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**POLITICS OF MEMORY AND THE STATE
OF EDUCATION BEFORE AND AFTER POLAND
REGAINS INDEPENDENCE USING
THE EXAMPLE OF THE CITY OF BIAŁYSTOK –
CONTEXTS OF REGIONAL EDUCATION**

Abstract

In this paper, we attempt to present how dominant countries weave memory policy in their educational activity in order to gain control over the members of subordinate groups. This is an important topic in the context of the 100th anniversary of Poland's independence being celebrated this year. We refer to the educational policy of the invaders to Poles and the Polish state towards minorities in the interwar period. We will illustrate this through the example of Białystok, the city of north-eastern Poland.

Key words: social memory, historical memory, memory policy, history of education in Białystok, region, regional education.

**POLITYKA PAMIĘCI A SYTUACJA SZKOLNICTWA PRZED I PO ODZYSKANIU
PRZEZ POLSKĘ NIEPODLEGŁOŚCI NA PRZYKŁADZIE MIASTA BIAŁYSTOK –
KONTEKSTY EDUKACJI REGIONALNEJ**

Streszczenie

W tekście podejmujemy próbę pokazania sposobów używania przez dominującą władzę polityki pamięci w działaniach edukacyjnych w celu podporządkowania sobie członków podległych grup. Jest to temat ważny w kontekście obchodzonej w tym roku setnej rocznicy odzyskania niepodległości przez państwo polskie. Na przykładzie Białegostoku poruszamy zagadnienie polityki oświatowej zaborców wobec Polaków oraz państwa polskiego wobec mniejszości w okresie międzywojennym.

Słowa kluczowe: pamięć społeczna, pamięć historyczna, polityka pamięci, historia szkolnictwa w Białymstoku, region, edukacja regionalna.

Introduction

The subject of this article is an attempt to present the issue of the memory of the past as a crucial element of memory policy and to outline the contexts of its use in educational activities. Taking up this topic seems to be important for several reasons. This year, we celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the Polish state regaining independence. Such an important event is an excellent opportunity for reflection and memories, for talks about our history, but also for thinking about the challenges facing contemporary education, including regional education.

Education is, in fact, one of the best tools for implementing the policy of memory of the ruling party, so shaping the memory of the state, nation and region. In this text, we refer to the educational policy of the invaders to Poles and the Polish state towards minorities in the interwar period within the context of the example of Białystok, the city of north-eastern Poland. In connection with the celebrated anniversary of regaining independence, many different celebrations and events take place in Białystok, on the occasion of this commemoration. In ad-

dition, the City Council has established that 2018 will be the year of Independence People.

Regional education – theoretical and methodological approach

The context of regional education adopted in this article is primarily based on the objectives of implementing such education. Certain human behaviour can only be understood in the context of culture, thanks to which appropriate attitudes, behaviours, patterns and values are formed in individuals. Without reference to the culture of ancestors one cannot consider collective memory, which Jerzy Nikitorowicz defines as a “group of ideas about the past of the group”¹. Therefore, it is not necessary to state without dispute that the school plays a key role in preparing the young generation for participation in culture. One such possibility is created by regional education, which can be described as a whole of didactic and educational activities aimed at implementing content related to the region in terms of knowledge, shaping skills, competences and attitudes. The aim of regional education is therefore to prepare for the conscious and responsible use of the richness of regional cultural goods.

As a scholarly discipline, regional education is quite new and for the moment certainly lacks well-established theoretical reflection². However, it has extensive roots and is present in our lives practically since forever. The idea of regional education (formal and informal) has been known for a long time, although it has existed under various names and definitions. However, it was not until the 1990s in the last century that these issues became popular in the canon of content studied in Polish schools³.

¹ J. Nikitorowicz, *Etnopedagogika w kontekście wielokulturowości i ustawicznie kształtującej się tożsamości*, Kraków 2017, p. 109.

² P. Petrykowski, *Edukacja regionalna. Problemy podstawowe i otwarte*, Toruń 2003.

