



THE NATIONAL IDENTITY OF THE YOUTH OF MŁAWA AND ASSESSMENT OF POLAND'S PARTICIPATION IN EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to verify the national identity of young people from the last years of secondary schools and to learn about their assessment of Poland's functioning in the European Union. One hundred and fifty five persons attending the third grade of a general secondary school and the third and fourth grade of vocational secondary school located in the city of Mława were qualified for the study. The survey was conducted via a paper and online questionnaire. The results showed that all respondents associate the most strongly with the Polish identity, whereas European identity complements their national identification. Young people are also positively inclined towards the European Union. The vast majority of respondents believed that Poland would not have been able to achieve its current economic development without the support of the EU.

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**TOŻSAMOŚĆ NARODOWA MŁAWSKIEJ MŁODZIEŻY ORAZ OCENA UCZESTNICTWA
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Słowa kluczowe: tożsamość narodowa, naród, młodzież, Unia Europejska.

Abstrakt

Celem badania było zweryfikowanie tożsamości narodowej młodzieży ostatnich roczników szkół ponadpodstawowych oraz poznanie ich oceny funkcjonowania Polski w Unii Europejskiej. Do badania zakwalifikowano 155 osób uczęszczających do klas trzecich liceum ogólnokształcącego oraz klas trzecich i czwartych technikum zawodowego. Szkoły znajdują się w Mławie. Badanie przeprowadzono za pośrednictwem papierowego oraz internetowego kwestionariusza ankiety. Z przeprowadzonych badań wynika, że wszyscy respondenci mocno identyfikują się z tożsamością polską, podczas gdy tożsamość europejską traktują jako uzupełnienie ich tożsamości narodowej. Młodzi ludzie są również pozytywnie nastawieni do Unii Europejskiej. Zdecydowana większość respondentów uważa, że bez wsparcia UE Polska nie byłaby w stanie osiągnąć dotychczasowego poziomu rozwoju gospodarczego.

Introduction

The European Union is a multilevel and multifaceted undertaking. It applies to economic, political and legal as well as socio-cultural aspects. The influence of a country's participation in the European Union on various areas of society's life is a widely studied issue (Koseła *et al.*, 2002, p. 8). Among the member states, there are societies that are more or less enthusiastic about participation in European integration. The long-standing statistics of the Public Opinion Research Center show that the Polish attitude to membership in the European Union has changed in favor of the community since 2004, which grew from 60% of support in January 2004 to 90% in October 2021. Moreover, according to a report of the European Parliament, young Poles declared the highest, 82%, attachment to the EU against an average of 62% (*Desk research. European...*, 2021, p. 12).

So how does the EU influence the identification issues of the inhabitants of the member states? Researchers of this phenomenon raise, among others, the question of the relationship between attachment to the Union and its influence on national identity, is there a possibility of these phenomena coexisting, does attachment to the Union mean a significant weakening of national identity and does it create a threat to either identification? (Shabad & Słomczyński, 2012, p. 31). Both national and European identities are collective identities, which are groups classified on the basis of common elements which at the same time connect its members and separate the group from others (Paleczny, 2008, p. 8). The concepts of identity are considered in the context of sharing identity with others as is the case of sharing an identity with members of a specific nation. Considerations may also concern the identity crisis resulting from groundbreaking events that change the perception of an individual or groups to a given phenomenon. There is also the context of numerous categories and factors that influence the multitude of identities (Krauz-Mozer, 2017, p. 13). National identity, including being Polish, is distinguished from other identities of individuals by its exceptional durability (Kisiel *et al.*, 2016, p. 368). It can be assumed that over the years it was shaped by socio-historical processes, which made the nation the main element of their identification for Poles (Wysocki, 2017, p. 58).

The aim of the research was to establish the national identity of youth in the face of a progressing globalization processes and their assessment of the European Union from the Polish perspective. The study included 155 students from the third classes of general secondary schools and the third and fourth classes of vocational technical schools in Mława. It was conducted among students with the use of paper and online questionnaires.

