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The French paradox, or a bottom-up modification of integration policy. The republican model and Polish immigrant organisations in France

Abstract

The article provides empirical knowledge on the functioning of the French paradox in integration policy at the mezzo level. The research problem is to explain how immigrant organisations take part in bringing out and sustaining the contradictions inherent in the French model of integration. The analysis is based on 48 individual in-depth interviews conducted in the frame of grass-roots research carried out among activists of Polish voluntary associations in France as well as representatives of French public institutions and non-governmental organisations. The individual in-depth interviews concerned the conditions under which Polish associations function, including the characteristics of France as a host country. The main conclusion of the article is that despite their legal and institutional invisibility, migrant minorities – the elephant in the room of integration policy in France – are able to achieve their own specific goals and forge a public presence through associations operating pursuant to *Loi 1901*.

Keywords: France, multiculturalism, republicanism, model of integration, migrant minorities

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Introduction

"But migration, like any type of transnational economic activity […], cannot and does not take place in a legal or institutional void", wrote Hollifield (2004, p. 901) in an article on the emerging migration state. Using the example of the United States, he demonstrated the increasing role policy has played in regulating international migration in recent decades. This is happening despite the economic pressure to be open towards non-citizens and to guarantee them an ever greater number of civil rights. He called this phenomenon a "liberal paradox", a result of contradictions between the tendencies of modern states to both secure themselves and enhance their opportunities on global markets (Hollifield et al., 2008).

This text concerns France, which, like other Member States of the European Union, has largely transferred the management of migration from third countries to the supranational level (Gońda et al., 2020). The establishment of a European regional migration regime allowed states to finesse or even avoid the liberal paradox (Hollifield, 2004, p. 903). With all citizens of EU Member States having equal rights, France does not pursue any policy at all related to legalising the stay of immigrants from EU countries. As elsewhere in the EU, they are treated *de facto* as internal migrants (Kubera & Morozowski, 2020). And yet, the combination of European principles and the specific nature of the system of the French Republic has brought about something more than the mere elimination of the liberal paradox. For, at the level of national regulations, it is also true that France does not recognise intra-EU immigrants – neither legally nor institutionally – as potential members of cultural minorities. Without being French citizens, they are treated like other French people, towards whom the Republic is blind to the existence of cultural or religious communities (Escafré-Dublet & Lelévrier, 2019; Noiriel, 1988; Weil, 2002). Their right to maintain a certain separateness and to be protected against violence and discrimination are enshrined in the law at the level of the individual, but not collectively, as is the case in other countries (Palermo & Woelk, 2003; see: Commission nationale… 2022, pp. 263–268).

If we consider only the principles of the Republic, European migrant minorities in France, as social wholes, find themselves suspended in the legal and institutional void Hollifield described. Among them is the Polish diaspora, most of whom are French citizens of Polish origin or citizens of Poland – like France, an EU Member State. Yet if we move our analysis from the macro to the mezzo level[2], that is, the level on which non-governmental and other organisations operate, we can observe a socio-cultural reality in which migrant minorities do obtain subjectivity. The aim of this article is to provide empirical evidence at the mezzo level on how the French paradox functions in integration policy. Despite their legal and institutional invisibility, migrant minorities can achieve specific goals and forge a public presence in France. I describe how immigrant organisations take part in bringing out and sustaining the contradictions inherent in the French model of integration. The study is based on field research

[2] Following Pries and Sezgin (2012), I place immigrant organisations at the mezzo level, while recognising that the micro-macro distinction is of an analytical character (see: Alexander & Giesen, 1987).

conducted among Polish immigrant organisations, specifically, Polish voluntary associations in France (hereinafter PVAFs).

That there is a dissonance between the universalistic, colour-blind conception of citizenship on the one hand, and institutional practice together with political discourse, in which more and more emphasis is put on cultural and ethnic identity, on the other, is a conclusion often reached about the contemporary French state (Bertossi et al., 2015; Brubaker, 2001; Escafré-Dublet, 2019; Schain, 1993). France continues to base its policy of cohesion on socio-geographic criteria, without dealing directly with ethnic-cultural communities (Audebert, 2013). Inspired by the EU 2000 directives, the French national government and local governments have developed anti-discrimination and diversity policies over the past two decades, but have often overlooked descent as a cause of discrimination – as took place at the national level, particularly in the years 2007–2012 (Bereni et al., 2020). This phenomenon, known as "deracialisation", characterises many of the practices of administrative officials responsible for anti-discrimination and naturalisation policy. At the same time, in their activities, they often take account of those aspects of reality in which the categories of culture, ethnicity, and race organise social relations (Mazouz, 2017). Moreover, since 1993, French institutions have been collecting statistical data on the subject of descendants of immigrants in French society (Simon, 2010). Initially, this mainly concerned employment; today, it covers many aspects of the lives of the persons concerned, including the relationships between various dimensions of their identity (Simon & Tiberj, 2012; Beauchemin et al., 2018).

