

EDUCATIONAL RESTRUCTURING AND CHANGE: POST-COMMUNIST EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN POLAND

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Abstract: *This study provides an overall picture of educational transformation in Poland since the political changes in 1989. The transformation process in Poland is analyzed in accordance with a common theoretical framework distinguishing three phases of transformation: (1) deconstruction, (2) reconstruction/modernization/stabilization and (3) systemic reform. The process of transformation is analyzed in terms of ten specific areas, including, among others things, curriculum, structural changes, teachers, the social dimension. It is argued that the changes introduced in the reconstruction phase of the transformation were more important and powerful than the structural reform introduced in 1999. In the last part, the recent initiatives of an ultra-conservative minister of education, Roman Giertych, are commented upon.*

Key words: *Poland, educational transformation, educational system, educational policy, dimensions of transformation, systemic reform, civic education, NGOs in education*

1. Basic Information on the Country

Official name. The official name of the Polish Republic is Rzeczpospolita Polska, "rzeczpospolita" being the Polonised version of the Latin *res publica*. Poland is a parliamentary republic and Warsaw is the country's capital.

Main turning points of history. The beginning of the Polish state is associated with the dynasty of Piast at the end of the 10th century. In 966 Mieszko I, a member of this dynasty, was baptised and brought Christianity to the country. The Piasts united the lands which roughly resembled the present territory of Poland. During the following centuries the Polish Commonwealth (Poland united with Lithuania) expanded eastwards and ruled over vast territories situated between the Baltic and Black Seas. In the 17th and 18th centuries Poland became involved in long wars which weakened the country while neighbouring Russia, Prussia and Austria were increasing their political power. This led to the partitions of Poland during the last decades of the 18th century. Efforts to regain independence in the 19th century were fruitless. Poland emerged again as an independent state after WWI in 1918. In September 1939, the invasion of Poland by Germany started WWII. In 1945 Poland, liberated by Soviet troops, fell under communist rule. Authoritarian rule led to a growing opposition which culminated in the formation of the Solidarity trade union in 1980. In 1981 martial law was imposed and for many years Solidarity became an underground movement. In 1989, after the so called "round table" negotiations, the

first partially free parliamentary elections took place. A dynamic period of political and economic transformation began.

Institutions of the democratic state. The functioning of the Polish State is defined by the Constitution of 2 April 1997. The legislative power is exercised by the Parliament (Sejm) and the Senate (Senat). The Sejm is the lower chamber of the parliament and consists of 460 members elected according to a proportional representation system for a 4-year term. The Sejm supervises the government. The Senat, the upper chamber, consists of 100 members.

The executive power is exercised by the President and the Council of Ministers. The President, who is the head of the State and protects its sovereignty, is elected by the nation for a 5-year term.

Political parties in the first half of 2007 – the ruling coalition: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość “Law and Justice”, Samoobrona “Self-defence”, Liga Polskich Rodzin (the League of Polish Families). The opposition: Platforma Obywatelska, (Citizens Platform) Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (the Alliance of Democratic Left). In August 2007 the coalition collapsed, at present only “Law and Justice” rules, the parliament stopped to exist. The general election will take place on October 21th.

Inhabitants. Poland covers 312,685 square kilometres and has a population of 38.18 million. 61.5% of Poles live in towns and urban areas and 38.5% inhabit rural areas. From the year 2002 we have seen a natural decrease in the population. In the year 2005 there were 9.7 deaths to every 9.6 live births per 1,000 inhabitants. The official language is Polish. Poland is very homogenous as regards nationality; it is estimated that no more than 1,500,000 people are members of national minorities: German, Byelorussian, Ukrainian, Slovak, Lithuanian, Romany as well as the ethnic minority of Kashubian. The situation of nationalities is unclear because it is estimated that ca. 1,500,000 Poles left Poland after 2004 (for an undefined period or for ever?) and moved to Western Europe. Approximately the same number of persons arrived from the countries of the former Soviet Union and Vietnam and they now work in Poland’s shadow economy. Religion: Poland is predominantly Roman Catholic (about 35.8 million baptized). The Catholic church also includes the Uniate Church (Greek-Catholic) with a congregation of ca. 82,000. Other religions and denominations are represented by a large number of relatively small communities. Among them the biggest are: Orthodox – 510,000, Protestant and related – 140,000, Jehovah witnesses – 126,000 and Old Catholic – 50,000.

Economic characteristics. After the collapse of the socialist form of enterprise we are witnessing in the present decade the steady growth of GDP, which in percentage terms was +5.4 in 2004, +3.2 in 2005, +5.8 in 2006. At the end of 2006 the rate of unemployment was 14.9% and average annual inflation 2.1% (2005). In June 2006 the rate of unemployment within the 25-34 age cohort was 27.9% – a reason for emigration from the country.

International context. In 1991 Poland became a member of the Council of Europe, in 1996 a member of the OECD and in 1999 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). On 1 May 2004 Poland became a member of the European Union.

2. Educational System: Actual Situation 2005 – 2006

2.1. Pre-primary Education

Pre-primary education is regarded as the first level of the school system. It concerns children from 3 to 6 years of age. As of 2004/05, 6-year-old children are obliged to complete a year of preparation for primary education called "0 grade". The classes are attached either to kindergartens or primary schools.

2.2. Compulsory Education

There are 3 phases of compulsory education:

Klasa zerowa ("0 grade") for 6-year-old children

Szkoła podstawowa (6-year primary school) for children 7-13 years of age. This school is divided into 2 stages:

stage 1 – integrated teaching, 7-10 years of age;

stage 2 – teaching based on separate subjects, 10-13 years of age.

Gimnazjum (3-year lower secondary school) 13-16 years of age

stage 3 – teaching based on separate subjects.

2.3. Post-compulsory Education

(upper secondary and post secondary level)

There are 7 types of schools in upper secondary and post secondary education

- Liceum ogólnokształcące (general upper secondary school) 16-19 years of age
- Liceum profilowane (specialized upper secondary school) 16-19 years of age;
- Technikum (technical secondary school) 16-20 years of age;
- Zasadnicza szkoła zawodowa (basic vocational school) 16-18/19 years of age;
- Uzupełniająca liceum ogólnokształcące (supplementary general secondary school) 18/19-20/21 years of age;
- Technikum uzupełniające (supplementary technical secondary school) 18/19-21/22 years of age;
- Szkoła policealna (post-secondary school) 19-21 years of age (very rarely 20).

The school year is divided into two semesters. It comprises around 185 days between September and June.

2.4. Higher Education

There are state and non-state (private) higher education institutions. The final examination certificate at the end of upper secondary school (świadectwo dojrzałości) is required by all institutions for admission to higher education. Additional admission requirements depend on the type of institution or faculty.

The first cycle studies (higher vocational education) last from 3 to 4 years and finish with the vocational qualification diploma and the title of licencjat (equivalent to BA) or inżynier (engineer) which give access to the job market or to extended higher education (the second cycle studies) and to obtaining the title of magister (MA) or its equivalent. After obtaining an MA diploma one can apply for doctoral studies – the third cycle of studies. One can learn using the form of full-time or extramural study.

3. Transformation of the Educational System 1989 – 2006

3.1 The Process

Deconstruction

As the first non-communist government of Prime Minister Mazowiecki had already taken over the responsibility for education in 1989 it was obvious which relics of the past needed to be overcome. It was necessary to:

- increase the percentage of youth graduating from secondary schools, which awarded diplomas allowing the students to go on to tertiary education,
- introduce new ideas into the teaching of humanities, particularly history, which had been especially falsified;
- draw up and implement a civic education programme,
- increase the scope of foreign language teaching,
- analyse and determine the new role of vocational training.