³ To a large extent this was associated with the processes of Poland’s admission to the European Union.

One of the first documents regulating the realisation of regional education is the 1995 publication “Cultural Heritage in the Region. Program Curriculum Assumptions”, in which were described were the main tasks and goals. Some of them worth mentioning include better understanding of own culture and cultural heritage, distinguishing the value of own region in the national, state and human values context, shaping the citizens to be conscious of their rights and their ‘small homeland’, as well as shaping open attitudes, enabling learning about other cultures and European integration⁴. Of course, these assumptions, or rather the ways of achieving them, will vary amongst regions⁵.

However, regardless of their directions, but also the needs and initiatives undertaken in the whole local environment and by various entities – from educational institutions to local government – everyone is responsible for the regional education. Hence, it is particularly exposed to various ambiguities that can “(...) lead to the creation of an illegible and facade description of reality, often losing the sense and meaning of so many valuable activities”⁶.

In the last twenty years, these objectives have been carried out in schools in various forms and with various methods. This was facilitated with favourable conditions such as obligatory educational projects in junior high schools. But above all – regional content was present in previous program frameworks (as a cross-curricular path: regional education – cultural heritage in the region). As the available research indicates, many schools in the Podlaskie Voivodship have carried out these paths very well⁷.

⁴ *Dziedzictwo kulturowe w regionie. Założenia programowe*, Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, Warszawa 1995.

⁵ J. Nikitorowicz, *Edukacja regionalna i międzykulturowa*, Warszawa 2009.

⁶ P. Petrykowski, *Edukacja regionalna...*, op.cit., p. 5.

⁷ Compare: A. Swarc, *Intercultural education in urban and rural secondary schools*, In: *The city: a learning experience*, ed. K. Kamińska, A. Szerląg, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2011, pp. 168–186. Idem, *Edukacja międzykulturowa w pozalekcyjnych formach kształcenia – komunikat z badań*. „Pogranicze. Studia społeczne”, vol. XVII (2011), pp. 188–199. Idem, *Rola i miejsce treści kulturowych w procesie kształcenia na przykładzie podlaskich gimnazjów*. „Ars inter Culturas” 2014, no. 3, pp. 171–178.

Unfortunately, in the current core curriculum, regional content is not as prominent. It is true that it is included in the curricula of particular subjects, such as geography or history. However, this is not enough to be able to say that there are good grounds for running regional education in the current school system. Only the introduction of a new school subject could change that.

Memory Policy – Historical Memory v. Social Memory

Historical and social types of memory are important elements of memory policy that evolve along with any changes in the political situation of the state. Memory policy is used both by the secular and religious authorities for their own benefit, as well as for the benefit of an individual, community or the whole nation. In general, memory policy is used by the cultural majority as well as by minorities.

Memory policy is created by state leaders as the official part of the memory of an ethnic group, nation, or state. Memory policy is mostly based on historic memory that, by definition, is considered to be the only binding type of memory and is therefore used by politicians currently in power as a tool to indoctrinate society. If a social context and differences in historical backgrounds of minorities living in a country are not taken into consideration, then memory policy may be a dangerous assimilation tool. It may be dangerous for the culture of assimilated groups and for the country itself.

When using memory policy, every society evolves various myths. The purpose of these myths is to build a community, unite people around a common goal and make a group of people want to work for a country. A founding myth of a nation or state hence serves to cultivate the memory of nation's or state's past. It should make members of the nation feel special. If any state wants to last, then it will implement a memory policy based on the myth that contributes to the development of one common identity and unifies people as one nation. In case of emergency, a nation with a coherent identity will eagerly protect its unique community and with conviction.

Myths and legends are part of history of every nation, region and town. Myths should ensure the continuance of tradition. They also evoke values important for the identity of a community. To give an example, at the heart of Polish history lies the myth of Lech, Czech and Rus who founded three Slavic nations. Even if the story is not historically true, the power of memory transmission through the myth is so great that it allows every member of the community to find their place in a particular reality thus building social identity. Memory is a basic element of identity.

