

History and civic education in Poland

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Abstract

This paper analyses the situation of history and civic education in Poland. It presents an overview of the Polish education system - the genesis, main features, structure and funding. It looks at the teaching content and goals of historical and civic education through the lens of curriculum translated by the author. There is an analysis of the primary school and secondary school history curriculum, primary school civic education curricula and newly (2022) introduced "History and Present" subject in secondary school. The new history curriculum was introduced in 2018 and slightly changed in 2022 after introducing a new subject, which has taken over the teaching about history after 1945 and the role of civic education. History education in Poland is taught in a chronological order from two perspectives - national and global. The national perspective is privileged. The main goals of history education in Poland are: patriotic attitude, sense of responsibility for the country, and national pride. Civic education begins with teaching the students basic social competences, like cooperation, searching and sorting information, understanding the media narratives. In secondary school socialisation is tied to specific cultural norms and a vision of the individual, family and society rooted in Christianity and Greek-Roman tradition.

keywords: Polish education system, history education, civic education, History and Present

Introduction

Poland is a country in Central Europe. There are 37,9 million people living in Poland according to the Central Statistical Office. 4,76 million of them are people in the age of 7-18 which is the age group under the obligation of education. (Statistics Poland, 2023). Population dynamic in Poland is defined by 2 main demographic trends - low fertility rate (1,26 children per woman), and high immigration rate, mostly from Ukraine. (Bukowski, Duszczyk 2022, OECD 2023).

Historical roots of Polish education system

The symbolic beginning of the Polish State is placed at the end of the 10th century. In 966 Mieszko I, the first historically documented ruler of Poland, was baptized and he introduced Poland to the Judeo-Christian and Latin culture. The Piast dynasty united the lands that covered roughly the present territory of Poland. After uniting with Lithuania under the Jagiellonian dynasty in 1385, both countries ruled over vast territories situated between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. The first Polish university (Jagiellonian University) was founded by the king Casimir the Great from the Piast dynasty in 1364.¹ (OECD 2021, JU 2023).

The National Education Day is celebrated in Poland on October 14. On this day in 1772, the Commission of National Education was established by the Sejm (Polish noble parliament), which is considered to be the first Ministry of Education in Europe created with inspiration from the ideas of Enlightenment. Its impact on society was limited due to the rapid decline of the Polish state which was partitioned by three neighbouring countries - Prussia, Russia and Austro-Hungary -, and ceased to exist as an independent political centre for 123 years. Poland returned to the map of Europe as an independent state after the First World War in 1918. During the Interwar period Poland tried to re-establish itself as a new state with a long history. Those efforts were interrupted by the Third Reich on 1 September 1939 with a military attack which began the Second World War. In the course of war, around 20% of Polish population were killed, economy and infrastructure were heavily destroyed and borders of the state reshaped by moving them to the West. The Soviet army stopped the Nazi occupation, but it installed a new regime with a puppet government. Poland stayed in the Soviet sphere of influence for the next 44 years (EC 2023).

¹ The university is called the Jagiellonian University from the XIXth century because of the donations made by the king Jagiello and his wife to restore its functionality at the beginning of the XVth century (Jagiellonian University 2023).

The Polish education system

The Polish education system was shaped after the political transformation (fall of the communist system) in 1989. Changes were made in all aspects: the core curriculum, as well as its structure, organization and management. As a result of the changes, its characteristic features have developed.

On the one hand, the Polish education system is centralized and all the main regulations are in the competence of the Ministry of Education and Science. There is a nationwide curriculum and system of external exams at the end of primary and secondary school. Exams are obligatory for the students finishing primary school and facultative for the ones who are finishing secondary school. Post-primary school exam is obligatory to take and it cannot be failed. Graduates of secondary schools must pass an external secondary school leaving examination (*matura*) to continue their studies at higher education level. The results of both exams have a decisive impact on the student's further educational path (OECD, 2023).

