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State Policy in the Field of Defence Preparation of the Society in the Second Polish Republic

Polityka państwa w zakresie przygotowania obronnego społeczeństwa w II Rzeczypospolitej

• Abstract •

Recalling the activity of the prewar State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training seems necessary in view of the increased interest of the society, mainly young people, in defence matters and patriotic past. Obviously, the circumstances and conditions have changed significantly but the idea and organizational structure of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training seems to be still present today. It is essential that the activities of both the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training and its local structures did not impose and did not monopolize the defence commitment of the society but only provided all the groups of the society with material and organizational aid related to civil defence training.

Keywords: state; defense; politics; local government; training; army

• Abstrakt •

Wobec wzmożonego zainteresowania społeczeństwa, a przede wszystkim młodzieży, sprawami obronności i patriotycznej przeszłości przypomnienie działalności przedwojennego Państwowego Urzędu Wychowania Fizycznego i Przystosowania Wojskowego wydaje się konieczne. Oczywiście w sposób zasadniczy zmieniły się okoliczności i uwarunkowania, ale idea i forma organizacyjna Państwowego Urzędu Wychowania Fizycznego i Przystosowania Wojskowego wydaje się i dzisiaj aktualna. Niezwykle istotne jest to, że działalność Państwowego Urzędu Wychowania Fizycznego i Przystosowania Wojskowego oraz jego terenowych struktur nie narzucała i nie monopolizowała aktywności obronnej społeczeństwa, a jedynie wspomagała materialnie i organizacyjnie wszystkie środowiska w ich działaniach związanych z przystosowaniem obronnym.

Słowa kluczowe: państwo; obronność; polityka; samorząd; szkolenie; wojsko

After the First World War, military training of the citizens in the biggest European countries was institutionalized, taking important place in the war preparation system. In the 1920s and 1930s, citizens' and mostly youth's military training was carried out on a large scale in Germany and the Soviet Union, the neighbouring countries hostile towards the reborn Polish state. There was awareness of the existing threats among the political and military elites of the Second Polish Republic and therefore, starting from 1918, in the General Staff of the Polish Army studies and organizational preparations in the field of military training popularization among a wide range of the society were conducted.

The article *State Policy in the Field of Defence Preparation of the Society in the Second Polish Republic* was written on the basis of archive sources escrowed in the State Archive in Kielce, in collection of Kielce Voivodeship Office I, as well as in the Central Military Archive and compact studies.

An empirical method, focused on the analysis of the central state bodies aiming at the creation of legal, organizational and material bases of the dissemination of civil defence training, was applied in the article.

Two world wars showed that contemporary military conflicts were not only the struggle between fighting armies on the battlefield but also the combat of whole societies. Therefore, in the years 1918–1925, studies and organizational preparations in the scope of dissemination of physical education and civil defence training among a wide range of the society were conducted in the Third Branch of the General Staff of the Polish Army. From November 10, 1925, the assigned unit in the Infantry Department which operated till 1927, that is, to the moment of launching the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training, dealt with physical education and civil defence training matters. The creation of provincial, district and municipal committees for physical education and civil defence training initially faced many problems, mostly formal ones (Central Military Archive, Introduction to the Inventory, *The Outline of the Organizational Development of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training*, pp. 3, 7, 8; Szymański, 1995, pp. 89, 90).

The Council of Ministers issued the government order “To establish the Chief Council for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training as well as Provincial and District Committees for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training” to create legal basis for the above-mentioned projects; the order was published on May 15, 1925 in the Official Journal of the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education. Among the tasks of the Chief Council of the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education were: issuing opinions and submitting applications in the matters relating to physical education and civil defence

training at the level of appropriate ministries, commencing theoretical work in the above-mentioned issues, coordination of state and self-government bodies' activities in the field of physical education and civil defence training, taking independent initiatives, publishing reports of the Chief Council's activities, granting directives to provincial committees of physical education and civil defence training, and monitoring their activities (the State Archive in Kielce, in collection of Kielce Voivodeship Office I, sign. 7848, pp. 91, 92).

As for provincial institutions, provincial committees for physical education and civil defence training were to be established in each voivodeship, the tasks of which were to include: conducting theoretical work and giving opinion, spreading the idea of physical education and civil defence training for state defence, taking independent initiatives and operating in the territory of the voivodeship, granting directives to district committees and monitoring them, annual reporting of the state of activities connected with physical education and civil defence training in the voivodeship to the Chief Council (the State Archive in Kielce, in collection of Kielce Voivodeship Office I, sign. 7848, p. 94).

