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Distinctive Stereotypical Features of Jews in the Awareness of Poles

In researching the phenomenon of anti-Semitism in Poland, great explanatory value can be placed on the ethnic stereotype category, enabling the detection of facts as well as the formulation of conclusions on the subject of what Poles think about Jews, in what manner they are perceived and how they relate to them. And so, does this stereotype of Jews, functioning within the awareness of Poles, have an anti-Semitic character? Does sociological research indeed reveal it as having a negative aspect?

According to the Institute of Jewish Affairs in London, ranking among the signs of anti-Semitism are, among others, the presence of anti-Semitism in the highest levels of political life, the existence of political parties with programs containing anti-Semitic elements, the appearance of publications with anti-Semitic content, acts of aggression against Jews or their institutions, the lack of legal means in fighting instances of anti-Semitism, increasing anti-Semitic attitudes emerging within public opinion research². From the observation of public life, of course anti-Semitism manifests itself in both written works and in film, in anti-Semitic symbols or in anti-Semitic hooliganism (cemetery desecration, graffiti on walls, shouts during demonstrations and in stadiums).

Literature distinguishes between various types of anti-Semitism. If examinations reveal negative features to the stereotype and the maintenance of a large, social distance from the Jews, then we are dealing with social anti-Semitism³. If they confirm beliefs in Jewish omnipotence, they therefore provide evidence of political anti-Semitism. Burdening the Jews with the death of Christ attests to religious anti-Semitism. Assigning a degenerate nature, psyche or character to Jews indicates an anti-Semitism formed on the basis of racism⁴. H. Datner-Śpiewak speaks of the existence in Polish society of two comparatively distinctive kinds of anti-Semitism: the traditional, which has as its basis a religious aversion (“deicide”), as well as, the manifestation of modern one, expressing a conviction by Poles that Jews have too much influence in various spheres of life – politics, the economy and the mass-media in Poland and around the world⁵.

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² *Antisemitism. World Report*. Institute of Jewish Affairs, London 1992; H. Datner-Śpiewak, *Struktura i wyznaczniki postaw antysemitów*, w: *Czy Polacy są antysemitami?*, red.: I. Krzemiński, Warszawa 1996, s. 25.

³ E. Nowicka, *Dystans wobec innych ras i narodów w społeczeństwie polskim*, w: *Swoi i obcy. Studia nad postawami wobec innych narodów, ras i grup etnicznych*, t. 1. red.: E. Nowicka, Instytut Socjologii UW, Warszawa 1990; B. Wilska-Duszyńska, „My” i „oni” – młodzież wobec etnicznie obcych, w: *Tolerancja i uprzedzenia młodzieży*. Raport z badań, Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, Warszawa 1993.

⁴ S. Buryła, *Antyjudajizm czy antysemityzm? Kilka znaków zapytania*, „Studia Judaica” 7, 2004, nr 1, s. 96-103.

⁵ H. Datner-Śpiewak, op. cit., s. 32.

For a long time, under the influence of W. G. Sumner's pioneering research on ethnocentrism, negatively standardized stereotypes were perceived as a sign of distortion and cultural irregularities⁶. Later – following the appearance of the famous publication by T.W. Adorno and his associates on the authoritarian personality – sources of prejudice and stereotypes were discerned in character defects as well as in people's low mental fitness and mental retardation⁷. In turn, representatives of the linguistics field associated the phenomenon of stereotypes with symptoms of a disease of the language and of the thought process, disrupting the reliability of communication, falsifying reality and endangering the communication processes between people. On the basis of the anthropology of culture, stereotypes are regarded as tools of enslaving the mind, destroying the potential of spontaneous, human creativity. However, sociologists stress that stereotypes are convictions which are believed, confessed to and which are defended. Stereotypes fulfill our cognitive and emotional basic needs – they serve to identify *us* and *them* as well as providing feelings of familiarity and normalcy. Disturbing stereotypes causes a loss of the sense of direction in the outside world, as well as a mental crisis within their believers.