On the other hand, local government units are in charge of schools as such and they manage them under the supervision of the Ministry. At the beginning of 2022, the competence of the Ministry in this regard was enlarged by strengthening the role of the Ministry superintendent. Circumstances in which the headmaster of a school or educational institution evades or fails to implement the recommendations issued by the education superintendent has been specified. The superintendent will have the opportunity to summon the principal of the school to explain the reasons for not implementing the recommendations. If the principal still fails to implement the recommendations, the superintendent is able to submit a request to the school or institution's governing body to dismiss the principal during the school year, without notice. Also, the new law introduced an obligation for school principals to obtain detailed information about the action plans and outlines of classes and materials used in the classes offered, as well as to obtain a positive opinion from the education superintendent for the activities of such an organization at the school or facilities. The law was criticized by some circles by giving too broad competences to superintendents and making the school too dependent on the Ministry. (Skura, 2022, MES 2021)

The professional situation of all teachers employed by the state is regulated by the so-called Teacher's Chart. It contains principles of employing, remunerating and dismissing teachers, their duties and the path of professional advancement. (Sejma 2023).

The main document regulating education in Poland is the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) of 1997. It grants the right to education to all up to age 18. It also introduces an obligation in this regard. This obligation is carried out in school (full-time compulsory education) or non-school settings (part-time compulsory education) (European Commission 2023).

In the Polish education system, compulsory schooling and compulsory learning have been separated. Compulsory schooling (i.e. the obligation to attend an 8-year primary school) applies to children and youth aged 7-15. Compulsory education applies to young people aged 15-18 and may be implemented at school or outside school (e.g. through vocational training at the employer's). Also 6-year-old children are required to attend one year of preschool education (ECEC) (EC 2023).

The Polish education system contains 8 years of primary school (for 7-14-year-olds.) with grades 1-8 and 4 years of secondary school (for 15-18-year-olds) grades 1-4 or 5 years of technical secondary school (for 15-19-year-olds) with the same history curriculum. There are separate curricula for 7-9-year-olds (ISCED 1), 10-14-year-olds (ISCED 1+2) and 15-18-year-olds (ISCED 3) (OECD, 2023, MES 2022).

Age (years)	ISCED	Educational level	Length of education level	Nature of education level
3-5	0	early learning and childcare		optional
6	0	pre-school education	1 year	compulsory
7-14	1+2	primary school	8 years	compulsory
15-18	3	secondary school	4 years	compulsory
15-19	3	technical secondary school	5 years	compulsory
19-20	4	vocational school	1,5 - 2 years	optional
19+	5	higher education		optional

Table 1: Structure of education in Poland (OECD, 2023, MES 2022)

School maintenance and funding

The education system in Poland is mostly sustained and funded by the state. According to an OECD report published in 2023, in 2020 Poland spent 4.6% of its GDP on education on all levels (primary, secondary, tertiary, including doctoral) of which 27% was dedicated to primary education, 24% to lower secondary education, 20% to upper secondary education, 1% to post-secondary non-tertiary education and 28% to bachelor's, master's and doctoral or equivalent programmes (OECD, 2023).

It is estimated that public funds represent 87% of funding in school education and 79% in higher education and early childhood education and care. This funding is also regranted to private or non-governmental educational institutions like non-public child-care institutions, nursery schools, and higher education institutions if they fulfil requirements laid down in national legislation (OECD, 2023).

The position of history education in Poland

There are elements of history from the earliest stage of education (students between the ages of 7 and 9). In primary school (10-14 years), there is a separate history curriculum and 9 lessons/week to be completed throughout the education cycle². For ISCED 3 meaning the 4-year secondary school there are 7 lessons/week³ of history and 3 lessons/week of History and Present prescribed for the education cycle. Lessons can be unevenly distributed between 4 years of secondary school education, for example: 1 lesson of history and 2 lessons of History and Present per week in the first year, 2 lessons of history and 1 lesson of History and Present per week in the second year, 2 lessons of history per week in the third and fourth year. (MES 2022).

