



Discussion about education in the Parliament of the Second Polish Republic

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In the Second Polish Republic two main concepts of education were defined: national education, represented the National Democracy (Narodowa Demokracja), and state education, proposed by the Sanation camp: the Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rządem – BBWR). These two concepts were confronted in the addresses of the MPs and senators in the parliament of the Second Polish Republic which pertained to the legal bases of the education system. However, developing a consensus regarding the education of the young generation in a society divided along national, religious, and political lines turned out to be difficult. It can be proposed that neither Roman Dmowski earlier, nor Józef Piłsudski later managed to fully implement their concepts of education.

Key words: education; the concept of state education; the concept of national education,; Parliament; Second Polish Republic

Discussions and arguments about the education of young generations date back to times immemorial. They are a part of the history of civilisation, and they take place on numerous levels: philosophical, ideological, political, economic, and social ones. The discussions ensue in family homes, public and government institutions, and the media. In democratic states, the Parliament becomes a natural setting for the debates on the education of future generations¹.

In the Second Polish Republic there were 1037 sessions of Sejm and 342 sessions of the Senate. They started with the first Legislative Sejm (1919–1922) of the independent state of Poland, and ended with the

extraordinary session of Sejm and the Senate which took place on September 2, 1939, after the Nazi aggression. The work of the Senate of the Polish Republic began on November 28, 1922. Its sessions were held considerably less often than those of Sejm. The parliamentary sessions were accompanied by sittings of Sejm committees, which were an “introduction” to debates in Sejm. Throughout the years 1918–1939 the political scene was constantly changing. There were several dozens of political parties and groups that made up diverse constellations in the Parliament. Especially in the parliamentary democracy prevalent until 1926 the political parties played a decisive role in the legislative and the executive. Depending on their power and prominence in different political alliances, the parties would influence the decisions of the parliament and the educational policy of the government through their delegates². After 1926, when the Sanation led by Józef Piłsudski took the power, the role of the Parliament was limited, and the importance of the executive increased. However, in spite of the legal and administrative limitations pertaining first and foremost to the political parties of the opposition, and the difficult conditions in which they had to work – which is reflected in, among others, the numerous interpellations of the Members of Parliament – political parties remained active until the end of the Second Polish Republic.

The political parties and groups, along with the teachers’ organisations and pedagogues who cooperated with them, tried to use the pedagogical thought from the times of the Partitions to develop a fundament for the education of the young generation, which was to be included in their programmes. In the Second Polish Republic two main concepts of education were defined. They were: national education, represented generally by the National Democracy³, and state education, represented

² Since 17. 11. 1918 in the Second Republic of Poland there were 29 cabinets with 18 prime ministers. Some of them would occupy the position a number of times, e.g. Wincenty Witos was the prime minister three times, and Kazimierz Bartel five times. Professors Antoni Ponikowski and Julian Nowak as well as Janusz Jędrzejewicz and Kazimierz Bartel were simultaneously prime ministers and ministers of Religions and Public Enlightenment, which served to increase the importance of this Ministry.

³ National Democracy (Narodowa Demokracja – ND, commonly called “endecja” because of the abbreviation) or the national movement (ruch narodowy). The term National Democracy applies to the entire national democratic camp, which included not only the formal political structures, but also numerous organisations and economic, social, cultural, sports, and women’s societies and associations. The national democratic camp constituted a wide political circle joined by ideological, organisational, and personal connections. Political groups (People’s National Union – Związek Ludowo-Narodowy, National Party – Stronnictwo Narodowe) were at its core. Roman Dmowski (1864–1939) was a co-founder and the main ideologue of the movement.