W. Lippmann, however, claimed that stereotypes were necessary and obvious ideas. The cognitive nature of man cannot withstand a vacuum in the perception and understanding of the world around him. On account of limited subjective and objective possibilities, people make use of stereotypical images without the use of sensory or mental cognition. To this end, they take advantage of imagining that which is outside our perceptual range, something that we cannot independently single out from its surroundings and so it is something that we cannot directly see or hear, personally feel, understand, nor judge. We have learnt to imagine extensive parts of the world which we have never seen, never heard, never touched, nor ever remembered. Despite that, we create a "trustworthy" picture of the world which remains, wholly or partly, outside of our direct experience. Out of necessity, we rely on a naive theory produced by us ourselves, or which has been passed on to us. We produce outlines of things, people, social groups and institutions which are generalisations presented as well-known types, in the most part, filled with those stereotypical elements which we carry in our heads. In other words, being guided by a necessary limitation in observing the world, we disregard details and classify phenomena in the form of stereotypes. The standardization of ideas about the world is, however, inevitable. The total abandonment of all stereotypes for exclusively direct experience would lead to cognitive poverty and the tarnishing of our knowledge about the world.

The sources of stereotypes of Jews lie deep in the centuries-old history of Polish-Jewish relationships. For centuries, they constituted a significant group of inhabitants of Poland. Conflicts, occurring in differing backgrounds, between the Polish and Jewish populations, constituted the immediate source for the development of prejudice and for the

⁶ W. G. Sumner, *Folkways*, Boston 1906.

⁷ T. W. Adorno, *The authoritarian personality*, New York, 1950.

negative stereotype of Jews amongst Poles. Following the tragedy of the Holocaust, Jews today constitute a small minority in Poland. However, cultural patterns of perceiving and relating to Jews have remained with the Poles. From a genetic perspective, stereotypes are the result of direct, perceptual relations, in which both peoples mutually influence each other. Direct, perceptual relations like that, between Poles and Jews in Poland today, do not significantly appear within a social scale. They are images created in the distant and not-so-distant past.

And so, what stereotype of Jews in Poland is revealed from sociological research? Is it positively or negatively oriented, or does it have a neutral character? According to this research, Jews belong to a group of people well-known and important to Poland and to the Polish people⁸. Within the group of peoples in closer or not-so close proximity to the European Poland, are Americans and Canadians, Chinese and Japanese, Turks and, of course, Jews.

Historical factors undoubtedly exert influence on this perception of Jews. For centuries, Poland was home to the largest Jewish community in the world. During the inter-War period, three million Jews lived in Poland. From an anthropological point of view, stereotypes constitute long-lasting, cultural elements which have broken away from their authors and have established themselves as models, independent of the circumstances under which they came into existence⁹. Within the stereotypes of Jews, as collective beliefs historically rooted in the culture of the Poles, a mechanism of permanence has been encoded; stuck in the social awareness of different “enduring” forms of cultural anti-Semitism, being updated automatically under the influence of tensions in Polish-Jewish relationships – not always made consciously nor identified. This is exactly how W. Lippmann explained the nature of social stereotypes – as a specific type of cultural universal, having “rigid” views of the external world, fixed in our minds, marked by a high degree of standardization, in content, of collective convictions.

Anti-Semitic moods are reviving in Poland. A. Cała calls it anti-Semitism without Jews and without anti-Semites¹⁰. Poles, today, do not find themselves in direct, personal contact with Jews. Religious and secular Jewish organizations, today, have 6,000 members and Poland’s population, of Jewish origin, is estimated at between 10,000 and 15,000 people. In such a situation, any signs of present-day anti-Semitism cannot be interpreted as realistic ethnic, economic or political conflict, in the same form as it appeared before World War II. For there to be anti-Semitism without anti-Semites, according to A. Cała, two elements are actually required.

⁸ J. Błuszkowski, *Stereotypy narodowe w świadomości Polaków. Studium socjologiczno-politologiczne*, DW Elipsa, Warszawa 2003, s. 103–107.

⁹ S. Czarnowski, *Kultura*, w: tegoż, *Dzieła*, t. 1, PWN, Warszawa 1956, s. 19.

¹⁰ A. Cała, *Antisemitism without Jews and without antisemites*. Artykuł opublikowany w *Jewish Studies. Center for teaching and research on Jewish history, culture and society*, dostęp: marzec 2006, <http://www.ceu.hu/jewishstudies/yb03/06cala.pdf>.

Firstly, anti-Semitism manifests itself on the basis of social attitudes. Admittedly, research indicates that only a scant number of people in Poland profess anti-Semitic views. Similarly, but to a limited extent, there is also in Poland a so-called peasant anti-Semitism which contains a component of Christian anti-Judaism. Only a few per cent of Poles agree with one of the following statements which are indicators of anti-Semitism of this type: The Jews killed Christ, they are enemies of the Christian faith, the fate of the Jews is a consequence of God's punishment. A clear form of modern anti-Semitism, which adheres to a conspiracy theory, has not appeared. A. Cała, however, acknowledges as an anti-Semite, a person who refrains from expressing negative attitudes or prejudice but, at the same time, makes no expression of affirmation towards Jews. This statement is the strongest argument justifying the thesis concerning anti-Semitism without anti-Semites. From research conducted by the Jewish Historical Institute, 57% of Poles who responded did not select even one pro-Jewish response¹¹.

