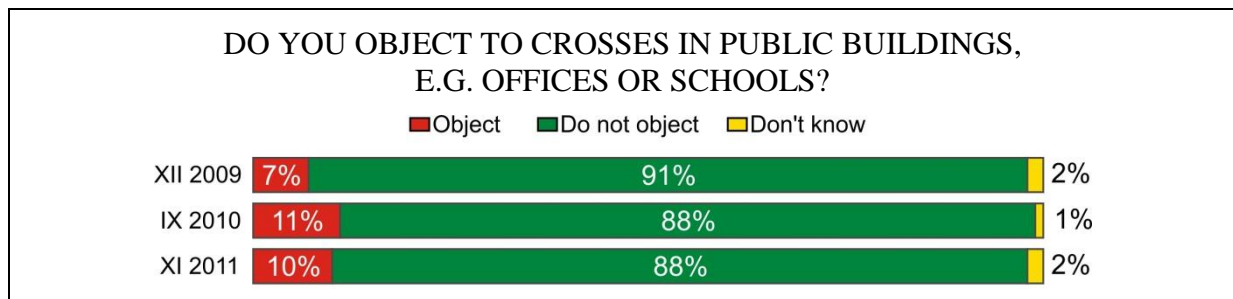


CROSSES IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

After a rather long period of low intensity of public ideological conflicts related to public manifestation of religious views, the issue of the presence of religious symbols has returned to the public debate. It was stimulated by the conflict about the cross in front of the presidential palace, which was placed after the crash of the presidential plane in Smolensk. The protest of the “defenders of the cross” was perceived by many people as anarchic appropriation of the public space, and it contributed to the increase in popularity of anti-clerical views. It seems clear that the demand to reduce the role of the Church and its influence on the state was critical for the success of the new party Palikot Movement in the recent parliamentary elections.

Legal controversies about the presence of religious symbols in the public space make the voice of the public opinion particularly important.

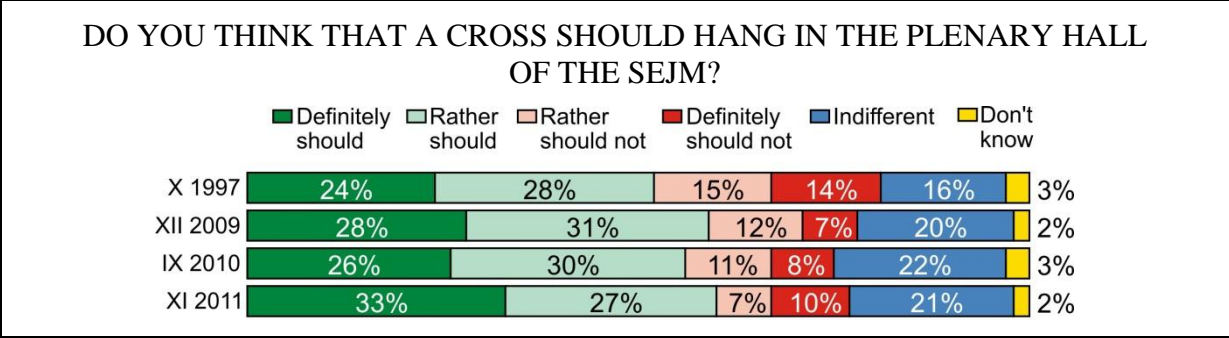
On the most basic level, the acceptance of the cross is expressed by the absence of the feeling that it is inappropriate in the public space. Thus understood, the acceptance is very broad. A vast majority of people in Poland (88%) do not object to a cross in a classroom or office, while every tenth objects to it.