Politicians fight for control over the past and the ways of commemorating the past. Winning the fight means assuming control of the people of one's nation as well as power of creating new myths and cultivating already existing ones. The winning politician takes control of the past symbolically, but he/she also wins the future, thereby strengthening the position of their own faction and their narration. The winner's authority and future political order are legitimised. The triumphant politician has history at his disposal and decides how to interpret particular events. On the other hand, historical memory may become a weapon in the hands of the defeated in their struggle to be heard.

Memory policy manifests itself in government practices of naming streets after national heroes, who are replaced as soon as the political system changes⁸, as well as in decisions about putting up monuments, or awarding orders for heroes and community workers from the past of a city, region, country or the world. Memory policy largely depends on the dominant political orientation, i.e. new authorities may refuse somebody once granted recognition. Hence, memory policy is realised through educational and cultural activities, which means allowing or forbidding particular communities to cultivate their language and culture. It is also pursued in decisions in favour of or against building schools, theatres, museums or clubs; establishing societies; and issuing newspapers⁹.

⁸ Compare: T. Fiedorowicz, M. Kietliński, J. Maciejczuk, *Białostockie ulice i ich patroni*, Białystok 2012.

⁹ Compare: A. Cz. Dobroński, *Białystok – historia miasta*, Zarząd Miasta Białegostoku, Białystok 2001.

Educational policy is the most effective tool for developing the memory of a state, nation, or minority groups. It has an influence on decisions about events, characters and values that are included in the cultural canon. Obviously, the state is mostly concerned with those elements that define the group as a nation and that emphasise its strength as a majority. Elements of minority cultures may also be included in the cultural canon of the dominant group. It may only happen when the dominant group finds these elements useful and not threatening.

Beside history, social memory is another factor taken into consideration when adopting memory policy¹⁰. Social memory comprises the elements of the past left in individual experiences every member of the group have, or what they call their past. It is a collection of reminiscences about real or fictional events that people were directly involved in or passed from generation to generation as part of oral or written traditions. When members of society try to evaluate past events, they look at the events through their past experiences, but mostly through their present experiences and their probable future experiences.

Social memory is memory of individuals who live in communities and develop through communication a social framework of memory. In other words, any individual is the subject of social memory and the process of remembering. Memory of an individual is shaped by the social framework. Past events evaluated from the perspective of social memory are placed within a mythical timeframe, which makes them last. The time of social memory is different than the historical time that is linear in character, i.e. all the events extend in a line that has its end and beginning and time is determined by absolute dates and dead facts. As Barbara Szacka writes, although our contemporary western world works within the linear timeframe, it has nothing to do with the timeframe of social memory¹¹.

¹⁰ Compare: A. Szpociński, P. T. Kwiatkowski, *Przeszłość jako przedmiot przekazu*, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Warszawa 2006, p. 27.

¹¹ Compare: B. Szacka, *Przeszłość jako wymiar czasu*, In: *Wobec przeszłości, pamięć przeszłości jako element kultury współczesnej*, ed. A. Szpociński, Warszawa 2005, p. 32.

Unlike social memory, historical memory requires the use of proper knowledge of history. According to Maurice Halbwachs, there can be as many sub-types of social memory as there are groups that develop their identity by referring to the past. There is no one universal type of social memory. Every member of a community has a different understanding of the events the community experiences. Therefore, memory of the events is different for every individual.

Despite functional, structural and cognitive differences, historic memory is an important context for social memory¹². If the social dimension of memory policy is not taken into consideration and all the attention is directed towards historical controversies, it will result in establishing ineffective solutions to social problems. Arguments between historians about dates and corresponding events is in fact a fight for power. It is an important aspect of memory policy in every country. We live in the times of keen interest in memory, which indicates the changes taking place in the field.

