

Polish Schooling in Ukraine at the Turn of the 20th and the 21st Century

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Poles who have resided in the lands of the nowadays Ukraine for centuries have always made efforts to organise Polish schooling. Unfortunately, times were not always favourable to their work, and the circumstances, especially the political situation, have made the education of Polish children impossible to a significant degree. How far the hostile actions of politicians could go has been proven at the beginning of the 20th century, when, since the 1920s, Poles were virtually deprived of national schooling. It was only after the formation of independent Ukraine in 1991 that the Polish society could commence their efforts to organise comprehensive education in the Polish language. Attempts were made to develop education in various organisational forms and on various levels, establishing Polish-language public schools, as well as Polish-language classes, extracurricular lessons in Polish, Polish language courses, Polish language courses, e.g. organized through Catholic and Polish associations. These actions have been accompanied by numerous problems of economic, political, and legal nature, as well as the shortage of teaching staff. This paper presents the process of the reactivation of Polish schooling at the turn of the 20th and the 21st century within the borders of the independent Ukrainian state.

Key words: *Poles in Ukraine; Polish schooling in Ukraine; teaching Polish; reform of education; independent Ukraine*

Education in Polish in the Ukrainian lands has a long history and it is connected with Polish settlements in these lands. However, Poles did not always enjoy the opportunity to develop their schooling, in the past centuries, and including the 20th century, in which the development of Polish education encountered a number of difficulties, limitations, and prohibitions. There were 31 Polish secondary schools registered in the lands of nowadays Ukraine in 1918, which had 5536 students. There were also 9 vocational schools with 425 students, and 1247 primary schools with 73 688 students. 1800 teachers were employed with these institutions. The University College initiated its work in Kiev, and Polish landowners and intellectuals who resided and owned land in Ukraine donated

funds and buildings to the Polish schools.¹ However, the circumstances of Polish schooling began to change significantly since the 1920s. Throughout the 1920s and the 1930s, the communist authorities used schools for ethnic minorities as a tool for Sovietization and indoctrination in the spirit of Russian nationalism. The Polish autonomous region of Markhlevshchisna may serve as an example: schools were treated there as the most effective institution to educate society to be loyal to the Soviet government.² When the experiment was conducted Polish schools were not dissolved “because the Bolshevik regime aimed to use Polish schools to win the support of Poles.”³ Political indoctrination encompassed the entire didactic and educational activity in schools as well as other educational institutions.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Polish community in Crimea also had their chance to receive education in their native tongue. In the 1920s there were two institutions teaching reading and writing to the illiterate where the training was conducted in Polish, and there were two Polish schools, in Sevastopol and Simferopol, with Polish as the language of instruction, with 70 students and 3 teachers.⁴

Because the attempt of soviet education in Polish schools did not produce desired results finally all the schools and Polish educational and cultural institutions were closed. Teachers and priests faced repressions, deportation, and even death, which led to the shortage of teaching staff, which can be experienced even today.

¹ Grabowska B. (2013). *Poczucie tożsamości młodzieży uczącej się w szkołach z polskim językiem nauczania na Białorusi, Ukrainie i w Republice Czeskiej – studium porównawcze* [The sense of identity of Polish youth studying in Polish-language schools in Belarus, Ukraine, and Czech Republic – a comparative study]. Toruń, pp. 124–126; Sierkowska J. (2006). *Szkolnictwo polskie na Ukrainie. V Forum Oświaty Polonijnej, Oświata polonijna na początku XXI wieku – stan i perspektywy* [Polish schooling in Ukraine, The 5th Forum of Polish Immigration Education – the state and the perspectives]. Kraków, http://www.wspolnota-polska.org.pl/index.php?id=o_Vfor02.

² The region of Markhlevshchisna existed in the years 1925–1935. Grabowska B. (2013). *Poczucie tożsamości młodzieży ...*, op. cit., pp. 126–127; Iwanow M. (1991). *Pierwszy naród ukarany: stalinizm wobec polskiej ludności kresowej (1921–1938)* [The first punished nation: the Stalin rules and the Polish inhabitants of the eastern borderlands of the former Republic of Poland]. Warszawa – Wrocław; Kulesza A. *Nieudany eksperyment – Polskie rejony autonomiczne w Związku Sowieckim* [A failed experiment – the Polish autonomous regions in the Soviet Union], http://www.naszawitryna.pl/jedwabne_47.html.

