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# POLAND'S DIASPORAL POLICY (1991–2025): DYNAMICS OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

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Received 27 April 2025

Accepted 26 June 2025

doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2025-3-3

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*The development of relations between the Polish state and its compatriots abroad has a long tradition, dating back to the period of the Second Republic. Under the model of interaction established at that time, the upper house — the Senate — was responsible for relations with the Polish diaspora (Polonia). This institutional framework was restored in the post-socialist period and was regarded as a means of demonstrating continuity in relations with Poles abroad. Over time, however, practical contradictions emerged, particularly concerning the allocation of funds for diaspora policy and the struggle among political forces to position themselves as defenders of the Polish diaspora. As a result, several attempts were made to reform the institutions of diaspora policy in Poland, involving both the strengthening of the executive authorities and the Senate. Theoretically, the article draws on a neo-institutional methodology and interprets the observed transformations as forms of institutional change driven both by structural factors and by the expansion of the range of actors involved in interactions within the state apparatus. The analysis demonstrates that the main trends in the transformation of diaspora policy institutions in Poland between 1991 and 2025 were the formalization of institutional design, the gradual reduction in the scope of implemented changes, and the general incompleteness of the transformations, which stemmed from their relative frequency and inter-party competition, primarily between the Civic Platform and Law and Justice.*

## Keywords:

diaspora policy, Polish policy, Polonia, Poland, institutional transformations

Poland's diaspora policy has a long tradition. In 1920, the first departments for emigrant affairs were established under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. However, it gradually became clear that support measures for the diaspora were often linked to issues of culture, language preservation, and youth policy. Therefore, from 1928 to 1930, responsibility for relations with the diaspora was largely transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Second Republic and to individual regional and ethnic organizations [1, p. 128–131].

**To cite this article:** Loshkariov, I. D. 2025, Poland's diasporal policy (1991–2025): dynamics of institutional changes, *Baltic Region*, vol. 17, № 3, p. 42–58. doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2025-3-3

In 1934, however, the Second Congress of Poles Abroad in Kraków approved the statute of the World Union of Poles Abroad (Pol. *Światowy Związek Polaków z Zagranicy, Światpol*) and elected the Marshal of the Polish Senate, Raczkiewicz, as chairman of the Union. The organization's declared goal was "maintaining unity with the Fatherland in the name of the unity of the Polish nation" [2, p. 307]. Thus, a distinctive institutional model of relations with the Polish diaspora emerged, as its affairs were handled not by the executive authorities but by the upper house of parliament.

In 1989–1990, this model was restored almost unchanged following negotiations held in Rome under the auspices of Pope John Paul II between representatives of the Polish government and Polish diaspora organizations [3, p. 59–60]. In Polish socio-political discourse, the relationship between the state and the diaspora is described either as 'polityka polonijna' or as 'caring for Polonia' (Pol. *opieka nad Polonią*): the Polish diaspora is designated by a separate word, in contrast to diasporas of other origins. Traditionally, the task of the Polish state has been to protect the rights and freedoms of emigrants and to establish strong ties with them by addressing non-standard issues and areas, taking into account the specific characteristics of the Polish diaspora in a given country or even in particular regions within that country. In other words, Poland strives to attune itself to the rhythm of uncoordinated and diverse initiatives within Polish communities abroad [1, p. 116–117].

Maintaining ties with Polonia and strengthening the position of its representatives in host countries has been regarded as a "national task" since 1991, along with the creation of conditions for repatriation [4, p. 106]. This principle was enshrined in the 1997 Constitution of Poland (Article 6). According to available data, the 'old' Polish diaspora in the world includes more than 10 million people (according to some estimates, up to 21 million): 9–10 million live in the United States, over 1 million are believed to be in Brazil and Canada, and over 500 thousand are residents of Argentina.<sup>1</sup> A significant number of people of Polish descent also live in the post-Soviet space. However, until recently, they were not included in the concept of Polonia and were instead referred to by a separate term — Poles in the East.

Since competition for economic and social capital persists in the modern world [5], Poland has repeatedly attempted to update and intensify its diaspora policy. According to Gamelén, by 2014, approximately 110 countries worldwide had established ties with their compatriots and begun to develop a comprehensive institutional infrastructure for interaction with their diasporas [6, p. 182]. After joining the EU in 2004, attempts to update diaspora policy received additional impetus due to the significant outflow of population from the country. In 2007, more than 2.3 million Polish citizens (approximately 6.6% of the country's total population) were permanently residing outside Poland, which came as an

<sup>1</sup> *The Global Polish Diaspora: A Vast and Diverse Community*, 2025, URL: <https://polaron.com.au/the-global-polish-diaspora/> (accessed 18.06.2025).

unpleasant surprise to politicians and experts [7, p. 84]. In the context of the limited effectiveness of the measures taken, a discussion emerged in the early 2010s about the possible contours of a 'new Polonia policy'. This policy envisioned the centralization of governance and the optimization of efforts by various institutions, the rejection of a unilateral approach to relations with the diaspora, as well as the clarification and reduction of the number of objectives set by government bodies [8, p. 10–13].