Educational policy implemented by the invaders against Poles before regaining independence on the example of Białystok

Education is an excellent implementation tool of memory policy of the ruling political faction. In the social discourse, there has been a debate about the legitimacy of the term 'history policy' compared to the term 'memory policy'. The term 'history policy' has an analytical character (just like educational, social or economic policies). Whereas 'memory policy' refers to the question of exerting political power by using history to shape memory. Regardless of the term we use, authorities undoubtedly influence the way we understand history. Our attitude to history is shaped by different institutions: political leaders, political factions of the country, local governments, educational policy implemented by the school on behalf of the state, opinions of politicians

¹² A. Szpociński, P.T. Kwiatkowski, *Przeszłość jako przedmiot przekazu...*, op.cit., pp. 18–24.

shown by the media, or family as an institution of natural education. Of these institutions, only the family has the power to shape our memory independently of the state policy (including the policy of invaders).

Education in Bialystok under Prussian Rule*

After the third partition, Poland was wiped off the political map of Europe. On 26th January 1796, the Prussian armed forces entered Bialystok, seizing the land granted to Prussia in the partition treaty. The first step of the Prussian invader was to evict Polish schools from their buildings. Those decisions indicated the direction the Prussian partitioner was to take in terms of Polish education: "Two years after the third partition, the Prussian Ministry of Education, acting upon the decree of Frederick William II of 5 May 1797 about establishing the Educational Committee for South Prussia in Warsaw, launched unification of Polish schools. They tried to maintain the organizational base of Polish education and adjust it to Germanization policy"¹³.

Education was considered the best tool to raise future generations of German citizens. Therefore, seminars for teachers were organised in Poznan, Lowicz and Bialystok. The main purpose of the seminars was to train teachers in how to indoctrinate Polish children and young people. There was a need for teachers who would wholeheartedly agree with the policy of indoctrination and who would support the Prussian government. In 1798, German ideology was introduced to Polish schools. From then on, the German language became the official language and learning German was obligatory.

Moreover, in 1801, the post of a 'censor' was created. Censors were senior students who were prepared to encourage younger students to learn German and helped younger schoolmates to acquire the language. Students who neglected learning the official language were subject to severe punishments. In order to recruit Poles as zealous agitators of Prussian ideology, every year some of the students who grad-

¹³ Quoted after: M. Goławski, *Szkolnictwo powszechne w Białymstoku...*, op.cit., p. 25.

uated from school were sent to an academy in Prussia to be trained as teachers.

The Germanisation of the Polish nation was carried out very skillfully. The Poles who became sufficiently Germanised were rewarded. They received local managerial positions. Furthermore, the Polish lands were populated with the citizens of Prussia. It was widely believed that by this means, the Polish language would naturally lose its importance.

The Prussian authorities reformed the so-called Podwydziałowa School in Białystok and raised it to the rank of a senior school. It was transformed into a six-grade secondary school, the first one in Białystok. One of the main objectives of the newly created school was to teach German. The German language was not only the language of instruction. It was also obligatory for students to speak German with each other and with teachers. Moreover, the Polish youth was to go to school with German peers, and teachers were supposed to be German so that the Poles could better adopt to the new reality. At that very moment the Podwydziałowa School ceased to exist. The common people's school and the parochial school were still operating.

In 1807, there was another turning point in the history of education in Białystok. The city fell under the rule of a new invader.

The situation of schools under the Russian occupation 1807–1915*

In 1807, the Prussia pogroms and the Treaties of Tilsit forced Germans to abandon the Polish lands they had annexed after the third partition. Unfortunately, as a result of political decisions of Napoleon and tsar Alexander I, Białystok, Bielsk Podlaski, Drohiczyn and Sokolka counties were taken by Russia. The counties formed the Białystok Area (Obwód Białostocki) with its seat in Białystok.

* Compare: M. Goławski, *Szkolnictwo powszechne w Białymstoku...*, op.cit., p. 31 and further; A. Lechowski, *Białystok w latach 1864–1936*, In: *Historia Białegostoku...*, op.cit., pp. 303–307.

The situation was beneficial for Polish education as it helped to avoid the previously launched Germanisation programme. Moreover, schools in Białystok would be under the favourable influence of the University of Vilnius for the following 15 years, i.e. up until 1832 when it was closed down by the tsar.