While some interpret that dissonance in terms of a "republican dilemma", others see it as an innate feature of the French model, which not only permits but produces ethnocultural definitions of French identity that are directly contrary to republican principles (Bertossi, 2012). The coexistence of ethnocultural and politico-universalistic premises – not only in official practice, but also in local and national legislation – did not appear in France in the 1990s (due to European integration) or at the end of the 1970s (as a result of the suspension of immigration from non-EU countries in 1974), but was characteristic of the colonial system (Kubera, 2020a). Others treat models of integration, including the French republican and the British multicultural ones, as Weberian ideal types founded on certain historically formed philosophies, idioms or paradigms. Faced with the same challenges related to globalisation, France and Great Britain have pragmatically oriented minority policies that resemble one another, since they both seek to balance civic integration and multiculturalism (Bertossi, 2007; Loch, 2014; cf. Streeck, 2023). As Bertossi et al. (2015, p. 74) wrote, *[m]odels are not an* a priori *resource for action or an* ex ante *normative frame through which actors give shape to their strategies. Instead, these strategies give shape to varying, polysemic, and contradictory models*. From this perspective, no policies are ever completely coherent, and the assumptions they are based on are constantly challenged by various stakeholders involved in policy implementation. This applies to integration policies, as well, since they concern a process that extends over time and is shaped by individuals, organisations, and institutions (Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016).

Immigrant organisations are proof of the existence of relationships among individuals that cannot be described solely from a universalistic perspective. By definition,

such organisations are founded by persons having a migrant background who belong to a particular ethnic or national group for the primary purpose of providing services (social, economic or cultural) to members of that group, or advocating for them (Nowosielski & Dzięglewski, 2021, pp. 13–14; see: Fennema, 2004; Portes & Fernández-Kelly, 2016; Wang, 2018). While there are indications in the literature that immigrant organisations can influence local and national policy (Maxwell, 2012), less attention is paid how, in practice, those organisations use and negotiate the assumptions of the republican model of integration. In attempting to make a qualitative description of their importance in sustaining the French paradox, I focus on those Polish immigrant organisations that are membership associations constituting part of the non-profit sector and whose activities are based mainly on volunteer work (Smith et al., 2016, pp. 93–94; Tschirhart, 2006, pp. 523–524). I, therefore, mainly use the term PVAFs.

Every year in France about 65,000 new associations are formed, and the total number of active ones is 1.4–1.5 million (Bazin et al., 2022). They function pursuant to the *Loi du 1er juillet 1901* (Légifrance, 2023a), their freedom is guaranteed constitutionally, and they can be established quite easily, without prior authorisation. Only combat groups and private militias can be dissolved, as well as associations that could threaten France's territorial integrity (Palermo & Woelk, 2003, p. 237). In 1981, it became permissible for foreigners, regardless of the regularity of their stay, to establish and run associations headquartered in France, without having to report to the prefecture; such associations have no separate legal status, but also act pursuant to *Loi 1901* (Bertossi, 2007, p. 24; see: Légifrance, 2023b).

The history of Polish immigrant associations in France goes back about 200 years (Christol, 2013; Ponty, 2011). Organisations were founded by political refugees in the first half of the 19th century (the "Great Emigration"), then by those who arrived between the end of the January Uprising and the beginning of the First World War, by economic migrants during the interbellum (mainly concentrated in the mining area in the Nord Pas-de-Calais – NPDC), by WWII veterans, and by a variety of political emigrants from 1945 to 1989 (Garçon, 1992; Gogolewski, 1990; Śladkowski, 1980; Żaba, 1986). In the 1990s, and especially after 2004 (when Poland acceded to the European Union) and after 2008 (when the French labour market opened up to Polish citizens), Franco-Polish relations intensified, and this included economic immigration from Poland to France (Tanajewski, 2004; Brutel, 2014). At present, about 220 PVAFs exist, of which about one-third conduct publicly visible, year-round activity (Kubera, 2023). Located in all regions of Metropolitan France, they often continue the traditions of organisations founded in earlier periods. Participants are Polish immigrants who have lived in France for various lengths of time (who are Polish or French citizens) or descendants of immigrants (second, third or further generation), as well as French people without any Polish migrant background. They differ in many respects, as do the audiences of PVAFs' activities, including the degree to which they are rooted in French or Polish culture (Kubera, 2022). PVAFs most often concern themselves with Polish culture and art, preserving traditions and national identity, and promoting Poland (Krzyworzeka-Jelinowska, 2019; Kubera, 2020b).