The demands for specific changes were at the beginning of the transformation based on the ideas of especially active groups of teachers – mostly teaching in secondary schools in big cities – as well as on documents prepared six months earlier for the “round table” negotiations by Zespół Oświaty Niezależnej (Association for Independent Education, part of Solidarity) which was secretly active between 1982 and 1989. Some deemed the demands for the eradication of communist relics “a return to normality”.

During those first years (1989-1991) it was natural for the new educational system to define itself in terms of negating whatever the communist authorities had been promoting, and it could not have been otherwise. For decades cut off from educational debates going on in the West as well as from trends which could be found there, it was difficult for us to imagine what new perspectives the development of our educational systems offered.

Reconstruction, Modernization, Stabilization

Between 1990 and 1999, when the structural reform of the educational system was underway, there took place many events which, in modernising education, prepared the ground for more radical changes. Among them, the following should be considered in more detail:

1. The appearance of educational NGO's which resulted in schools being opened that were named "civic" or "social". These schools were in fact non-profit-making private schools, created by groups of teachers or teachers and parents. They had a notable influence on the educational programme and methods. Many parents became involved in the creation of learning conditions which they believed to be more suitable for their children. Somewhat later private for-profit schools also appeared.

2. The Parliament's passing of the Act of 12 September 1990 on Schools of Higher Education, which enabled private colleges and universities to be established. This had a big influence on tertiary education, raising young people's aspirations and – what became apparent a few years later – causing a previously unheard of (and quite unexpected) rise in the number of people graduating from tertiary education institutions. Between 1990 and 2005 the number of college and university students increased almost fivefold.

3. Intensive actions aimed at the development of foreign language teaching. Widespread knowledge of foreign languages was considered a priority of the educational system as early as at the end of 1989. According to our estimations, we needed ca 25,000 teachers of English and the demand for teachers of German and French amounted to about 8,000 each. Therefore, in the first half of 1990 we prepared a programme of foreign language teacher training in a new type of school – the Foreign Language Teacher Training College. During 1990 and 1991, 55 colleges opened all over Poland, mainly in towns in which there did not exist institutions of tertiary education. In 1990, Polish universities offered only traditional "philological" training. Three-year colleges were the first attempt to prepare foreign language teachers in a modern way.

4. In September 1990, there came into existence a legal framework for the teaching of religion in primary and secondary schools. The decision as to whether a primary school student was to participate in religion classes was left to the parents and in the case of secondary school students – to the students, who nonetheless had to have their parent's approval. During the classes no grades were to be given. For students not participating in religion classes, ethics classes were to be introduced.

5. The Parliament's passing of the Education System Act of 7 September 1991, which ordered the entire matter of primary and secondary education.

6. The possibility of using other countries' educational experience – consent was given for the creation of Waldorff or Montessori-type schools or schools within the "The International Baccalaureate" system;

7. Introduction of changes in the education and training of teachers – taking into account the experience of other countries;

8. The undertaking of intensive actions aimed at introducing computers and the Internet into schools; especially important for the development of education was the initiative undertaken by the Sejm in the 1990s, aimed at providing each Polish school with internet access.

9. Making it possible to create "integrated or inclusive schools", in which

handicapped children and so-called regular children study together;

10. A large increase in the number of students applying to secondary schools awarding the "matura" diploma and, resulting from this, a decrease in the number of students wanting to study at secondary vocational schools (which did not award the diploma). The vocational schools had mostly been connected with large socialist industrial plants, awaiting their own transformation.

11. The abolition of the state's monopoly in creating the curriculum and the fact that many institutions and economic entities were now allowed to create and publish school books and teaching materials. Before 1989, there existed one institute authorised to create the curriculum and one state-owned publishing house authorised to publish school books. In the 1990s, this could be done by groups of teachers, educational institutions, private publishing houses, etc. In 1991 the Ministry of Education stopped publishing official curricula, and instead formulated for each subject the so-called core curriculum, i.e. the basic assumptions concerning each taught subject. As long as he/she took into account the core curriculum, each author could create his/her own curriculum and textbook. The procedure of making textbooks available to be used in schools was not very complicated and it was easy to attain the Minister's approval.

12. A gradual handing over to local, district and regional authorities of the power to run schools and educational institutions and, connected with this, the long – and far from finished – process of those authorities' learning how to develop and shape local educational policies. The communes (gminy) took over the responsibility for running primary and 3-year lower secondary schools, while districts (powiaty) took over the responsibility for higher secondary schools.

13. The increase in the importance of the principal and the school teachers. The appearance of the opportunity to create a type of local educational plan at each school, making it possible to take into account the particular needs of the environment in which the school operates. The enabling of teachers in public schools to implement their own "individual" curricula.

14. The appearance of the possibility for schools to take into account the needs of the region as well as needs connected with the pupils belonging to a specific ethnic group (e.g. teaching the Kashubian language and cultural heritage in kindergartens and schools has only been possible since 1990). Also in the 1990s there appeared the possibility of original curricula which encompass knowledge of the region.

15. A sudden development of different new non-government organizations, very active in the field of education; they realize many important tasks with minimal (or without any) support from local or national governments. Many social organizations and NGOs have more and more to say when it comes to education (e.g. the role of the Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej (Centre for Civic Education) or the „Edukacja dla demokracji” (Education for Democracy Foundation). In my view the development of these organizations is more important for education than some ministerial reforms.

16. The development in recent years of a movement aimed at protecting small schools. Due to demographic changes, the number of students in many villages

has significantly diminished. As a result, the district authorities have often decided that some schools must be shut down. There appeared the tendency to protect these schools, because the fall in the number of students could be seen as creating an opportunity to greatly improve the teaching conditions, introducing a more individualized approach to the pupils, etc. The movement itself has an influence on the awakening of a social responsibility for the children's education.

As can be seen, most of the achievements in the scope of the development of education do not result from planned „constructivist” activities, but rather from the abolition of limitations, which had hindered people's freedom to take the initiative.

Systemic Reform

Until 1998/99, there existed an 8-year primary school, after which students could continue their education in a 4-year general secondary school, a 4- or 5-year technical secondary school, a 4-year general vocational school or a 3-year basic vocational school. In 1999, a reform was introduced in compliance with the Act of 8 January 1999 on the Implementation of the Education System Reform. Since 1999/2000, students have first gone to 6-year primary schools, then to a 3-year gimnazjum (lower secondary school) which – like the primary school – is compulsory, and afterwards either to a 3-year specialized upper secondary school or to a 2-year vocational school. In November 2001 it was decided that old-type schools, such as technical upper secondary schools and general upper secondary schools, would still function but their educational cycle would be reduced by one year. 2- or 3-year basic vocational schools were also reactivated, graduates of which could take an exam confirming their vocational qualifications and, after finishing a 2-year supplementary general secondary school or a 3-year supplementary secondary technical school, could take the “matura” examination.

According to the plan for school reform the following three main areas of the education system were to be the targets of the new system:

Raising the level of society's education by developing high and higher education: this target was to be achieved by introducing 'gymnasia' and prolonging the period of compulsory schooling by one year, and also by creating a new type of high school with a professional profile.

Creating equal educational opportunities for all children and teenagers: the obstacles which do not let some students get well educated (parents' economic status and their level of education, place of living, disability) were to be overcome by a system of scholarships and by creating better conditions for integrating students with SEN.

Improving the quality of education: this included changing the curricula, preparing the graduates both for adult life and for permanent self-education. The new curricula were created so as to provide each graduate with the basic skills necessary for further learning, interpersonal communication, teamwork, a creative attitude towards problem-solving, good command of computer programmes and foreign languages.

3.2. Particular Dimensions of Transformation

3.2.1. Aims and Functions of Education

The basic principles of the Polish education system are included in the Education System Act of 7 September 1991. Education is defined as part of “the common welfare of the whole of society”. It should be guided by the principles contained in the Constitution and by instructions contained in universal, international legislation and conventions.