Depending on the particular year, the total number of lessons dedicated to history teaching slightly varies. In the school year 2023/24 there will be 36,8 learning weeks. In previous years the number of learning weeks ranged from 36 to 36,8. Generally speaking, it can be estimated that 36 learning weeks are certain plus optional hours which add up because of the unequal distribution of days in the week (Kalendarz 2023/24).

² Education cycle in upper primary school is 5 years, in secondary school (pol. *liceum*) is 4 years, for technical school it's 5 years.

³ One lesson is 45 minutes long.

There is a common curriculum for grades 4-8 with a common preamble with general goals of learning specified, but the 4th grade curriculum varies from the section devoted to grades 5-8. The preamble declares that: *We look at it [the history] through events and the people who participated in them. And we do this to understand today, to co-create a community of values. These values have been most fully expressed for centuries by the idea of freedom, constantly present in our history.* Therefore, it clearly underlines the connection of teaching history with the present and offers a particular, grand-scale interpretation of Polish history through the value of freedom. It also claims that:

School, even the best, will not teach everything. However, it will provide you with tools to expand your knowledge on your own, while maintaining the necessary criticism and ensuring the reliability of the message. Pride in the achievements of our ancestors should not turn into mindless apology, and criticism does not have to lead to denying the sense of the collective national effort, which has permanently rooted us, Poles, in the heart of Europe.

Attitudes and certain emotional relationship with the state, nation and national culture are encouraged: *It is important to develop ties with the home country, civic awareness, attitude of respect and responsibility for one's country, and strengthen the sense of dignity and national pride* (MES, 2023a).

History curriculum for 4th grade introduces students to basic understanding of history: it indicates ways of measuring time in history and chronological concepts; recognizes types of historical sources; distinguishes history from legends. Also, it prescribes knowledge about national symbols - colours, emblem, national anthem, public holidays and their meaning. Apart from national perspective, it also strives towards respect to local and family history: the student *“learns about the history and traditions of the area and people of particular merit to it; knows local monuments and describes their history”*. In this grade curriculum prescribes a collection of 25 historical figures from all historical periods to learn about. Among them are kings, Noble prize winners, WWII resistance movement members, leaders of national revolutions.

For accomplishing these goals there is one lesson of history per week, meaning approximately 36 lessons in the school year (MES 2023a).

Curriculum for grades 5-8 goes through the history of the whole world and Polish history. It prescribes 2 lessons per week in each grade, meaning 72 lessons per school

year in each grade, 288 lessons in total. There are three general objectives of history teaching in this education cycle:

1. Historical chronology (measuring time, basic chronological concepts such as era, BC period, AD period, millennium, century, year),
2. Historical analysis and interpretation (critical analysis, placing processes and events in space and time-lines, understanding the difference between descriptive, explanatory and evaluative function of text)
3. Creating a historical narrative (creating a historical narrative based on historical sources, presenting arguments justifying own opinion in relation to historical processes and figures).

Grade 5	Neolithic Revolution - XV th century
Grade 6	XV th century - Napoleonic era
Grade 7	Napoleonic era - eve of World War II
Grade 8	beginning of World War II - access of Poland to European Union

Table 2: chronological scope of history curriculum for upper primary school (MES 2023a)

It contains 42 main topics with 2-13 subtopics. Two perspectives are present - national history and world history (with the reservation that accent is placed mostly on the history of Europe). In terms of European integration there is one point about the history of the European Union: *presents the goals and main stages of development of the European Union* and one about the accession of Poland to it in 2004. The curriculum ends with a general remark considering "Conditions and methods of implementation": *Shaping and developing a patriotic attitude, while respecting the achievements of other nations, should be a priority at every educational stage in primary school. The propaedeutic solution used in class IV is transformed into a chronological description of the course of history in subsequent classes* (MES 2023a).

