

Educational Activity of Polish Christian Women's Societies in the South-Eastern Borderlands in the Second Polish Republic

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In the interwar period, Christian women's societies operating in the three provinces of the south-eastern Second Republic of Poland: Lwów, Stanisławów and Tarnopol, through their social and educational activities, played a significant role in the development of education, culture, social and economic life in these areas. They have contributed to the development of various socio-cultural, charitable, caring, educational and economic activities. Their large number and often similar scope of activities required proper coordination, efficient management and supervision. Union of Polish Christian Women's Societies was founded in Lwów in 1913 and was conducting its activity until 1939 and such a task was undertaking that task.

Key words: Union of Polish Christian Women's Societies; Polish women's societies; educational and social activities; South-Eastern Borderlands

In the interwar period, many Polish Christian (Catholic) women's societies operating in three south-eastern voivodeships Lviv (Lwów), Stanyslaviv (Stanisławów) and Ternopil (Tarnopol) – through their broadly understood educational activities – played a big part in development of education, culture, as well as social and economic life on those territories. They contributed to varied activities: sociocultural, charitable, protective, educational, and economic. Their activities (work) were conducted for the good of society, nation, citizens, and Catholics; they served Polish local communities in South-Eastern Borderlands. The societies were very active through the whole interwar period, increasingly so during the economic crisis and when faced with the emergence (intensification) of various adverse phenomena: social (e.g. homelessness, alcoholism, prostitution, poverty), political (e.g. Parliament and Senate elections), natural (e.g. floods, harsh winters). In their activities, informed by their

own ideas and clear aims, they used traditional forms of education, work, social assistance, as well as created new and modern ones. Many well-educated women were members of those societies – officials, teachers, doctors of medicine, representatives of the gentry, students, and workers. Their quantity and often similar (overlapping) areas of work required coordination, efficient management, direction, and supervision.

One which was supposed to fulfil those tasks, while developing and improving broadly understood educational activities, was the Union of Polish Christian Women's Societies.

Organisation was brought to life February 9th 1913 in Lviv during the Congress of National Delegates, by 60 Polish women's societies, which aimed at "creating one, strong, cohesive, uniform women's organisation, which would allow for sharing thoughts and experiences with working for social and national betterment, as well as be an institution regulating that work and initiating new actions".¹ Management of the Union was chosen during the Congress. Eleonora Lubomirska² became a chairman and performed this function till 1939. Additionally, the congress elected two deputy chairmen – Maria Argasińska and Maria Opieńska, two secretaries – Anna Reiterowa and Zofia Rylska and eleven Management members.³

On January 18th 1914 in Lviv, another General Congress of Delegates of Societies belonging to the Union was working on reformulating main goals and responsibilities of the association in the light of the threat of war. 62 Societies were represented on the Congress, from such cities as: Lviv, Cracow, Kolomyia, Stanyslaviv, Przemyśl, Zhovkva, Ternopil. During the Congress, changes were made to the Statute of the Union – the guiding idea of the Union's activities was to be "idea of communication, idea-work, which was supposed to become a seed of nation-wide unity". In accordance with the Statute, the Union was to consolidate, coordinate, be "a centre of all female work in various fields". The fields of work were

¹ Central State Historical Archives [hereinafter: CDIAL], Objednannja polskych žinočnych chrytyjanskykh tovarystv Lviv 1913–1939 [hereinafter: OPŻChTL], collection 841, carton 1, no. 28, pp. 1–4; Also: CDIAL, OPŻChTL, collection 841, carton 1, no. 8, p. 11 ("Appeal" 1914).

² Born April 5th 1866, died in 1940 in Pau (France). Daughter of Józef Hussarzewski – son of Jan Adolf Hussarzewski. Wife of Andrzej Lubomirski (1862–1953), a delegate to the Diet of Galicia and Lodomeria from 1898 to 1907, later (from 1907) a delegate to the Parliament of Vienna, exceptional social and economic activist. Mother of four. She donated Hussarzewski's library to Ossolineum (inherited from grandfather Adolf).