In particular, this system should provide a fulfilment of the right of each citizen in the Republic of Poland to learn; the right of children and young people to be educated and cared for; support provided by schools to back up the educational role of the family; the possibility for various entities to establish and run schools and institutions; the adjustment of the contents, methods and organization of education to pupils’ psycho-physical abilities, and the possibility of availing oneself of psychological assistance; the possibility for disabled and maladjusted children and young people to learn at all types of schools and for general access to secondary schools.

Key legislative documents are:

- The Education System Act of 7 September 1991;
- The Act of 8 January 1999 on the Implementation of the Education System Reform;
- The Act of 26 January 1982 – Teachers’ Charter;
- The Act of Higher Education of 27 July 2005 replacing the Act of Schools of Higher Education (1990) and the Act on Higher Vocational Schools (1997).

3.2.2. System of Educational Management and Administration

The main role in initiating and exercising control over current and long-term educational policy is played by the Minister of National Education.

Through its members in the Education Committee, the *Sejm* [Lower Chamber of the Parliament] may present its proposals and initiatives, although, in the majority of cases, the Committee works on materials that have originally been prepared by the Ministry of National Education. The Parliament is responsible for the final version of legal acts that determine the orientation of educational policy and the amount of money earmarked for education.

Teachers’ Unions have a considerable role in shaping current educational policy. The Minister for Education is obliged to consult Teachers’ Unions on the most important decisions, and in certain cases he must have their approval.

The Ministry of National Education is responsible for nearly the whole system of education. Vocational schools, which in the past were run by other ministries, are now the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education. At present only art schools, as well as correctional institutions are under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Justice, respectively.

The national educational policy is developed and carried out centrally, while the

administration of education and the running of schools, pre-school institutions and other educational establishments are decentralised. The responsibility for the administration of public nursery and primary schools (and since 1999/2000 also 'gymnasia') has been delegated to local authorities (communes). It has become the statutory responsibility of *powiaty* (districts) to administer upper secondary schools, art schools and schools for children with SEN. The provinces (voivodships) have a co-ordinating function, supervising the implementation of the policy of the Ministry and being responsible for pedagogical supervision.

Central Level

The Minister of National Education co-ordinates and carries out the state education policy, and is partly responsible for supervising the work of education superintendents (*kuratoria*).

The Minister determines the timetables, core curricula, conditions and procedures for the approval of curricula, textbooks and teaching aids. He/she is responsible for the rules for assessing and promoting pupils and for conducting tests and examinations. He/she determines the required standards for tests and examinations, and the rules and conditions for implementing innovations and experiments by schools. He/she is also responsible for the organisation of the school year and for the procedures concerning the organisation of psychological and pedagogical support in schools.

Regional Level

The regional level in Poland is the level of 'voivodship'. The number of voivodships is 16. The education superintendent (*kurator*) is the chief educational body at regional level. He/she is responsible for general administration of education in a voivodship. He/she is appointed by the head of the province, the 'voivode'. The education superintendent implements the policy of the minister of education. On behalf of the voivode, the superintendent is responsible for pedagogical supervision over public and non-public schools.

District Level

The district level in Poland is the level of '*powiat*' (an intermediate administrative unit between the voivodship and the commune). There are 379 districts now.

The districts exercise administrative control over upper secondary general and vocational schools, as well as over post-secondary schools and public special schools. They are also responsible for the management of art schools, sport schools, lifelong education centres, psychological and pedagogical guidance centres, and out-of-school education centres.

Local Level

The local level in Poland is the level of the commune (*gmina*). In 2004 there were

2,478 communes, most of which were rural ones. Communes exercise administrative control over pre-school institutions, primary schools and lower secondary schools called a "gymnasium" (Nota bene: "gymnazjum" in Poland is a mainstream school for all children – it is not a school for the academically gifted as in Germany or Czech Republic.) Pedagogical supervision is excluded from their tasks - it is the responsibility of the education superintendent (*kurator*).

Educational Institution Level

School heads are recruited on the basis of an open competition and employed by the school governing body for 5 years. In justified cases this period may be shortened, but not to less than 1 school year. In consultation with the school governing body, the school head appoints and dismisses his/her deputy and other executive staff, if those posts are in accordance with the statute of a school.

The school head manages the school (institution) and functions as its ambassador to the outside world, takes care of the pupils and provides the conditions for their harmonious psychological and physical development, applies the resolutions of the school council or the teachers' council, has budgetary control and is responsible for the proper use of school finances, and co-operates with higher schools and teacher training institutions in the field of organising teacher pedagogical training.

The school head, being the manager of the institution, decides also on the employment and dismissal of teachers and non-teaching staff and on assessing the performance of teachers.

3.2.3. Financing of the School System

In 2004 public spending on the whole system of education (with higher education included) was estimated at 5.4% of GDP. In 2005 public spending on primary and secondary education (without higher education but with post secondary schools included) was equal to 4.1% of GDP.

All educational tasks carried out by the three levels of local government are financed within the framework of a general subsidy from the State Budget. In the year 2000 a uniform system of allocation of funds, using the algorithmic formula based on the number of pupils, was adopted. This formula is based on the real number of pupils, adequately increased by the system of weightings (taking into account specific conditions, i.e. rural areas, as well as specific educational tasks, i.e. the presence of SEN pupils, integration of SEN pupils into mainstream education, vocational training, sports schools).

The local government unit, as a body running or subsidising the school, is responsible for the designing of a budget programme (i.e. a plan of expenditure) for all schools and educational institutions in its respective area.

Educational investments are a local government responsibility, although they can be co-financed from the State Budget through the voivodship authorities.

3.2.4. Structure of the Educational System

Pre-school Education

A child aged 3 to 6 may receive pre-primary education, which is not compulsory, but the majority of six year-old children attend either kindergartens or pre-primary classes attached to primary schools.

Pre-school education in Poland underwent certain changes caused by a decrease in the number of pre-school children and by the partial introduction of fees into this type of educational institution. In 1995 the attendance rate was calculated as 46.2% of children aged 3 to 6 and in 1998 as 49%. In the school year 2003/2004 52.3% of 3 to 6 year olds attended pre-school institutions.

Public kindergartens are administered and financed by local governments – communes. Parents' payments cover children's meals, extra lessons, and a so-called extra fee if a child attends the kindergarten for more than 5 hours a day.

According to the Education Act of 1991, pre-school education is treated as the first level of the education system in Poland. Starting from the school year 2004/05 children aged 6 have been obliged to complete the "zero year" either in a kindergarten or in a pre-primary class attached to a primary school.

The main goal of pre-primary education is to support and stimulate the child's development. Education of a 6-year-old includes teaching primary reading skills and basic mathematics. In the school year 2003/2004 97.7% of 6 year-olds attended pre-schools or 0 grade classes at schools. The kindergarten is obliged to provide unpaid teaching and nursing for at least 5 hours a day – the time necessary for the implementation of the content included in the Core Curriculum for Pre-School Education. The majority of pre-school institutions work for 9 hours a day. The number of children in one section cannot exceed 25. In the case of integration-based and other special pre-school classes the limits are lower (15-20, among which 3-5 are SEN children). The main criterion used for grouping children is age. Grouping together children of a different age is also justified in certain circumstances.

Compulsory Education

Full-time compulsory education starts during the calendar year in which the child reaches 6 years of age. Six-year-old children are obliged to complete a year of preparation for primary education called "0 grade". Compulsory education lasts 10 years, normally continuing until the pupil is 16 years of age, but in no case continuing beyond the age of 18 years. It covers education in the zero grade, 6-year primary schools (*szkoły podstawowe*) and 3-year lower secondary schools (*gimnazja*). Part-time compulsory education, however, in school or out-of-school classes, lasts until 18 years of age (based on the Constitution of the Republic of Poland adopted in 1997). Compulsory education is free of charge for all pupils.