Characteristics of the studied group

One hundred and five women (67.74%) and 50 men (32.26%) participated in the study. The city was the place of residence for 61 respondents (39.35%), including 36 women and 25 men. The inhabitants of rural areas constituted the majority, the total number of which was 94 people (60.65%), including 69 women and 25 men. It is no coincidence that the question was structured in a way in which the respondents could only answer “town” or “village”. Due to the size of the town of Mława, schools operating in its area are attended by local people or people commuting from neighboring areas, most often villages. Therefore, a description of the size of a given village or town where the respondent comes from would be unnecessary.

Students of a general secondary school constituted the vast majority of the respondents and accounted for 115 of them (74.19%), including 82 women and 33 men. The remaining respondents were students of vocational technical secondary schools, constituting 25.81%, which included 23 women and 17 men (Fig. 1).

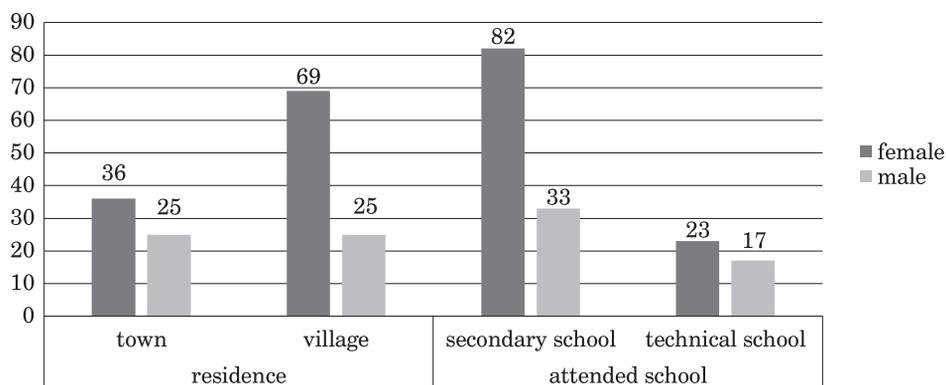


Fig. 1. Respondents broken down by gender, place of residence and type of school attended
Source: study based on own research.

National identity of the respondents

Determining their identity did not cause any problems for young people, because in the question concerning which identity the person associates with, the answer “I don’t know” was not chosen by any of the respondents. Almost half of the respondents (43.87%) considered themselves exclusively Polish. The comparison of the results with the results of the CBOS survey conducted in March 2019 allows us to draw similar numerical conclusions (*Komunikat z badań: Aktualne problemy...*, 2019). However, the CBOS survey shows a regular decline in the number of people identifying themselves only as Poles in favor of an increase in the number of respondents identifying themselves as Poles and European. The results of our own research have indicated, however, that in the group of young people, the most frequently indicated identification is solely Polish, then Polish, and only then European (36.77%), followed by simultaneous Polish and European identification (18.71%) (Fig. 2). The above results are relatively high compared to the results for answers in which the word “European” appears as the first or only part. Only one respondent (0.64%) felt more European than Polish, and none of the respondents considered themselves to be solely European.

Identity is made up of many different factors. For this reason, the respondents were asked about the influence and importance of the factors selected by the author on their national identification. The responses proposed in the questionnaire included the place of residence, mother tongue, blood ties, religion, and history; as well as national colors and symbols. The respondents assessed the validity of a given factor, having a choice of answers constructed using the Likert scale, from “definitely yes”, through “rather yes”, to a neutral answer “I don’t know”, to “rather no”, and then “definitely not”.