Tasks of district and municipal physical education and civil defence training committees, which were supposed to be created in each district of the voivodeship as well as in each town separated from the district, were determined. Among their tasks were: co-operating with state and self-government authorities on the organization and development of physical education and civil defence training in a given area, developing of independent activity, presenting annual reports concerning their activity to the provincial committee. The regulation also determined who the district or municipal presidium should consist of, namely: a school inspector; a commander of the garrison, a starost or a mayor; one representative of physical education teaching staff from each – secondary, elementary, and vocational – type of schools as well as teacher's seminaries; an instruction officer; a district or municipal doctor; three representatives of the district council or the municipal council; representatives of the presidium of the physical education and civil defence training provincial committee and delegates of the designated institutions (the State Archive in Kielce, in collection of Kielce Voivodeship Office I, sign. 7848, p. 95).

The first plenary session of the Chief Council of the Provincial and District Committees for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training took place in the auditorium of the King Stefan Batory State Lower Secondary School in Warsaw on March 28, 1926. The tense political situation in the country was not conducive to a constructive session. The first plenary session of the Chief Council of the Provincial and District Committees for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training constituted a caesura in building a state institution responsible for the dissemination of

civil defence training in interwar Poland. The distinctive feature of the activities in the field of physical education undertaken before 1926 was emphasizing the health objectives as well as subordinating the chief institution promoting physical culture in the country, i.e., the Chief Council of the Provincial and District Committees for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training, to the civil department, i.e., the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education (the State Archive in Kielce, in collection of Kielce Voivodeship Office I, sign. 7869, p. 62).

When Piłsudski's party took power in May 1926, there was a significant acceleration of work on disseminating the physical education and civil defence training among the society, especially among the youth. The result of this was the creation of two following institutions: the Scientific Council of Physical Education, and the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training in the beginning of 1927. The second one was established at the Ministry of Military Affairs. *The Instruction on the Education of the Military Training Units*, which divided the training into: school youth, academic youth, out-of-school youth, reservists, and women, was issued by the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training in December 1927. In practice, the involvement of the academic youth into the civil defence training program was a failure. Civic education, military education, physical education and military training were going to be taught within the scope of civil defence training. The State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training conducted civil defence training with considerable military support from 1932. The State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training coordinated work of social organizations and associations dealing with training in the field of civil defence as well as defence education of the society. Civic education, aimed at developing national and state awareness among members, was put in the first place in civil defence training in the organizations and associations acting in the framework of district and municipal physical education and civil defence training committees. The attendance in training, festivities and state celebrations was meant to serve this purpose. Loyalty, discipline, responsibility, sense of justice and leadership skills were considered to be particularly desirable personal traits. The great influence of the army on civil defence training, on its educational and didactic part, was to serve to increase the defence capabilities of the state as well as to serve in the army for which the conscripts were prepared in the framework of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training structures. Much importance was also attached to "moral and ethical" education. Within its framework, the aim was to shape such qualities as: honour, courage, devotion, piety, collegiality, and most of all, faith in the strength of the nation and the individual. The State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training did not run the civil defence training camps, the organization

of which was taken over by school troupes as well as authorized organizations and associations. In the beginning of 1930s, the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training took the initiative to organize specialized training camps for civil defence in strict military specialties. Despite the high costs of organizing and conducting this form of civil defence training, the development of specialized forms of youth defence training, such as: military aviation training, armour training, military radiotelegraph operator training, and water-, ski-, horse-riding, was started. In the work of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training, the joint participation of members of the organizations and associations dealing with physical education and civil defence training as well as joint participation of trainees and the army in state and military celebrations was of significant importance. Training of the candidate for a “soldier–patriot” was the aim of the programme. The training aimed at the development of physical and moral strength, obedience towards orders, faithfulness and other personal traits.

The popularization of this form of education was achieved by acquiring civil defence training degrees which entitled to certain privileges during military service (Central Military Archive, Introduction to the Inventory, p. 3; Junosza-Dąbrowski, 1936, p. 9; Kęsik, 1996, pp. 56–58; Wyszczelski, 2007, pp. 248–253).