This article examines the institutional transformations of Poland's diaspora policy between 1991 and 2025. The author aims to investigate how the dynamics of institutional change have evolved, what forms these changes have taken, and how stable they have proven to be. Within the framework of neo-institutional analysis, the study also explores the environment of interactions, including the intense inter-party confrontation characteristic of contemporary Poland (the so-called 'Polish–Polish war').

### **Neoinstitutional analysis of sectoral public policy**

Neoinstitutionalism as a methodology in the social sciences assumes that units of analysis (parties, leaders, officials, and firms) most often obey explicit and implicit rules, structure their behaviour, and plan further actions based on the framework that is set [9; 10]. An important aspect in compliance with the rules is the complex balance between efficiency and legitimacy: actors can achieve more by breaking the rules, but others are unlikely to be satisfied with such behaviour, so there is a constant bargaining over how to interpret and transform explicit and implicit norms (institutional frameworks) in the most advantageous direction [11]. In political research, neo-institutionalism provides a framework for analyzing change, including the abolition or adoption of rules, their combination, shifts in the degree of interconnectedness, the narrowing or expansion of areas of responsibility, and the emergence of fundamentally new forms of institutional design [12; 13]. In fact, an institution is understood as what is established as an explicit or implicit norm and as the processes of constructing certain rules, their combinations, and variations [14].

The most important point in the study of institutions is how exactly they change, the transition from one state and structure of rules to the next. Several theories and approaches have been proposed to explain institutional transformations, each offering different perspectives on the dynamics of this process and on the methods used to analyze it. This diversity largely depends on the chosen analytical starting point — whether it is the underlying causes of change, the moment of transformation itself, the actors involved, external influences, or the nature of multi-level interactions [15; 16]. Among the numerous interpretations of institutional change, the approach of James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen is particularly well known. These researchers proposed combining the analysis of the depth of changes and their participants, which made it possible to identify four types of transformation (Table 1).

Table 1

**Types of institutional changes  
(according to James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen)**

| Type of change | Set of participants | Cause                                                                               | Procedure          |
|----------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Replacement    | Expanding           | Relatively uneven distribution of resources                                         | Formal             |
| Layering       | Expanding           | Relatively even distribution of resources with trends to a more uneven distribution | Formal             |
| Drift          | Non-expanding       | Change of common profit if norms are fully obeyed                                   | Informal           |
| Conversion     | Non-expanding       | Change of ideational perception of norms                                            | Formal or informal |

As to of replacement of institutions, the old rules are completely abolished and new ones are established, which is associated with the emergence of new participants in interactions who are dissatisfied with the previous approach to resource distribution and are capable of calling the legitimacy of institutions into question if their position is ignored. Layering of institutions involves making significant amendments and additions to the design of existing institutions, which reflects a compromise between new and old participants in interactions: the former are not yet capable of changing the rules entirely, while the latter cannot stop the process of editing and updating. Drift is the preservation of the formal aspect of the rules, but a change in their content due to external changes: new additions and amendments are not proposed, but some of the regulations are not followed ('dead norms'). Finally, conversion assumes that the ideological content of the rules changes as they are interpreted and understood differently than before. Within the framework of conversion, a new correspondence of the institutions of collective identity to modern practices and similar institutions in other countries, and the goal-setting of states is actually established. In the case of displacement and conversion, the composition of participants is not almost or completely updated, which increases the significance of external factors for institutional transformations [17]. On the contrary, Edward Koenig noted that *layering* and *replacement* most often occur within the framework of formal procedures and are driven by external factors such as decisions made by higher authorities, the inclusion of new participants in institutional interaction, or broader shifts in the distribution of power within the state (for instance, following elections). Institutional replacement and, to a lesser extent, conversion are associated with informal bargaining and the internal development of institutions [18]. Probably, the balance of endogenous and exogenous factors in institutional changes is not so straightforward, since neoinstitutionalism is based on the thesis of the relationship between how rules are observed and how they change under the influence of current circumstances and long-term cumulative processes [19; 20].

For the analysis of sectoral state policy (in particular, diaspora policy), this scheme provides several important methodological advantages. Firstly, it considers the reasons for different orders in institutional transformations, such as

resources, ideological, and actor-centric processes. Secondly, it becomes possible to indirectly assess the potential direction of institutional changes by analyzing the composition of the participants involved (for example, responsible ministries or departments). Thirdly, this scheme distinguishes between formal and informal procedures, which are often presented in an undivided form in neoinstitutional analysis.

Regarding Poland, neoinstitutionalism makes it possible to link the dynamics of changes in diaspora policy with electoral cycles and party preferences, to determine the extent to which shifts in national priorities were reflected in this specific policy area, how the composition of actors involved in shaping diaspora policy evolved, and which institutional forms gained or, conversely, lost their relevance.