It is believed that, until 1825, the elementary and the secondary schools were not subject to Russification. In 1826, the first signs of Russification were brought about along the great education reform carried out by the Russian authorities in the Polish lands. There were clear tendencies to stop teaching Polish gradually and to introduce the Russian language as the language of instruction and to include elements of Russian studies into the school curricula. The first stage of Russification was acquisition of Polish soldiers to serve in the Russian army. Russian became the official language in 1826. It also became the language of instruction in teaching History, Maths and Physics.

After the fall of the November Uprising, the efforts to eliminate any manifestation of Polishness intensified. In 1834, Russian became the language of instruction for all the school subjects but Catholic Religious Education. And in 1840, as a result of progressing Russification, teaching Polish as a school subject was no longer allowed.

In the 19th century, Białystok began to transform into an industrial city, which resulted in the growing city population¹⁴. Due to the steady increase in the population of craftsmen and workers, there was a need to develop people's schools. From the mid-19th century people's schools mostly for the children of city factory workers were established. There was a people's school for the children of local evangelicals, and there were Jewish people's schools. There were also elementary schools such as an Orthodox elementary municipal school, a railway elementary school, an elementary school for factory workers and craftsmen. Clearly, together with the growing culturally diverse population, the need to provide education in Russian, German and Yiddish arose. However, it was impossible to set up a Polish people's

¹⁴ Compare: H. Mościcki, *Białystok. Zarys historyczny*, Wydawnictwo Magistratu Miejskiego, Białystok 1933; A. Sadowski, *Białystok. Kapitał społeczny mieszkańców miasta*, Białystok 2006.

school. Polish people had to resort to clandestine teaching Polish history, passing the memory of the nation and teaching Polish.

Polish Schools in Białystok on the threshold of independence. German Occupation of 1915–1919*

In 1915, with the arrive of the new invader came hopes for establishing the Polish school in Białystok. Polish society wanted to seize the opportunity and develop it to the fullest extent. Taking advantage of the seeming German goodwill towards Polish society, a plan to start the Polish school was implemented. School funds were systematically raised.

Simultaneously, the statute of the Society for the Promotion of the Polish School (Towarzystwo Popierania Szkoły Polskiej) was defined. School equipment and teaching aids were collected. Another step was taking over the buildings where Russian schools were situated.

All the actions were undertaken in the belief that it was work for independent Poland. One of the dreams was to raise a Polish generation liberated from the influence of the invader. Therefore, Polish intelligentsia, gentry and social workers united in their efforts to lay the foundations for the Polish school in Białystok.

On 18th November 1915, the work of the Society for the establishment and support of the Polish school in Białystok and surroundings was officially approved by the Germans. On 12 December 1915, the Society was named “The Society for the Support of Polish Schools in Białystok.”

On 6th November 1915, in the first time since 1831 Polish elementary school with Polish as the language of instruction was established in Białystok. The schedule, designed by a special committee and approved by the German authorities, included lessons in Religious Education and Polish. However, the Germans did not agree to incorporate History into the school curriculum.

* Compare: M. Goławski, *Szkolnictwo powszechne w Białymstoku...*, op.cit., p. 55 and further. A. Lechowski, *Białystok w latach 1864–1936*, In: *Historia Białegostoku...*, op.cit., p. 319 and further.

The ideological foundation for Białystok education reflected patriotic sentiments suppressed by Polish society. These were expressed in the declaration approved by the Society: “The remarkably Polish spirit should permeate the school that will follow the course of patriotic and religious education”¹⁵. At the end of 1915, the Society publically commemorated the outbreak of the November Uprising – until that time, the event was honoured secretly.

The school year of 1916/1917 welcomed further development in the elementary and secondary education. The idea of creating rural elementary school even appeared. However, implementation of the project faced serious difficulties. In 1917, Germans passed control over the elementary schools from the Society to the municipality, so signifying the beginning of Germanisation of Polish society.