Primary Education

From 1999/2000 children between the ages of 7 and 13 have been attending new primary schools for a period of 6 years. Admission is based on age. The general objectives of the primary school are formulated as follows: to develop in children the ability for self-expression, reading and writing, the ability to solve arithmetical problems, the ability to use simple tools, to develop habits of social life, to develop cognitive abilities enabling understanding of the world, to develop conscious motivation to prepare for undertaking tasks requiring systematic intellectual and physical effort, to develop the aesthetic and moral sensitivity of children and their creative abilities.

The organisation of the school year is defined by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry issues the calendar, specifying the dates of the start and the end of the school year and school holidays. The school year is divided into two semesters.

Classes are organised by age, by subject or by level of competence (more and more often FL teaching classes are subdivided).

Teachers are free to choose teaching materials, depending on the finances of the school. They also choose textbooks, from the list approved by the Minister of National Education.

Compulsory Secondary Education (*Gimnazjum*)

In the school year 1999/2000 a new type of school, i.e. the *gimnazjum*, was established. This school constitutes a lower secondary level. The only admission requirement is successful completion of the 6-year primary school and attainment of the primary school leaving certificate.

The main objectives are formulated as follows:

- to introduce the pupil to the world of science by means of teaching the language, concepts, theories and methodologies characteristic of a given discipline at a level facilitating further education;
- to arouse and develop individual interests;
- to introduce the pupil to the world of culture and arts;
- to develop in pupils social skills and abilities through creating possibilities of experience through co-operation within peer groups.

The organisation of the school follows the example of primary education.

Post-compulsory Education – General Upper Secondary and Vocational Schools

The upper secondary education covers the age group 16 to 18 or 19/20. In the reformed post-gymnasium education the following schools have been operational since the school year 2002/03:

- *liceum ogólnokształcące* (3-year general secondary school) offering 3 years of full-time general upper secondary education for students aged 16 to 19. It offers the *Matura* examination necessary for admission to higher education.
- *liceum profilowane* (3-year specialised secondary school) - new institution

established in 2002/03 offering 3 years of full-time general and specialised upper secondary education for students aged 16 to 19. It offers the *Matura* examination necessary for admission to higher education.

- *technikum* (4-year technical secondary school) - institution offering 4 years of full-time technical and vocational upper secondary education for students aged 16 to 20. It offers the *Matura* examination necessary for admission to higher education.
- *zasadnicza szkoła zawodowa* (2 to 3-year basic vocational school) - institution offering 2 to 3 years of full-time upper secondary vocational education for students aged 16 to 18. The leavers have access to a trade or occupation or to the *liceum uzupełniające* or *technikum uzupełniające*.

At the levels of upper secondary and post-secondary education in Poland there are also the following types of institutions:

- *uzupełniające liceum ogólnokształcące* (2-year supplementary general secondary school) – a new institution introduced in 2004/05 offering 2 years of full- or part-time general upper secondary education for students aged 18 to 20 in preparation for the *Matura* examination. This school is meant for those leaving the 2/3-year vocational school.
- *technikum uzupełniające* (3-year supplementary secondary technical school) – a new institution introduced in 2004/05 offering 3 years of full- or part-time vocational upper secondary education for students aged 18 to 21 in preparation for the *Matura* examination. This school is meant for those leaving the 2/3-year vocational school.
- *szkoła policealna* (maximum 2.5-year post-secondary school) – this institution enables people with secondary education to obtain a vocational qualification in the form of a diploma upon passing an exam.

Upper secondary schools are non-compulsory and mostly coeducational. There are also a small number of single-sex schools within vocational and professional education. Public (state) schools are free of charge. The main objective of general upper secondary education is to prepare youth for admission to higher education establishments of various types. The objective of vocational upper secondary education is to prepare youth for the world of work. The organisation of school time is arranged according to the same rules as those established for primary schools.

Post-secondary Vocational Education

Post-secondary schools (*szkoły policealne*), are included as part of secondary education in the Polish classification and assigned to level 4 in the ISCED. Post-secondary schools admit first of all graduates of general upper secondary schools. Most of them require only a secondary school leaving certificate, not the *matura* certificate.

Post-secondary schools prepare students for work in blue-collar and equivalent occupations or in occupations and specialities that require secondary vocational

qualifications. The period of instruction varies. For the majority of occupations it is two or two and a half years, for some only one year.

Students in these schools are trained as nurses, accountants, administrative personnel for enterprises and hotels, computer specialists or librarians. Those who complete a course of study for a blue-collar occupation receive the title of qualified worker. Those who have completed a two- or two and a half - year course of study receive the title of technician or equivalent.

Private Schools

In line with the Education System Act of 1991, schools can be of two types: public (state) schools, which offer free education within the framework of the core curricula, and non-public. The latter can be civic (social), church or private schools. The schools are called "social" or "civic" because they are non profit-oriented and because of the huge amount of work that is invested in them by people from local social groups – mostly parents and teachers. All these schools may have their own curricula, which are approved by the minister of education. They are financed by fees received from parents. Non-public schools with the rights of public schools are eligible for a grant calculated according to the number of pupils, which equals 100% of the average cost of educating a pupil in a public school. Non-public schools in Poland have the right to issue school certificates that are recognised by all other schools and by the universities.

Most non-public schools have small numbers of pupils and small classes. They may be distinguished from the public schools by their personalised teaching programmes, by a wider range of curriculum choice and by a higher standard of foreign language teaching.

Non-public primary school pupils make up 1.7% of the total number of pupils attending primary schools, pupils in non-public lower secondary schools make up 2.3%, non-public general upper secondary school pupils about 3.8% and non-public vocational secondary and basic vocational school pupils - 1.8%.

3.2.5. Curriculum, Curricular Policy and Development

Pre-school Education

There are three sets of curricula (prepared on the basis of the core curriculum) approved for pre-school education. Two of them concern children aged 3-6, one deals with six year-olds only. Kindergartens and pre-school classes attached to primary schools are obliged to follow one of these curricula. Pre-primary teachers can write so-called "authors' curricula", always based on the national core curriculum.

The core curriculum for pre-school education comprises the basic objectives and the teacher's tasks set within a framework of 4 educational areas. The following areas of activities have been defined: acquisition of knowledge and understanding of oneself and the world, acquisition of skills, finding one's place in the peer

group and community, construction of a system of values. There are no official recommendations with respect to the methods. A pre-primary school teacher has the right to choose the most suitable ones.

Primary Education

The scope of primary education is determined by three elements: the core curriculum, outline timetables and requirement standards. Core curricula have to be respected by each school.

Education in the 6-year primary school is divided into 2 stages: stage I – grades 1 to 3, called integrated teaching and stage II – grades 4 to 6.

The teaching at stage 1 is meant to provide a smooth transition from pre-primary to school education. Educational activities are conducted according to a flexible timetable prepared by the teacher

During this stage the number of teaching hours per week for a period of 3 years is 72 (52 hours of integrated teaching, 6 hours for religion/ethics and 12 hours left to the school head's discretion).

The school governing body is allowed to increase the number of compulsory teaching hours by a number not exceeding 3 hours per week for one grade in one school year. However, the weekly number of compulsory teaching hours, as well as religion/ethics classes and additional classes, cannot exceed a maximum of 23 hours in grades 1 to 3.

Stage 2 of the primary school covers grades 4, 5 and 6. Teaching at this stage is arranged by subjects listed in the outline timetable (Polish language, History and Civics, A Modern Foreign Language, Mathematics, Natural Science, Music, Art, Technology, Computer Science, Physical Education, Religion/Ethics).