### **Genesis of the current diaspora policy in Poland**

Given the peculiarities of parliamentarism in Poland, in 1989, the responsibility for coordinating diaspora policy fell on the upper house, the Senate. This restored the institutional logic of the Second Republic and emphasized the historical continuity with the period of Piłsudski's rule. The Senate formed the Commission on Emigration and Relations with Poles Abroad, which regularly discussed initiatives to strengthen ties with Polonia and made recommendations on the distribution of budget funds in this area. The final decision on financial issues was made by the Marshal of the Senate. The Resolution of the Senate of the Third Convocation "On the relations of Poles and Polonia with the Fatherland" in 1997 emphasized that the special role of the Senate is the continuation of the "noble tradition" of protecting the rights of diaspora participants.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, the executive branch in Poland also had its sights set on a diaspora policy. In 1991, the government approved a document entitled "Goals and priorities of government policy towards Polonia, emigration and poles abroad" (Pol. *Cele i priorytety polityki rządu wobec Polonii, emigracji i Polaków za granicą*). The text emphasized the importance of maintaining comprehensive ties between people from Poland and their country of origin, as well as preserving Polish identity ('Polishness') in other countries. In many ways, the document was based on the logic that the 'obligations' of the Polish state towards the diaspora are one-sided, and that communities abroad are only required to actively participate in the proposed initiatives [21, p. 77–78].

The initial model of diaspora policy assumed that tactical issues of diaspora policy were within the competence of the Senate, while the formulation of goals and strategy for relations with compatriots was more likely to be within the purview of the government. The 1997 Constitution consolidated this institutional link, since it transferred the right of legislative initiative in the area of public finances to the exclusive powers of the government and left the procedure for approving budgetary issues to both chambers of parliament. Due to the ambiguous

<sup>1</sup> Uchwała Senatu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej y dnia 5 marca 1997 r. w sprawie więzi Polaków i Polonii y Macierzą, 1997, URL: <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WMP19970160147/O/M19970147.pdf> (accessed 24.04.2025).

understanding of the instruments of diaspora policy, this division was largely formal in nature, leading to rivalry between the two branches of government in matters concerning diaspora policy.

In 1998, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs made an attempt to transfer the decision-making centre. A document entitled “General concept of Polonia policy” was prepared. It assumed the transfer of the development and implementation of policy regarding Polonia and Poles abroad to the Ministry. The document emphasized that the Ministry, in fact, already maintained contacts with representatives of the diaspora on a regular basis, but did not influence the financing of projects. However, the relevant Senate committee spoke out sharply against the proposed text and accused the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of trying to monopolize diaspora policy. At the same time, the discussion acknowledged that contacts with Polonia were conducted primarily through diplomatic and consular missions and emphasized the need for stronger coordination between the executive and legislative branches [22]. While in 1991–2001 institutional contradictions surrounding diaspora policy were largely aggravated by inter-party confrontation, during the government of Leszek Miller (2001–2004), this factor virtually disappeared. In 2002, the government adopted a programme of cooperation with Polonia and Poles Abroad, which for the first time raised the issue of reciprocal obligations of the diaspora representatives. According to this document, Polonia was to contribute to the implementation of Polish national interests in the host countries, and not only participate in state projects for cultural and social development. An interdepartmental group was created under the Prime Minister to coordinate work on issues of Polonia and Poles abroad.

Simultaneously, the Advisory Council of Polonia was created under the Marshal of the Senate, which was given the function of discussing financial issues and discussing projects to strengthen relations with the diaspora. Later, the density of institutions under the Senate’s jurisdiction increased even more, since the Polonia Bureau was established under the upper house, which helped to submit applications for funding and monitored the projects being implemented. At the same time, at the conceptual level, there was a surprising unanimity, which was enshrined in the Senate’s resolution (2002), repeating the main provisions of the government’s programme of cooperation with Polonia and Poles abroad [21, p. 77–78; 22, p. 73–80]. These achievements turned out to be unstable in the context of the subsequent aggravation of inter-party confrontation (the ‘Polish-Polish war’) and another wave of EU enlargement (2004). Instead of the stable work of diaspora policy institutions in 2001–2004, there was a temporary decrease in the conflict between the branches of government on issues of interaction with Polonia. The transition to the left-wing parties of the majority in parliament and the presidential position led to an informal division of powers. Under conditions of political competition and following the adoption of the 1997 Constitution, an institutional layering emerged between the traditional role of the Senate in matters concerning relations with Polonia and the practical activities of the executive branch — namely, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was better equipped to carry out this work. However, this layering was later replaced by an institutional shift representing a temporary informal compromise,



under which the rivalry between the upper house and the executive branch was effectively suspended. This tactical decision did not result in the creation of more stable institutions of diaspora policy in Poland, but it did help ease tensions at the level of state institutions as a whole.