Secondly, signs of anti-Semitism are appearing in the sphere of public life. Here, A. Cała mentions anti-Semitic statements made by politicians and functionaries from Polish political groupings which have anti-Semitic views¹². The author also draws attention to the tolerance shown towards anti-Semitic publishing houses and towards acts of vandalism against Jewish cultural monuments in Poland. In the long course of history, formation patterns of the perception of Jewish people are rooted in the political culture of Poles, irrespective of the number of Jewish people now living in Poland. As Z. Bauman observes, modernity has already inherited an opinion about Jews without any Jewish men or women living in cities or villages¹³.

And so, what is the descriptive content within the ethno-political culture of Poles which strengthens the stereotype of Jews? Three types of expressions appear in their linguistic images: positive, neutral and negative. Polish people regard Jews as a people with a rich tradition from which they draw strength and meaning. Tradition guarantees the maintenance of one's identity. Respect for that tradition is expressed as a cult of the past. They place great value on family life, ensuring a faithful passing on their national heritage – customs, norms and values – from generation to generation. In the opinions of Poles, the Jews' traditionalism and conservatism are also reflected in their deep religiosity, their rigorous following of the principles of their faith, as well as in the zeal with which they perform their religious observances. Within the view of the Jews as a people based on a rich tradition, there are also perjoratively-tinged expressions. Poles attribute Jews with a religious

¹¹ H. Datner-Śpiewak, *Struktura i wyznaczniki postaw antysemitycznych*, w: *Czy Polacy są antysemitami?*, Red.: I. Krzemiński, Warszawa 1996, s. 32.

¹² A. Cała, *Antisemitizm...*

¹³ Z. Bauman, *Nowoczesność i Zagłada*, przeł. F. Jeszuński, Warszawa 1992, s. 111.

fanaticism and an intolerance towards believers of other religions and of supporters of differing viewpoints¹⁴.

When referring to the intellectual culture and mentality of Jews, Poles express a similar ambivalence. In the perception and evaluation of this culture, opposing elements are present in the extreme. In the opinion of Poles, Jews are characterised by outstanding talents, singling themselves out favourably from other nations. They also regard them as an educated, clever, talented and creative people in many fields, making a meaningful contribution to world culture and science. But, simultaneously, there are also negative opinions on the subject of the mentality of Jews which talk about the fact that they are superstitious and have a tendency towards mysticism and fatalism¹⁵.

To an even greater degree, the internal contradiction of the stereotype of Jews appears in the perception and evaluation of their economic culture. A considerable section of Poles regard them as good in business. They are ranked as amongst society's rich, frugal and enterprising, able to manage their businesses, hard-working, diligent and thrifty. Alongside these positive elements maintained within the economic image of Jews, there are also negatives within the Poles' consciousness. Poles perceive them as a mean, greedy, sly and shrewd people, prepared to profit at someone else's expense¹⁶.

This inconsistent manner of perceiving the economic culture of Jews is closely linked to ideas about their lifestyle and customs. In the opinion of Poles, Jews live an austere lifestyle. They do not like to enjoy themselves, avoiding alcohol. Rather, they are sad and unsociable. They have the habit of saving and accumulating money. They do not look at life through contemporary eyes. For them, it is important to ensure the conditions appropriate to their lifestyle.

In the psychological-characteristic profile of Jews, expressions describing their virtues also contain some pejorative content. Poles consider that Jews are ambitious, active, prudent and disciplined. At the same time, Poles consider them as a closed, conceited, devious, unfriendly, cowardly and vindictive people. The accumulation of the above negative characteristics may explain the Poles' prejudice against Jews¹⁷.

Anti-Semitic content is clearly noticeable in the manner by which Poles perceive and react to the Jews' identity as a people. Poles stress that Jews carefully protect their national identity which is strongly intertwined with their religious identity. They stick together and isolate themselves from other people¹⁸. They are nationalists, considering themselves as the

¹⁴ J. Błuszkowski, op. cit., s. 160-162.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ A. Cała, *Autostereotyp i stereotypy narodowe*, w: *Czy Polacy są antysemitami?* Red.: I. Krzemiński, Warszawa 1996, s. 226–228.