The State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training, initiated on the Józef Piłsudski’s inspiration, was a large-scale project. It was a specialized institution, the creation of which was preceded by several years of experience and research, which proved the usefulness of its planned organizational forms and methods of action aimed at increasing the defence efficiency of the society. At the request of the Ministry of Military Affairs on February 10, 1926, the government adopted a resolution announcing the introduction of universal compulsory physical education and civil defence training for youth, which constituted limited part of defence training. The ministries of military affairs, home affairs, religious denominations and public enlightenment were responsible for organizational matters and the preparation of appropriate government orders. The next step was the regulation on the creation of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training, the Scientific Council of Physical Education, provincial, district and municipal physical education and civil defence training committees issued on January 28, 1927. The organizational structure and the detailed scope of activities of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training were established by the minister of military affairs in cooperation with two ministers mentioned in the regulation of March 21, 1927. The idea of mass physical and military training of the youth, and thus strengthening the defence capabilities of the country, was not easy to implement. On the one hand, the core curricula were to be prepared, and

on the other, the institution responsible for the realization of this idea was to be organized. The first years of functioning of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training meant shaping and improving the internal structure as well as fulfilling tasks which the institution faced. The implementation of the idea of physical education and civil defence training looked much worse in the field, where its goals and tasks were often not understood and treated as additional, inconvenient duties for the state administration and local governments. This triggered the response of the Minister of Home Affairs, General F. Sławoj Składkowski, who issued a special circular to voivodes and starosts, in which he clearly stated that they were required to act as chairmen of the physical education and civil defence training committees and were responsible for the work of provincial, district and municipal committees, and they would be assessed in terms of their work. The process of creating the district and municipal physical education and civil defence training committees encountered many obstacles. The reason for this would be, in the opinion of the central authorities, the misunderstanding of the obligatory instructions by the starosts. According to this opinion, the starosts limited their duties to the transmission of commands to self-government unions not involved in the promotion of this action. In connection with the above-mentioned, the government stated that it was necessary to pursue an action promoting the goals of physical education in such a way that self-governments would voluntarily provide financial assistance to achieve these goals. The starosts, refuting the allegations, pointed to the lack of basic information on the goals and methods of conducting the physical education campaigns and the need for central authorities to introduce an obligation for the youth to join organizations dealing with physical education and civil defence training (the State Archive in Kielce, in collection of Kielce Voivodeship Office I, sign. 7870, pp. 270, 290, 292, 345, 361; Pindel, 1995, pp. 69–75).

The response of the chief state authorities to this situation was sending urgings and instructions. The State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training appealed to the voivodes for strenuous efforts to support the physical education and civil defence training activities in their provinces. The institution forced the provincial administration authorities to provide material support to the organizations dealing with physical education and civil defence training. The starosts were indicated as those who should take the main responsibility for promoting civil defence training among local communities. At the same time, the message was sent that leading the physical education and civil defence training action would be the responsibility of the army with the help from civil instructors. The starosts were expected to provide substantive assistance to the newly established clubs and sport sections including, among other things, in terms of facilitating registration,

providing space for sports facilities and financing courses and competitions, as well as the organization of the permanent and free medical care (the State Archive in Kielce, in collection of Kielce Voivodeship Office I, sign. 7869, p. 262; collection of Kielce Voivodeship Office I, sign. 7848, pp. 25, 26).

Transferring matters concerning material security to the provincial civil administration can be clearly seen in the example of the Council of Ministers regulation, according to which the positions of chairmen of the provincial physical education and civil defence training committees were to be taken by the voivodes, and district committees – by the starosts. In spite of this, the army maintained the dominant position in the committees. This action probably resulted from the very high rank of the voivode in interwar Poland. He administered single-handedly, with the help of the voivode's office, in a dual manner: as the government representative and the head of the supervised bodies of general administration. The superiority of the voivode over the majority of government administration bodies in the province resulted from the nature of the voivode's office as the government representative. In the middle of 1927, the statute concerning the organization of the physical education and civil defence training committees was published. Among the tasks of the province committees were the coordination of the bodies of three ministries: the Ministry of Military Affairs, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education, in the area of the province in the physical education and civil defence training action, and also the cooperation with self-government bodies in order to gain financial resources. The tasks of the committees also included: supporting the activities of social organizations dealing with physical education and civil defence training; taking action in order to acquire sports facilities; organizing courses for instructors as well as vocational courses and so on; equipping shelters for the youth, summer camps; occupational prophylaxis, propaganda of physical education and civil defence training as well as accumulating necessary funds (the State Archive in Kielce, in collection of Kielce Voivodeship Office I, sign. 7848, p. 55; collection of Kielce Voivodeship Office I, sign. 7870, p. 425; Ryszka, 1962, pp. 191, 193).