### **Reforms of the Civic Platform (2007 – 2014)**

Due to the instability of the parliamentary majority in 2005–2007, issues of diaspora policy were somewhat postponed. Nevertheless, the PiS governments began preparatory work on creating another state programme of cooperation with Polonia and Poles abroad. In addition, the government of Jarosław Kaczyński began implementing the “Closer to Work, Closer to Poland” programme (Pol. *Blżej pracy, blżej Polski*), which provided assistance to Polish labour migrants in settling in host countries and protecting their rights through the system of consular missions.<sup>1</sup>

However, after the victory of the Civic Platform party in the parliamentary elections in 2007, the issue of diaspora policy appeared on the political agenda again. Even before the elections, Donald Tusk’s party identified the promotion of repatriation as a key government priority and proposed abolishing taxes on pension savings and remittances of migrant capital. Already at the end of 2007, a large-scale “Return Programme” was adopted, containing a set of measures to stimulate the repatriation of migrants and representatives of Polonia. In addition to ‘tax holidays’ and a reduction in social and pension contributions, the programme provided for the opening of labour exchanges in London and Dublin with vacancies in Poland, the creation of specialized mechanisms for attracting highly qualified personnel, support for the opening of Polish schools abroad and the creation of distance education at universities [7, p. 86–87].

At the same time, Donald Tusk’s government introduced several additional measures aimed at strengthening dialogue with Polish communities abroad. One of the first was the adoption of the Pole’s Card in 2007, presented as an effort to redress historical injustices suffered by Poles living in the post-Soviet space (Poles in the East). This document on “belonging to the Polish nation” became a new mechanism for expanding ties with people of Polish origin and indirectly created incentives for repatriation. In particular, the Pole’s Card was not issued to individuals permanently residing in Poland, even though most of the rights and privileges associated with this document could only be exercised within Poland. A more direct mechanism for encouraging repatriation, the Rodak system, assisted approximately 2,300 people in its final year of operation, while decisions on individual cases could take up to seven years [23]. Secondly, a ministerial programme for the development of Polish education abroad for 2009–2011 was adopted in 2009, which laid the foundation for permanent departmental programmes in this area. The scale of this activity was considerable: over 14,000 people studied in 75 educational institutions under programmes for Poles

<sup>1</sup> Program działań na rzecz zwiększenia opieki nad polską migracją zarobkową „Blżej pracy, blżej Polski”, *Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej RPO*, 2025, URL: <https://bip.brpo.gov.pl/pliki/1172574832.pdf> (accessed 24.04.2025).

abroad in the 2009/10 academic year.<sup>1</sup> Since 2010, congresses of Polish teachers have been held in Ostróda. Such events helped to approve methodological recommendations, discuss problems of teaching, and exchange experiences.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, Donald Tusk's government began systematically strengthening the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in implementing diaspora policy. Under the Five-Year Programme of Assistance to Poles Abroad (2007–2012) adopted by the executive branch, responsibilities such as coordinating Polonia policy and promoting a positive image of Poland abroad were explicitly assigned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As part of an internal reorganization, a dedicated division was established within the Ministry in 2009, later renamed the Department of Cooperation with Polonia and Poles Abroad. The issues of promoting the Polish language and culture, preserving memorial sites, investment contacts, as well as analyzing and protecting the rights of Poles abroad were transferred to this Department. In 2012, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radosław Sikorski, succeeded in transferring the authority to distribute funds for specific Polonia-related projects from the Senate to his department. Previously, these funds had been allocated on a non-competitive basis to partner and contracting organizations, for example, the Fund for Aid to Poles in the East or the Polish Community Association. But from that time onward, an annual competitive selection process was introduced, requiring the submission of formally prepared applications and detailed justifications of requested funding. The corresponding amendments were made to the law on public procurement of 2004.<sup>3</sup>

The transfer of diaspora policy to the actual jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not have unambiguous support within the "Civic Platform": the Marshal of the Senate (2005–2015), Bogdan Borusewicz, opposed such a decision and tried to continue the work without financial resources [24]. In particular, Bogdan Borusewicz joined the activities of Polish organizations in Germany in 2012 and helped them obtain permits to create a bureau of Polish associations, media and educational courses in Polish.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of the reforms introduced by Donald Tusk's government, Poland's diaspora policy came almost entirely under the jurisdiction of the executive branch, primarily the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In other words, the institutional framework for interaction with compatriots was fundamentally restructured. This shift was made possible by the parliamentary majority held by Tusk's Civic Platform party in both chambers of parliament. If during the period of leftist dominance in Polish politics (2001–2004), the Senate and the executive branch coordinated their actions with respect to Poles abroad, then in 2007–2014,

<sup>1</sup> Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym, 2009, *Główny Urząd Statystyczny*, p. 105, URL: [https://stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/e\\_oswiata\\_i\\_wychowanie\\_2009-2010.pdf](https://stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/e_oswiata_i_wychowanie_2009-2010.pdf) (accessed 20.04.2025).