³ CDIAL, OPŻChTL, collection 841, carton 1, no. 5, pp. 1–4; Also: CDIAL, OPŻChTL, collection 841, carton 1, no. 2, pp. 33–34.

specified – the societies were to operate in the social, economic, educational and charitable dimensions, they were supposed to work for “nationalisation, socialisation, and enlightenment of the great national masses, (...) improvement of people’s health in the cities, as well as in the country, (...) increase in prosperity and native industry”.⁴

Goals of the association were clearly defined in the Statute. The Union was to:

- “awaken the national and civil spirit among the general public;
- influence shaping of Polish, honestly national, non-party public opinion;
- provide organised, expedient and penal help in the area of national needs;
- consolidate social, humanitarian, educational, and economic work of Polish women societies – unite women working in different fields under a common idea of national work;
- create and acquire new job opportunities for women;
- support and develop educational and intellectual movement;
- provide the members of the Union and indigent members of the Societies belonging to the Union free legal advice and free help in finding work”.⁵

Enumerated goals were to be attained mainly through work in four specialised sections: social, humanitarian-charitable, educational, and economic. Each section had its own, specified tasks. Social section was tasked with carrying for “the national interests, (...) upbringing our youth in the religious and national spirit, fighting alcoholism and illiteracy, improving morality of family life and social life, physical and moral health of women and children”. Humanitarian-charitable section was tasked with organising Samaritan courses, arranging care for the sick and indigent, improving hygiene of the general public, organising help and care for working women. Educational section was focusing on development and propagation of the intellectual movement among women from all the social classes, as well as on supporting women in acquiring occupational education.⁶ Economic section was tasked with “gathering funds for work and organising work in the field of economy, establishing companies and

⁴ CDIAL, OPŻChTL, collection 841, carton 1, no. 8, pp. 11–12 (“Appeal” 1914).

⁵ *Statut Zjednoczenia Polskich Chrześcijańskich Towarzystw Kobiety we Lwowie* (1914). Lviv, pp. 3–4.

⁶ In order to develop and strengthen the intellectual movement among women from all social classes, the Union organised many lectures; e.g. members of the Union took active part in the First Congress of Polish Hygienists in Lviv on January 19th 1914, organising Women’s Hygiene Section where they delivered lectures.

businesses, promoting the principle of cooperation, economic improvement of the country and national industry, mainly female one, as well as striving to expand the scope of professions available to women".⁷

In 1914, 27 Lviv societies and 33 societies from Eastern Lesser Poland joined the Union. Following societies, among others, became members of the Union:

- from Lviv: The Circle of Salesian Sisters, Polish Women's Circle, Congregation of the Children of Mary – Students of the Sisters of Immaculate Conception, Teachers' Sodality, Infant Jesus Society, Society of the Merciful Women of St. Vincent de Paul, Catholic Women's Labour Association, St. Salome Association, St. Zita Association, Union of the Circles of Landladies, Association of Catholic Women;
- from Cracow: Help Office for Christian Mothers, Sisterhood of Christian Mothers, Polish Association of Catholic Women, Teachers' Sodality;
- from Kolomyia: Polish Dormitory for Girls, Female Boarding School for Seminarians, Polish Women's Circle of the People's School Society, Circle of Self-Education of Teachers, Marianska Sodality, Teachers' Sodality, Society of St. Vincent de Paul;
- from Przemyśl: Women's Circle of the People's School Society, Teachers' Self-Help;
- from Stanyslaviv: Circle of Christians, Circle of Charity Ladies, Circle of Polish Women, Circle of Ladies of the People's School, Sodality of the Ladies, Sodality of the Teachers;
- from Ternopil: Polish Women's Organization;
- from Zhovkva: St. Salome Association.⁸

⁷ *Statut Zjednoczenia Polskich Chrześcijańskich Towarzystw Kobiety we Lwowie* (1914). Lviv, pp. 4–5; Also: CDIAL, OPŻChTL, collection 841, carton 1, no. 1, pp. 12–17.