Data and methods

In this article, I present the results of a qualitative analysis of 48 individual in-depth interviews conducted as part of a research project entitled "Polish immigrant organisations in Europe" (see: Kubera, 2022; Nowosielski & Dzięglewski, 2021). All of the interviews, which took place between September 2016 and July 2017 concerned the conditions under which PVAFs function, including the characteristics of France as a host country. For the present analysis, I divided the interview subjects into two categories. The first comprises activists of Polish immigrant organisations (41 interviews). They are board members (21) and rank-and-file members (5) of about 20 PVAFs, including five where I used the case study method. Those 20 PVAFs differ in their activity profile, length of existence, geographic location, as well as the characteristics and size of their membership and audience (the number of PVAFs given is not precise because many respondents belonged to more than one organisation). This category also comprises experts (15) – defined as persons of Polish origin who act for the benefit of the Polish diaspora at the supra-local level. They included a journalist, a researcher, a Polish Catholic Mission priest, representatives of umbrella organisations, staff of diplomatic outlets, lawyers, and an art gallery employee. The second category of respondents comprises representatives of French institutions and non-governmental organisations responsible for integration policy or cooperation with the PVAFs, and Polish institutions at various levels (7 interviews). These were employees of government institutions at the central level (2), the regional level (1) and the municipal level (1), as well as employees of non-governmental organisations whose reach is municipal (2) or central (1). In an article on the internal functioning of PVAFs in which I used the same research material (Kubera 2022, pp. 72–75), I provided a more detailed description of the selection procedure and interviewing conditions, as well as of the morphology of the PVAFs analysed, such as their operations and formal structure, combined with their members' and major recipients' prevailing social and demographic features.

The content of the interviews made it possible to examine from the inside, from the perspectives of various participants in society, how PVAFs function (as examples of organisations that act on behalf of an ethnic or national minority composed of migrants in France), not only legally or institutionally, but also sociologically. The research problem the analysis concerned was the role PVAFs play in ensuring that the Polish minority, which is not recognised by the state officially, can achieve specific goals it has and have a visible public presence. In other words, the idea was to find out whether, at the mezzo level of the social structure and practical solutions, the republican model perceives multicultural reality – as it is characteristic, e.g., of the British model. As a first step, the previously transcribed interviews were encoded using a computer program to tease out content concerning the problem under investigation. In the second step, the pertinent data were divided thematically according to three types of narrativised conceptions of republican principles that acted as points of reference in the interviews, for both categories of respondents. These conceptions, as they came out during the interviews, can be summarised as follows: 1) France does not perceive

immigrant organisations as representatives of national or ethnic communities; 2) The assumptions of French integration policy do not correspond to the specific goals and activities of immigrant organisations; 3) French public institutions should not be guided by ethnic criteria when providing support to immigrant organisations. The further sections of this article are the result of an analysis made of interview fragments in those three thematic areas.

"There aren't any Polish organisations, they're French"

PVAF activists often repeated that, both legally and institutionally, their associations do not differ at all from other third-sector French organisations acting under *Loi 1901*. True, many of their names contain the expression *franco-polonais*, and some indicate that they gather together, e.g., Polish students, artists, engineers, veterans or physicians of Polish origin – but formally, they seek support from French institutions *as if* they were not Polish associations. Because there are no separate mechanisms for financing immigrant organisations, they compete for funds from the same sources and under the same rules as other French professional, cultural, social, scientific or sports organisations.

In this respect, the perceptions of representatives of the institutions surveyed were similar. They declared that, when deciding to fund a given NGO, they do not concern themselves with how many of their members are citizens of the Republic or have family ties with different ethnic or national cultures. The institutions usually cooperate based on an assessment of the convergence of the goals of their institution with those of a given NGO, the quality, and the feasibility of the project presented. Even if the Polish embassy publishes a list of PVAFs on its website and calls them "Polish", French institutions, do not officially recognise them as associations of persons connected with the Polish diaspora. All such lists of immigrant organisations are created from the bottom up, or based on their names and activity profile. For example, an article by Berthomière et al. (2015) on Algerian, Portuguese, Turkish, and Vietnamese organisations in France arose from a web search of all French associations (see: Journal Officiel, 2023). Thus, when a French institution encounters a PVAF whose goal is to support the integration of immigrants from Poland, intensify Franco-Polish contacts or develop Polish culture in France, there are no legal grounds for treating it otherwise than as a French association that for some reason takes an interest in Polish culture. It is symptomatic that, in one of the interviews with the staff of French NGOs, Polish immigrant organisations were compared to associations of people from and friends of the French department of Aveyron who live in other parts of the country, such as Paris.