by Sanation⁴. The latter idea appeared later, in 1927. The concept of national education was formed during the times of the Partitions and it would evolve after the regaining of independence. Its supporters proposed the role models of “a man as a citizen, a hero, a good worker” (S. Szczepanowski) and “the citizen soldier” (Z. Balicki), as well as the idea of “service to God and the Fatherland” (L. Zarzycki)⁵. In the parliament, the national democratic camp was represented by People’s National Union (Związek Ludowo-Narodowy), which was transformed into the National Party (Stronnictwo Narodowe) in 1928. The idea of state education relied upon the concept of a society conscious of the importance of the state and the *raison d’état*, social solidarity, and the cult of labour⁶. In the years 1928–1935, the main political organisation of the Sanation camp was the Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rządem – BBWR), which consisted of all pro-Sanation political parties: Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna – PPS), Polish People’s Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe – PSL) “Wyzwolenie”, Peasant Party (Stronnictwo Chłopskie), Christian Agrarian Party (Chrześcijańskie Stronnictwo Rolnicze). In 1937, a renewed attempt was made at an integration of the Sanation camp into the Camp of National Unity (Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego – OZN).

The debates about schooling in the Legislative Sejm were mostly devoted to creating legal bases for the unification of the curricula and the administration of the education system in the entire state, developing the standards of teachers’ work, education, and wages, as well as solving the problems of the financing of schooling related to the multiple currencies and hyperinflation. Although the themes related to the ethos of education were not a frequently addressed in the speeches of the MPs, they were not altogether ignored. They were an issue for the right wing politicians, following the idea of national education. It was only with the works on the

⁴ Sanation (Sanacja) – an informal name of the political camp of Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935), functioning from 1926 to 1939, and formed in relation with the slogan of “moral sanitation” of the public life in Poland coined by its leader. The slogan was used before and during the coup d’état of May 1926.

⁵ Chojnowski, A. (1979): *Koncepcje polityki narodowościowej rządów polskich w latach 1921–1939* [Concepts of the National Policy of the Polish Governments in the Years 1921–1939]. Wrocław.

⁶ Jakubiak, K. (1994): *Wychowanie państwowe jako ideologia wychowawcza sanacji* [State Education as the Educational Ideology of the Sanation]. Bydgoszcz; Magiera, E. (2001): *Ideał wychowania państwowego w II Rzeczypospolitej* [The idea of state education in the Second Polish Republic]. In: *Przemiany edukacyjne w Polsce i na świecie a modele wychowania* [Educational Changes in Poland and the World and Models of Education]. Kraków.

March Constitution of 1921 pertaining to religion, education, and schooling that arguments regarding obligatory religion classes (favouring the Roman Catholic denomination) in schools and religious schooling, supported by the MPs of People's National Association (Związek Ludowo Narodowy – ZLN), National People's Union (Narodowe Zjednoczenie Ludowe – NZL), National Christian Workers' Party (Narodowo Chrześcijańska Partia Robotnicza – NChPR). The representatives of this camp would emphasise that religion is an essential element of national education, based on Christian values. The members of PPS and PSL "Piast" argued that "schools should first and foremost educate good Polish citizens, rather than followers of various religious denominations". They proposed that the latter element would be dominant in religious schools. At the same time, it was not argued that religion classes be banned from schools altogether: it was only their obligatory character that was questioned⁷. The resulting compromise led to the removal of religious schools, while the obligatory religion classes remained in state and local-government schools. Intense arguments on these issues took place in Sejm with the ratification of the 1925 Concordat. Article 13 was a source of the greatest controversies. The article confirmed and broadened the decisions of the March Constitution (art. 120) pertaining to the obligatory character of religion classes in all public schools except universities. Private schools also had to run such classes, if they wanted to keep their public school rights. Although the regulations of the art. 13 pertained only to teaching religion at school, rather than religious education or the religious character of schools, a discussion about the supposed "threat" of religious schooling and clericalist society was initiated by the left wing parties and minorities of Communist origin⁸. The question of children from non-religious families and religious minorities was to be solved by an executive act⁹.

In Sejm of the first term (1922–1927) the struggle for the introduction of national education as a dominant element of the education system was

⁷ Transcript of the 181st session of Legislative Sejm of 4. 11. 1920, columns 31–36; 188th Legislative Sejm session, 23. 11. 1920, columns 58–63.

⁸ Transcript of the 187 SU session, 24. 03. 1925, columns 94–269, and 92 Senate sessions, 23. 04. 1925, columns 383–442. Speeches of the MPs: K. Czapiński (PPS), Z. Piotrowski (PPS), J. Putka (PSL "W"), and senator J. Woźnicki (PSL "W"), MP: T. Błażejowicz (ChD) and senator M. Thulie (ChD).

