; Kamusella 2012).
- After the First World War and the defeat of Germany and Austria-Hungary, the Silesian territory faced several conflicting claims. Whereas the former Austrian districts were divided between

Poland and Czechoslovakia, Upper Silesia was contested Germany and the newly-independent Second Polish Republic. The 1919 Treaty of Versailles called for a plebiscite allowing the Silesian population to decide over the future status of Silesia. In the 1921 plebiscite, 59.5% voted in favor of incorporation in Germany and 40.5% (among which a large share of the economically important southeastern area) wanted to be part of Poland. However, after an armed uprising by the Silesian Poles in May 1921, the southeastern part of Upper Silesia was incorporated into Poland (Silesian Voivodeship) while lower Silesia was left entirely to Germany. The Silesian Voivodeship of the Second Polish Republic possessed wide-ranging autonomy and had its own parliament (Encyclopedia Britannica; Kamusella 2012).

- With the invasion of Poland at the beginning of the Second World War in 1939, Upper Silesia was reacquired by Nazi Germany and included in the Third Reich. Many Poles were forcibly removed from their territory and were replaced with German settlers. The Silesians were granted full German citizenship (Encyclopedia Britannica; Kamusella 2012).
- After the Second World War, and as a result of the Yalta Conference and the Potsdam Agreement, the Allies returned to Poland their Silesian pre-war shares and other Silesian territories east of the Oder-Neisse line. Czechoslovakia was also granted its pre-war share of Silesia. The region's German population that had not already fled the country was transferred to Allied-administered Germany (Encyclopedia Britannica; Kamusella 2012).
- The communist authorities did not recognize the Silesians as a separate ethnic group but instead treated them as "crypto-Germans". As "second-class citizens" (Kamusella 2012: 53), they left communist Poland, whenever possible, for West Germany where they were granted German citizenship as Aussiedlers or "ethnic German resettlers".

### **Concessions and restrictions**

- The local government reform of July 1998 created 16 voivodeships (provinces), among which also the Lower Silesian Voivodeship that was created out of the former Wrocław, Legnica, Wałbrzych and Jelenia Góra voivodeships. The new voivodships were given the task of setting regional development strategies and were also granted regional assemblies that were elected in general ballots. The president of the region, the Marshall, is "the most important political figure" (Bafail 2010: 11) and is elected by the regional assembly (Bafail 2010; Encyclopedia Britannica). Poland however has remained a centralized country and the decentralization reform was mainly administrative in nature. Hence, we do not code this.
- In the 2002 national census, questions about nationality and family language were included for the first time and 173,000 people declared themselves as Silesians. However, the Polish authorities did not recognize the Silesians as an ethnic minority or as one of the nine national minorities, and attempts by the Silesian Movement to have Silesian ethnicity officially recognized by the Polish government have failed (Dembinska 2013; Pędzwiatr 2014). Furthermore, the Silesian languages (both Silesian and Upper Silesian) do not have an officially recognized status. Hence, we do not code a concession.

### **Regional autonomy**

NA

### **De facto independence**

NA

### **Major territorial changes**

NA

## EPR2SDM

<i>Movement</i>	Silesians
<i>Scenario</i>	n:1
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	Germans; Poles
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	29002000; 29001000

### Power access

- Silesians have yet to be recognized as a minority group. We found no evidence for representation in the national executive. [1990-2020: powerless]

### Group size

- Roth (2015: 120) reports a variety of group size estimates ranging from 2.3 million to 8.6 million, depending on the geographic definition of Silesia. Minahan (2016: 386) suggests an estimate at the lower end: 2-2.5 million. We follow the latter. According to the World Bank, Poland's population in 2016 was 40 million. [0.05625]
  - o Note: the estimates reported by Minahan and Roth seem to include the whole population of these respective regions. With 847,000 the number of people who self-declared as Silesian in the 2011 Polish census is significantly lower; however, the possibility to declare Silesian as nationality in the census exists only since 2002 and the number of people using this option is increasing quickly (<200,000 declared Silesian nationality in 2002), suggesting that 850,000 is likely too low a number.

### Regional concentration

- We did not find reliable data on the number of self-identified Silesians within Silesia (see above). However, the movement is described as regionalist in our sources, which suggests regional concentration. [regional concentration]

### Kin

- We found no evidence for trans-border ethnic kin. [no kin]

### Sources

Bafoil, François (2010). "Regionalization and decentralization in a comparative perspective. Eastern Europe and Poland."

[https://www.mir.gov.pl/fundusze/Fundusze\\_Europejskie\\_2014\\_2020/Negocjacje\\_2014\\_2020/Raporty/Documents/regionalization\\_and\\_decentralization\\_eastern\\_europe\\_and\\_poland.pdf](https://www.mir.gov.pl/fundusze/Fundusze_Europejskie_2014_2020/Negocjacje_2014_2020/Raporty/Documents/regionalization_and_decentralization_eastern_europe_and_poland.pdf)  
[November 30, 2014].