Nevertheless, the responses from both PVAF activists and staff of French institutions did disclose the existence of certain social contexts in which immigrant organisations are treated, formally or informally, as representing a specific migrant minority in France. In the case of PVAFs, this particularly concerns well-known organisations that have a strong local network. For instance, the leaders of those organisations are present, often along with their banners or Polish national symbols, during French na-

tional holiday celebrations in communities in the NPDC mining region, or in the vicinity of Saint-Étienne, where the presence of people of Polish origin dates back to before the WWII. In turn, a PVAF established at the end of the 1990s was invited to take part in a celebration naming an esplanade in the front of the cathedral in Marseille in honour of John Paul II. During the event, with the participation of the mayor of the city, members of the association wore Polish national costumes. Polish symbols, costumes, cuisine, etc. are also visible in many other places during celebrations of associations, cities or neighbourhoods. Many PVAFs run or support Polish schools, scouts, football teams, music groups, choirs, and motorcycle clubs. Like Polish organisations that specialise in a particular type of activity, from providing social assistance to renovating monuments, or those that gather together particular social groups, they cooperate with their *French* counterparts or those associated with another diaspora in France, e.g., the American, Bulgarian, Czech, German, Spanish, Italian, Moroccan or Ukrainian, to name but a few of those mentioned during the interviews. In every department of Metropolitan France today, PVAFs act as informal Polish consultants and centres of culture to which officials (from the local to the central levels), universities, museums, libraries, orchestras, media, hospitals, welfare centres, the police, and many other institutions turn when dealing with something connected with Poland or Polish people.

Immigrant organisations in France may, then, be identified socially in a dual manner – not just as they are defined legally, but also in terms of ethnicity. In the interviews, representatives of French institutions sometimes used the term "Polish association" or "Poles" when referring to PVAFs they knew of. PVAF activists called their organisations "Polish" more often, though many emphasised that they are also French, with a French statute and the privileges that entail. Yet the legal and institutional void mentioned in the introduction also permits a situation where an immigrant organisation is not recognised as such – not only by French institutions but also by members of the diaspora itself, who have internalised the legally sanctioned blindness to cultural diversity. I observed this during the research at least twice. The first instance concerned a PVAF in the Paris suburbs whose work focused on newly-arrived immigrants, organising events primarily for a Polish-speaking public. The leaders of two other PVAFs shared an unflattering opinion about that association because of its orientation mainly towards people of Polish origin. The first described it as an "enclave of Polishness", while the other avoided calling it Polish, as shown in this excerpt from the interview:

Researcher [R]: *But it's Polish [the association]?*
Interviewee [I]: *There aren't any Polish ones. It's a French organisation.*
R: *Do Poles work there? Is it addressed to Poles?*
I: *Yes, it's addressed to Poles.* (IDI_9)

The second instance concerned a PVAF in Paris that specialises in advising Poles who find themselves in a difficult situation (but also helps other immigrants). While its name does not suggest any connection with Poland, its founders were socialised in Poland, its website is bilingual, and during neighbourhood celebrations, it adds Polish

touches (the flag, costume, Polish cheesecake, and traditional cuisine like bigos). In cooperation with other NGOs also well established locally, it ran a workshop on discrimination against immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe. Yet, when I telephoned the office of that NGO and asked if they knew of any Polish associations in the area, the answer was a negative. Later, in the interview, the PVAF employee in question confirmed my conviction that this had not been a mistake. Several times she repeated that her organisation is never perceived as Polish; moreover, she does not use that designation in contact with other NGOs in the neighbourhood.

These situations attest to a dissonance between the republican definition, which legally recognises only the national civic community, and practical definitions derived from life in a culturally and ethnically diverse society. In the cases studied, however, the relationship between these definitions was not conflicting: the practical definitions, formed from the bottom up, but at times even used in formal spheres, did not compete against the legal definition, but supplemented it.