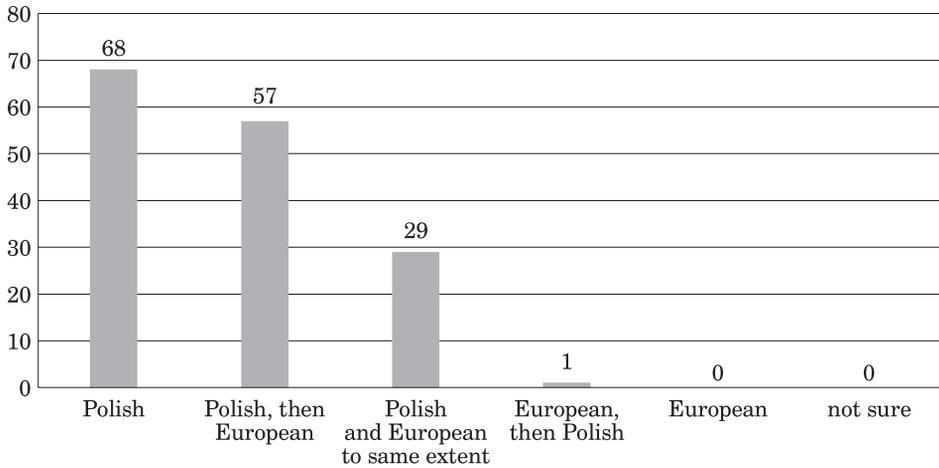


Fig. 2. Declarations of the respondents' identity

Source: study based on own research.

The factor that plays the most important role in shaping the identity of young people is the mother tongue, which was indicated by 98.71% of the respondents. A similar number of affirmative responses was obtained by the place of residence, considered significant by 96.13% of the respondents. The legitimacy of blood and history ties as an element of their identity was declared by 85% of respondents. National colors are definitely important for 51.61% of the respondents and rather important for 30.32%. Religion has the most diverse structure of the declared answers. It is a factor in which the percentage of responses containing the elements "yes" and "no" is almost identical and amounts to 42.38% ("definitely yes" 16.77% and "rather yes" 25.16%) and 41.29% ("definitely not" 22.58% and "rather not" 18.71%). It was also a determinant characterized by the highest, almost 17% uncertainty, of the respondents.

Patriotism of the respondents

To the question "Do you consider yourself a patriot?" More than 58% of the respondents answered it in the affirmative, and only 5.16% in the negative. However, a significant part of the respondents had a problem with the answer to this question (Fig. 3).

The respondents, when asked about their perceptions of patriotism and defining the factors enabling them to express love for the motherland, the most important factor related to the response proposals was considered to be respect. Therefore, what was important for them was respect for national symbols (59.35%), for the history of the nation (46.45%) and for Polish culture, traditions

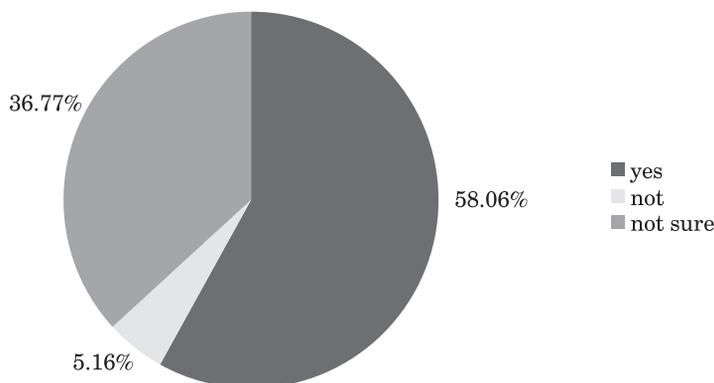


Fig. 3. Identification of the patriotism of the respondents

Source: study based on own research.

and customs (42.58%). Thirty nine point thirty five percent of respondents agreed with the active form of expressing patriotism by voting in elections and participating in the life of the state. The history of Poland has shown that for many years the readiness to fight for the homeland was something necessary for the survival of the nation and was one of the highest forms of expressing love for the homeland. Thirty six point thirteen percent of respondents still agreed with this statement. The manifestations of patriotism chosen by respondents relatively rarely included paying taxes, with only 5.81% of respondents identifying with this attitude or the purchase of local products (1.94%). Therefore, economic patriotism seems to be alien to young people. A rare expression of patriotism for the respondents also included wearing patriotic clothes (1.29%).

Emigration plans

Taking into account the age of the respondents and the period of life they are in, related to graduating from post-primary school, and then taking up higher education or work, they were asked to share their reflection on their future place of residence and possible migration directions, as well as the reasons for choosing such a place of residence. For this purpose, a space was left in the questionnaire for an independent statement and the reason for the above-mentioned attitudes in the open-ended question (Fig. 4).