⁹ Except for the circular of the MWRiOP of 05. 01. 1927 pertaining to, among others, the establishment of interclass and interschool groups of children for religion classes (which was hardly ever carried out), no practical legal and administrative solutions were introduced.

initiated in 1925 with the educational reform project of the Minister of Religions and Public Enlightenment Stanisław Grabski¹⁰. The project limited the access of vocational schools graduates to higher education. It was developed by the Ministry of Religions and Public Enlightenment (Ministerstwo Wyznań Religijnych i Oświecenia Publicznego – MWRiOP)¹¹ by a close group of co-operators and since it was never consulted with teachers, and the Left was strongly opposed, it was impossible for it to be introduced. It was on the Sejm agenda on November 3, 1926, and it was sent to the Education Commission, which did not discuss it, because the Commission's make-up was changed.

After the coup d'état of May 1926 the Sanation camp took the power. Once the political situation became stable, the works on an educational ideology and schooling system reform began. Because it was believed that the education of youth may change reality, slogans promising the building of the a new society were used to gain popularity among the public. In 1927, the term "state education" was coined. Speeches of Sanation camp MPs emphasise the necessity to bring up new citizens loyal to the state with its symbols and power, including the personality cult of J. Piłsudski. It was stressed that all citizens need state education, including ethnic and religious minorities, which were never to be a part of national education. The idea of state education would, therefore, address the crucial problem of ethnic minorities. The representation of these minorities in the subsequent terms of Sejm was increasingly numerous and active.¹²

The nationalists were hypersensitive to issues concerning ethnic minorities and they could not comprehend the rights that the minorities were granted with the Treaty of Versailles and the compromise of the March Constitution. This was reflected in, among others, the borderlands acts, i.e. the so-called "lex Grabski", with their strong nationalist tendencies¹³. To address the allegations of the ethnic minorities, S. Grabski wrote: "it is

¹⁰ Stanisław Grabski (1871–1949), Legislative Sejm and the 1st term Sejm MPWRiOP minister in the cabinets of Władysław Grabski, Aleksander Skrzyński, Wincenty Witos.

¹¹ Ministry of Religions and Public Enlightenment (Ministerstwo Wyznań Religijnych i Oświecenia Publicznego – MWRiOP) consisted of 2 departments, dealing with problems of religions and education.

¹² In the 1st term Sejm the national minorities bloc had 89 MPs (20% of all representatives). It included Ukrainians, Russians, Germans, and Jews. It was even more numerous in the Senate (24%). The number decreased in the subsequent terms of the Sejm, because some oppositional Ukrainian and Belarussian MPs were arrested after the coup d'etat of May 1926.

¹³ The so-called borderlands acts were mainly penned by S. Grabski. They included the act of 31. 07. 1924 with its decisions on the organisation of schooling for the Ukrainian,

necessary for the Polish state school in the Polish state to educate non-Polish youth as good Polish citizens, just like Polish youth. They should, therefore, be given the Polish culture of the spirit, the love of Polish literature, art, the cult of Polish national heroes, and the pride in being a part of the Polish state”¹⁴. The subsequent actions of the MWRiOP caused diverse reactions: some would perceive them as an attempt at a unification of the schooling system, others, in turn, would see them as repressive towards national and religious minorities. The number of the so-called urgent propositions and interpellations undermining the policies of the cabinet was rising rapidly. It was claimed that the constitutional and Treaty rights securing freedom of religion and upbringing in one's own language, tradition, and culture were being violated¹⁵. The interpellations addressed various cases where it was impossible for people to bring up their children in the religion and culture of the parents. This included the ban to promote minority cultures in minority languages, the obligation to work and attend school during religious holidays, violation of religious celebrations, and the lack of respect for the traditions of ancestors. Complaints on the imposing of the Polish national ethos were also included. The interpellation by K. Daczka and R. G. Piesch, MPs from the German Union parliamentary club, about the problem of respecting the parents' right to make decisions about the upbringing of their children¹⁶ as well as the numerous interpellations of Ukrainian and Belarussian MPs complaining about the obligatory Roman Catholic religion classes that children from Orthodox and Greek Catholic families had to attend, and the obligatory education in Polish schools may serve as examples¹⁷.