⁸ Following societies also belonged to the Union – from Lviv: Rural Choirs, Women's Circle of the F. Boberska People's School Society, Circle of the E. Plater People's School Society, Congregation of the Children of Mary – Students of the Sisters of Immaculate Conception, Workers' Gardens, Industrial Help of Women, PP. Economics, High School Teachers' Section, Sacré Couer Sodality of Women, Teachers' Sodality, Falcon Female Branch, Female Confection Employees' Confederation, Cheap Kitchens, Infant Jesus Society, Women's Savings Society, St. Salome Association, St. Zita Association, Eleusis Emancipation – Sisterhood Circle, Union of Hosiery, Association of Teachers, Association of Catholic Women; from Cracow: Help Office for Christian Mothers, Circle of Female Industrial Help, Circle of the People's Schools Society, Polish Association of Catholic Women, Teachers' Sodality, Association of Teachers, Association of Post Office Officials, Association of Postal Officials; from Kolomyia: Polish Dormitory for Girls, Female Boarding School for Seminarians, Polish Women's Circle of the People's School

When Poland regained its independence, the Union continued and developed its activities. With “idea of communication” in mind, it coordinated social, economic, educational, and charitable work of Christian women’s societies. Each month it organised – during the whole interwar period – sessions and proceedings during which the members discussed current social, economic, political, religious, educational, and cultural problems, as well as nationwide issues. During proceedings, in accordance with current social needs, specific tasks were undertaken and means of accomplishing them determined, new forms of work were created – outposts and institutions, strategies were established. Tasks were assigned to be performed by the specific Societies (taking into account their specificity, nature of individual organizations and their capabilities). This allowed for better work organisation – combining strengths and resources, more effective use of potential and capabilities of specialised organisations – but also eliminated duplication of actions and various activities.⁹

The Union and its member societies focused mainly on providing aid, care, philanthropy and charity; educational and cultural activities were a secondary focus.

The issues of proper upbringing and education of the society, especially women (in the Christian spirit, in accordance with expressed ideas and goals of the organisation), were a very important aspect (dimension) of the Union’s activities. Interest in issues of upbringing and education was reflected in everyday work of the societies, as well as in discussions during numerous Women’s Congresses organised by the Union. For example, on April 5–6th, 1921, many members of numerous societies and women’s organisations from all of Poland attended the Women’s Congress organised by the Union. The aim of this Congress

Society, Circle of Self-Education of Teachers, PP. Economics, Female Section of the County Organization, Marianska Sodality, Teachers’ Sodality, Association of Teachers; from Przemyśl: Teachers’ Self-Help; from Stanyslaviv: Women’s Circle of the People’s School Society, Association of the H. Sienkiewicz People’s School, Ladies Sodality, Teachers’ Sodality, Women’s Work Society. CDIAL, OPŻChTL, collection 841, carton 1, no. 7, pp. 1–6.

⁹ More on the subject in: Piwowarczyk, M. (2012). Integracja działań społeczno-kulturalnych na rzecz społeczności lokalnej Lwowa na przykładzie Zjednoczenia Polskich Chrześcijańskich Towarzystw Kobietych we Lwowie w okresie 1918–1939. In: Herciuk, D., Haratyk, A. (eds.) *Rozwój ukraińskiej i polskiej oświaty i myśli pedagogicznej (XIX–XXI w.)*. Vol. 2: *Udział społecznych i kulturalno-oświatowych towarzystw w rozwoju ukraińskiego i polskiego szkolnictwa*. Lviv: Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, pp. 126–155; Also: CDIAL, OPŻChTL, collection 841, carton 1, no. 21, pp. 1–9.

was to develop concepts and ways to work on raising the level of morality at home, in school and in the society as a whole. Attendees discussed issues concerning increase of morality of Polish family, role and tasks of women in social life, upbringing and education. Many lectures were delivered on such subjects as: "Fighting Demoralisation", "Divorce as a Force of Destruction in Society", "Catholic Postulates Regarding the Marriage Act", "The Need for Social Work of Women", "Organisation of Work of Women", "Women in Politics", "Women in Universities", "Family and School in Working on Moral Revival of the Nation". The Congress also passed a series of resolutions, appeals to Polish women, in which it expressed following demands, among others: "introduction of compulsory courses of pedagogy and home economics in all female schools" or "organisation of systematic work in order to familiarise women and mothers with their obligations and tasks in life". During the Congress, attendees postulated and supported women's aspirations to occupational education and equality in all aspects of public life.¹⁰