The history curriculum for secondary school (ISCED 3) includes 59 thematic sections with requirements from the regular and extended level. The regular level is obligatory for all students, whereas the extended one is for students who decide to pass the matura exam (school leaving exam) on the extended level. Just like in primary school, there are also two perspectives present here - the national history

and the world history focused mostly on Europe and from XXth century on global perspective. The following assumptions were made for the implementation of individual thematic sections in a given grade, taking basic and extended scope of education into account:

- 1) grade I – antiquity – Middle Ages;
- 2) grade II – until 1815;
- 3) grade III – until 1939;
- 4) grade IV of general secondary school/grades IV and V of technical secondary school - after 1939.

On ISCED 3 level there are 7 lessons/week per education cycle. That gives 252 lessons of history for the whole education cycle.

The general aims of history education are formulated in the curriculum preamble:

”The aim of history education is to learn the truth about the past of Poland and the world. Teaching history should help students achieve this goal by acquiring knowledge about the past of their country and the civilization circle to which Poland has belonged for over a thousand years. In this way, students gain help in shaping their patriotism, which means love for the homeland; homeland in a broad sense - starting from the political and cultural community, the emergence of which in our lands is closely related to the baptism of Mieszko I in 966, and has its sources both in the medieval universalism of Latin civilization and in the ideals of the classical era of Greco-Roman antiquity.” (MES 2023b, Introduction)

At the beginning there are seven main aims of history education:

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1. deepening knowledge about important events in the history of the Polish nation and state as well as in the world history,
2. *strengthening the sense of love for the homeland through respect and attachment to the traditions and history of one’s own nation and its achievements, culture and native language; consolidating the awareness of the existence of ties connecting the Polish national heritage with a broader civilization circle resulting from the combination of the achievements of Greek philosophy, Roman law and the Christian religion;*
3. *shaping ties with the home country, civic awareness, attitude of respect and responsibility for one’s own country; strengthening the sense of dignity and*

national pride; building respect for other people and the achievements of other nations and countries;

4. *shaping respect for national heritage; developing a sense of care for national treasures and historical monuments;*
5. *encouraging interest in one's own past, the past of one's family and local and regional history;*
6. *developing historical thinking and moral and aesthetic sensitivity;*
7. *developing humanistic skills, language skills, the ability to independently seek knowledge and use various sources of information, and to critically formulate and express one's own opinions."* (MES 2023b, Introduction)

At the end of the curriculum there is a section entitled *Conditions and ways of implementation*. It states that:

"[...] it is important in the teaching process to use, whenever possible, forms of commemorating key historical events, such as trips to memorial sites and museums, including those located in the given region.

In the process of learning about the events concerning the tragic fate of repressed soldiers and civilians of the underground during World War II and the post-war years, it is important that the student understands the meaning of the terms: Pantheon of the Cursed Soldiers, Pomeranian Katyn, Golgotha of the East and Łączka.

In historical education, the key is to personalize the past as much as possible and to illustrate the issues discussed with iconography and audio-visual materials, so that students can learn about historical events while experiencing them. It is worth using various forms of extracurricular historical education as often as possible (trips, youth exchanges, projects, competitions, school academies, anniversary celebrations, historical reconstructions, multimedia museum exhibitions, games with educational value, e.g. board games, videos, etc.)." (MES 2023b)

Teachers have freedom in implementing the curriculum as long as they cover all of the subtopics. They are encouraged to leave the school building and use the offer of memorial sites in the vicinity or visit the ones which are considered the most important (Warsaw Uprising Museum, Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum in Oświęcim).

Textbooks and teaching aids

The textbook market in Poland is regulated by the Ministry of Education and Science. There are 4 main publishing houses whose textbooks are allowed in schools. In general, there is a moderate plurality in this regard. Also, there is an electronic portal run by the Ministry of Education and Science called The Integrated Learning Platform which contains educational materials for all school subjects and is considered to be an auxiliary e-textbook for history, as well as for other subjects. Also, on this platform there are 4 officially admitted historical computer games. Three of them are designed specially to be an additional didactic help for schools.