Eighty eight people, who constituted 56.77% of the respondents, intended to stay in their home country, 42 of them claimed that the factor determining their staying in their home country and their lack of migration plans (as indicated by their responses) were the presence of close family and friends. In the context of the family, the willingness to set up one's own household in Poland in the future was also mentioned. Twenty respondents mentioned their attachment

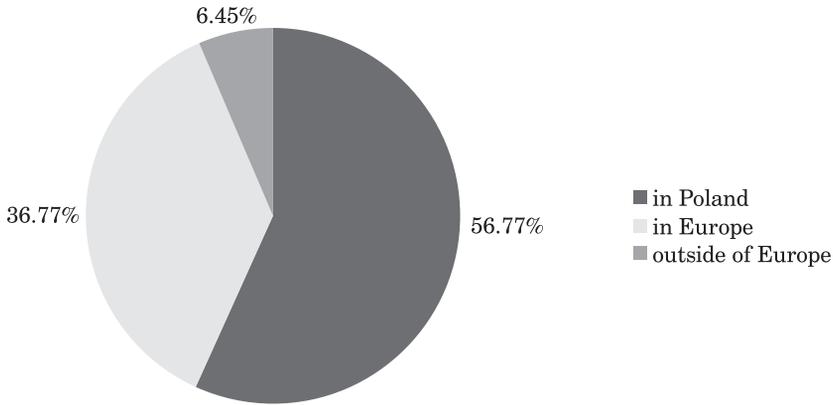


Fig. 4. Preferred future place of residence of the respondents

Source: study based on own research.

to the country, its culture and customs. Only 9 people did not plan to leave the country due to the future start of higher education or work, since they intended to “start studies in Gdańsk” and “join the army”. They also felt that staying in Poland would provide them with a well-paid and permanent job. One of the respondents decided to further develop within the country, because, quote: “the profession I want to do (history teacher) requires cooperation with the inhabitants of Poland”.

There is also a group among the respondents who did not have plans to leave for a simple reason, which is that Poland is a country where they feel good, they love their homeland and they cannot imagine living in another place. Two respondents indicated the language barrier as a reason for staying in the country, since they believed that it would be easier for them to function without the need to constantly communicate in a foreign language. One of the respondents shared her opinion on staying in the country due to the possible future situation of the country: “I believe that over time, our country will finally have people who will lead our country to prosperity with dignity”.

The intention to emigrate was declared by 43.22% of the surveyed students, divided into two directions of departure. Europe was indicated by 37.77% of respondents, while the remaining 6.45% targeted non-European countries. When asked why they intended to leave the country, more than half of the group mentioned better development opportunities and higher earnings in their statements. One of the respondents shared a specific example of a country and development in the profession of a forensics technician, in which, as she claimed, she can only be fulfilled by working in the United States, due to the high level of advancement of this country in a given field compared to others. Another respondent indicated Iceland as the fulfillment of her housing dreams, due to the politics and socio-economic situation of the country. Respondents were encouraged to leave by the perceived disturbing state of the Polish political

scene, the unresponsive government, the prospect of high and constantly rising inflation, as well as the vision of greater societal tolerance and the lack of hatred in other countries. The lack of respect for women's rights was also mentioned, so female representatives did not feel safe staying in Poland. The respondents were also driven by the desire to travel around the world, and learn about new cultures and languages.

Identity and emigration

Being abroad is associated with being a member of a national minority. For some migrants, this can be a situation where their identity is put to the test. Functioning in a multicultural society, or in one that is homogeneous, though completely different culturally, raises the question: what attitudes should be adopted? Should you conserve your native culture and be completely removed from the customs functioning there, immerse yourself in the new culture completely, or perhaps you should draw from both your native and acquired customs? According to 65.16% of respondents, Polish and foreign customs should be combined, while 26.45% believed that only the Polish cultural heritage should be retained. Adapting to the culture of the place of residence was recommended by 6.45% of the respondents (Fig. 5). Three respondents commented on this issue as follows – living abroad one should:

- “not be interested in Poland”;
- behave “depending on the views of the world”;
- “remember one's origin, follow Polish customs and respect the traditions and views of the inhabitants of the country you are in”.