"In France one doesn't think in terms of ethnic groups"

The dissonance between the legal and institutional regulations and social practice did not come up only in how specific immigrant organisations are perceived compared to other non-governmental organisations. It was also visible in how integration policy is defined. The staff of French institutions and NGOs all concurred that that policy only applies to citizens of non-EU states. It is not addressed to any other part of the population of France, whether French, Polish, German or Spanish (i.e., EU citizens) because it only concerns the process of legalising a person's stay or their obtaining French citizenship. In this sense, integration policy is nothing other than a policy of entry (Schain, 1993, pp. 60–61). Understood in this way, integration policy can only apply to EU immigrants who, having met the relevant criteria, express their will to become part of the French national community. According to those I spoke with, all other French policies apply equally to all residents of a particular socio-economic profile, regardless of their citizenship or any ties they may have with one diaspora or another. This view was expressed by, among other subjects, a representative of a French nationwide NGO acting on behalf of immigrants: *In France, one doesn't think in terms of ethnic groups. It's more about the category of social class. Let's say you belong to the social class of the unemployed – whatever your country of origin, you're considered in the overall policy plan for people out of work* (IDI_32). Given that ethnic or national minorities are not recognised, and that the only representatives of other nations, therefore, are foreigners present in the country, it is clear that these policies make no distinction in how French citizens are treated in terms of, e.g., their individual migration trajectory or that of their family.

In effect, in the research, there was an observable paradox related to this narrow definition of integration policy (legality of stay and citizenship) as the only one that concerns immigrants. On the one hand, representatives of government institutions (IDI_28) mentioned public services dealing with employment (*Pôle Emploi*) or social welfare (CCAS, *Centre Communale d'Action Social*) as important integration policy

partners. On the other hand, the public service staff members I contacted stated that immigration issues do not fall within their remit. A curious situation: public services are perceived as playing a leading role in the process of incorporating immigrants into the host society, but describe the people they serve in a way that does not distinguish them from the population at large. One could say that integration policy as broadly defined is implemented almost "by the way", as other state policies are implemented. This explains why, e.g., representatives of government institutions (IDI_28) thus described what the CCAS does: *Their role is to provide social resources for everyone who needs them – among the French majority and minorities of foreigners.* With the exception, then, of integration policy as narrowly defined, there is in France no policy at all under which people of migrant background are given priority treatment and no policy from which they are excluded *a priori*.

In this situation, immigrant organisations have the same status as other French organisations and can be partners in implementing many different policies in France. There is a condition, though – they must be able to fit the sometimes specific needs of their audience within the broader framework. This was confirmed in statements made by representatives of various institutions, including, for example, at the regional level: *We're not going to make an effort to work with Franco-Polish associations just for the sake of working with them. Their activities have to coincide with the interests of our institution* (IDI_29). In the research findings, I noted very many cases where PVAFs pursue their particular goals with the help of French institutions. Financial support given to organisations acting for the benefit of the Polish diaspora did not derive, though, from special mechanisms or a separate pool of funds allocated to the needs of ethnic or national minorities, but from various sectoral policy instruments from the local to the central levels. Aid for activities is usually awarded through project competitions that PVAFs and other organisations enter.

The fact that French institutions do not run separate programmes for people having a migrant background does not preclude those people from taking part in activities that further their integration into various aspects of society. On the contrary, integration – understood as social cohesion and the existence of bonds between individuals – is one of the most important goals of French institutions. While the aim is not to integrate specific cultural and ethnic communities, which are not recognised formally, France does support activities that integrate individual citizens, who may identify more or less strongly with such communities. My findings show that such activities often increase the visibility of those communities in the public sphere, reinforce their distinctive character, and facilitate their achievement of specific goals. Nevertheless, communities of people who have similar migratory trajectories – the elephant in the room of French policy – are treated in those activities as every other French-like non-governmental organisation. Paradoxically, therefore, PVAFs have a better chance of obtaining funding for integration activities when the fact that they gather together people of Polish origin is not the only rationale for their application.

The research results indicate there are several ways integration can be conceived (other than legalising people's stay or granting them citizenship) that argue in favour of French institutions awarding immigrant organisations financial support. Firstly, organisations of immigrants from other parts of Europe are partners for people who

deal with European integration, e.g., in departments of municipal, regional or national bodies responsible for international cooperation. Secondly, staff members of institutions also defined integration as the coexistence – and even the mutual enrichment – of different cultures. They emphasised that their purpose is neither to mix nor assimilate cultures, which is an important indicator of the French model's transformation. At any rate, immigrant organisations can take part in projects that support the recognition of different cultures – be they French or other. Thirdly, and probably most obviously for the republican model, integration means the existence of connections (*mixité sociale*) and equal opportunities among people from different social classes. As part of the *politique de la ville*, additional budget funds and cohesion policy tools are allocated for areas affected by social and economic hardships. Fourthly, activities that support integration can improve the lives of many other categories of people living in France. For example, those PVAFs whose members are among the elderly can apply for assistance for activities that promote intergenerational solidarity.