Figure 1: Screenshot from the Cypher's Game

Cyphers Game (figure 1) is a game about the Polish-Bolshevik war in 1920. The history of this war is introduced through the task of breaking Bolshevik cyphers in a short point-and-click series of logical riddles. *Warsaw Rising* is a tactical game with RPG elements which portrays the Warsaw Rising in 1944.

The third game *Dignity, freedom and independence - cultural heritage of John Paul II* contains 18 missions which guide students through biographical milestones of the Pol-

ish pope and talks about the major historical events in the history of Poland. The fourth one *This war of mine* is a commercial production which is offered by the Ministry free of charge. It is about difficult moral dilemmas of civilian population in besieged city of Sarajevo in 1994. It is suggested as an auxiliary material for Polish language and ethic classes, although it contains some historical events (MES 2023f).

Examinations in Polish education system are run by the body called Central Examination Commission under the Ministry of Education and Science. The first centrally organised exam takes place after finishing primary school. All students after grade 8 take the compulsory exam called an eight-grader exam. It is a written test that aims at assessing the extent to which a primary school student meets the requirements set in the core curriculum for general education in the primary school. Obligatory exams are taken in Polish language, mathematics, modern foreign language and one out of the following five subjects: biology, chemistry, physics, geography or history. This exam cannot be failed and its results are one of the biggest factors in admission to post-primary schools (EC 2023).

The second centrally organised exam is the so-called matura exam which is obligatory after finishing secondary school. There are two oral exams - one from Polish language and one from a modern foreign language and four written exams - Polish language, modern foreign language, mathematics and additional subject on extended level. Among those additional subjects, students can choose history as well (MES 2023h).

Non-formal education and commemoration policies

Considering the overall condition of history education in Poland, a few interdisciplinary initiatives are worth mentioning. The government allocated considerable funds for cultivating memories about specific events by creating long-term granting programs. They were run under the one, big hub - the multiannual governmental programme „Niepodległa” (“Independent”) for the years 2017-2022, dedicated to the national celebrations of the Centenary of Regaining Independence and restoration of statehood of the Republic of Poland. Apart from commemorating events, the programme co-funded plenty of various educational projects such as virtual walking tours, mobile learning apps, educational materials in which students were among the targeted audience. (MCNH 2018).

In terms of visiting memory sites, government run a subsidy programme called *Discover Poland* for schools of all levels to cover up to 80% of costs of school trips to the national memorial sites. It allowed smaller schools at risk of geographical or financial exclusion to participate in this cultural offer of the public institutions (MES 2023e).

The position of civic education in Poland

Civic education is an obligatory subject in the 8th grade of primary school. There are 2 lessons per week, meaning 72 lessons in the school year. It introduces students to the basic concepts of politology, sociology, economy and psychology. The preamble to the civic education curriculum states:

The learning objectives (general requirements) of the subject have been formulated for four areas: knowledge and understanding; use and creation of information; understanding yourself and recognizing and solving problems; communication and cooperation. The implementation of the goals and the contents of education are intended to shape students' civic and pro-community attitudes. This content was constructed according to the concept of environmental circles - from primary social groups, through the local and regional community, the national and state community, to the international community. (MES 2023d)

Learning objective	Learning scope
Knowledge and understanding	typology of social groups (school, local community, nation), democratic procedures, political system of the Republic of Poland (bodies, authorities)
Use and creation of information	ability to find information about social life and formulate own opinion based on this information
Understanding oneself, recognizing and solving problems	needs, rights, aspirations, duties and identity of the individual
Communication and cooperation	ability to debate and formulate opinion, cooperate in a group and show the way to take care of simple official matters.