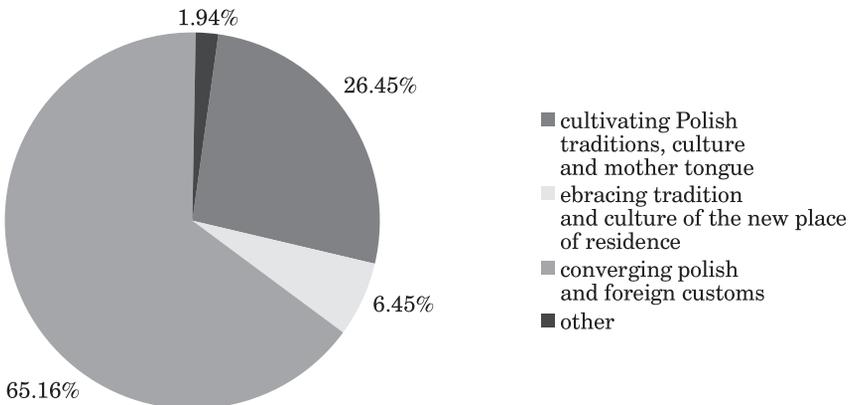


Fig. 5. Attitudes to be adopted in relation to life abroad

Source: study based on own research.

Perception of Poland's membership in the EU

Poles are one of the nations that are very enthusiastic about their country's participation in European integration. This was found in surveys commissioned both by the European Union and national opinion polling centers. EU Eurobarometer surveys conducted in the spring of 2021 showed that currently 81% of Poles feel that they are citizens of the European Union, and 79% are optimistic about its future. Moreover, Polish society trusts European institutions more than state institutions by 52% and 49% of Poles trust the activities of the European Parliament and the European Commission. In the case of the currently functioning government and parliament, support was 28% and 26%, respectively (*Standard Eurobarometer 95...*, 2021). This conclusion can also be made on the basis of research conducted by the Public Opinion Research Center in 2020 on social trust. Almost 75% of respondents trusted the European Union, 46% trusted the government, and 33% the Sejm and the Senate (*Komunikat z badań: Zaufanie społeczne*, 2020). Therefore, young respondents were asked about their opinion on Poland's membership in the European Union in order to obtain their opinions and identify the existing trends. A significant portion of them, almost 90%, assessed Poland's participation in the EU positively, while the remaining 10.32% believed that the country loses in its membership to the EU (Fig. 6).

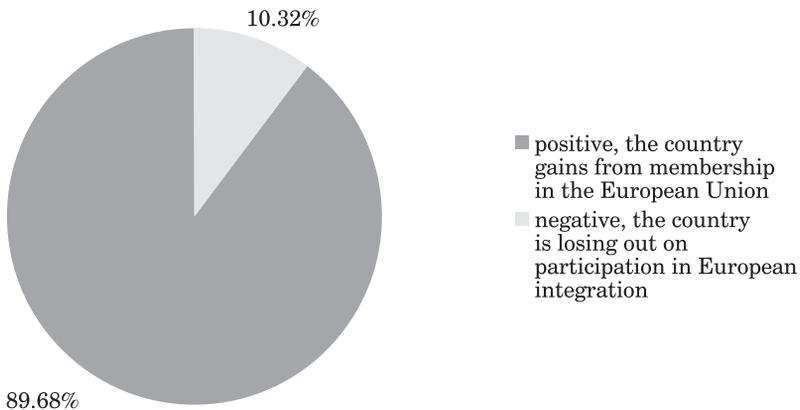


Fig. 6. Assessment of Poland's participation in the European Union

Source: study based on own research.

The public debate often raises the question of how the country would develop had it not been for its membership in the European Union. Sixty one point sixteen percent of respondents predicted that the country would not be able to achieve the level of economic development that is experienced today. A low percentage of those polled, only 2.58%, believed that Poland would have developed at the same level or better than today. On the other hand, almost $\frac{1}{3}$ of respondents felt this question was difficult.