³ Osadczy W. (2003). *Polacy na Ukrainie dzisiaj. Informator* [Poles in Ukraine today. A catalog.], pt. II. Lublin – Warszawa, p. 54. At the beginning of the 1930s, there were over 400 schools in Markhlevshchisna.

⁴ Gadomski A. (2004). *Szkolnictwo polskie na Krymie* [Polish schooling in Crimea]. In *Polacy na Krymie* [Poles in Crimea]. ed. Fr. Walewander E. Lublin: Instytut Badań nad Polonią i Duszpasterstwem Polonijnym KUL, p. 160.

The dissolution of Polish schools and the lack of the opportunity to teach in Polish, combined with the threat of persecution and deportation were the reasons why it was only possible for Polish culture to survive in the East, only there where the soviet authorities still allowed Polish schools to function, that is in Lvov, where even during the occupation there was secret schooling, where pre-war Catholic and lay female professors would teach.⁵

Throughout the soviet rule, the education of ethnic minorities was perceived as an obstacle in the ideological training of the soviet society, which is why all the educational institutions for Poles had not the slightest reason to exist.⁶ After World War II only the Poles in the following three Soviet Republics could receive education in Polish: the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (the Vilnius region), the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Lvov), and, temporarily, the Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic (1948 – Grodno, 1949 – Brest on the Bug), that is only in the lands of the former Republic of Poland. Both in the Vilnius region and Lvov there was an education in Polish available on the primary and secondary level.⁷ Ultimately, all the Polish schools in USSR were closed, except for one primary and one secondary school in Lvov. Secondary level education in the USSR was provided by 10-grade secondary schools. Unfortunately, not all Polish-language schools had 10 grades. Formally, therefore, it was not possible to receive secondary education in Polish. The teaching staff in Polish-language schools were educated in the Pedagogical Institute in Vilnius. Because of such severely limited opportunities, the demand for education in Polish was great, however, Poles were widely dispersed among the various republics, which made it difficult to provide all the interested with access to not only Polish schools, but even classes with Polish as the language of instruction.⁸

It was only after the establishment of independent Ukraine in 1991 that the Polish communities could commence their attempts to organise comprehensive education in Polish. It was assumed that the education ought to be conducted in diverse organisational forms and on various levels, encompassing Polish public schools as well as classes with Polish as the language of instruction, extracurricular lessons in Polish, and language courses conducted by, e.g., Catholic communities and Polish organisations.⁹ In order for these efforts to be implemented they

⁵ Paluch J. M. (2013). *Wczoraj i dziś. Polacy na Kresach* [Yesterday and today. Poles in the Eastern Borderlands]. Kraków, p. 221.

⁶ Gadomski A. (2004). *Szkolnictwo polskie...*, *op.cit.*, p. 162.

⁷ Hut P. (2014). *Polska wobec Polaków w przestrzeni poradzieckiej. Od solidaryzmu etnicznego do obowiązku administracyjnego* [Poland and Poles in the post-soviet areas. From ethnic solidarity to administrative duty]. Warsaw, p. 239.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

needed to be supported by proper legal regulations, also at the level of the central government.

While it is true that as early as 1990 an agreement was reached between the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Poland and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, which was intended to support the development of education for the Polish minority, no substantial actions were undertaken to organise Polish schools until Ukraine gained its independence in 1991. The functioning of schooling for the Polish minority in Ukraine was legally regulated by two acts: “The treaty between the Republic of Poland and Ukraine about good neighbourhood, amicable relations, and cooperation” of May 18, 1992, and “The agreement between the government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of Ukraine on cooperation in the realms of culture, science, and education” of May 20, 1997. The problems of teaching Polish, cooperation between schools, universities, and scientific institutions are discussed in the documents. The right to learn Polish and to study in Polish was guaranteed in the documents, as well as the right to speak Polish freely, to access information in Polish, and to establish Polish educational, cultural, and religious organisations and institutions.¹⁰ In spite of the legal regulations, the establishing of Polish schools was far from easy. The efforts of the inhabitants of some of the cities and towns would take years, for example, in Horodok it took 10 years. The “Polonia” association, who would supervise this work, supported parents in proving that the number of ethnically Polish children in a particular city or town is sufficient to organise a Polish school, Polish classes in Ukrainian schools, or to construct a new school.¹¹