In addition to the particular subjects, the following cross-curricular themes have been introduced at this stage: health education, ecological education, reading and media education, education for society, education for family life, cultural heritage of the region and patriotic and civic education.

The school head is responsible for the inclusion of the cross-curricular themes in the school curriculum. During this stage the number of teaching hours per week over a period of 3 years is 87 (72 hours of subject teaching, 6 hours for religion/ethics and 9 hours left to the school head's discretion).

On the basis of the outline timetable, the school head develops the school timetable, divided into school years. The school governing body is allowed to increase the number of compulsory teaching hours by a number not exceeding, 3 hours per week for one grade in one school year. The weekly number of compulsory teaching hours, as well as religion/ethics classes and additional classes, cannot exceed a maximum of 28 hours in grades 4 to 6.

Teachers have the right to choose forms and methods of teaching. They are also free to choose textbooks from the list approved by the Minister.

Gimnazjum

According to the core curriculum for the *gymnasium* the teaching at this stage is arranged in subjects, listed in the outline timetable (Polish language, History, Civic Education, A Modern Foreign Language, Mathematics, Physics and Astronomy, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Fine Art/Music, Technology, Computer Science, Physical Education, Lessons with the Class Tutor, Religion/Ethics).

Beside separate subjects, the following cross-curricular themes (named "pathways") have been introduced at this stage: philosophical education, reading and media education, health education, ecological education, regional education – the cultural heritage of the region, European education and Polish culture in the context of Mediterranean civilisation.

The school head is responsible for the inclusion of these pathways in the school curriculum. At this stage the number of teaching hours per week over a period of 3 years is 94 (82 hours of subject teaching, 6 hours for religion/ethics and 6 hours left to the school head's discretion).

The school governing body is allowed to increase the number of compulsory teaching hours by a number not exceeding 3 hours per week for one grade in one school year. The weekly number of compulsory teaching hours, additional teaching hours and religion/ethics classes cannot exceed a total of 31 hours in all grades of the lower secondary school. Subject teachers have the right to choose methods of teaching.

Upper Secondary Schools

Core curricula for general education in all types of upper secondary schools are included in the Annex to the Regulation by the Minister of National Education of 26 February 2002.

They are divided by subjects: Polish language, A Modern Foreign Language, Latin and Ancient Culture, Mathematics, History, Civics, Geography, Biology, Physics and Astronomy, Chemistry, Technology, Information Technology, Art, Music, Self-Defence Training, Physical Education, Ethics (optional), Philosophy (optional), Education for Family Life, Cultural Studies, Entrepreneurship, A Minority Language.

Besides separate subjects, the following cross-curricular themes have been introduced in the general upper secondary school, in the upper secondary specialised school and in the upper secondary technical school: reading and media education, ecological education, European education, philosophical education, health education, regional education – cultural heritage of the region, preparation for family life.

In all upper secondary schools there are obligatory core curricula defined for the basic level of teaching. In general upper secondary schools (*liceum ogólnokształcące*), however, starting at grade 1, there are 2 to 4 subjects chosen to be taught at the advanced level.

The core curriculum has to be respected by the school – but the teachers are free to follow one of the selected curricula with the use of a variety of textbooks

selected from the list approved by the Ministry.

During this stage in *liceum ogólnokształcące* the number of teaching hours per week over a period of 3 years is 98 (88 hours of subject teaching, 6 hours for religion/ethics and 4 hours left to the school head discretion).

The number of teaching hours in the 4-year *technikum* is 140 (129 hours of subject teaching, 8 hours for religion/ethics and 3 hours left to the school head's discretion).

The number of teaching hours in the 2-year basic vocational school is 70 (63 hours of subject teaching, 4 hours for religion/ethics and 3 hours left to the school head's discretion).

The number of teaching hours in the 3-year specialised 'lyceum' is 100 (91 hours of subject teaching, 6 hours for religion/ethics and 3 hours left to the school head's discretion).

The school governing body is allowed to increase the number of compulsory teaching hours by a number not exceeding 3 hours per week for one grade in one school year. The weekly number of compulsory teaching hours, additional teaching hours and religion/ethics classes cannot exceed a total maximum of 35 hours in all grades.

Subject teachers have the right to choose methods of teaching and are free to choose textbooks from the list approved by the Ministry.

3.2.6. Monitoring and Quality Control

Administrative and pedagogical supervision have become separated. Pedagogical supervision over the school is exercised by regional education authorities: *kurator* (superintendent), while general supervision (organisational, administrative and financial) is carried out by the school governing bodies (commune, district or voivodship self-governing authorities).

The measurement of educational achievements and the partial assessment of school performance are carried out now by the Central Examination Commission and eight Regional Examination Commissions. The external examinations at the end of the primary school and the gymnasium have been implemented since 2002. External support for schools and teachers is mainly provided by the National In-Service Teacher Training Centre, by regional centres and by educational advisors.

Pre-primary School

There are no formal principles for evaluating or monitoring pre-primary school children. The only exception is so called „balance-sheet of the child aged 6” which is connected with the recruitment to primary schools. This form of evaluation concerns only the state of health and physical development of a child. It aims at the selection of pupils that ought to be directed to special schools.

In public kindergartens, the teacher is responsible for continuous observation of the child and keeping up-to-date records of his/her achievements.

Primary School

In grades 1-3 pupils are promoted automatically if their achievements are assessed positively. Repetitions of the year are exceptional, and have to be justified by psychologists and accepted by the parents. In years 1-3 the assessment is descriptive.

Starting with grade 4, the teacher has the following scale of marks at his/her disposal: 6 - excellent, 5 - very good, 4 - good, 3 - satisfactory, 2 - acceptable, 1 - unsatisfactory. School marks, as well as assessment criteria, should be transparent to the pupil and his/her parents. Pupils are assessed separately in each subject. The evaluation depends entirely on the teacher. Only final marks per semester (half of the school year) and at the end of the school year have to be approved by the teachers' council in each school. The results of the assessment carried out during the year are taken into account in the end-of-year assessment. The assessment is divided into partial, semester and annual assessment. Pupils have the right to take an examination to verify the level of their ability if the semester or annual mark, given by the teacher, is in their or their parents' opinion too low. Pupils also receive marks for their behaviour (conduct) according to the following scale: excellent, very good, good, acceptable, unacceptable and reprehensible.

Starting with grade 4, a pupil is promoted to a higher grade if he has received „acceptable” (2) marks or above for all compulsory subjects at the end of the school year. If he/she receives an “unsatisfactory” mark in one subject, he/she can repeat the exam in this subject. A pupil who has failed the repeat is not promoted and remains in the same grade. The teachers' council of a school can decide about the conditional promotion of a pupil who has got an “unsatisfactory” mark in one subject only.

An external standardised test upon completion of the primary school (grade 6) was introduced in 2002. It provides pupils and parents as well as schools with information about the level of achievements of the primary school leaver. These tests are comparable on the national scale. The primary school leaving certificate is required for admission to lower secondary schools. The result of the competence test is mentioned in this certificate.

Gimnazjum

Internal evaluation at gimnazjum level is the same as that in primary education. A pupil is promoted to a higher grade if he/she has received “acceptable” (2) marks or above for all compulsory subjects at the end of the school year. If he/she receives an “unsatisfactory” mark in one subject, he/she can repeat the exam in this subject. A pupil who has failed the repeat is not promoted and remains in the same grade. The teachers' council of a school can decide about the conditional promotion of a pupil who has got an “unsatisfactory” mark in one subject only. At the end of each school year pupils will receive certificates in a standardised form.

At the end of the 3rd year of the gymnasium, an external standardised examination has been introduced. This examination checks abilities, skills and knowledge in the

field of humanities and science. It is compulsory for all pupils. The results are indicated on the gymnasium leaving certificate. They are comparable on a national scale.