For some citizens, accession to the EU was associated with concerns about the intensification or weakening of certain phenomena: a fear of losing what is known, a fear of what is strange, unknown, most often related to the cultural and social arena. When asked about the changes that took place at the level of occurrence of selected phenomena, 77.42% of respondents believed that patriotism and attachment of Poles to tradition remained at the level before joining the EU. Over 61.29% of respondents also considered the religiosity of their compatriots to be unchanged over the years, although 33.55% noticed a decrease in its level, and the remaining 5.16% of respondents saw an increase. More than half believed that Polish society has become more tolerant, 27.74% did not notice the change, and 21.29% believed that the current society is less tolerant than before. The European community increased civic awareness in Poland according to 45.81% of respondents, while 45.81% did not notice either the intensity or reduction of the level of this phenomenon. According to almost half of the respondents, countrymen appreciated freedom and independence after joining the EU. About $\frac{1}{3}$ of the respondents noticed the liberalization of the views of society, although 55.48% of the respondents did not notice any change in this phenomenon.

Advantages and disadvantages of participating in the EU

The respondents were asked to indicate the most important benefits, which they have noticed in connection with the functioning of Poland in the European Union. Out of all the proposed answers, almost 80% of the youth surveyed appreciated the freedom of movement within the European Union the most. Over $\frac{2}{3}$ of respondents also appreciated the benefits of EU funding. Almost half of them also highly appreciated the possibility of easily finding a job abroad. A bit lower were the EU actions targeted at young people. Only $\frac{1}{3}$ of the respondents also took into account ensuring security in connection with participation in the community of states, as well as the diversity and mixing of cultures in Europe. Less than 10% appreciated agriculture and its development, climate action as well as the unification of national and EU law. Additionally, one of the respondents shared his own proposed response about “general control of national authorities”. Only one respondent saw no benefits of participating in the EU.

In order to present the broadest possible opinion concerning participation in the European Union, questions were also asked about the perceived disadvantages that young people have in connection to this subject. Although previously respondents appreciated the ease of crossing borders within the EU, almost half of the respondents indicated the presence of immigrants in the country as the greatest disadvantage, and 30.32% regretted the emigration of their compatriots.

One of the respondents commented on the issue of migration to the country: “the influx of immigrants – it depends from which country and whether it is legal to cross the border”. Moreover, 40% of the respondents perceived the low importance of Poland in the international arena. According to some respondents (27.74%), EU authorities have too much influence on the activities of state institutions, and to a similar extent they are not satisfied with the presence of foreign products in Polish markets, replacing products from local, domestic suppliers. Less than 20% of respondents complained about issues such as the obligation to pay EU contributions (18.06%), the increasing globalization processes (8.39%), deteriorating living conditions (7.74%) or liberalization of views (5.81%). Only 14.84% of the respondents were not able to indicate a single disadvantage of participating in the EU. One of the respondents considered it unfair to “impose (by the EU) climate neutrality on Poland”.

The opinion of the respondents concerning Poland’s relations with the EU was also important in the research. Their opinion on the future level of Poland’s cooperation with the European Union in specific areas of activity is as follows. A relatively low percentage of respondents were in favor of maintaining separateness, therefore most of the answers focused on the issues of deepening or maintaining the current level of cooperation. Almost 80% of respondents believed that the country should deepen cooperation in the field of environmental and climate protection, human rights as well as foreign and trade policy. The respondents also expressed the need to increase the partnership in the case of security and defense policy. The most diverse structure of responses was characterized by the issue of culture and customs, which are the most controversial in the public debate. Forty five point eight one percent of respondents believed that they should remain at the current level, 23.87% were in favor of deepening cooperation, 25.81% were in favor of limiting it, and the remaining respondents did not have an opinion on the topic. More than half of the respondents approved of further integration of Polish agriculture with the EU policy, 36.13% were in favor of keeping the current state of affairs. A similar relationship of responses occurred in the case of migration policy and humanitarian aid.