<sup>2</sup> Czyżycka, K. 2001, 30 lat dla Polonii, *Stowarzyszenia Wspólnota Polska*, URL: [http://wspolnotapolska.org.pl/30lat/dzialania\\_edukacja.php](http://wspolnotapolska.org.pl/30lat/dzialania_edukacja.php) (accessed 21.04.2025).

<sup>3</sup> Senat utraci pieniądze dla Polonii?, 2015, *Onet Wiadomości*, URL: <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/senat-utraci-pieniadze-dla-polonii/gmqgh> (accessed 23.04.2025).

<sup>4</sup> Niemiecka Polonia apeluje do Borusewicza o wsparcie, 2012, *Onet Wiadomości*, URL: <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/niemiecka-polonia-apeluje-do-borusewicza-o-wsparcie/hdrlg9m> (accessed 23.04.2025).



diaspora policy became a separate branch of state policy, over which centralized control (both political and financial) was established. On the one hand, such centralization facilitated the state's interaction with the diaspora and made it possible to build a long-term strategy in this regard. On the other hand, for the heterogeneous Polonia and its various organizations, the centralisation of state policy meant an increase in specific obligations: investment, political, and cultural capital. With a significant part of the diaspora (in Western Europe and North America) not in need of assistance from the state of origin, the growth of the 'burden of obligations' played a rather negative role in the implementation of Poland's diaspora policy.

Notably, under Donald Tusk's government, changes in the institutions of diaspora policy occurred more abruptly than under the Leśnica administration. This was apparently linked to the instability of the previous institutional model and to personal rivalry between Radosław Sikorski and Bogdan Borusewicz, as well as to a shift in the focus of policy efforts: following the EU enlargement, more than two million people (approximately 5.2% of the country's population) had left Poland by 2011.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the composition of participants in the implementation of diaspora policy has changed: it became necessary to coordinate decisions both at the national level and the supranational level.

### **Transformations during the rule of the Law and Justice party (2015—2023)**

Before the parliamentary elections, Ewa Kopacz's government succeeded in adopting the Programme of Cooperation with the Polish Diaspora for 2015—2020 and the accompanying Tasks for 2015—2016 in August 2015. Although the document introduced a number of ideological innovations, such as replacing the concept of Polonia with the term diaspora and redefining relations with the diaspora as a partnership, the Civic Platform government ultimately lost the elections. Therefore, many provisions of the Programme were adjusted by representatives of the Law and Justice party, which formed a new government coalition. Paradoxically, the presence of a strategic document for 2015—2020 in the field of diaspora policy prevented the consistent improvement of diaspora policy institutions and led to several situational and often uncoordinated decisions [25, s. 149]. Moreover, in January 2016, Michał Dworczyk, Chairman of the Sejm Commission for Relations with Polonia and a member of the Law and Justice faction (later Head of the Prime Minister's Office), expressed the view that transferring the functions of goal-setting and financing to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been "hasty and ill-prepared".<sup>2</sup> Representatives of the ruling party continued to criticize their predecessors and insisted on restoring the historical role of the Senate in the sphere of Poland's diaspora policy.

<sup>1</sup> International migration outlook 2013, 2013, Paris, *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*, URL: [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/international-migration-outlook-2013\\_migr\\_outlook-2013-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/international-migration-outlook-2013_migr_outlook-2013-en.html) (accessed 20.04.2025).

<sup>2</sup> Sejmowa komisja chce przeniesienia pieniędzy na Polonię do Senatu, 2016, *Dzieje.pl*, URL: <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/sejmowa-komisja-chce-przeniesienia-pieniedzy-na-polonie-do-senatu> (accessed 24.04.2025).

As a result of the reforms adopted between February and July 2016, the upper house of the Polish parliament formally regained control over relations with Polonia as of 2017. Unlike previous years, the responsibility of the Senate was recorded for the first time in the law on public procurement. Before that, the functions of the upper house in relation to Polonia were a tribute to tradition, and not a formal norm. However, the implementation of diaspora policy was not fully transferred to the Marshal of the Senate: the head of the chamber received the right to approve the budget for diaspora policy projects in agreement with the Presidium of the chamber, and the Presidium began to determine the basis of the state assignment, that is, in fact, the goals and objectives of the policy implemented by the state.<sup>1</sup> The annual competition for getting grants was transferred to the Chancellery of the Senate. As the budget for the implementation of diaspora policy increased (in 2016 — PLN 60.5 million, in 2018 — already PLN 100.5 million), institutional norms became more complex: applications for funding from partner organizations were transferred to an electronic portal and deadlines for their submission were set (until the end of November each year). This resulted in a slight decrease in both the number of submitted and approved applications: in 2018, 721 applications were submitted, of which 269 were approved; in 2019, the number of submissions fell to 616, with 267 approved.<sup>2</sup>