At the end of the 20th century, the educational activity of Poles residing in Crimea also increased, mainly thanks to the Crimean Association of Poles in Simferopol, with departments in many cities of the peninsula. A significant number of inhabitants, not only ethnically Polish, expressed their willingness to learn Polish, which was taught, among others, in Sunday schools in Sevastopol, Kerch, Eupatoria, Yalta, as well as two higher schools in Simferopol (the International Slavic University and the Vernadskiy Tauric National University). In

¹⁰ Grabowska B. (2013). *Poczucie tożsamości młodzieży...*, op.cit., p. 127; *Traktat między Rzeczypospolitą Polską a Ukrainą o dobrym sąsiedztwie, przyjaznych stosunkach i współpracy* [The treaty between the Republic of Poland and Ukraine about good neighbourhood, amicable relations, and cooperation], <http://www.msw.gov.pl/bpt/documents/8074.pdf>, *Umowa między Rządem Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej a Rządem Ukrainy o współpracy w dziedzinie kultury, nauki i oświaty* [The treaty between the Republic of Poland and Ukraine about good neighbourhood, amicable relations, and cooperation], <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id+WDU20000030029#>.

¹¹ Koprowski M. (2011). *Kresy we krwi* [The Eastern Borderlands in blood]. Warsaw, pp. 71–72.

spite of such high interest in the Polish language, there was not a single Polish school in Crimea, and there were no Polish philological studies at the universities. During summer holidays the people learning Polish were provided the opportunity to learn the language and the culture. At the end of the 20th century, teaching in Polish started at the International Slavic Institute (20 students in a year) and at the Tauric National University, there were lectures in the basics of Polish for students of Russian and Ukrainian philology. Only the Secondary School 7 in Simferopol received the permit of the school authorities to teach Polish. Ethnically Polish students as well as representatives of other nationalities would take part in these lessons to learn the Polish language, history, and culture.¹²

In the end, it was possible to organise the teaching of the Polish language in Ukraine in diverse forms and on all the levels of education, from kindergartens to universities, as well as weekend schools, parish schools, and many types of courses for children, youth, and adults. Thanks to these solutions these were various forms of teaching Polish functioning within the Ukrainian education system, such as schools with Polish as the language of instruction, bilingual schools with classes in Polish, schools with lessons in Polish, with Polish introduced as the native language in the local education system (as a second or third foreign language), schools with lessons of Polish as facultative courses and interest circles.¹³ There were not many independent Polish schools in Ukraine. The main obstacle in their creation was the low level of Polish language skills among the ethnically Polish communities, especially in the eastern and central parts of the state of Ukraine.

Since the 1990s the interest in learning Polish was visibly and gradually increasing. Attempts to meet the needs of the people willing to learn were undertaken by Catholic parishes, local schools, and Polish organisations, which established the so-called points of teaching Polish. These points were aimed to first and foremost develop the interest in Polish language and Polish literature among children and youth, to teach to use Polish in speech and writing, to familiarise the young generation of Poles residing in Ukraine with the history and geography of Poland as well as Polish traditions, customs, and folk and religious songs, and to promote active participation in Polish life in Ukraine. It was one of the most popular forms of learning, which is proven by the fact their number exceeded 230 in 2009.¹⁴ One of the institutions supervising the teaching of Polish was the Union of Polish Teachers in Ukraine (Zjednoczenie Nauczycieli Polskich na Ukrainie - ZNPnU).