Table 3: Learning objectives explanation of civic education curriculum in primary school (source: MES, 2023d)

Those goals are achieved by 12 topics to be completed in the course of learning. In topic number 4 the notion of human rights is introduced in connection with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ratified in 1948 and the Polish Constitution from 1997. There are separate topics for family, school, local community (commune - *gmina*), regional community (district - *powiat* and voivodeship - *województwo*), the Polish political system, international communities (United Nations, NATO, European Union), and mass media. In connection with media critical analysis of media narrative is introduced (advertisements, difference between information about facts from comments and opinions). At the end the civic education curriculum defines specific teaching methods in the chapter "Conditions and methods of implementation": *educational situations should be created in which the student uses specific methods of self-presentation, solving conflicts and problems, and co-decision-making.* (MES 2023d) *Moreover, in order to develop communication and cooperation skills, various group work methods should be used, including student educational projects (each student should participate in two projects).* At the end, there is ICT mentioned as an important aspect to be introduced into students learning: *Information and communication technology should be used to develop competences in acquiring, collecting, organizing, analysing and presenting information about social life, including public life. It is important to use the websites of public institutions, including local government bodies, public authorities and social organizations.* (MES 2023d) *Additionally, if possible, it would also be important to obtain information during an educational trip (including a virtual one, using dedicated applications) to selected institutions, e.g. to the commune (city/district) office.* (MES 2023d) Therefore, just like in the history curriculum, the civic education curriculum also encourages school visits to places connected with the teaching content (MES 2023d).

History and Present

In the school year 2022/23 a new subject called „History and Present” was introduced to secondary schools as obligatory one, replacing civic education on a regular level. History and Present subject is prescribed in 1st and 2nd grade of secondary school in a total amount of 3 lessons/week of in the education cycle meaning 108 lessons in total (MES 2022).

History and Present curriculum preamble declares that: *History and Present is an interdisciplinary subject combining knowledge about human social life and its main insti-*

tutions with knowledge about the contemporary history of Poland and the world. The subject, implemented at the beginning of the education process in general secondary schools and technical schools, will enable students [...] for a conscious and responsible participation in public life. (MES 2023c, chapter: Introduction) Its chronological scope begins after Second World War in 1945 and ends in 2015. There are three general learning objectives: forming relation to the truth, good (understood as a moral ideal) and life. The truth relation means that students understand *the most important cultural, political, social and economic changes in Poland and the world after 1945 to the present day*. Relation to the good means that student *independently and fairly assesses the changes taking place in Poland and in the world since the end of World War II* and understands *the foundations from which our homeland grows, shaped according to specific cultural norms and a vision of human, family and society dating back to the classical Greco-Roman civilization and Christianity* (MES 2023c, chapter: Learning objectives – general requirements). In relation to life understood as a life of an engaged citizen, the student expresses interest in public life, takes responsibility and understands the importance of civic virtues, duties and rights of the citizen. Although it is not fully clear how those goals are going to be achieved. In the section of „specific requirements” apart from the first chapter „knowledge about the foundations of social life” other 6 topics introduce requirements in a similar manner to those from the history curriculum. There are two perspectives present - national and global - and several subtopics listed with dates, events, processes and persons to memorize. The ending chapter „Conditions and method of implementation” suggests methods like meeting with the witnesses of history, local memorial sites and places connected with martyrdom during the Soviet or Nazi regimes. Also, it encourages teachers to use the offer of Institute of National Remembrance, State Archive. Moreover, *Students should be encouraged to take care of the memorial sites in their school (e.g. memorial rooms, showcases, leaflets, murals, websites), know the history of their family, town or local community in which they grow up, and look for historical sources in their own surroundings. Young people should be supported in initiatives to preserve family and local memorabilia, record accounts of witnesses to history, and create amateur films and broadcasts on recent history.* (MES 2023c). So activation methods with creative component are encouraged as well as individual initiatives of the students.