Integration understood thusly, and covering different parts of the population of France to the same extent, can be implemented whether in a given city, region or in the state as a whole the government is left-wing or right-wing. On the other hand, the leaders of PVAFs and other organisations admitted that the political views of politicians or officials on issues related to migration can affect whether their immigrant organisation obtains funds from a given pool. For PVAFs, culture, education, and intercultural exchanges are among their most frequent areas of cooperation with other French institutions. One-off or periodic concerts, exhibitions, film screenings, stage productions, workshops, and meetings showcasing Polish art and culture are organised in a multitude of public venues, often under the patronage of the French authorities. They feature contemporary Poles and French people of Polish origin, the history of the Polish presence in France, and support the development of Franco-Polish artistic, scientific, sports, and business contacts. Some projects are run at the initiative of the associations themselves, others in response to open invitations to take part in events such as municipal celebrations or European Days. An argument in favour of financing a visit by artists from Poland can be a partnership agreement between Polish and French cities or regions. Some places associated with Polish immigration, such as the Polish Library in Paris, the NPDC mining area, the tomb of Fryderyk Chopin or the Polish cemetery in Montmorency, are treated as elements of the French heritage and are supported for that reason (some of them entered on the UNESCO World Heritage List). Funding for educational projects goes to PVAFS, which runs both Polish and French language courses. Yet, as stated above, PVAFs need not be an obvious partner for French institutions while implementing projects connected with Poland. This is shown, e.g., by a regional institution in Hauts-de-France (formerly NPDC and Picardy), in whose projects with the province of Silesia no PVAFs were involved, only other French organisations that deal with the issues the projects related to (IDI_29).

The Republic's non-recognition of communities other than the civic community concerns not only ethnic and cultural groups, but religious ones as well. The PVAF activists and the staff of institutions interviewed spoke of secularism (*laïcité*) as one of the fundamental principles of the French state. They said that French institutions cannot become involved in projects concerning members of a specific religious com-

munity, and churches cannot be partners in implementing sectoral policy. This has practical implications for the relations between institutions and PVAFs, which often cooperate with Polish parishes. To provide an example, French institutions make premises available to Polish organisations running schools, but on the condition that no catechism lessons will be conducted there (children who wish to take part in them do so in other locations, such as parish halls). It also happens that PVAFs intermediate in the financing and implementation of projects that serve the Polish community gathered around a particular parish. The French paradox then arises in that institutions can allocate funds to secular associations, but not directly to parishes, even for non-religious activities. Thus, French institutions finance, for example, the heating of one of the historic Polish churches in France (the funds go to an association, while the building is treated as a component of the French cultural heritage).

The examples given in this section show how the system enables the practical definitions to be adapted to the rules resulting from the official republican definitions. French institutions engage in activities that do not undermine the principles of the Republic, but at the same time are very similar to those we observe in states that follow a multicultural model. While it is true that in France things are not thought of in ethnic categories, this does not mean that ethnic communities cannot pursue their goals under the auspices of various sectoral policies. It is also worth noting that immigrant organisations can run their own activities independently of French institutions. Some PVAFs choose a path of limited cooperation with those institutions and relatively weak visibility in their non-Polish surroundings. Provided they obey the law, France does not stand in the way of immigrants or any other organisations offering their services to a narrowly defined audience. *Polish enclaves* (IDI_1) and *communities* (IDI_2; IDI_22: IDI_47) can exist, and their organisations can enjoy all the benefits to which every French association is entitled (it is easy to set up an association, which then has easier access to the premises and infrastructure of public institutions, can accumulate funds, employ personnel under preferential conditions, benefit from tax, and insurance relief, etc.). In short, even though institutions do not directly support diaspora organisations as such, the system does not deprive them of the means of developing and financing their activities.

"We're no fans of communitarian associations"

We know, then, that even PVAFs that exclusively or primarily serve Poles can prosper in France. Nevertheless, their cooperation with French institutions is limited to those cases where the institution sees that, through the PVAF, it can achieve its own goals. A staff member of a French national body that deals with foreigners said that, in principle, the NGOs they cooperate with and which help integrate people from beyond the EU should not be associated with any diaspora, especially with the one to which a given immigrant belongs. *We're no fans of such communitarian associations*, she added (IDI_33). The leader of a PVAF to which the authorities of a district of Paris granted premises admitted that that assistance could have been hindered by her organisation being thought of as *a single-nationality association* (IDI_9).