It ought to be noticed that learning Polish was becoming more and more popular every year. Since the beginning of the 21st century the number of

¹² Gadomski A. (2004). *Szkolnictwo polskie...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 163–164.

¹³ Grabowska B. (2013). *Poczucie tożsamości...*, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

¹⁴ Osadczy W. (2003). *Polacy na Ukrainie...*, *op. cit.*, p. 55; Grabowska B. (2013). *Poczucie tożsamości młodzieży...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 128–130.

Ukrainian schools introducing teaching Polish as a foreign language for all students, regardless of their ethnicity, was growing systematically. Language courses were organised, as well, which were attended by children, youth, and adults, often from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

An optimistic phenomenon was the constant development of education in Polish. In the first decade of the 21st century in four Ukrainian kindergartens (3 in Lvov and 1 in Horodok Podolskiy), there were 4 Polish groups.¹⁵

Even at the end of the 20th century, two schools in Lvov with Polish as the language of instruction received the status of 11-grade comprehensive education schools, and after the beginning of the 21st century Polish students gained the opportunity to study in a primary school in Strzheltschiska as well as comprehensive education schools Mostsiska and Horodok Podolskiy. Lessons in Polish were introduced in 13 bilingual schools in, among others, Dovbish, Khmelnytskyi, and Kamenets Podolskiy; there all the subjects were taught in Polish in grades 1–4, and in grades 6–11, when the transfer to teaching in Ukrainian was completed, the students would study at extracurricular courses of Polish language as well as history and geography of Poland. The condition of organising Polish classes was the enrolment of at least 8–10 children. The teaching would be concluded with the so-called Polish maturity exam. In 14 schools Polish was taught facultatively (as one of the foreign languages), the grade was on the school diploma and it was one of the conditions of being promoted to the next grade. There was also an exam in Polish at the end of primary and secondary school.

The most popular forms of learning Polish included the weekend schools, available for all age groups. They were mainly organised by Polish associations, and the learning space was provided by local schools, parishes, community centres, monasteries, and Polish organisations. Apart from the language, one could also learn about the literature, history, geography, music, and culture of Poland; religion lessons were also conducted. The number of the schools and their students would grow gradually and proportionally to the increase of the interest in the Polish language in Ukraine.¹⁶

At 24 Ukrainian higher schools, including the Khmelnytskyi National University, the University in Kamenets Podolskiy, and the Holy Spirit Higher Religious Seminar in Horodok, students had the opportunity to learn Polish on

¹⁵ Grabowska B. (2013). *Poczucie tożsamości...*, op. cit., p. 128; <http://www.lwowkg.polemb.net/?document=186>.

¹⁶ Szymański K. (2015). Nauczanie Polaków na Ukrainie i Ukraińców polskiego pochodzenia w Polsce [Teaching Poles in Ukraine and Ukrainians with Polish roots in Poland]. "Kurier Galicyjski", May 25, <http://www.kuriegalityjski.com/inedx.php/polskaukr/623-nauczanie-polakw-na-ukrainie-i-ukraincw-polskiego-pochodzenia-w-polsce>.

language courses, and at the Kiev and Lvov Universities, there were special Polish courses organised as part of Slavic philology. The teachers working at Ukrainian universities were delegated there by the Ministry of Science and Higher Schooling of the Republic of Poland. At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, they worked in, among others, universities and polytechnics in Ivano-Frankovsk, Kiev, Sumy, Mikolaiv, Lvov, Dnipropetrovsk, Human, Odessa, Tcherkasy, and Mariupol.¹⁷

The children of Poles residing temporarily in Ukraine and children of Polish ethnicity with high proficiency in Polish would study at the School Consultation Point at the Polish Embassy in Kiev, which was called the Polish school. It would function 4 days a week in the afternoon and in the evening, and lessons were given there on all the levels of education: primary and lower and higher secondary ones.¹⁸

The level and the engagement of the population with Polish roots would vary greatly between East and West Ukraine, because the Poles residing in West Ukraine had much higher language competences¹⁹, which was the result of, first and foremost, political factors and the repressions against the Polish minority in the 20th century, as well as the greater ease of contact with Poles and Poland. Apart from the aforementioned opportunities to maintain relationships with Polish culture in West Ukraine, there was also a higher demand for institutionalised forms of learning Polish.