The introduction of the new subject raised a lot of controversies. The Polish Historical Society published a negative opinion about the new subject’s curriculum. Numerous

objections concerning, among others, imposing the one interpretation of events, domination of memorizing facts while omitting the importance of skills development, media literacy and critical thinking. It also underlines that a particular vision of social relations and anthropology is promoted without a space for discussion or debate (PTH 2022).

The opinion from The Center for Citizenship Education was also unfavorable. It states that legal education was almost completely removed from the core curriculum (particularly its practical elements, such as the course of administrative and criminal proceedings in the Republic of Poland, the method of appealing against decisions and resolutions of administrative bodies, the rights of a victim, perpetrator and witness of a crime, or the bodies and institutions to which you can ask for legal assistance in Poland in specific situations), necessary for every young citizen, as well as information regarding the constitutional competences of state bodies or the functioning of the political system. Issues related to local self-governments and citizen participation in solving the problems of the local community are completely ignored. (CEO 2023)

An example of a one-sided interpretation can be seen in curriculum chapter VII - „The World and Poland in the first two decades of the 21st century”. The student *characterizes the main cultural changes taking place in the Western world on the example of the expansion of the ideology of ‘political correctness’, multiculturalism, a new definition of human rights, family, marriage and gender; is able to place these changes against the background of the cultural heritage of the West as reflected in Greco-Roman and Christian thought” or “points out the differences between tolerating and affirming cultural and social phenomena.* (MES 2023c) Suggested directions of interpretation can be seen in the use of certain phrasing with a negative connotation or through the selection of the content discussed (discussion of the issue of acculturation and assimilation of minority groups, omitting the integration process). (CEO 2023)

This function of suggesting a way of reading the content is also performed by the marginalization of international and global phenomena and processes in favour of the content related to the Polish context, presenting them in specific circumstances, for instance: *the student explains the concept of ‘defamation’; gives an example of a propaganda impact of a defamatory nature (aimed at Poland’s defamation campaign under the banner of “Polish concentration camps”),* including placing selected global phenomena in an incomprehensible or very narrow context (for example, when the process of changing the European Union in the period after Poland joined its structure focuses

exclusively on negative phenomena: *the student characterizes the process of changing the European Union in the period after Poland joined its structure (growing position of Germany, crisis phenomena related to immigration, instability of the eurozone, Brexit, COVID-19 pandemic; ideological controversies on the forum of EU institutions)*. (MES 2023c – Chapter 7, pt. 6; CEO 2023)

The separate topic is in the textbook for History and Present, especially the one written by professor Wojciech Roszkowski - one of available two and approved for use by the Ministry of Education. Currently, there is only one academic article analyzing this publication and the introduction of History and Present as a new subject written by Przemysław Ziółkowski.

The author assesses the idea of introducing the new subject positively. He indicates that because of the curriculum overload teachers don't have enough time to properly focus on the history after 1945. Also, he underlines the dominance of global history over national history. From his perspective those two perspectives should be more balanced. Lastly, he claims that far too much focus is placed on antiquity and medieval times whereas those ages have much less significance than contemporary history in the preparation of the students to a conscious and responsible life in a democratic society. (Ziółkowski 2023)

In some places the author of the textbook imposes on the reader some extreme and oversimplified views on history, not leaving space for other interpretations. The purpose of the textbook is to instil particular attitudes and beliefs in students. Author finds this the weakest aspect of the textbook for "History and Present". It shapes thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs in many clear-cut sentences; The textbook contains a message that is frequently based on the author's opinions and has nothing to do with the tolerance and respect that are the cornerstones of the school. For example, you can read about "gender ideology" or "European deviations" on page 19 and "child production" or "abominations" on page 226. (Roszkowski 2022)