Youth and parliamentary elections

In order to examine the civic involvement of respondents, questions were also asked about their intentions to use the democratic privilege of voting in elections. The obtained result is at a promising level, as 149 respondents (96.13%) declared their intention to actively participate in elections. When asked about the importance of the elections to the European Parliament, almost 60% considered them as important as the national elections, and 32.90% of respondents considered them to be less important. Only 5.16% preferred the EU elections over national elections, and 2.58% considered them to be completely irrelevant (Fig. 7).

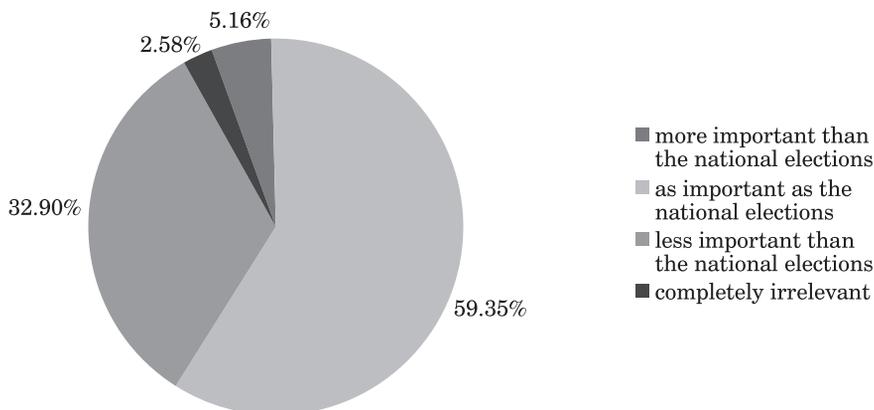


Fig. 7. The importance of elections to the European Parliament

Source: study based on own research.

Conclusions

The survey conducted among 155 students of secondary schools in Mława allowed for the formulation of various conclusions regarding both their identity and its components, as well as opinions on the present and future shape of Poland's functioning in the European Union, the most important of which were:

1. The youth had certain declarations regarding their national identity, and none of the respondents had any problems with determining belonging to a given identity. All respondents strongly identified with Polish identity. For a large part, it was the only choice, others indicated it in various configurations, along with a European identity.

2. Patriotic issues, although the majority of respondents declared themselves patriots, caused considerable difficulties to the rest, as nearly 37% were unable to define their position on this issue. While identifying the factors determining their patriotic tendencies, the respondents most frequently indicated those related to respect; such as respect for national symbols, the history of the nation and respect for Polish culture, traditions and customs.

3. More than half of the youth did not have plans to emigrate and intended to stay in their home country. What most often influenced their decision was the reluctance to leave the family. Those who intended to leave the country more often indicated European countries as the destination of their trip than those outside Europe. They indicated better development opportunities and higher earnings as the main reasons for such a decision. A significant proportion of the respondents (65.16%) were in favor of adapting and combining Polish and foreign customs while living abroad.

4. Almost 90% of young people positively assessed the issue of Poland's participation in the European Union. According to 65%, Poland would not have

been able to achieve the currently experienced economic development without the EU support, and nearly 30% of respondents found this question difficult. Perhaps they were not able to imagine Poland outside the EU, since their generation remembers Poland only as a member of the EU community from birth.

5. Of all the benefits that the EU provides, young people most appreciated the freedom of movement within the EU. This undoubtedly affected the numerous migration declarations of the respondents. Thus, the presence of immigrants and the emigration of compatriots were the most frequently indicated shortcomings in connection with the country's presence in the EU.

6. When assessing Poland's cooperation with the European Union in particular areas, young people were more inclined to advocate deepening or maintaining the current level of cooperation than maintaining their individuality. This concerned, among others, environmental and climate protection, human rights, foreign policy, trade and security. The issue with the most diverse distribution of responses turned out to be culture and customs.

7. Almost all respondents showed a willingness to actively participate in elections after gaining electoral rights. When asked about the importance of the elections to the European Parliament, 60% agreed that they were as important as national elections. However, what is disturbing, $\frac{1}{3}$ of the surveyed youth placed them lower in the hierarchy of importance.

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