¹⁷ J. Błuszkowski, op. cit., s. 160-162.

¹⁸ A. Cała, *Autostereotyp i stereotypy narodowe...*, jw., s. 216.

describe these nations. Its aim was to isolate a group of nations, similar with regard to perception. As a result of applying a statistical procedure called correspondence analysis, a *Perception Map of Nations* operating in the consciousness of Poles was constructed. The empirical material which were subjected to correspondence analysis encompassed 22 nations and the 78 characteristics which were assigned to them. Nations having closer descriptive profiles lie closer to each other on the map and vice versa – the further apart they lie, the greater they differ from each other, taking into account specific perceptions. The descriptive strength of a characteristic depends on where it lies in relation to an intersection of the coordinates system of the perception map; the further a characteristic lies from this point, the stronger that characteristic is in a given nation. The perception map shows that contrasting characteristics group together on both axes, with regard to semantics.

On the left of the horizontal axis of the perception map, a group of nations from the west lie close to each other. This group is comprised of the following nationalities: the Dutch, Swedes, Austrians, English, Germans, Americans, Canadians and Japanese. Their stereotyped images fall into two subsets of characteristics. The first contains features characteristic of the *homo oeconomicus* – of a rich man, businesslike, enterprising, hard-working and thrifty. The second generates a model of a *well educated person* – intelligent, active, prudent, ordered, modern, innovative, progressive and rational.

On the right of the horizontal axis of the perception map, a group of nations from Eastern Europe lie close to each other – Russians, Belarussians and Ukrainians. Poles attribute them with the negative characteristics of the descriptive profile *homo oeconomicus*. Nationalities finding themselves at this pole are considered as being poor, lazy, unenterprising, unbusinesslike, backward and uneducated.

A group of Mediterranean cultural nationalities lie on the upper section of the vertical axis – Italians, Spaniards, the French, as well as Hungarians. – characterised in the *homo ludens* category. Poles consider that typical representatives of these nationalities like to have fun, are happy and amicable, open, kind, accommodating, sincere, understanding and extravagant.

On the lower section of the vertical axis of the perception map are two nationalities, disparate in terms of geography and culture – Jews and the Chinese. Poles ascribe them with ascetic mores – they shy away from fun, avoid alcohol, they are introverted, egotistical, conceited, in a mentality dimension – conservative and tied to tradition. Within the perception axis are the characteristics fitting the *homo oeconomicus* type; in the stereotypical opinions of Poles, Jews are hard-working, frugal and disciplined.

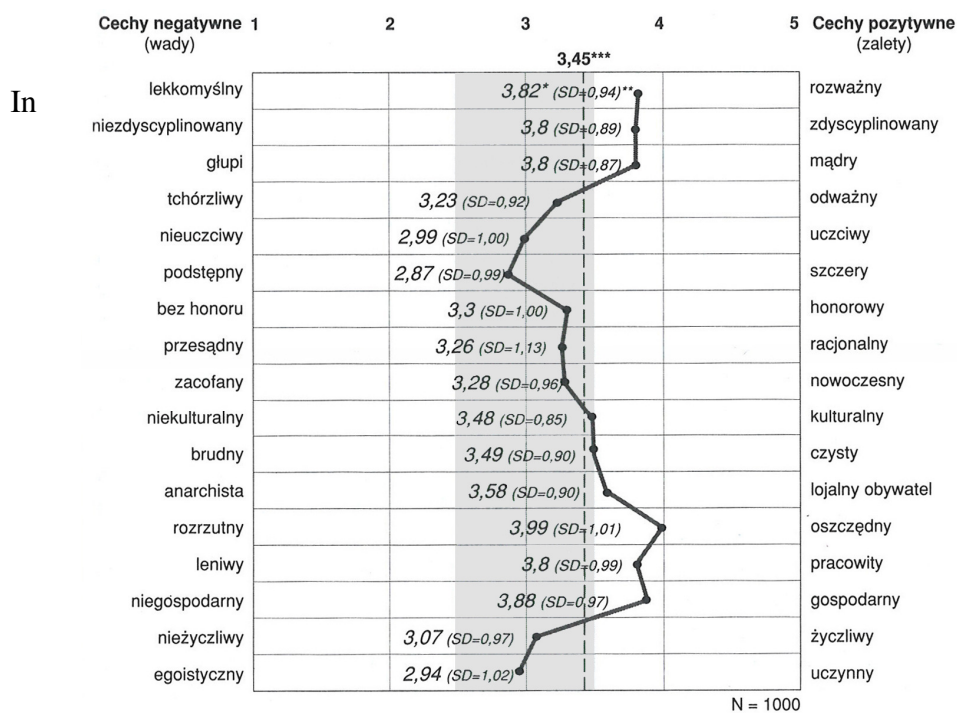
In the central part of the perception map, a group of Central European nationalities stand out - Poles, Czechs and Slovaks

In the diagram of stereotype auto-perception, the typical Pole is an observant Catholic, a patriot, a person of honour, tied to his family.