The work of Polish schools, associations, and points conducting the teaching of Polish could materialise, to a significant degree, thanks to various institutions and organisations from Poland, among which one ought to mention the “Help for Poles in the East” Foundation, the Semper Polonia Foundation, the “Polish Community” Association, Polish Schools Abroad, the Centre of Polish Language and Culture for the Polish Diaspora and Foreigners at the Maria Skłodowska-Curie University in Lublin, and the Polish Teachers’ Centre in Lublin.²⁰

¹⁷ Grabowska B. (2013). *Poczucie tożsamości młodzieży...*, op. cit., p. 133; <http://www.nauka.gov.pl/szkolnictwo-wyzsze/sprawy-miedzynarodowe/jezyk-polski-za-granica/lektoraty-jezyka-polskiego-za-granica/>.

¹⁸ Grabowska B. (2013). *Poczucie tożsamości młodzieży...*, op. cit., pp. 130–131.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 130.

²⁰ “Help for Poles in the East” Foundation - http://www.pol.org.pl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=24&Itemid=64; the Semper Polonia Foundation – <http://www.semperpolonia.pl/programy/ex-libris-polonia>; the “Polish Community” Association – <http://www.wspolnota-polska.org.pl/index.php?id=wnioswp>; Polish Schools Abroad – <http://www.spzg.pl/index.php/menu-gorne/kierowanie/podreczniki/>; the Centre of Polish Language and Culture for the Polish Diaspora and Foreigners at the Maria Skłodowska-Curie University in Lublin - <http://www.cjpk.umcs.lublin.pl>; and the Polish Teachers’ Centre in Lublin <http://www.pcn.lublin.pl/pcn/intro.php>

In spite of the agreements between the governments, the teaching of Polish in Ukraine would encounter numerous problems, among which one ought to mention, first and foremost, the lack of fully qualified teachers. Because of the high demand for Polish lessons combined with the shortage of teaching staff, Polish priests and nuns, mainly from the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine, became involved in the process. The Polish Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Schooling, as well as non-governmental organisations, would also attempt to remedy the situation.²¹ A partial solution was the decision made by the Polish Ministry of National Education to support the Polish communities in Ukraine by delegating teachers from Poland there. Since 1991 the Central Teacher Training Institution (Centralny Ośrodek Doskonalenia Nauczycieli – CODN) would delegate the willing and properly qualified educators to work in schools, classes, and Polish language centres, and the trips were organised by the Team for the Polish Diaspora,²² established with the former organisation.

As a result of the actions undertaken by the Polish state, the first teachers from Poland began their work in Ukraine in the school year 1990/1991, and the highest number of teachers would arrive in the first decade of the 21st century.²³ The number of teachers, which would fluctuate between 38 and 46 since the year 2000 was to decrease at the end of the first decade of the 21st century.²⁴

Among these teachers, there were not only the teachers of Polish language, but also those of Russian as well as other specialisations. Their main aim was nevertheless to teach Polish and allow Poles to “regain” their native tongue.²⁵ Few of them had the opportunity to work in Polish schools. Most of the teachers would work with Polish language workshops and Polish classes.

Among the teachers making the decision to go abroad two age groups were prevalent. The first group consisted of retired pedagogues with enormous experience, the other of university graduates seeking professional challenges.

The difficulties faced by Polish schools in Ukraine included lack of course books for the particular school subjects to be taught in Polish, which led to the necessity to use course books in Ukrainian, as well as the unregulated financial questions of the renovations of school buildings, as well as providing schools with equipment and cleaning products.²⁶

The state of schooling for the Polish minority in Ukraine would also lead to certain doubts and objections with reasons connected with, among others, the

²¹ Grabowska B. (2013), *Poczucie tożsamości młodzieży...*, op. cit., p. 131

²² Osadczy W. (2003), *Polacy na Ukrainie...*, op. cit., p. 56.