Cederman, Lars-Erik, Andreas Wimmer, and Brian Min (2010). "Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel: New Data and Analysis." *World Politics* 62(1): 87-119.

Dembinska, Magdalena (2013). "Ethnopolitical Mobilization without Groups: Nation-Building in Upper Silesia", *Regional & federal studies*, 23 (1), 47-66.

Encyclopedia Britannica. "Silesia." <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/544097/Silesia>  
[November 30, 2014].

- GADM (2019). Database of Global Administrative Boundaries, Version 3.6. <https://gadm.org/> [November 19, 2021].
- Grabowska Agata, and Pawel Ladykowski (2002). "The Change of the Cashubian Identity before Entering the EU." *IES Proceedings 1.1*. <http://www.ies.ee/iesp/grabowska.pdf> [November 30, 2014].
- Kamusella, Tomasz (2012). "Poland and the Silesians: Minority Rights à la carte?" *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 11(2): 42-74.
- Lexis Nexis. <http://www.lexis-nexis.com> [December 10, 2013].
- Minorczyk-Cichy, Aldona (2010). "On November 11, We Celebrate in National Colors. Or Maybe in Silesia Too?" *Chorzów Nazemiasto*. November 10. <https://chorzow.naszemiasto.pl/11-listopada-swietujemy-w-barwach-narodowych-a-moze-w/ar/c1-650740> [March 30, 2023].
- Musialik, Wanda, and Dorota Schreiber-Kurpiers (2015). "Analysis of integrative and destructive forces among social groups in Silesia in the Prussian period (1740-1918)". In Lucyna Harc and Teresa Kulak (eds.), *Silesia under the Authority of the Hohenzollerns (1741-1918)*. Wrocław: Publishing House eBooki, Uniwersytet Wrocławski.
- National Census (2011). <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2011/> [July 23, 2022]
- Notes from Poland (2021). "Politicians and activists campaign for people to declare Silesian identity in census", January 14, 2021. <https://notesfrompoland.com/2021/01/14/politicians-and-activists-campaign-for-people-to-declare-silesian-identity-in-census/> [July 23, 2022]
- Pedziwiatr, Konrad (2014). "Silesian Autonomy Movement in Poland and one of its activists." Tischner European University Working Paper.
- Pidd, Helen (2011). "Upper Silesia Flags up Its Call for Autonomy." *The Guardian*. April 8. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/08/upper-silesia-flags-up-independence> [June 20, 2014].
- Roth, Christopher F. (2015). *Let's Split! A Complete Guide to Separatist Movements and Aspirant Nations, from Abkhazia to Zanzibar*. Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books.
- RT (2009). "Poles apart: Silesians realize themselves as a nation." December 28. <http://rt.com/news/poles-apart-silesians-realize-themselves-as-a-nation/> [November 30, 2014].
- RT (2013). "Poles Apart: Silesians Realize Themselves as a Nation." March 27. <http://rt.com/news/poles-apart-silesians-realize-themselves-as-a-nation/> [June 20, 2014].
- Ruch Autonomii Śląska (2022). <https://autonomia.pl/> [September 30, 2022].
- Ryszardczarnecki (2010). "Disappearing photo, i.e., RAŚ and the iron cross". *Ryszardczarnecki*. April 6. [https://web.archive.org/web/20110927173931/http://www.ryszardczarnecki.pl/pl/?page=blog\\_tresc&id=2557](https://web.archive.org/web/20110927173931/http://www.ryszardczarnecki.pl/pl/?page=blog_tresc&id=2557) [March 30, 2023].
- Szmeja, Maria (2022). "Silesians in the Face of Polish Cultural Dominance". *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*. 36(3): 850-866.
- The Guardian (2011). "Upper Silesia flags up its call for autonomy." April 8. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/08/upper-silesia-flags-up-independence> [November 30, 2014].
- UPI (2013). "Upper Silesia Autonomy Efforts Ongoing despite Poland Court Ruling." December 10. [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/Special/2013/12/10/Silesia-autonomy-backers-vow-to-carry-on-after-Poland-ruling/UPI-27781386651720/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2013/12/10/Silesia-autonomy-backers-vow-to-carry-on-after-Poland-ruling/UPI-27781386651720/) [June 20, 2014].
- Vogt, Manuel, Nils-Christian Bormann, Seraina Rüegger, Lars-Erik Cederman, Philipp Hunziker, and Luc Girardin (2015). "Integrating Data on Ethnicity, Geography, and Conflict: The Ethnic Power Relations Data Set Family." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59(7): 1327-1342.
- VOX Europ (2011). "The irreducible autonomy of Silesia." March 31. <http://www.voxeurop.eu/en/content/article/578111-irreducible-autonomy-silesia> [November 30, 2014].
- ZPKA (2002). "Silesian Autonomy". *ZPKA*. 2(16). April-June. [https://web.archive.org/web/20080224224605/http://www.zpka.org.pl/bk\\_16slaska.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20080224224605/http://www.zpka.org.pl/bk_16slaska.html) [March 30, 2023].