It was only in 1918, on the threshold of their capitulation, that Germans were allowed to reopen elementary schools in Białystok. In the school year of 1918/1919, Polish education was developing rapidly, looking forward to the long-awaited independence of Poland.

Educational policy towards minority groups in interwar Poland taking into account the situation of Białystok

The case of Białystok is an example of educational policy towards minority groups in interwar Poland. As A. Sadowski points out, in the time of the Second Commonwealth of Poland, Białystok changed from a Jewish-Polish city of the 19th century into a Polish-Jewish city¹⁶. The percentage of Poles in the city grew due to war and post-war migrations.

According to the first Polish census of 30th September 1921¹⁷, Białystok had a population of 76,792 inhabitants, 48.7% of which were

¹⁵ Quoted after: M. Goławski, *Szkolnictwo powszechne w Białymstoku...*, op.cit., p. 71; A. Lechowski, *Białystok w latach 1864–1936*, In: *Historia Białegostoku...*, op.cit., p. 319 and further.

¹⁶ Compare: A. Sadowski, *Białystok...*, op.cit., p. 157.

¹⁷ Compare: *Pierwszy Powszechny Spis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 30 września 1921 r. Mieszkania, ludność, stosunki zawodowe. Województwo białostockie*, GUS, Warszawa 1927.

Jewish, 46.6% – Polish, 1.9% – German, 1.8% – Russian, 0.8% – Belarusian, and 0.2% – others. The significant growth in the Polish population after the First World War could be explained by the policy of Zionist organisations that encouraged Jews to settle in Palestine as a result of which many inhabitants of the Jewish faith left Białystok. According to the census of 1931, Białystok had a population of 91,100 inhabitants. Meanwhile, 50.9% of the city population pointed to Polish as their mother tongue, 42.6% – Yiddish and Hebrew, 3.6% – Russian, and 2.1% – German¹⁸.

A socially, politically, economically and culturally fresh situation of Poland created a need for a model citizen that would be adequate for the new reality. A school where the educational policy designed by the dominant political powers of the country is implemented should be the best place to create such a model¹⁹.

The moment that Poland became a sovereign state, two views on education clashed with each other. On one hand, the National Democracy led by R. Dmowski postulated that the idea of national education be introduced to educational and cultural institutions as binding one: “After 1918, a large number of national and religious minorities led to the growing popularity of nationalistic tendencies in national education. A nation was considered an ethnic community with its own interests, often conflicting with the interests of other ethnic communities”²⁰. They were also against providing separate state schools for children from minority groups, while at the same time advocated opening Polish schools especially in the areas where Poles were a minority.

On the other hand, after the May 1926 coup d'état, the Sanation movement developed a concept of state education²¹. The concept had

¹⁸ A. Sadowski, *Białystok...*, op.cit., p. 158.

¹⁹ For more information about the education system in Poland after regaining independence see: J. Szablicka-Żak, *Szkolnictwo i oświata w pracach Sejmu Ustawodawczego II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1997.

²⁰ Quoted after: U. Wróblewska, *Polityka oświatowa państwa polskiego wobec mniejszości narodowych, grup etnicznych i wyznaniowych zamieszkujących Kresy Wschodnie w II RP*, „Nauka” 2011, nr 2, p. 111.

²¹ For more information see: Cz. Majorek, *Historyczne źródła teorii wychowania obywatelsko-państwowego w Polsce doby międzywojennej*, In: *Edukacja histo-*

many followers. An emphasis was put on the role that the idea played in forging national identity and restoring historic memory of the generation of Poles deprived of their statehood for over 100 years. State education met the needs of numerous minority groups, appreciating their individuality, while at the same time making the assumption of the joining together of the potential of many national, ethnic, and religious groups in one. Irrespective of social, ethnic or political backgrounds, all citizens were destined to build the Polish state together²².