After many reorganizations, on April 1, 1928, District Offices of the Provincial and District Committees for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training associated with each Command of District Corps, District Headquarters at infantry divisions, and Peripheral Headquarters of the Provincial and District Committees for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training associated with regiments, were established. It was only at the district level that this structure was combined with the structure of civil administration due to the existence of physical education and civil defence training district committees at the starosts' offices. From that moment,

provincial, district and municipal physical education and civil defence training committees played the role of subsidiary bodies in relation to the District Offices of the Provincial and District Committees for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training. The main task of the district and municipal committees was to provide financial resources for the physical education and civil defence training action as well as to support its activities through an organized social and self-governmental factor. The organizational structure and the position of offices in relation to committees in the superior situation was the reflection of the intended and implemented division of activities in the field of physical education and civil defence training between the state, the self-government, and the society. According to this concept, the state was to be the regulating and leading factor of the whole physical education and civil defence training activities in the country. The state was supposed to train teachers and instructors of the physical education, to build sports facilities for public schools and the army, but subsidize to a limited extent only the poorest territorial self-governments which carried out physical education and civil defence training activities. The responsibility of self-governments was to finance all activities and investments in their territories, cover the costs related to health care of the participants of physical education and civil defence training and, within budget limits, subsidize the poorest associations. On the other hand, the society was to provide organizations and associations participating in physical education and civil defence training with the necessary equipment and guarantee them administrative and political self-sufficiency (Młodzianowska, 1963).

In 1929, the State Office for Physical Education and Military Defence Training issued an instruction for the district centres of the physical education which were professional physical education and civil defence training district centres for physical education training. Among their tasks were: training the physical education instructors, securing medical care provided for the trainees, physical education promotion, providing methodological aid to physical education organizations, developing programmes and giving opinions concerning them, etc. The head of the district office, as the supervising authority for the physical education district centres, was responsible for the activity plans and course schedules for the centres, allocated resources and approved all expenses as well as supervised administrative and economic activities related to his duties. The duties of the commander-in-chief of the centre included managing the work according to the plan received from the district office, managing the physical education courses organized by the centres and monitoring their quality, developing detailed plans for courses and classes, presenting proposals for cooperation with sports organizations to the head of the

district office, and supervising the state of instructors' training (the State Archive in Kielce, in collection of Kielce Voivodeship Office I, sign. 7840, pp. 4–7).

Hence, the responsibility for promoting physical education and civil defence training among the society was transferred to the military, which, through the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training and its district agencies, sought to have a full impact on physical education and civil defence training. The activities of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training were based on the military division of the country, at the Command of District Corps, the state authorities justified such a solution by the fact that the physical education and civil defence training development was entirely based and conducted by military factors, but the physical education and civil defence training district and municipal committees (civil administration) did not have the resources to support organizations dealing with physical education and civil defence training. However, physical education and civil defence training district offices had at their disposal material and human resources base to support the development of physical education and civil defence training in the territory of the state (the State Archive in Kielce, in collection of Kielce Voivodeship Office I, sign. 7880, p. 23).

In 1933, the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training inspected the existing organizations in the territory of the state and selected those which were eligible to conduct physical education and civil defence training and therefore could count on material assistance. Among them were: the Polish Scouting Association, the Shooting Association, the Union of Reserve Officers, the Association of Reserve Non-Commissioned Officers, civil defence training organizations, i.e., the Postal Service Military Training, the Railway and Forest Workers Military Training, and the State Defence Military Training for Women. The general scope of activities of the largest organizations was also determined. Hence, the Polish Scouting Association operated mainly on the school premises and its members were trained in school troupes. The Shooting Association operated in the out-of-school areas among juvenile and out-of-school male and female youth. The Union of Reserve Soldiers operated among reserve soldiers, the State Defence Military Training for Women among female school and out-of-school youth (the State Archive in Kielce, in collection of Kielce Voivodeship Office I, sign. 7843, p. 129).

The above-mentioned organizations were subordinate to the military authorities at all organizational levels. The conditions they should be characterized by were also established. Among them were: obedience and discipline, creative work for the state as well as productivity and availability. A firm tone of these directives had a specific purpose, expressed in the will of close submission of the above-mentioned organizations to the military authorities and the elimination of unfair rivalry between them.