Results of the analysis of the evaluation plotting of stereotypes of Jews conducted by the semantic differential method provide evidence of the dominance of neutral assessments, refraining from or avoiding judgmental or devisive responses (the so-called escapist replies of the *hard to say* type. Assessments of Jews are most often located in the middle of the bipolar scale, a neutral evaluation. In *The Polarised Evaluation Profile of Jews* expressions having a negative meaning appear much more rarely than do neutral evaluations and do not enter into conflict with the norms of political correctness. It is difficult for Poles, for example, to unambiguously respond to whether Jews are devious or sincere, egotistical or accommodating, dishonest or honest, unfriendly or kind, cowardly or brave, superstitious or rational, backward or modern, without honour or honourable, uncivil or cultured. Only in some areas are Jews decidedly assessed positively. Poles consider them as thrifty rather than wasteful, businesslike rather than non-businesslike, prudent rather than reckless, disciplined rather than undisciplined, clever rather than stupid, diligent rather than lazy and loyal citizens rather than anarchists.

Contextual analysis, in the evaluation of nations, of the similarities and differences regarded as important to Poland allowed each of them to be placed in an ordered evaluation scale. Poles judge most favourably those nations representing the high end of civilization development – the Japanese, English, Germans, Austrians, Dutch, Canadians, Swedes, Americans and French. Five nations occupy the central position in which, alongside the Jews, are the Spanish, Poles, Hungarians and Italians. Below the central group are the Chinese, Czechs, Slovaks, Lithuanians and Turks. At the bottom are the Belarussians, Russians and Ukrainians²¹.

The Polarised Evaluation Profile of Jews



²¹ J. Błuszkowski, op. cit.: s. 200-203.
 * Średnia ocena Żydów wyliczona dla danej pary przeciwstawnych cech ewaluatywnych.
 ** W nawiasach podano wartości odchylenia standardowego (SD) od średniej.
 *** Syntetyczny wskaźnik oceny Żydów wyliczony łącznie dla wszystkich par przeciwstawnych cech ewaluatywnych.

In researching stereotypes, the emotional component stands out. It embraces attitudes and affectations which contain their own sentiment - positive or negative. Contrived words expressed within the emotional component are the social distance between nations. They indicate attitudes which can fit onto a scale ranging from sympathy or a desire for close, warm and intimate relations, through indifference, to a dislike and an avoidance of contact with representatives of various nations. In the analysis of the social distance of Poles from Jews, two of its dimensions were taken into account - micro-social and macro-social. The micro-social dimension includes within it primitive forms of communal bonding which grow out of the desire of individuals to connect with each other and to remain within interpersonal relationships. They manifest themselves as connections of mutual affirmation, of familiar co-existence, intimate, enclosed within a narrow range. Workers' groups, local-neighbourhood communities, friendships and family ties belong within the range of this type. Social distance in the micro-social dimension is a form of continuum - beginning with contacts at work, through nearest neighbours and friends through to marriage. The measurement of social distance towards Jews in the micro-social dimension reveals, in all four areas of the continuum, a reluctance by a considerable number of Poles towards examining the possibility of establishing personal, direct contact with Jewish people. 14.5% of respondents were negative regarding the workplace. 17.5% rejected the possibility of living with them as close neighbours. 19.7% reacted negatively to the possibility of friendship. 47.2% of respondents ruled out marriage²².

The macro-social dimension carries wider, social ranges. We examine again four areas of contact of our nation with Jewish people, taking into account: their visiting Poland as tourists, working and settling temporarily in Poland, obtaining Polish citizenship and settling permanently in Poland. The social distance of Poles from Jews, as it emerges from research, grows and accumulates through these areas. 6.4% of those who participated in the poll were against Jews visiting as tourists. 23.9% of respondents rejected the possibility of them working or temporarily living in Poland. 31.7% were against them obtaining Polish citizenship. 32.3% did not agree with them living permanently in Poland²³.