The number of points indicated on the gymnasium leaving certificate decides about the pupils' admission to an upper secondary school. The detailed admission rules are defined by each upper secondary (post-gimnazjum) school which opens admissions to new pupils.

The Upper Secondary General Schools

The principles of internal evaluation are the same as those at primary schools. A pupil is promoted to a higher grade if he/she has received "acceptable" (2) marks or above for all compulsory subjects at the end of the school year. If he/she receives an "unsatisfactory" mark in one subject, he/she can repeat the exam. A pupil who has failed the repeat is not promoted and remains in the same grade. The teachers' council of a school can decide about conditional promotion of a pupil who has got an "unsatisfactory" mark in one subject only.

On completion of the 3-year general upper secondary school, pupils are awarded a school leaving certificate on the basis of school results, without a final examination. It mentions the subjects and the marks obtained at the end of the final year. It gives access to the *Matura* examination or to post-secondary education.

At the end of upper secondary education (except basic vocational schools) pupils may sit for *egzamin dojrzałości (Matura)*, a national examination, which is compulsory only for those intending to receive the *Matura* certificate and to gain access to higher education. The old type of *Matura* examination consisted of written and oral parts. Topics for the written part were set by regional educational authorities (*kuratoria*), but the assessment was done by teachers. The oral parts were totally the responsibility of teachers.

A new *Matura* examination, with its written part totally external – both in terms of setting the topics and the assessment – was conducted as an option for the first time in 2002. The new *Matura* examination was introduced into particular types of upper secondary schools in 2005, 2006 and 2007.

The Examination Commissions are totally responsible for the new *Matura* examination, as well as for all external evaluation in Poland.

The new *Matura* examination is held at the end of the 3-year general or specialised lyceum and at the end of the 4-year *technikum*. It consists of a written part, prepared and assessed by Regional Examination Commissions, and oral examinations, prepared and assessed by school teachers.

The Upper Secondary Vocational Schools and Vocational Certificates

The principles of internal evaluation in upper secondary vocational schools – i.e. partial, periodic and annual assessment – are the same as for primary education.

At the end of upper secondary technical education (*technikum*) pupils may sit for (*Matura*), an external national examination, which is compulsory only for those seeking to gain access to higher education.

Until 2004 at the end of the basic vocational school the vocational preparation of pupils was evaluated by means of a compulsory vocational examination. Its content and the level of requirements were defined by each school. Success in this examination, relating to the particular occupation, gave entitlement to the appropriate vocational school leaving certificates and the title of 'skilled worker'.

At the end of the upper secondary technical school (*technikum*) pupils were evaluated by means of a compulsory vocational proficiency examination. Its content and the level of requirements were defined by each school. Success in this examination gives entitlement to the *technikum* school leaving certificate and the title of 'technician'.

In 2004 the new external vocational examination (*egzamin zawodowy*) began to replace the old vocational examinations organised by schools. The introduction of this new exam is taking place according to the following schedule:

- In basic vocational schools in 2004 (in 2-year cycle) and in 2005 (in 3-year cycle)
- In upper secondary vocational schools in 2006
- In supplementary upper secondary vocational schools in 2007.

The new vocational examination is held in two forms: written and practical.

The exam is organised by the relevant Regional Examination Commission and aims at the assessment of students' knowledge and practical skills related to a given vocation.

3.2.7. School Autonomy and its Instruments

Decentralization of state education, carried out in the 1990's brought about growing parental interest in their ability to influence the form, range and control of schools. Bad conditions in many schools caused a lot of criticism but also fostered active reactions such as the creation of school councils, foundations or NGOs to collect funds for improving conditions at schools. Yet Polish society's involvement in helping schools achieve their educational targets is still quite low. Although organizations acting in the field of education are among the three most often chosen areas of social activity only 2.3% of adult Polish citizens belong to them.

From the legal perspective parents' influence on the way schools work is possible through representative bodies such as parents councils or schools councils.

The parents council can put forward petitions and opinions to the school council, teachers council and head teacher concerning all issues connected with the school. It also has the right to collect funds in order to support a school in fulfilling its statutory obligations. The rules setting out how the parents council should work are written down in the school statutes.

The school council is a body with much broader responsibilities and authority in the overseeing of educational institutions. It can be created by a motion from at least two of the three democratic bodies functioning at a school – the teachers council, student self-governing association or the parents council. It is constituted by an equal number of representatives from each of the organizations (in primary

schools this does not concern pupils) and the head teacher cannot be a member. School councils can deal with: putting forward petitions and opinions concerning the school's budget, presenting opinions on all plans concerning the way the school works and its future plans and collecting funds for the school.

In most Polish schools school councils do not exist. There is a legal right to create one at any time but this takes initiative and active participation on the part of parents, because one cannot count on the head's initiative to do it. In schools where a school council does not exist its duties are performed by a teachers council.

Another legally recognized organization is the public school council created by local governments at all three levels of local administration (commune, district and voivodship). It was assumed when the reform was being introduced that they would deal with studying and recognizing educational needs at the local level. As with school councils, there are few public school councils in Poland.

In order to foster the process of making schools more democratic and accountable to the public there are forms to be filled in by all the bodies functioning at a school. These are documents such as statutes, educational programmes, and development and prevention programmes. In reality the "mission statement" for a school is most often created by teachers' councils.

The level of parents' involvement in planning and supervising the functioning of schools is still rather low although during the last few years in different regions of Poland groups of parents have started working actively. They integrate their activities by creating regional and national organizations, e.g. the National Cooperative of Parents and Parents Councils located in Katowice (KPRiRR) or the Zachodniopomorskie Parents Society in Szczecin.

According to the KPRiRR one of the major obstacles to parents being able to get organised within the institutional framework of schools is the absence in the „Act on the System of Education” of procedures for democratic elections and organization on the part of their representative bodies. Another problem is the exercise of political pressure by local authorities who often treat public schools as reserved for them as an area for campaigning and gaining political support.

A few years ago the former Citizen Rights Spokesman (Ombudsman) was working on the proposal of establishing a National Education Council, an institution which could provide the outlines of wide-ranging, long-term strategic aims for our national education policy, and which could guarantee the realization of these aims regardless of an ever-changing political situation. At present this idea has been put into cold storage.

3.2.8. Educationalists, Particularly Teachers and Head Teachers

Pre-primary school teachers have the same rights, duties and salaries as teachers in primary education (years 1 to 3). The differences concern the teaching load which is 18 hours per week for primary school teachers, 25 hours for pre-school teachers of the younger age groups, and 22 hours for pre-school teachers of six-year-olds.

The system of pre-primary teacher training is constantly changing. At present, the forms of training offered are: three-year teacher training colleges, teacher

higher education schools (pedagogical academies), and teacher education faculties at universities. Out of the total number of teachers working in pre-primary schools, as few as 4.3% have completed only secondary education. Teachers with a Master's degree constitute 53.6% of pre-school teaching staff. The pre-school teachers are mostly female - women make up 99.3% of teachers at this level.

In grades 1-3 of primary school one teacher teaches all subjects (integrated teaching), while in grades 4-6 each subject is taught by a different teacher. To date, teachers have been trained to teach one subject. The newly introduced teacher training standards (Regulation of 7 September 2004) envisage training teachers as specialists in 2 subjects. Acquisition of computing skills and a good command of one foreign language is also becoming obligatory.

Teacher training consists of training in subject matter (biology, mathematics, etc.) and pedagogical training (teaching methods, psychology, pedagogy). Teachers may receive their initial training in three-year teacher training colleges awarding the title of *licencjat*. Graduates with *licencjat* may complement their education with two-year university study courses and obtain a Master's degree (*magister*).