Amid the growing funding for diaspora policy, Mateusz Morawiecki's government (2017—2023) decided to play a more active role in shaping it. Quite unexpectedly, after the deadline for submitting applications for funding of projects concerning Poles abroad had already passed, the position of Commissioner for Polonia and Poles Abroad was established within the Chancellery of the Prime Minister on 16 December 2019. The task of the Commissioner was to formulate government initiatives in this area, coordinate the activities of departments, interact with state and non-governmental organizations, and local governments. In other words, Mateusz Morawiecki, within the framework of his powers, created a separate dimension of diaspora policy under the jurisdiction of the executive branch. Jan Dziedziczak, who had previously overseen this area at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2015—2018), was appointed Commissioner for Polonia and Poles Abroad.<sup>3</sup>

An additional demarcation took place in the sphere of diaspora policy in Poland in 2020. It was announced that the government, within its powers, would dis-

<sup>1</sup> Senat zmienił swój regulamin, by móc opiekować się Polonią, 2016, *Gazeta prawna*, URL: <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/senat-zmienil-swoj-regulamin-moc-opiekowac-sie-polonia> (accessed 21.04.2025).

<sup>2</sup> Senat rozdzielił ponad 100 mln zł na opiekę nad Polonią i Polakami za granicą, 2018, *Dzieje*, URL: <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/senat-rozdzilil-ponad-100-mln-zl-na-opieke-nad-polonia-i-polakami-za-granica> (accessed 24.04.2025) ; Senat w 2019 r. przeznaczył ponad 100 mln zł na opiekę nad Polonią i Polakami za granicą, 2019, *Dzieje*, URL: <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/senat-w-2019-r-przeznaczy-ponad-100-mln-zl-na-opieke-nad-polonia-i-polakami-za-granica> (accessed 24.04.2025).

<sup>3</sup> Jan Dziedziczak pełnomocnikiem rządu ds. Polonii i Polaków za granicą, 2023, *WNP*, URL: <https://www.wnp.pl/polityka-i-sondaze/wydarzenia/jan-dziedziczak-pełnomocnikiem-rządu-ds-polonii-i-polaków-za-granica,47087.html> (accessed 22.04.2025).

tribute funds for projects independently through its Commissioner, and the Senate would retain the distribution of funds within its powers. The Commissioner was given the authority to distribute over PLN 59 million, and the Senate received about PLN 10 million. To distinguish this reform from the institutional model previously implemented by Radosław Sikorski, Mateusz Morawiecki's government designated the Ministry of Science and Education as the administrator of funds for Polish education abroad (PLN 28.3 million) and assigned responsibility for sports and cultural projects to the Ministry of Culture, National Heritage and Sports. Particular attention was given to protecting labour rights and ensuring the social and psychological adaptation of Polish emigrants, as these issues were transferred to the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy [26; 27]. The redistribution of funds in the sphere of diaspora policy took place against the backdrop of a discussion of a general reduction in public spending and an analysis of the effectiveness of state policy. In this regard, Morawiecki's government cautiously criticized the Senate: in particular, at a meeting of the relevant commission of the upper house, Commissioner Dedziczak noted that organizations that received funding in 2019 often did not provide feedback, and the Senate was not capable of demanding documents from them beyond formal reporting.<sup>1</sup>

Such abrupt changes in 2019–2020 were directly related to the fact that in 2019, an opposition majority to Law and Justice (PiS) was formed in the Senate. Representatives of the Civic Platform, Tomasz Grodzki and Kazimierz Ujazdowski, became, respectively, the Marshal of the Senate and the Chairman of the Senate Commission for Relations with Polonia and Poles Abroad. Therefore, it was illogical to allow political opponents to participate in the distribution of state funds from the point of view of the Law and Justice Party.

Mateusz Morawiecki's government sought to gain control over the funds allocated by the Senate to support Polonia and Poles abroad in the 2022 budget. The lower house of parliament introduced an amendment increasing the budget of the Commissioner for Polonia and Poles Abroad, Jan Dziędziczak, by PLN 10 million to finance summer holiday programmes for children of the diaspora in Poland. Government representatives explained at a meeting of the Senate's relevant commission that diaspora policy should have been integrated into the overall strategy of the executive branch, should have become part of a complex of institutions, and that the upper house was not capable of handling all the tasks. The commission demanded that its quota in the budget for projects in the field of diaspora policy be retained and criticized the disproportionate spending on diaspora support (in particular, on Polish schools in Germany).<sup>2</sup> Although the Senate quota was successfully defended, the Senate Commission began to analyze

<sup>1</sup> Posiedzenie Komisji Spraw Emigracji i Łączności z Polakami za Granicą (nr 6) w dniu 27-05-2020, 2020, *Senat*, URL: <https://www.senat.gov.pl/prace/komisje-senackie/przebieg,8653,1.html> (accessed 24.04.2025) ; Posiedzenie Komisji Spraw Emigracji i Łączności z Polakami za Granicą (nr 11) w dniu 13-08-2020, 2020, *Senat*, URL: <https://www.senat.gov.pl/prace/komisje-senackie/przebieg,8763,1.html> (accessed 24.04.2025).