Lithuanian, and Belarussian minorities of the Lwowskie, Stanisławowskie, Tarnopolskie, Wołyńskie, Poleskie, Nowogródzkie, and Wileńskie voidvodships and the Grodzieński and Wołkowskyjski districts of the Białostockie voivodship. Dz. U.RP, 1924, Issue 79, pos. 766.

¹⁴ Grabski, S. (1927): *Szkoła na ziemiach wschodnich. W obronie ustawy szkolnej z 31 lipca 1924 r.* [Schools in the eastern borderlands. In the defence of the schooling act of July 31, 1924]. Warszawa, p. 8.

¹⁵ The collection stored in the Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw includes over 10,000 interpellations. According to A. Ajnenkiel and A. Gwiżdż the number amounts to only 2/3 of all interpellations, mostly of the MPs. Ca. 500 of them pertained to general issues related to schooling and education. In compliance with the Sejm statutes, they were directed to the MWRiOP and other ministries. The majority of the interpellations were proposed by MPs of the ethnic minorities bloc. The interpellations reflect the most painful social problems of the time.

¹⁶ Interpellation no. 465 of 21. 04. 1923 submitted by K. Daczka and R. G. Piesch during the 33rd session of Sejm on 23. 11. 1928, column 4.

¹⁷ E.g. interpellation no. 162 of 21. 04. 1923 submitted by MPs of the Ukrainian Club during the 33rd session of Sejm on 23. 11. 1928, column 4.

In general, the Sanation camp did not reject or negate the idea of national education, however, they would emphasise the anachronistic character of the ideology shaped under foreign occupation. It was claimed that these ideas were useless in the new, independent state; the state that was also still weak, multinational, and inhabited by members of multiple religious denominations. In such a society, the preferences of one particular nation or religion could not be accepted. Therefore, it was proposed that it was necessary to rise above the national conflicts for the sake of the common good of all citizens. This led to an attempt to reform the education system. Throughout 1926–1928 projects of the reform were being developed by Kazimierz Bartel and Gustaw Dobrucki, ministers of the MWRiOP in the cabinet of Józef Piłsudski. Although the projects were well-received by teachers, they were never legislated. This was a result of the lack of political and economic stability of contemporary Poland. Also, there was no political will to initiate a discussion about these project in Sejm.

The cabinet's act on the organisation of schooling written by Janusz Jędrzejewicz, minister of the MWRiOP, was an expression of a stabilisation of the schooling system. After a heated debate, the act was passed by Sejm on February 26, 1932, and by Senate on March 11, 1932¹⁸. The essence of the legal changes introduced by the act lay in the transformation of schools from teaching institutions to educating ones. The aim was to be realised through the promotion of a social, citizen, and patriotic ethos. J. Smulikowski claimed that state education was a synthesis of this ethos, because it took into account the "regional mosaic" of Poland¹⁹. Even though Janusz Jędrzejewicz would initially propose that national education was, in fact, nationalistic education, which is why was it was unacceptable in a country where ethnic minorities constituted 31% of the population, he eventually changed his views, perhaps under the influence of his colleagues. Jędrzejewicz stated that "no aspect of state education is contradictory to national education"²⁰. The discussion on the project of the act which first took place in the Education Commission, where it was sent after the first reading, and then in the Parliament was covered by daily and professional press²¹. That is

¹⁸ With the date March 11, 1932. The act on the organisation of schooling, Dz. U. Issue 38 of 07. 05. 1932, pos. 389. Janusz Jędrzejewicz (1885–1951) – pedagogue, politician, minister of the MWRiOP, member of the Sanation camp.

¹⁹ Stenographic record of the 60th session of Sejm of 24. 02. 1932, columns 94–96.

²⁰ Jędrzejewicz, J. (1930): Wychowanie państwowe [State education]. „Zrąb”, vol. 3, pp. 314–316.