This can be clearly seen on the example of the order issued by the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training to encourage the above-mentioned organizations to jointly participate in all kinds of celebrations, including sports events. At the same time, the office reminded that the military authorities, which together with representatives of the state civil administration regulated cooperation between organizations conducting physical education and civil defence training, were entrusted with conducting physical education and civil defence training work. At the same time, it was announced that disobedience to the regulations of the military authorities in this regard might result in the suspension of the organization from conducting physical education and civil defence training activities (the State Archive in Kielce, in collection of Kielce Voivodeship Office I, sign. 7843, pp. 130–136).

Social organizations dealing with physical education and civil defence training generally recognized the position and rank of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training, but demanded financial resources from the office to carry out the tasks entrusted to them. This caused misunderstandings and complaints against the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training, which, denying the charges, stated that its mission was only to conduct and coordinate work related to physical education and civil defence training in order to prepare the youth to defend the country and additionally emphasized that the financial aid depended on the budget at its disposal. All these doubts and misunderstanding could be found in the press release of 1937, which defined the position of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training in this matter. It was stated in this release that the primary purpose of the office was to conduct activities related to physical education and civil defence training. It was emphasized that the office could provide financial assistance only within budget funds, which were limited. However, the State Office reserved the right to control the organizations and associations running the physical education and civil defence training programme and to demand from them regardless of granting the subsidies or not (the State Archive in Kielce, in collection of Kielce Voivodeship Office I, sign. 7845, p. 99).

As it was proclaimed, the main goal of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training, established in 1927, was first of all “moral” preparation of the society, especially the youth, to defend the state. In civil defence training the needs for both the time of peace and the time of war were taken into consideration. Civil military training depended on the voluntary action of the society. According to the military authorities, it showed tendency of increase in quantity, but fluctuations in numbers were observed in particular periods of time. In 1936, a project to reorganize civil defence training along with the mission was initiated in the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training. It was planned

to introduce compulsory service as part of civil defence training. This was justified by poorly developed action based on voluntary rules and the disappearance of strong moral attitudes of the Polish society towards external threats and by negative consequences of the period of the partition of Poland for the sense of national identity and nationality among the Polish population. The military claimed that concern for civic education in Poland had to be developed in the face of minimal public participation in national life as well as the destructive activities of national minorities. The basic idea of the new civil defence training, also known as military training, was to prepare the nation, especially the youth, to perform tasks during the war. Through such education, military circles also declared the pursuit of the political unity of the society and opposed the influence of political parties or religious associations on this education. According to them, political and ideological views were to be shaped by the state, and not by the shaky beliefs of political parties or clerical organizations. The essence of civil defence training was primarily national and state education, also described as the state and military education. The direction towards the “state” was justified by the idea of the superiority of the state interests, whereas the “military” by civil military training of the society and the use of military organizational structures (Stawecki, 1969, pp. 216–219).

In the first years of functioning of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training, the coherent organizational system was established which, despite the pressure of military circles, retained the voluntary and social character of membership. The State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training enabled the state authorities to supervise, control and conduct activities of the society related to physical education and civil defence training. The aim of these activities was to prepare the pre-conscription youth for military service. The direct training and education work of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training, which included: civic education, military education, physical education and military training, deserves special attention. The forms of work in organizations and associations operating under the auspices of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training were attractive to the youth, in majority patriotically oriented. Thanks to this, the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training in the years 1927–1939 was able to popularize participation in civil defence training and the number of people willing to participate in the training increased steadily. Taking into consideration the scale of activities, nowadays it is difficult to accurately estimate the number of youth participating in civil defence training, however, it was a mass participation. Therefore, it can be acknowledged that the effects of work of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training had a significant impact on the

entire process of defence preparations of the society of the Second Polish Republic (Pindel, 1995, pp. 77, 78, 92).

The recollection of activities of the pre-war State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training seems necessary in the face of the increased interest of the society, especially the youth, in defence matters and the patriotic past. Numerous organizations and associations, such as: the Polish Scouting Association, the Polish Organization "Strzelec", the Home Army Unit "Orlęta", the National Defence League, schools and military classes, reconstruction groups, military associations and a number of other organizations and associations having in their statutes activities related to the state defence, testify to the pro-defence activity of the Polish society, especially the youth.

Obviously the circumstances and conditions have changed significantly, but the idea and organizational form of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training seems to be relevant to this day. It is especially essential that the activities of the State Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training and its provincial structures did not impose or monopolize the defence activities of the society, but only financially and organizationally supported all communities in their activities related to civil military training. In a natural way the organizational structure of this institution should fit into the administrative division of the country, and the essential role was to be played by the self-government.

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