<sup>2</sup> Posiedzenie Komisji Spraw Emigracji i Łączności z Polakami za Granicą (nr 31) w dniu 04-01-2022, 2022, *Senat*, URL: <https://www.senat.gov.pl/prace/komisje-senackie/przebieg,9479,1.html> (accessed 23.04.2025).

the educational aspect of the diaspora policy more closely, actively criticized the delays in the allocation of funds and the confusion of areas of responsibility between the government commissioner and the Ministry of Science and Education.

These rhetoric about efficiency and cost reduction after the transfer of a significant part of the diaspora policy areas to the government turned out to be nothing more than political tactics. Within the framework of government projects in 2022–2023, opportunities for additional funding were sought related to the increase in construction costs and the announcement of targeted competitions (for example, to support foreign Polish media): in 2022, the amount of additional funding was PLN 120.5 million, and in 2023, it was PLN 82.7 million.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, two large-scale institutional transformations in Poland's policy toward Polonia and Poles abroad occurred between 2015 and 2023. During the first stage (2016–2018), the previous model was replaced: diaspora policy was transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and integrated into the broader framework of foreign policy. The Senate regained its former role, which was formally defined and distributed among the Marshal of the Chamber, its Presidium, and the Chancellery. In the second stage (2020–2022), the government of Mateusz Morawiecki, adopting a rather confrontational approach, brought diaspora policy under its own jurisdiction, leaving the Senate with only a few functions and a significantly reduced budget. This institutional layering, in contrast to the situation in 2001–2004, took place in the context of party competition: the executive branch was represented by a coalition led by the Law and Justice party, while the Senate was dominated by a coalition led by the Civic Platform.

### **The return of the Civic Platform**

The Civic Platform party, as part of the Civic Coalition bloc, won (122 seats in the Sejm and 36 seats in the Senate) in the 2023 parliamentary elections and formed a coalition government at the end of the year. In Donald Tusk's third government, the post of Commissioner for Polonia and Poles Abroad was abolished, and responsibility for interministerial coordination was transferred to a governmental interdepartmental group. Although this group had been formally established in 2021, it remained largely inactive. The group was headed by Radosław Sikorski, who had returned to the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland<sup>2</sup>. Notably, the new head of the relevant Senate commission was Bogdan Borusewicz, Sikorski's political opponent, who also assumed the position of Vice-Marshall of the Senate. Although strong political hostility persists between the current ruling coalition and its predecessors, Donald Tusk's government appears to have drawn lessons from the sharp public reaction to the Senate's complete

<sup>1</sup> Konkurs Polonia i Polacy za Granicą 2024 — wydarzenia i inicjatywy polonijne, 2024, *Senat*, URL: <https://www.gov.pl/web/polonia/konkurs-polonia-i-polacy-za-granica-2024---wydarzenia-i-inicjatywy-polonijne2> (accessed 24.04.2025).

<sup>2</sup> Międzyresortowy Zespół do spraw Polonii i Polaków za Granicą, 2024, *Gov.pl*, URL: <https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/miedzyresortowy-zespol-do-spraw-polonii-i-polakow-za-granica> (accessed 23.04.2025).

exclusion from the implementation of diaspora policy. At the present stage, the division between government projects and Senate projects regarding Polonia and Poles abroad has been preserved. Moreover, in 2024, instead of PLN 10 million, 71.5 million was transferred to the upper chamber. At the same time, Senate projects were once again placed on a competitive basis, while the functions of coordinating diaspora policy were transferred to the Polonia Bureau of the upper chamber, which, under the Law and Justice government, had primarily performed analytical functions. Against this background, the definition of the general goals of diaspora policy returned to the purview of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry prepared and achieved the adoption of the Government's Strategy for Cooperation with Polonia and Poles Abroad for 2025–2030. The document is ideologically close to the Programme of Cooperation with the Polish Diaspora of 2015, yet it also exhibits a significant difference. The principal and explicitly stated goal of diaspora policy is now the preservation and promotion of the Polish language, along with the expansion of student and academic mobility programmes for members of Polish communities abroad. In practice, however, the document omits objectives related to attracting diaspora investment, promoting a positive international image of Poland, or aligning with broader European norms and frameworks.