Since 1932, Polish schools have implemented the idea of state education based on the Jędrzejewicz's reform of March 1932²³. New curricula were designed and textbooks written. Cooperation between the school and student's local environment and family was emphasised. Memory policy was pursued through celebration of national holidays that engaged school, professional, church and family environments. All the citizens cooperated to organise the celebration of the January uprising, November uprising anniversaries, May 3rd Constitution Day, Independence Day, Jozef Pilsudski's name day. In interwar Białystok, there was an intensive development of state and private elementary and secondary schools²⁴.

In sovereign Poland, minorities received different treatment²⁵ depending upon the region, the character of the culture group and the degree of assimilation with Polish majority. The policy aimed at the minorities in the Eastern borderland, whose mother country was out-

ryczna i obywatelska w Polsce odrodzonej 1918–1939, ed. J. Maternicki, Warszawa 1987, pp. 15–19.

²² Compare: U. Wróblewska, *Polityka oświatowa państwa polskiego...*, op.cit., p. 112.

²³ The Jędrzejewicz's educational reform of the primary and secondary school was introduced by Minister Janusz Jędrzejewicz and implemented from 1932 through 1948. It was the result of the efforts of the Polish government to create an educational programme that would modernize the Polish educational system that was in a mess as a result of the partitions.

²⁴ For more information about the development of elementary schools in Białystok in the period of independence 1919–1933 see: M. Goławski, *Szkolnictwo powszechne w Białymstoku...*, op.cit., p. 74 and further.

²⁵ For more information on the subject see: U. Wróblewska, *Polityka oświatowa państwa polskiego...*, op.cit., p. 114 and further.

side Poland, i.e. Ukrainians, Belarusians, or Lithuanians differed from the policy aimed at the Jews. It differed significantly from the policy adopted in relation to ethnic groups such as Tartars, Karaites or Armenians who fitted in with the educational ideology of the Second Commonwealth of Poland.

Ukrainians, Belarusians and Lithuanians felt the Polish assimilation policy painfully. State and private schools with their mother tongues as languages of instruction were closed or subject to various restrictions. Polish teachers were employed. Their task was to impose Polish national identity on children from national minorities. Evidently, Poland used the same methods of assimilation to which it was subject during 120 years of occupation.

In 1935, after Piłsudski's death, the power over education and the same policy of memory was gradually taken over by supporters of national education, giving it a citizen-national character. The change of education policy found many supporters due to the impending threat of another world war. They were afraid of another loss of state and threat to national identity.

On the outbreak of the Second World War, considerable changes in terms of education and nationality occurred in Białystok. The traces of the Second Republic of Poland were quickly obliterated. But that is quite another story, requiring another time.

Self-understanding and self-identification achieved by means of comparison with other people is of a hermeneutic character, where the starting point is the target. Recognising one's own group happens in the context of other groups and is involved in the historic process. It means that in order to understand the past, an insight into the present is required, which in turn will refer us to the past that refers us back into the present that implies the future.

Similarly, it is believed that learning about the history of one's own family, in a hermeneutic circle, stimulates interest in local history. This raises the will to learn the history of the city, region and then the whole society organised in the country. Such an approach is followed

by arousing interest in the history of the country, and later on – tracing the past of the continent – it goes even further, reaching the global perspective, where the whole world seems fascinating and worthwhile.

Research on memory has become essential in the context of the multiculturalism of contemporary countries. It is impossible to move freely in the present and build the future wisely without knowing the past. Unawareness of the identity of one's ethnic group can cause self-identification problems. Analogically, ignorance of the meaning of symbols in the place one lives may lead to misunderstandings or conflicts. To prevent this occurrence, we need educational programmes that will help participants open up to the past and, in turn, become more sensitive to the present.

School is a state institution and serves an important function in the implementation of memory policy. It is the education strategy employed by the school that determines what social, political or cultural facts from the history of the dominant nation or the minority groups of the particular state are remembered. Moreover, the meanings attributed to the events tackled during the educational process are of great importance. Education is a powerful weapon in the hands of every state – it can strengthen or destroy it as the weapon that all three partitioners have used in their efforts to annihilate the Polish nation. Simultaneously, the Poles have used education to fight the enemy.

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