²³ Grabowska B. (2013). *Poczucie tożsamości młodzieży...*, op. cit., pp. 131–132.

²⁴ Hut P. (2014). *Polska wobec Polaków...*, op. cit., p. 251.

²⁵ Ibid., p.248.

²⁶ Osadczy W. (2003). *Polacy na Ukrainie...*, op. cit., p.68.

ethnic background of the students and the limitations of the national character of the Polish schools. For example, in Lvov there were more and more non-Polish students in both the Polish schools, and in the Zhytomyr region, with a 95%-Polish population, a Polish school was established in Dovbish, however, the institution was soon changed into a Polish-Ukrainian one, and in Horodok Podolskiy, where a school was built for Poles with Polish funds, a Ukrainian was nominated the principal, who decided to introduce Polish only in grades 1–4, and in higher grades, Ukrainian was the exclusive language of instruction. According to the inhabitants of Horodok, the school ceased to be Polish and gradually became Ukrainian.²⁷ What is more, the students learning in Polish could continue to study in Ukrainian higher schools or go abroad, to Poland. However, if one were to come back to Ukraine with a Polish university diploma, one would have to bear the costs of validating the document.²⁸

Despite the aforementioned problems, the development of Polish school infrastructure in Ukraine in the first decade of the 21st century was still supported by the Polish government. In 2000 the Polish side undertook a number of investments for Polish-language education, and the “Polish Community” Association would actively join in the efforts by, for example, transferring funds for renovations of school buildings, the adaptations of buildings for future schools, and the construction of schools. Attempts were made to support different institutions, however, the highest investments were made into schools with long traditions and in large Polish communities (Lvov).²⁹ Thanks to the support of the Polish government Polish schools and classrooms were equipped. “Children received course books and all the necessary learning materials. What is more, the Polish side would finance summer camps and trips to Poland as far as it was financially possible.”³⁰

The official evaluations of the Polish side would clearly show, however, that the development of Polish schooling in Ukraine did not happen efficiently and without problems. In the “Report of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Kiev” pertaining to the situation of Poles at the beginning of the 21st century it was emphasised that the material situation of the schools with Polish as the language of instruction was difficult (the schools were to a large extent underfinanced), there were obstacles created by local authorities when attempts were made to establish schools with Polish as the language of instruction with funds of the Republic of Poland, the obligatory teaching of a large group of school subjects in Ukrainian, which was the result of the directive issued by the Ukrainian Ministry

²⁷ Paluch J. M. (2013). *Wczoraj i dziś...*, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

²⁸ Hut P. (2014). *Polska wobec Polaków...*, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 149 and 252–253.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

of Education and Science, which made it mandatory to intensify the teaching of Ukrainian because of the national Ukrainian system of internal supervision of maturity exams in order to even out the chances of students when applying for places at universities.³¹ The dissolution of the local school authority, because of the lack of funds, and the cancellation of the teaching of Polish in a number of schools in the Tarnopol region (in Stariy Skalat, Polupanovka, and Halushtschintse).³² To sum up, it ought to be pointed out that the reactivation of Polish schooling did not happen smoothly and without problems. Its state was much better in western and central Ukraine. However, the outbreak of the armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia in 2014 put an end to the development of education for the Polish minority in East Ukraine. The state of the institutions and the situation of Poles in the Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Lugan, and Crimea region have changed totally as a result of the annexation of Crimea and warfare.

³¹ The directions in which the teaching in Polish was to be limited in schools with Polish as the language of instruction were carefully laid out in 34 points of the document. Among others, instruction of all school subjects in Ukrainian once a week was introduced, and Ukrainian history, geography of Ukraine, physical education, and national defence were taught in Ukrainian exclusively. The number of lessons of Ukrainian was increased by one for grades 2–5, and the teaching of math in grades 7 and above was to take place in Ukrainian as well as Polish. Grabowska B. (2013). *Poczucie tożsamości młodzieży...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 133–134.

³² Originally children would learn Polish four hours a week, in 2008 the number was reduced to one hour, and subsequently the teaching was stopped altogether. *Ibid.*, pp. 133–134.