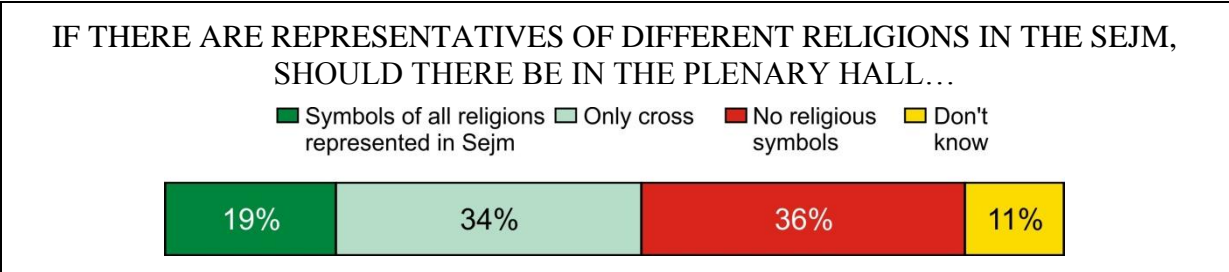
The cross in the hall of the Sejm was put by a group of MPs for the right-wing Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) in October 1997. The controversies concerned not so much by the constitutionality of the presence of the cross in the Sejm, as the method by which

it was placed there. The MPs put it there without consultation with representatives of other factions, and without permission of the Sejm leadership. In a survey conducted shortly after this event, over half of respondents (52%) agreed that a cross should hang in the hall of the Sejm, while 29% disagreed. At present the support for the presence of the cross in the Sejm is even more widespread, although it is far from universal: 60% approve of it, and 17% disapprove. Every fifth person (21%) is indifferent.

Opinions about the presence of the cross in the plenary hall of the Sejm is strongly related to religiosity. The more frequent the declared religious practice, the more common the declared conviction about the need for a cross in the Sejm. It is almost universal among people practicing several times a week (89%). Among respondents who never go to church this view is shared by 22%, while half are opposed to the cross in the Sejm.

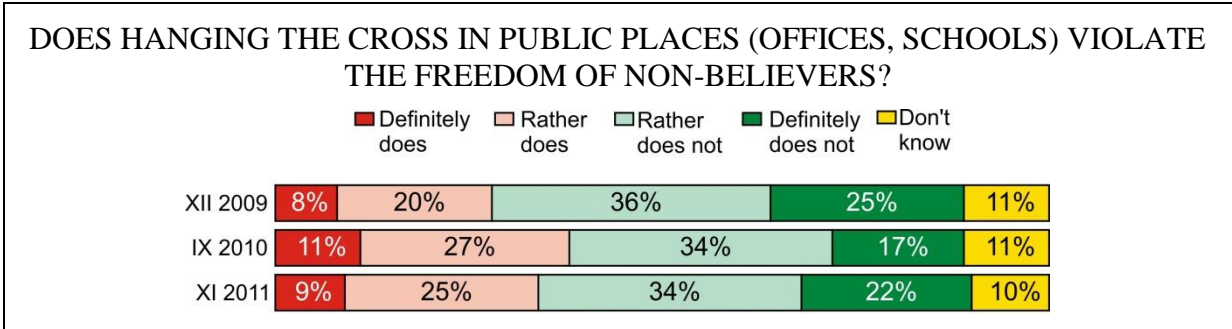


The presence of the cross in the Sejm seems to be natural for the majority of Poles. However, a large number of people modify their view considering that fact that MPs are people of different denominations. Overall, over half either believe that in the Sejm there should only be the cross (34%), or that there should be symbols of all religions whose representatives are represented (19%). Slightly more than one-third (36%) think, in this case, there should be no religious symbols in the plenary hall of the Sejm.



In public discussions there sometimes appeared the argument that the presence of the cross violates the freedom of non-believers. Most respondents (56%) disagree with this argument, while 34% agree that the presence of the cross may violate the rights of non-

believers. This conviction is now less widespread than in September 2010, when public opinion was drawn to the conflict about the cross in front of the Presidential Palace.



More information about this topic can be found in CBOS report in Polish: “Crosses in the public space” December 2011. Fieldwork for national sample: November 2011 (N=969). The random address sample is representative for adult population of Poland.