In 2002/03 almost 90.2% of 232,193 primary school teachers had completed higher education (81.1% held a Master's degree), and 2.9% of teachers had only completed secondary education.

The legal act defining the professional status and conditions of service of teachers employed in the school education sector is the Act of the 26th of January 1982 – *The Teachers' Charter* (with further amendments - the most important ones of 18th of February 2000 and 24th of August 2001).

According to the *Teachers' Charter*, the post of teacher may be taken by a person who has completed either a higher education course with appropriate pedagogical preparation or a course of study in a teacher training college. Any person graduating from these institutions is recognised as a qualified teacher within the specialisation he/she has completed.

A teacher starting his/her first ever job undertakes a year-long preparation stage in order to obtain a qualification as a "contract teacher", and then embarks on another stage of 2 years and 9 months leading to a qualification as "appointed teacher". The appointment does not lose its validity if a break in service has not lasted longer than 5 years.

Teachers working in 6-year primary schools ought to have one of the following qualifications: university education or equivalent completed (the title of *magister*), 3-year teacher training college completed (the title of *licencjat*), 3-year teacher training college completed (ending with a diploma, without the title of *licencjat*), a diploma of the formerly existing 2-year teacher training colleges (phased out at the beginning of the 1990s).

According to the *Teachers Charter*, a teacher can obtain the following professional grades: trainee teacher, contract teacher, appointed teacher and chartered teacher. An opportunity to receive the honorary title of education professor is also envisaged for chartered teachers with outstanding professional achievements.

The *Teachers' Charter* amendments (of 18 February 2000 and 24 August 2001)

established new rules for the remuneration of teachers as well as a new mechanism for the State to guarantee the availability of funds for their salaries. The average salaries for teachers classified in individual categories are calculated on the basis of the average salary of the trainee teacher, fixed at a level of 82% of the average state sector salary. This is a fixed mechanism for an annual revaluation and raise in teachers' salaries, identical to that for other parts of the public sector.

The average salaries for teachers classified in the remaining categories are calculated as the following percentages of the average salary of the trainee teacher (target percentages have been achieved gradually): contract teacher 125%, appointed teacher 175%, chartered teacher 225%.

The new remuneration system introduced a different division of powers concerning pay regulations. The powers of the Minister of National Education are limited to fixing the minimum rates of basic pay, whereas the rates for bonuses or allowances (except for the allowances for work in rural areas, which are fixed by law) and the rules for granting these are determined by the body responsible for the management of a given school.

According to the Teachers' Charter, the working time of the teacher may not exceed 40 hours per week. This workload includes the minimum teaching load which for the basic group of teachers (in all types of schools) is 18 hours per week (45-minute lessons). At the teacher's request, his/her weekly workload may now comprise up to 27 hours per week, with any increase in the workload implying a proportionally higher salary.

The teacher is required to improve his/her knowledge by participating in all forms of in-service training.

Teachers employed in the 3-year gymnasias ought to have – at a minimum – the qualifications reflected in the title of *licencjat*. 3-year gymnasium teachers are employed according to the same rules as apply to 6-year primary school teachers. In 2002/03 almost 97.1% of lower secondary school teachers had completed higher education (88.9% held a Master's degree), and 1.5% of teachers had only completed secondary education.

Upper secondary school teachers ought to have completed a university education (*magister* degree) or equivalent. 98.7% of teachers of general upper secondary students have completed higher education. In vocational schools, this percentage is lower: 95.7% in technical and vocational secondary schools and 78% in basic vocational schools.

The teachers at post-secondary vocational schools come from the labour market as well as from secondary and higher education.

3.2.9. Support Structures

At the regional level, self-governing 'voivodships' are responsible for running certain types of educational institution. These institutions are: teacher training colleges, teacher in-service training centres, pedagogical libraries, schools and institutions of importance for a given region.

The participation of social partners (individuals, institutions and organisations)

in school work does not occur on a large scale. A national education council which includes parents' representatives is enshrined in the legislation (the Education System Act of 7 September 1991, with further amendments). This council has not yet been established, but it should act in a consultative capacity on education policy, the budget, the curriculum and legislation.

The National Convention of Parents and Parents Councils is an organisation representing pupils' parents at national level.

There are about 500 centres for guidance and counselling in Poland. They are intended mostly for primary and lower secondary school pupils, with the aim of providing psychological assistance. The other field of activity of these centres is focused on counselling and guidance when a child chooses upper secondary school (it is intended for those who are either hesitant or have poor results at the gymnasium).

Some large schools employ school pedagogical counsellor or psychologist who contribute to the solving of individual or internal school problems. Institutions of special assistance to pupils (i.e. psychological and vocational counselling centres) perform important diagnostic and therapeutic functions. They are a requisite of success when starting primary education, and diagnosing predispositions relating to post-primary school selection.

Research on educational problems is carried out by the Institute for Educational Research and a number of departments of education within Universities.

In the last 17 years we have witnessed the emergence of a large number of NGOs involved in the problems of education e.g. The Centre for Civic Education or the foundation "Education for Democracy". They play a very important and stimulating role for the whole system of education.

3.2.10. Social Dimension

As was mentioned in part III, according to the plan for school reform two areas have become target areas for reform of the system of education:

- Creating equal educational opportunities for all children and teenagers: the obstacles which do not let some students get well educated (parents' economic status and their level of education, place of living, disability) are to be overcome.
- Improving the quality of education, preparing the graduates both for adult life and for permanent self-development. The new curricula were created so as to provide each graduate with the basic skills necessary for adult life: skills necessary for further learning, interpersonal communication, teamwork, a creative attitude towards problem-solving, a good command of computer programmes and foreign languages.

The choice of school for a child. Instead of obligatory enrolment of a child in the nearest school, the reform of the educational system gave parents freedom to choose a school for their children. The opportunity to make a free choice of school for one's children was treated as a democratic gain. What follows from this fact is fear of a growing social selection of pupils. Data collected in polls and

research conducted so far does not show that parents' freedom of choice can add considerably to the already existing social inequality, although there have been signs of schools' differentiating as some schools try to achieve more than average levels of achievement and become 'elite'. Sometimes 'gymnasia' are willing to enrol outstanding students outside their own area and later put them into separate classes offering better educational conditions.

'School of excellence' program. Few years ago a very valuable public initiative called "School of excellence" came into being in Poland. It is an action promoting public support for Polish education organized by the Centre of Civic Education Foundation (NGO) together with the influential daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Schools participating in this action (more than 4500) carry out very ambitious educational tasks, getting thousands of parents and other citizens from their area involved. Every 'school of excellence' creates its own programme to meet specific local needs. They all try to function in accordance with the following rules: the school educates well every individual student, assesses him/her fairly, teaches students to think and to understand the world, teaches students to become active members of society and prepares them for the future. "Schools of excellence" have their own network in the internet. The action is very popular and it fosters in an unobtrusive way high standards and the features of a good school.

4. Key Problems and Perspectives, Publicly Discussed Problems, Dilemmas, Main Topics, Priorities of Educational Policy and Educational Research, Perspectives

Remarks Summing up the Period of Transformation

In my opinion the changes introduced during the period of "reconstruction and modernization" were more important than the reform introduced in 1999. Poland has no long-term educational policy, i.e. a policy which would foresee the state of the education of Poles in 15-25 years' time and point out how this state is to be achieved. There were some attempts to create such a strategy, but for the most part they were based on short-term plans (spanning 2 or 3 years), they were usually not negotiated with the opposition, and were quickly discarded and forgotten.

During the last 17 years:

- little has been done for the internationalisation of education – the international baccalaureate should have been promoted;
- the European Computer Driving Licence has not been introduced into upper secondary education; the aim, which should have been introduced into the education system, should have been to make sure that each secondary school student, together with those who have the "matura" diploma, graduate with an ECDL, a document which has existed since 1996 and which opens doors to work opportunities in a united Europe. In Poland, many private schools make the ECDL available to their students.