When it comes to more practical matters, the Union financed, among others: H. Sienkiewicz Dormitory of Craft Workshops of St. Anthony in Lviv, A. Mickiewicz Polish Dormitory for Girls, Nurseries and Shelters for Orphans in Kolomyia, and many local societies. It also took active part in collecting donations for the Red Cross and the Society for Youth Care, acquired several places for summer health retreats for students and girl scouts in Kuźnice, Przeworsk and many surrounding manor houses.¹¹

In 1923, "in the name of better future, realising that exemplary qualifications of the nursing staff is very significant in development of infants", the Infant Care Association of the "Infant Jesus" – a member of the Union – initiated creation of a school for caretakers of infants in the Infant Jesus' Institution for Waifs in Lviv.¹²

In the years 1926–1927, the period of highest social and educational activity, the Union undertook many significant actions to integrate the Societies and implement statutory tasks. Whenever possible, it satisfied social needs in the area of care, assistance, and support for people in need from various social and professional groups. It coordinated activities of the Societies, supported them financially and by creating common ground for discussion, thought exchange, reaching agreement in matters, problems, and difficulties important to the Societies. For example, on April 10–11th, 1926, another Women's Congress took place

¹⁰ CDIAL, OPŻChTL, collection 841, carton 1, no. 14, pp. 12–22.

¹¹ CDIAL, OPŻChTL, collection 841, carton 1, no. 15, pp. 1–15.

¹² CDIAL, OPŻChTL, collection 841, carton 1, no. 16, pp. 2.

in Lviv. Several hundred people were in attendance – delegates from women's societies in Lviv, Stanyslaviv, and Ternopil. Many important issues concerning moral life of family and Polish women, as well as education and schools were brought up during the proceedings (through reports, discussions, and resolutions). A number of papers were delivered, e.g.: “Draft law on penalties for abandoning family”, “On fighting demoralisation”, “Matters of upbringing and education”, “Family as a fundament of State”. Moreover, the Congress, in its resolution to Parliament (signed by 7775 women), expressed its support for the draft law “On penalties for abandoning family”, which would – according to the delegates – contribute to “strengthening family ties; increase in public morality by forcing the closest family to care for children and elderly; reduction in infant mortality; reduction in number of beggars, which will in turn reduce expenses of municipalities, societies and similar national and municipal institutions; diverting many girls from prostitution by providing them with parental care”.¹³

In the years 1926-1927, the Union organised many lecture campaigns propagating history and culture of Poland, Catholic model of family life and upbringing, sober and moral life; in Lesser Poland, it organised summer camps for indigent Polish children; actively provided financial and legal help to societies that looked after children and young people, which allowed many institutions and shelters to continue their work. For female ex-convicts and women at risk of prostitution, the Union organised legal aid and counsel, material aid (in the form of benefits) and educational aid (in the form of various occupational courses); e.g. along with the department of venereal diseases of the General Hospital in Lviv, the Union organised a millinery course for engendered women, in which many of them showed interest. The organisation also advised and provided professional help in obtaining various loans, credits, subsidies for operations of economic associations, e.g. Society for Women's Education.¹⁴

Since May 1931, the Union changed its name to the Union of Polish Catholic Women's Societies in Lviv and was comprised of 40 societies, e.g.: Brotherhood of Christian Mothers dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows, Catholic Union of Polish Women, Catholic Association of Female Clothing Industry Workers dedicated to Saint Joseph, Circle of Polish Women, Circle of Polish Women's of the People's School Society in Kleparów, Circle of Female University Students, Intelligence Assistance

¹³ CDIAL, OPŻChTL, collection 841, carton 1, no. 19, pp. 1–5.

¹⁴ CDIAL, OPŻChTL, collection 841, carton 1, no. 21, pp. 1–9. Also: CDIAL, OPŻChTL, collection 841, carton 1, no. 22, pp. 2–13.