The third government of Donald Tusk maintained the institutional layering characteristic of Poland's diaspora policy, preserving the division of responsibilities between the executive branch and the upper house. Nevertheless, the coordination of this work within the government was once again entrusted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, rather than to the Office of the Prime Minister or the Commissioner for Polonia and Poles Abroad. The return of two previously opposing political figures, Radosław Sikorski and Bogdan Borusewicz, to roles central to the implementation of diaspora policy may, to some extent, serve as a stabilizing factor for this otherwise fragile institutional configuration. At the same time, no drastic changes have occurred in diaspora policy as a result of competition with the Law and Justice party, unlike in other areas such as judicial reform or media regulation [28; 29].

## **Conclusions**

Since 1989, Poland's diaspora policy has undergone several waves of institutional transformation (Table 2). Excluding the formative period of 1989–1991, when the modern Third Republic was being established, the first decade was marked by the creation of the foundations for a distinct sectoral policy toward Polonia and Poles abroad. The institutional framework of this period relied on the informal role of the Senate as the principal body responsible for 'caring' for the diaspora - an arrangement rooted in the historical experience of the Second Republic. However, the upper chamber lacked its own foreign missions and was therefore unable to maintain permanent contact with Polish communities abroad. Consequently, the issue of defining the role of the executive branch, and particularly that of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, gradually came to the fore.

Table 2

**Institutional transformations of diaspora policy in Poland**

| Period     | Type of transformation | Major changes                                                                                                                                                        | Impetus                                                                   |
|------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2001—2004  | Drift                  | Informal acquisition of operational functions by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs alongside the Senate                                                                | Dominance of one party in the executive and legislative branches          |
| 2007—2012  | Replacement            | Formal and legal transfer of all main functions and new programmes to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs                                            | Politicization of the agenda regarding the diaspora (ideological factors) |
| 2016—2019  | Replacement            | Formal and legal transfer of all functions to the jurisdiction of the Senate                                                                                         | Politicization of the agenda regarding the diaspora (ideological factors) |
| 2020—2022  | Layering               | Formal and legal division of functions between the Senate and the government, with a bias in favour of the government. Inter-party confrontation                     | Intra-party competition                                                   |
| Since 2024 | Layering               | Expansion of the sphere of responsibility of the Senate, transfer of functions in the executive branch from the government office to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs | Dominance of one party in the executive and legislative branches          |

The combination of historical tradition and the need to implement diaspora policy through the executive branch led to three major institutional transformations (2001—2004, 2007—2012, and 2020—2022), each of a different type: drift, replacement, or layering. However, these changes proved relatively unstable, as did the subsequent attempt to return diaspora policy to the Senate (2016—2018), since each phase involved deviations from the established norms and rules of interaction. Over time, a gradual reduction in the scale of institutional transformation has become apparent: the two most recent reforms were limited to adjustments, additions, and amendments within the existing institutional framework.

In the long term, the evolution of Poland's diaspora policy has been characterized by the progressive formalization of the 'rules of the game'. Alongside the adoption of legislation on public procurement, which regulates competition procedures for partner and contracting organizations, the delineation of responsibilities has increasingly been codified in secondary legislation, for instance, parliamentary regulations, government resolutions, and national programmes and strategies. This logic of formalization enabled the government of Mateusz Morawiecki to assert the executive branch's exclusive jurisdiction over several aspects of diaspora policy. In effect, positive law has gradually prevailed over unwritten traditions in shaping the behaviour of state institutions.



Although Polish politics is frequently described in terms of sharp inter-party confrontation, the so-called ‘Polish—Polish war’ [30; 31, p. 5—10], this characterization is only partly applicable to the sphere of diaspora policy. Institutional change has often been driven less by partisan rivalry than by the consolidation of relative monopolies within the legislative and executive branches. Nevertheless, inter-party conflict has been reflected in diaspora policy both structurally—when one party reallocated institutional resources from another—and ideologically, as parties sought to outdo each other in demonstrating commitment to Poles abroad. Even though Poland tried out several options for the institutional design of diaspora policy in 1991—2025, it is difficult to judge the effectiveness of each of them, since the transformations took place relatively often, and it is difficult to assess what would be preferable for working with Poles abroad in the medium term. Similarly, financial efficiency, especially for projects in the field of culture, television broadcasting, and language learning, can hardly be assessed only by quantitative indicators (number of visits to plays or museums, time spent watching programmes, number of students in language schools and language courses). Moreover, there were delays in the allocation of funds from the Polish budget on several occasions (for example, in 2016), which had an impact on the quality of the work carried out on the projects. The institutional inertia characteristic of the initial period in the history of modern Poland (approximately until 1997), the indirect impact of inter-party competition, and the relatively frequent deep institutional transformations together contributed to the fact that, despite the reform efforts undertaken between 2007 and 2012, Poland’s diaspora policy has remained a distinct sectoral domain of state policy rather than being fully transferred to the jurisdiction of the executive branch, as is customary in most countries. This combination of inertia and discontinuity prevented the implementation of a genuinely ‘new Polonia policy’, which had envisaged the centralization of governance and the more efficient use of state resources.

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