In some places there are unjustified parallels made between past and present. For example, in the chapter describing undemocratic elections in communist countries in the years 1945–1953 and the general censorship then, the author illustrated it with a caricature of Vladimir Putin, who was just born at the end of this period - in 1952 (p. 77), and also commented in the text on the possibility of blocking access to information for 3.5 million Facebook users, an online portal, which didn't exist at the time. (Ziółkowski 2023)

In the chapter devoted to nationalism in years 1953-1962 the author uses anachronistic examples - on one hand he shows NSDAP gatherings from the 1930s, on the other Polish Independence Marches from 2018 and 2019. The first one proves the nationalistic nature of German society, the latter shows the patriotic, healthy attitude of Polish society. This way of proving the point with anachronistic examples persists through the whole publication. (Ziółkowski 2023)

The future of the subject "History and Present" remains unclear due to the political changes that occurred in Poland after the parliamentary elections on October 15, 2023. The new government formed by a broad coalition of parties opposed to Prawo i Sprawiedliwość declares a reversal of changes made by the PiS government for over 8 years. The new minister of education in Poland - Barbara Nowacka - claims that the subject "History and Present" can't be taught with this kind of textbook, but the idea of the subject focusing on contemporary history is assessed positively⁴. (PAP 2023)

Dilemmas

The political change that took place in Poland in 2015⁵ had an impact on history education conducted in formal and informal settings. The importance of a history and memory policy was underlined from the beginning, and adequate strategies were formulated (CPRP 2015). A precise analysis of the actual impact of this political change on history education remains beyond the scope of this article. However, it is beyond doubt that concrete steps were taken in order to increase the value of history education like allocating financial resources in special grant programs mentioned in this article.

The liquidation of civic education in secondary school and replacing it with the History and Present subject was a controversial decision. The social competences present in the civic education curriculum were not transferred to the content of the History and Present curriculum. Also, introducing a new subject in the 1st and 2nd grades created a situation in which students learn simultaneously about antiquity and contemporary history. This method may be confusing for some students, especially if we assume

⁴ At the time of finalization of this article (January 2024) there is no information yet on the future of the subject History and Present.

⁵ In that year national-conservative, Eurosceptical party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość [Law and Justice] won presidential and parliamentary elections in Poland, gaining the full political power (without the right to change Constitution). They held this power for over 8 years. PiS transformed most sectors of social life, such as public media, education, culture, courts.

that contemporary history needs a basic understanding of the previous events (PTH 2022).

Moreover, many professional organisations connected with history education, such as Center for Citizenship Education, Polish Historical Society, teachers' professional press assessed the History and Present core curriculum and the textbook negatively.

Conclusions

The general impression from the lecture of Polish history curricula is that strengthening a positive attitude towards one's own country and its culture remains the main goal of history education. It is accomplished by underlining the importance of positive emotions (pride, respect, sense of dignity, love) and attitudes (duty, sense of responsibility) towards the homeland.

The Polish history curriculum shows different perspectives - political, social, cultural and economical. It is rather trying to show processes and persons than dates, battles etc. It underlines the connection of Polish history and culture with Judeo-Christian and Greek-Roman civilisations. In this recognition lies the method of history education which refers to the ancient categories of Good and Truth.

In terms of methods, Polish history education encourages teachers to take students outside the school, both in a declarative (curriculum) and in a practical sense (granting program for school trips) to visit memorial sites and museums.

In civic education and History and Present contemporary world problems like climate change, sustainable development or contemporary conflicts are not present. The curriculum of History and Present, which is supposed to be a replacement for the proper civic education, offers detailed anthropology and values some social changes (for example the cultural revolution of 1968) which can be contested by at least some parts of the society. Thus, it may raise questions about the real purpose of introducing this subject.

In general, Polish history education seems to reflect the conservative political views of the former ruling party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, which are shared with part of the Polish society. In content it is based on values, patriotic attitude, heroism, apology of the nation and seem to put national perspective over European or global one. It promotes various and innovative educational methods like introduction of computer games, e-learning materials, project-based learning, learning-by-doing.

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