Committee – Section of the Catholic Union of Polish Women, Congregation of Landladies dedicated to Our Lady of Kochawina, Polish Workers' Union of Female Catholic Workers "Lever", Polish Sodality, Association of Catholic Servants dedicated to Saint Zyta, Infant Care Association "Infant Jesus", Society for the Care for Young Women – Section of the Catholic Union of Polish Women, Society of the Merciful Women of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Salome Association, Society of St. Stanislaus Kostka for Care for Terminators in Lviv.¹⁵

All those Societies, with support and patronage of the Management of the Union and under its direction, developed their activities in their specific fields. They continued uninterrupted social and educational work until the end of the Second Polish Republic. They intensified their activities during the great economic crisis, providing assistance to the poorest, unemployed, homeless, lonely, and orphans. For example, in the years 1931–1932, the Union cooperated with Municipal Committee of Extracurricular Care in Lviv (in the aspect of feeding children), urban Christian care facilities for school-age children, closed care institutions (i. e. the Hospital of Mercy, the Lviv Citizens' Institute dedicated to Saint Lazarus), homeless care institutions (City Shelter for Homeless Women, Brother Albert's Shelter, Albertine Sisters' Shelter).¹⁶

In the first decade of independent Poland and in the years of great economic crisis, the Union complied forms, content, and principles of sociocultural and educational work, which were later continued and developed. Activities of the Union and its member Societies – which brought together hundreds of Polish Catholic women – played important part in helping the neediest inhabitants of the discussed voivodeships, mainly women and children. It contributed to the increase of social, cultural, educational, and economic activity of Polish local societies in South-Eastern Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic.

¹⁵ The most active in the area of child care were following societies: Catholic Union of Polish Women, Child Protection Society, Infant Care Association "Infant Jesus," Society for the Care for Young Women – Section of the Catholic Union of Polish Women, Society of the Merciful Women of St. Vincent de Paul, Society of St. Stanislaus Kostka for Care for Terminators in Lviv, Congregation of Landladies. CDIAL, OPŻChTL, f. 841, op. 1, no. 227, pp. 1–2; Also: CDIAL, OPŻChTL, collection 841, carton 1, no. 10, pp. 5–10.

¹⁶ The Union cooperated with: J. Neuman Municipal Nursery at 4 Stelmacha Street, Archbishop J. Bilczewski Municipal Nursery at 3 Bema Street, W. Biechoński Municipal Nursery at 9 Kaleczna Street, Municipal Nursery at 46 Zamarstynowska Street, Municipal Nursery at 102 Żółkiewskiej Street and Municipal Nursery at 31 Pijarów Street. Bonasiuk, A. (2000) *Lwów w latach 1918–1939. Ludność–Przestrzeń–Samorząd*. Rzeszów: Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna, p. 268.

Another example of the educational activities of Christian women's societies in South-Eastern Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic was their organising and supporting of private initiatives in the area of education and advancement (preparation) of teachers¹⁷. Proper preparation and education of public school teachers was one of the priorities of educational authorities in the reborn Poland. In realisation of this task, state institutions (authorities) were supported by private initiatives. These included, above all, initiatives and activities undertaken in the field of education (teacher education and training) by various and numerous (Polish and non-Polish) organisations and societies which included such work in their areas of interest.

In the interwar period, in three south-eastern voivodeships (Lviv Voivodeship, Stanyslaviv Voivodeship, Ternopil Voivodeship), a series of teacher seminars were organised, both public and private ones¹⁸.

In the mid-twenties (school year 1925/26), among 49 seminars operating in three south-eastern voivodeships, as many as 30 were private establishments run by different organisations, societies, religious congregations, municipal associations or private entities (among them were 22 private seminars teaching in Polish language and six private seminars teaching in Ukrainian language – those operated in Lviv, Drohobych, Sambir, Stanyslaviv, Stryi, Kolomyia – and two private ultraquist seminars.¹⁹

Various Christian organisations and socio-educational societies demonstrated their interest in schools, institutions that prepared teachers, educators, and guardians. Some of them included educational activities in their statutes, others undertook activities in this field occasionally. Organisation and program of the established and maintained teachers'

¹⁷ See: Piwowarczyk, M. (2016). Rol socialno-osvitnych tovarystv v orhanizaciji ta pidtrymci pryvatnyh iniciatyv u haluzi osvity ta profesijnoho vdoskonalenuja vcyteliv u Druhij Reči Pospolytij na teritoriji Lvivskoho, Stanislavskoho i Ternopilskoho vojevodstvi (vybrani pryklady) In: Herciuk, D. – Myshchysyn, I. (eds.). *Rozwój ukraińskiej i polskiej oświaty i myśli pedagogicznej (XIX–XXI w.)*. Vol. 6: *Edukacja prywatna w Polsce i na Ukrainie: aspekty historyczne i pedagogiczne tworzenia szkół prywatnych, obecny stan i perspektywy rozwoju*. Lviv: Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, pp.151–167.