Comparative analysis reveals a hierarchical form of social distance of Poles towards various nations. As emerges from the analysis, certain nations are kept at a smaller distance than others. Jews, in both dimensions – micro-social and macro-social – occupy a low position in this hierarchy. Poles place Americans, the French, English, Dutch, Canadians, Austrians, Spanish, Italians and Swedes at the level of highest regard and proximity. For Poles, these nations, decidedly, serve as a positive reference system. A willingness to establish close and long-lasting contact with them can be interpreted in terms of auto-identification. All these nations belong to western civilisation. They are perceived as being rich, modern, educated, thrifty and enterprising societies. A declared sympathy, openness and

²² Ibid., s. 301–303.

²³ Ibid., s. 303–305.

the readiness to cooperate with them is linked to the aspiration of Poles to being a western society. The second group in the distance hierarchy is comprised of Poland's neighbours – Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Lithuanians, Germans – as well as Japanese.. Poles declare the greatest distance from a group of nations, as diverse in culture and geography – Chinese, Jews, Belarussians, Turks, Ukrainians and Russians.

From the analysis presented of the sociological research, it can be clearly seen that the stereotype of Jews had a heterogeneous character; positive, indifferent and negative elements are interwoven within it. It contains internal, contradictory descriptions and assessments. In the awareness of Poles, Jews are a people with a rich tradition, united with a deep religiousness. But, at the same time, they attribute them with a religious fanaticism and an intolerance against followers of other religions. They refer to the intellectual culture of the Jews in the same manner. On the one hand, they recognise them as a particularly talented, clever and educated people, who have contributed to world knowledge and culture. On the other hand, they consider that Jews are superstitious with a tendency towards mysticism. That dichotomy is also present in the picture of Jewish, economic culture. Poles perceive them as good businessmen, rich, economical, enterprising, hardworking, thrifty and, at the same time, state that they are mean, greedy, sly and shrewd, as well as wanting to profit at someone else's expense. In the psychol-characteristic profile of the stereotype of Jews, similar contradictions appear. Poles consider that they are ambitious, active, prudent and disciplined but, at the same time, closed, conceited, devious, unfriendly, cowardly and vindictive. The co-existence of opposing elements in the image of Jews proves that we are dealing here with two stereotypes – a positive stereotype emphasising the virtues of Jews and a negative stereotype with an anti-Semitic prejudicial character, attributing them with a quite extensive set of faults. The anti-Semitic contents are noticeable, particularly in the manner to which the national identity of Jews is referred. Poles consider that Jews keep to themselves, are isolated, considering themselves as a chosen people, with a desire to control the world. Neutral elements within the stereotype of Jews clearly dominate in the evaluation dimension and attest to the appearance of non-identified anti-Semitism. At the level of social attitudes, very few people in Poland, while not declaring anti-Semitic views or beliefs, at the same time, refrain from expressing any positive assessments.

Research indicates that, in Polish public life, xenophobia is spreading²⁴. Its multiplying manifestations are present in the press and in electoral campaigns. In the policies and statements from various politicians, as well as in the pages of Polish right-wing publications, a dislike for foreigners, and especially anti-Semitism, is seen ever more often, as attested by the discussions surrounding the matter of Jedwabne. In J.Tazbir's opinion, Polish anti-Semitism, in great part, results from the need for a formidable enemy. The

²⁴ J. Tazbir, *Przed kolejnym zakretem*, w: *Polacy o sobie*, red.: P. Kowalski, Łomża, 2005, s. 11-12.

existence of such an enemy, according to various politicians, is essential for the consolidation of the nation. A belief in a conspiracy against the Poles simplifies all political and economic problems, as well as problems in the international arena and, at the same time, provides a feeling of power and meaning for Poland which supposedly can be directed against an all-powerful, world organization.

Summary

In researching the occurrences of anti-Semitism, important explanatory value lies in the ethno-political stereotype category. This category helps to assess what Poles think about Jews, how they perceive Jews and how they relate to them. Does the stereotype of Jews in Poland, therefore, have an anti-Semitic prejudicial nature? Research carried out by sociologists does not indicate a uniform orientation of the stereotype held by Poles. Positive attitudes alternate with negative ones. However, neutral assessments and references may dominate which may indicate, not only a lack of knowledge about Jews, but also a reluctance by Poles to express their real attitudes and beliefs concerning typical representatives of the Jewish people.