²¹ Kurier Poranny, Gazeta Polska, Kurier Lwowski, Kurier Warszawski, Robotnik, Przegląd Pedagogiczny, Zrąb.

why people could follow the debate day to day, and even participate in it by pressuring the MPs. A representation of all the levels of schooling was invited to one of the Education Commission sessions. The academic teachers had the most negative opinion of the Commission. The project was introduced by J. Smulikowski, MP, and 18 MPs joined the discussion in Sejm, most of whom were teachers and education activists²². The representatives of the National Club and the ethnic minorities were highly critical of the idea of state education. In his address, Stanisław Strzetelski of the National Club accused the Sanation camp, which was in power at the time, of trying to change the political system through educational ideology. The MP claimed that the ideology “was based upon the idea of a ‘pure’ state”, which, as foundation, was “formal, shallow, superficial”. He stated that the results could be “risky and dangerous”, because instead of a well-thought-out programme there was only the following “the forms of government that happen to be trendy today”, and the “ideology [was] a huge misunderstanding”. “All within the state, all for the state, all through the state – this fascist slogan is also popular with the Sanation camp in Poland”²³. The BBWR MPs would also concentrate on the idea of state education. They had positive opinions about it and they expressed their hope that the act may promote social advancement of graduates of gymnasiums and lyceums as well as vocational schools. As Maria Jaworska stated, the latter were to constitute a “new type of intelligentsia”. Representatives of national minorities, in turn, heavily criticised the idea of state education. They perceived it as similar to national education and they were afraid that the education system would become extremely unified and that their children would, as a result, lose their national identity (Milena N. Rudnicka-Łysiak, Emil Sommerstein, and Izaak Grúnbaun). The discussion in the Senate was similar, and the senators supported their colleagues from the parliamentary clubs. Eventually, even J. Jędrzejewicz was dissatisfied with the reform. It was his opinion that the implementation of the reform contorted the idea of state education. After 1935, the enactment of the new constitution, the

²² Among them there were members of the National Club: Tadeusz Bielecki, Stefan Z. Dąbrowski, Jan Kordecki, Tadeusz Lech, Stanisław Stroński, Stanisław Strzetelski, MPs of BBWR: Gabriela Balicka, pr. Jan Czuj, Maria Jaworska, Kazimiera Marczyńska, Stefan Mękowski, Bolesław Pochmarski, the Ukrainian Club: Milena Natalia Rudnicka-Łysiak and Sergiusz Chrucki, the Jewish Club: Emil Sommerstein and Izaak Grúnbaun, the Communist Parliamentary Fraction: Chil Mordechaj Rosenberg, and the Christian Social Club: pr. Szczepan Szydelski.

²³ Stenographic record of the 61st session of Sejm of 26. 02. 1932, columns 24–66, the address of S. Strzetelski, MP.

death of Piłsudski, the radicalisation of the Sanation camp, and the crisis of the ideology of state education, a new concept was sought. The former soldiers of the Polish Legions supported the idea of military education. The resolution proposed in Sejm on February 18, 1938 by Jakub Hoffman: a former soldier of the Polish Legions, a teacher in common schools, and a secretary in the Education Commission, which postulated the formation of a committee that was to develop an idea of school education, was the last act of the debate. The resolution was not passed²⁴.

The annual heated debates on the preliminary budget of the MWRiOP were an occasion to discuss the ethos of education in the parliament. The ministry would attempt to secure sufficient funds to finance the basic aims of the educational policy as well as the cultural needs of different social groups. It was during the debate on the MWRiOP budget for 1932/33 (i.e. in the year when the act on schooling was being implemented) that S. Stroński, MP of the National Club, heavily criticised the project as well as the very idea of state education. To address the criticism, minister Janusz Jędrzejewicz spoke and defined state education as “citizen education, as it teaches one to subordinate one’s individual good to the common good, that is, the good of all citizens. It teaches one to be able to make sacrifices and to serve; just like religious education, it postulates that there is something more valuable than the good of an individual, that there are some higher values, superior to the individual, that the common good, expressed by the state, is superior to all individual needs that may be contrary to it. State education is grave and austere, it has a noble cause, and it can and it should unite all citizens, regardless of their social class, personal property, or worldview. It teaches about the common good, about cooperation, about organised work, and about living in a community. It teaches that people should be prepared to defend the community against destructive forces from outside and from within. It dares to request people to make sacrifices, even to sacrifice their lives, but not for the sake discipline, commands, or fear, but for the sake of the common good, a common ideal”. When he raised the grave and somewhat pompous question: “Who dares to say that state education understood in this way is harmful and shallow? Who, being honest and earnest, dares to mock the slogans of state education, to treat them as mere novelties?”, it was swiftly answered by a National Democratic MP: “if it is understood in this way, then no one”²⁵. Apparently, he was not able