Yet the research revealed many cases of "single-nationality" organisations receiving symbolic, political, and material support from French institutions – at the local, regional, and central levels. Unlike the cases described in the previous section, these projects were mainly addressed to members of the Polish diaspora in France, and cooperation was possible precisely because of the specific nature of the PVAF concerned, and not in spite of it. French institutions recognised the role immigrant organisations can play in intermediating between them and immigrants, particularly, those who have not been in the country long. Formally, those organisations do not represent a collective of people having a common origin, but they can speak and lobby on their half. They can also intermediate for public services when there is a need to operate in a language other than French; an example of this is the ongoing cooperation between the city of Paris and a PVAF that helps people of Polish origin who are suffering the crisis of homelessness. From the interviews, three factors emerge that favour such cooperation by French institutions.

The first is the size of the diaspora and of the immigrant organisation itself (cf. Maxwell, 2012, pp. 136–137). It is not for no reason that the only PVAF to date that has obtained permanent support from the authorities at the supra-local level is Maison de la Polonia, located in the former region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais (now Hauts-de-France), where not only every eighth resident, but many officials as well, are of Polish origin. The organisation was founded by the regional authorities in 1995. In 2007, it merged with the Congress of French Polonia, in existence since 1949, and at the time of the research, it comprised more than 90 PVAFs (mainly in the NPDC). Many respondents argued that federations representing a large number of smaller organisations have a greater chance of being treated by institutions as representing a certain part of society, if not a specific diaspora in France. If an umbrella organisation acts on a larger geographic scale, it can also be financed by the French government; an example of which was an organisation of Moroccan workers that was active in fourteen different cities at some point (IDI_32). In the NPDC, Maison de la Polonia was a federation with such weight, and national-scope ambitions. With the help of the regional authorities, it had a budget it could share with member organisations. Yet, in 2016, it suspended its activities due to changes in the priorities of the new regional authorities (though the Congress of French Polonia still exists).

The second factor is when a French institution takes notice of the fact that an immigrant organisation has political or diplomatic potential. Members of a diaspora are potential voters, and are, therefore, not to be neglected (in the case of French people of Polish origin, see: Voldoire, 2015; Vychytil-Baudoux, 2010). They may also play an important role in the relations between the country of origin and the host country. At the central level, particular attention was paid to PVAFs in 2004, when Poland acceded to the European Union. At that time, after a unification congress that went on for several days, the Federation of French Polonia (FFP) was established at an event held in the prestigious Luxembourg Palace under the patronage of the Polish and French governments. Yet it quickly became evident that the FFP does not embrace most PVAFs. The Maison de la Polonia and the Congress of French Polonia did not become members, only observers, as a result of divisions within the diaspora. In 2016, only 20-something PVAFs were members of the FFP, and Polish diplomatic outlets did

not treat it as the only body representing PVAFs (IDI_3). Despite this rather small membership, the 10th anniversary of the founding of the FFP was also celebrated at the Luxembourg Palace and was attended by the Polish ambassador and the chairman of the French Franco-Polish Friendship Senate Group. The symbolic importance of the FFP is also demonstrated by its presence during French national holiday celebrations at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. Some of the research respondents associated with various PVAFs expressed their disappointment, however, that Poles in France do not enjoy deeper institutionalised cooperation with the French central authorities. As examples of other entities that are not purely socio-economic but are recognised by the Republic, the most frequently mentioned were the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF, *Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France*) and the French Council of Muslim Worship (CFCM, *Le Conseil Français du Culte Musulman*).

The experience of other PVAFs also shows that mayors and other officials accept invitations to take part in events devoted to various parts of the Polish diaspora. Sometimes Polish diplomatic outlets are helpful – especially in the case of younger organisations. For instance, thanks to the involvement of consulate staff, the then-mayor of Paris' 7th arrondissement opened an event organised by an association of Polish professionals in France established in 2004. In turn, assistance from the consulate in Lyon enabled a cultural and educational organisation from the south of France to rent prestigious concert halls normally difficult to access. Another PVAF from the south benefited from an intervention by the honorary consul. He managed to convince the chairman of a department council to permanently subsidise a Polish school the PVAF runs, arguing that most of the pupils at the school were future French citizens and potential voters (IDI_42).