- dynamic works, which began in 1990 and were aimed at large-scale improvements in the foreign language teaching (the creation of Foreign Language Teacher Training Colleges) later lost their impetus, but in 2008 the teaching of first FL will start in the first grade of primary school and the teaching of second FL will start in the 4th grade. Polish graduates do not receive internationally recognised certificates confirming their knowledge of foreign languages.
- educational reform creating the 3-year lower secondary schools, motivated by the need to create equal educational opportunities, did not improve the learning conditions of children from families with a bad SES, as these opportunities largely depend on the medical, psychological and pedagogical attention paid to the child during kindergarten and early school education.
- in the 1990s there were no attempts to reverse the process of shutting down kindergartens, especially in rural areas. The importance of kindergarten education has only become appreciated in the years following 2000.
- in giving local governments the right to supervise education in their area little was done to make these authorities aware of how important educational policy is for a community aiming at becoming a 'knowledge society';
- lower demographic pressure (leading to falling school rolls) was not taken advantage of in order to improve learning conditions, and the school buildings – now used to a lesser extent – were not utilized for teaching adult learners.
- neither the Ministry nor public educational institutions showed interest in the prospect of organizing distance education at the secondary and tertiary level, especially for those persons, who were in the past unable to get an appropriate education.

On 23 June 2007, in the opinion-forming Warsaw weekly magazine "Polityka", there appeared an article entitled "Giertych daje szkołę" ("Giertych gives us a lesson"), which started with the sentence: "It is the end of the school year, in which the Minister of Education, Roman Giertych, fought to get a good mark for active participation. However, the impression the Minister managed to make was of an ADHD child continually disrupting the class." The authors of the article believe that from the beginning of his term of office in February 2006 until the present the Minister initiated a new campaign (program, project, initiative) approximately every two weeks. Each of these was aimed at bringing about important changes in the educational system, yet each one was only begun and then overshadowed by its successor.

These initiatives were not intended as a starting point for a debate on education, they were presented rather as the Ministry's *panacea* for all that is wrong with the system. Regardless of the Minister's intentions, his initiatives provoked a more or less vigorous public reaction, i.e. something along the lines of a very disorganised public debate.

Below is a list of the issues which caused the biggest reaction in the last year:

1. The initiative against violence and aggression in schools. Based on a few – very much publicized by the media – events, one of which had a truly tragic outcome (a female lower secondary school student who was harassed by fellow-pupils committed suicide) educational authorities came to the conclusion that school aggression was omnipresent and special means were needed to restore order. Accordingly, in November 2006 the „Zero tolerance for violence in schools” program emerged. Within this program the following actions were undertaken:

- Introduction of monitoring systems in schools;
- prohibiting minors from congregating in public places during the night;
- appointing the so-called “Giertych’s threes” (consisting of a police officer, a local government representative and a board of education representative), whose task were to diagnose the scope of aggression and violence in schools;
- a plan to create special ‘strict discipline schools’ (‘boot camps’) for those students who pose the most problems;
- prohibiting the use of mobile phones in schools.

It was also made impossible for students to be able to access through school computers websites propagating violence or sex (the use of special filters).

Those initiatives generally met with a positive response from the so-called „average citizen”, as they promised simple and radical solutions for existing problems. The „Zero tolerance” program also comprised many constructive recommendations, e.g. how to draw students’ attention away from inappropriate ways of spending time by the organization of after-school activities. However, restrictive proposals were of the most interest, as they seemed to be in line with the general conviction that more discipline was needed in bringing up children.

2. The so-called “matura amnesty”, announced in September 2006, caused much controversy. It consisted in the Minister’s directive changing the criteria for the grading of this examination, so that many students, who had originally failed now learned that they had indeed passed the exam. The Minister was accused of lowering the standard of the “matura” examination. Many tertiary education institutions, which had earlier agreed to treat the diploma as a ticket to tertiary education, also protested. In January 2007 the “matura amnesty” was deemed unconstitutional.

3. In January 2007 the Minister ordered schools to list all pregnant students. Officially, this was done so that these students could be adequately cared for. Public opinion, however, saw this as stigmatisation or a foreshadowing of restrictions. Many statements made by the Minister and the Deputy Minister show their negative attitude towards sex education and informing students about available means of contraception, not to mention abortion. In Polish schools, in accordance with recommendations of the Roman Catholic Church, it is only possible to express a positive opinion on so-called natural methods of birth control.

4. In 2006 the head of the National In-service Teacher Training Centre was fired because he published a translation of the manual on tolerance prepared by Council of Europe. The scenarios of lessons presented in the manual were described as “propagating homosexuality”. According to the Minister, any information given to students about the existence of homosexuality amounts to propagating it. In the

education system the only permitted view is that homosexuality is a deviation. In March 2007 'propagating' homosexuality in schools was prohibited.

5. "Patriotic education" has been initiated, which is meant to consist in organizing field trips to sites of the Polish nation's 'martyrdom'. There is a suspicion that the idea of introducing the subject of "patriotic education" into schools in the form of „a turn towards the past and the cult of martyrdom" is the Minister's attempt to counterbalance civic education as introduced at the beginning of the 1990s, which aims at forming conscious and active citizens of a contemporary society. It has also been announced that Polish history is to be taught separately from general history.

6. The role of religious education has been increased – from 2010 religion is to be one of the "matura" examination subjects (this initiative was introduced in May 2006). In the meantime educational authorities want the grade obtained by students in religious education classes to be treated like all other grades and to have an impact on the grade points average – the GPA is important in applying for colleges and universities.

7. According to the Minister and the Deputy Minister Darwinism is only a hypothesis and, what is more, it has proven less convincing than Creationism. They believe this view should be incorporated into the curriculum.

8. In June 2007 the Minister announced that there will be changes in the school reading list – the removing of important Polish and world writers, such as Goethe, Dostoevsky and Gombrowicz, and their replacement by Polish authors such as Dobraczyński, writing in the "God-and-Country" spirit. This idea caused a violently negative reaction. The Minister tried to tone down the conflict by saying this was just an idea to be discussed.

9. Starting from September 2007 all schools have been required to introduce school uniforms.

10. In ministerial circles there appear statements in favour of abandoning co-education and the introduction of all boys and all girls schools. It is not clear what is meant to be achieved by this – single sex schools have had a longstanding tradition in Poland. At present there exist a small number of private single sex schools. It is thus possible that nothing will come of these statements.

It is not hard to guess that the above-mentioned list of the Minister's initiatives and views causes intellectuals and liberal-minded people to express concern for the state of education in Poland.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that my personal attitude to the activities of the Minister of Education is critical. I believe he is looking to the past instead of the future. No deliberations are undertaken concerning the effects of PISA research, "key competencies", scenarios for the future of education, European ideas or possible ways of taking up the challenges of the 21st century.

In August 2007 Giertych (being the head of the League of Polish Families) lost his ministerial post because of the collapse of ruling coalition, but the present (October 2007) minister from The Law and Justice party is probably ready to continue the

Giertych's way.

In Poland the educational lobby hardly exists – there is a lack of a group of people (not necessarily educational professionals) or organisations trying to convince public opinion that certain educational solutions should be adopted. There exists a teacher lobby which looks after its own interests, but this is something else.

At present, each change in the political context (the coming to power of one or another party) may – but does not have to – mean changes in the approach to education, especially since within this sphere it is easy to be a rabble-rouser, make empty promises, etc. If I am to be optimistic I would expect in the future, a social contract between the main political players to emerge, which would define some rules of educational development. Up to now education was defenceless, but recent victory of Citizens Platform during the election that took place in October 21th can create new and much better situation.

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