¹⁸ See: Sanojca, K. (2013). *Relacje polsko-ukraińskie w szkolnictwie państwowym południowo-wschodnich województw Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*. Kraków: Historia lagellonica, p. 295.

¹⁹ Zagórowski, Z. (1926). *Spis nauczycieli szkół wyższych, średnich, zawodowych, seminarjów nauczycielskich oraz wykaz zakładów naukowych i władz szkolnych. R.2*. Warsaw–Lviv: Książnica–Atlas, pp. 380–382. See also: Doroszewski, J. (2002). *Seminaria nauczycielskie w Polsce w świetle polityki oświatowej państwa (1918–1937)*. Lublin: Lubelskie Towarzystwo Naukowe, p. 22.

seminars corresponded to those of state-owned teacher's seminars; although they functioned without the full status of state schools. In 1933, we could find following examples of such facilities:

- Private Female Teachers' Seminar of the Society for Christian Teaching in Tłumacz. The owner of the school – which taught in Polish – was the Society for Christian Teaching in Tłumacz (headed by a priest Kazimierz Tabaczkowski). The school was designed for girls “without differences in denominations and nationalities”. According to the statute: “individual direction of the school was such upbringing and education of the candidates for teachers, that they become aware of their duties and creative citizens of the Republic of Poland and achieve best possible religious, moral, intellectual, and physical proficiency, as well as the best preparation for life and teaching profession”;²⁰
- Private Female Teachers' Seminar of the Sisters of St. Basil in Stanyslaviv. The school was designed for female youth of Catholic religious denomination and Russian nationality (teaching in Russian language);²¹
- Saint Josaphat's Private Female Teachers' Seminar of the Sisters of St. Basil in Lviv (teaching in Ukrainian). The school was designed for female youth of Greek Catholic religious denomination and Ukrainian nationality;²²
- Private Female Teachers' Seminar in Lviv, run by the Assembly of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth. The school was designed for female youth of Christian religious denomination and Polish nationality (teaching in Polish language). According to the statute, the goal of the school was to “implement discipline and solid work in order to shape future teachers – citizens ready to serve their country and basing their internal lives on Catholic ethics”. After 1932, the school met the conditions for running a business and had a permit for the duration of its operations (in 1936 it did not have full state school rights).²³

Ultimately, Union of Polish Christian Women's Societies in Lviv fulfilled its role as a coordinator and initiator of the broadly understood educational activity of Polish Christian women's societies in the South-Eastern Borderlands in the Second Polish Republic. It was an institution

²⁰ CDIAL, Kuratorium Lwivskogo Škilnogo Okrugu m. Lviv [hereinafter: KLSO], collection 179, carton 1, no. 565, pp. 56–57.

²¹ CDIAL, KLSO, collection 179, carton 1, no. 565, p. 15.

²² CDIAL, KLSO, collection 179, carton 1, no. 565, pp. 33–35.

²³ CDIAL, KLSO, collection 179, carton 1, no. 565, pp. 3–5.

that brought together and activated dozens of women's organizations and thousands of women who were involved in educational, cultural, assistance, caring and charitable work, thus contributing to the formation of the socio-cultural character of Polish local communities in the discussed areas. The wide scope of the Union's activity, as well as the diversity of applied forms, can/should inspire entrepreneurship/activity of Polish communities at the beginning of the 21st century, not only in the areas of the former South-Eastern Borderlands of the Polish Republic.

What is more, activities of Christian women's societies in the area of teacher education/training should be considered as valuable and effective. It was possible, thanks to the institutions/seminars, to educate hundreds of well-prepared teachers who, through their work, contributed significantly to raising the level of schooling/education of Poles in the Second Polish Republic period.