²⁴ Resolutions, i.e. supplementary acts of Sejm that made it obligatory for the government to take the proposed actions. J. Hoffman’s resolution was rejected during the 76th session of Sejm on 24. 02. 1938.

²⁵ Stenographic record of the 49th session of Sejm of 5. 02. 1932, column 38.

to convince everyone, because S. Strzetelski (National Club) severely criticised the proposed act during the debate that took place three weeks later.

It was a parliamentary tradition that prime ministers would give exposés. They typically presented their plans pertaining to the particular ministries. Usually few words were said about education, and sometimes none. These bland and banal speeches were hardly memorable. However, if questions of schooling and education were addressed, they were typically legal, organisational, and financial problems. Prime ministers would make some general remarks on the patriotic education of the young generations, mentioning the ideals and the legacy of the Commission of National Education (Komisja Edukacji Narodowej – KEN)²⁶. The addresses were made by representatives of opposing political camps, who used to accuse their opponents of appropriating and distorting the educational ideals of KEN. In the speeches of the MPs and the members of the cabinet the historical context was often used as an illustration and justification of the proposed theses.

M. Ossowska defines ethos as the lifestyle of groups sharing common traditions and values²⁷. The dissemination of an artificially created ethos, related to the idea of state education or national education, turned out to be difficult, if not impossible, in a society divided along national, religious, and political lines. It can be proposed that neither Roman Dmowski earlier, nor Józef Piłsudski later managed to fully implement their concepts of education. From 1937 to 1939 there were certain tendencies in the Sanation camp to seek cooperation with the National Democrats in relation to education. However, the idea was never realised. Nevertheless, this time was not wasted, because in spite of the interpretative debates led by the ideologues of the opposing political camps, the values on which education was to be based were never questioned. What is more, families, the Catholic church, and youth organisations played an essential role in education. World War II verified both the concepts of education, and the generation the same age as independent Poland showed their patriotic, public-spirited, and heroic

²⁶ Commission of National Education (Komisja Edukacji Narodowej – KEN) was established in Poland after the Jesuit Order was dissolved in order to deeply reform schooling and education. It was active from 1773 to 1794. It was a central education authority, dependent only on the king and Sejm. Commission of National Education was the first educational institution with the prerogatives of a modern ministry of education in Poland as well as entire Europe.

²⁷ Ossowska, M. (1986): *Ethos rycerski i jego odmiany* [The chivalric ethos and its types]. Warszawa.

attitude. Their fight against the German and the Soviet occupiers is written in history's pages. Anna Pawełczyńska, a member of the generation of peers of the Second Polish Republic, describes the times: "in interwar Poland there was a unique cooperation of families, schools, parishes, scout teams, and sport teams. Unlike the older generations [living in the Partitions of Poland under foreign occupation – author's note], or the nowadays generations, we weren't subject to contradictory ideas being forced down our throats. The values learned in our families were not mocked. It is not easy to teach someone to be dutiful, but it is easy to teach one to ignore their duties. It is very difficult to establish cooperation, but it is very easy to disorganise and to destroy. It is difficult to educate a responsible person, but it is easy to bring up a demanding individual. We didn't want much from Poland, we wanted to serve her"²⁸.

²⁸ The interview of Jacek and Michał Karnowski with professor Anna Pawełczyńska, a sociologist of culture, a soldier of the Home Army, a prisoner of Auschwitz: *Wojna przeciw Polsce trwa* (2014) [War against Poland goes on], In „*w Sieci*”, Issue 2(58), 2–7 January 2014, p. 27.