The third factor is how visible and well-networked an organisation is as a result of its activities. Forging good relationships with those who represent institutions takes time, but is vital to building mutual trust. This is so on the central level (see the cooperation with a group of French senators) and the regional level (see Maison de la Polonia), but in fact is observed most often locally. Respondents associated with different PVAFs emphasised the importance of taking part in direct meetings, including local ones, with activists of other associations and staff of institutions, and – when establishing contact – of offering to make a contribution before asking for support. A necessary condition is to *present oneself as an organisation from here* (IDI_38) that is part of the local landscape of associations. Whether they are immigrant organisations or not, those with such an image can count on more than those that are unknown (although, given the limited resources a given city or department has at its disposal, this can cause conflict between associations). One such organisation covered by the research promotes Polish folklore in the NPDC. For years, it has had exclusive use of the school rooms where it holds rehearsals and stores costumes. Another organisation located in the south obtained a subsidy for a bus to take pupils to a Polish school. Activists of the PVAFs I looked at, who had carried out successful projects in the past, often admitted that, in fact, officials come to them with invitations to take part in upcoming events.

These findings show that French institutions do not have to limit themselves to cooperating with immigrant organisations only on projects subject to non-ethnic criteria.

Yet, there are contexts in which associations created (because of current or past migration) are treated as representatives of a specific diaspora. Numerous organisations that are politically significant and well-connected may be recognised by institutions as associations of people of similar origin, even if they are all French citizens. However, not every immigrant organisation is deemed to represent an ethnocultural minority, even semi-formally. As there are no procedures for attaining such a status officially, what is key are the characteristics of the diaspora itself: its size, its rootedness in French society, and its organisational potential.

Discussion and conclusions

The data gathered reveal certain relationships between immigrant organisations of specific ethnocultural identity and the state, where migrant communities are not legally or institutionally recognised as minorities. An analysis of the data allows several conclusions to be drawn.

Firstly, the data confirm the paradox of French integration policy at the mezzo level. Legally and institutionally, the existence of immigrant organisations does not undermine republican principles. PVAFs have the same status and submit the same reports as other French associations functioning pursuant to *Loi 1901*. They cannot be found in official registers among other non-governmental organisations: since, officially, no national and ethnic minorities exist, nor do organisations that could legally represent them. The Republic is blind to the ethnocultural separateness of PVAFs' membership and audiences, and so granting them privileges or discriminating against them would be contrary to the principles of the French state. This definition of the national community and of private contracts between people of French or other nationalities (as associations in France are) is shared by many people in French society, including some of those who are actively involved in immigrant organisations. Yet an analysis of the discourse and practice of how PVAFs function shows that other definitions also exist in which ethnocultural differences in society are recognised. Under the cloak of universalistic criteria, without particular sectoral policies, or even contrary to republican principles, immigrant organisations are treated as representing a significant part of the population. French institutions engage in many activities whose beneficiaries are primarily members of a particular diaspora. It even happens that PVAFs are officially or semi-officially recognised by some institutions as minority organisations, and in this way, French policy approaches a multicultural model. Migrant minorities thus become visible as such in the public sphere, including politically, and are better able to achieve their particular goals.

Secondly, my analysis showed the potential of individuals and their groups to modify policy on existing legal and institutional frameworks from the bottom up. This implies there is a need to take account of the socio-cultural reality created at the point where the micro and macro levels meet when constructing theories on integration policy. While France does not recognise national or ethnic minorities officially, it does allow diaspora communities to function autonomously in the form of associations or in cooperation with institutions, and by doing so they acquire subjectivity. The French

example also reveals the delusory nature of the belief that socio-cultural processes related to migration can be completely controlled in liberal democratic states.

Thirdly, we must not forget that, like other models, the republican model is limited in its ability to achieve a balance between its principles and the values of migrant communities. In this article, I focused mainly on those PVAFs that have managed to fit their goals into a broader framework. Some immigrant organisations, though, remain visible only to a particular segment of their diaspora and have few contacts with institutions. Perhaps, like other French associations, they prefer to function on their own. Or, this may be due to a real or imagined lack of compatibility between a given organisation's goals and republican principles, or to their leaders' lack of knowledge of procedures or of the French language (which puts associations seeking to maintain their members' cultural identity and those set up by recently arrived immigrants at a disadvantage). The experiences of PVAF activists and representatives of French institutions indicate that not every immigrant organisation has an equal chance of obtaining support. The Matthew Effect comes into play since large organisations that have at least some leaders who are well-rooted in the host society (immigrants who have lived in France for a long time or descendants of immigrants) and have the significant political or diplomatic ability are better able to have an impact on integration policy from the bottom up. The same can be said for those organisations that are well-connected and recognisable in their surroundings. These circumstances ensure that the majority culture dominates, as it is promoted and develops through fixed mechanisms and specialised institutions.

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