

Legislature on Schools in the First Parliament After the Restoration of Independence of the Second Republic of Poland (1919–1922)

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The article contains legislative work pertaining to schooling and education of the Legislative Parliament of the Second Republic of Poland (1919–1922) with regard to the political situation after the restoration of independence.

Key words: *Second Republic of Poland; Parliament; legislature on schools*

While in November 1918 the dreams of independence, which generations of Poles had cherished, were fulfilled, the borders of the Republic of Poland remained undefined. The dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the German defeat, and the civil war in Russia caused that the process of the establishment of new borders in Eastern and Southern Europe became long and complex, because of military, political, and economic reasons. While the borders were being defined, the clash of territorial ambitions led to conflicts which were decided by military force rather than reason. The interests of great powers such as France and Great Britain, which was unfavourable to the Polish cause, had to be taken into account by the lesser European states, such as Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Czechia, in their struggle for independence.

Starting with the fights for Przemyśl, Lwów, and Eastern Galicia which took place between Poland and Ukraine, and ending with the fights for Upper Silesia between Poland and Germany in 1921 – Poland had taken part in six wars. The stage of the forming of the western border was finalised in June 1922. The fact that most of the borders were defined in the course of severe political and military conflict caused the borders to be perceived as constantly threatened.

This is exemplified by the claim made by the minister of foreign affairs Aleksander Skrzyński, who stated that 75% of the Polish borders were under threat, 20% were insecure, and 5% were safe (border with Romania)¹. Unification

¹ Łossowski, P. (1984), *Polska niepodległa a jej sąsiedzi* [Independent Poland and its neighbours] In *Polska niepodległa 1918–1939*, Warszawa, p. 34.

of the lands of the Polish state from the territories formerly occupied by Russia, Prussia, and Austria began as a difficult process in its political, economic, and cultural aspects. An important aim was to form a reborn state in the context of its educational policies, which was expressed in the unification, democratisation, and nationalisation of the schooling system². The development of an integral idea of the education system and providing it with legal bases was not a simple task for the teachers' organisations originating in different states and for the political parties of different world views. It called for the undertaking of frequently dramatic decisions and compromise in solving problems.

The goal of the cabinet of Jędrzej Moraczewski, organised by Józef Piłsudski, was to conduct elections to the Legislative Parliament, whose work started on February 10, 1919, and completed on November 27, 1922. In its 4-year term eight cabinets functioned, with the following prime ministers: Ignacy Paderewski, Leopold Skulski, Władysław Grabski, Wincenty Witos, Antoni Ponikowski (twice), Artur Śliwiński and Ignacy Julian Nowak; their aim was, among others, to shape educational policies. The problems of schools and education were the subject of substantial parts of the exposés of the prime ministers Leopold Skulski and the professor and former rector of the Warsaw Polytechnic Antoni Ponikowski, who had simultaneously accepted the role of the Minister of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment (Minister Wyznań Religijnych i Oświecenia Publicznego; hereinafter: MWRiOP). This was not uncommon, as a number of prime ministers would share these functions (Antoni Ponikowski, Julian Ignacy Nowak, Kazimierz Bartel, Janusz Jędrzejewicz) or serve as MWRiOP in different cabinets (Kazimierz Świtalski, Janusz Jędrzejewicz). The exposés were dominated by the issues of the unification of the schooling systems in different districts, creating the material basis of schooling and education, promotion of elementary schooling, improving the livelihood of teachers, providing care for vocational and higher schooling, which were perceived as a factor in the economic development of the country. However, in spite of the seemingly consistent declarations pertaining to the development of 7-grade public schools, the will to implement the postulate was dependent on the political options of the ruling camp, actual financial capabilities conditioned by hyperinflation, and the lack of material infrastructure and shortage of teaching staff. In the formerly occupied territories were significant differences in material and human resources. In the lands formerly occupied by Prussia the network of schools was well-developed, in

² In the occupied previously Polish territories the occupation governments led a restrictive policy of rooting out Polish culture of the students through "germanisation" (Prussia), "russification" (Russia) in all the aspects of the functioning of schools and education. That is why it was necessary to return to intensive promotion of national culture in all its manifestations.

the former Austrian partition there were well-educated teachers but not many schools, and in the lands formerly occupied by Russia, there was nothing. The migration of students and teachers had to take place. They had to be provided for, frequently starting from scratch, taking into account that many of the buildings had been confiscated by the army. All the efforts undertaken for the benefit of schooling and education needed to be provided with legal bases by the Legislative Parliament.

Decrees constitute a particular type of legal acts. That is why during the first seating of the parliament on February 10, 1919 among all the decrees given by the Chief of State Józef Piłsudski, 12 pertained directly to the issues of schooling and education. Their character and importance differed. The first five were of enormous significance to the functioning of schools and teachers, the importance of the remaining ones was local. All of them were unanimously accepted, in spite of the heated debates.

It is doubtless, that the most important of the decrees pertained to the compulsory education for children aged 7 to 14. Compulsory education was an obligation which was particularly difficult to fulfil because of the lack of school infrastructure, teaching staff, and the post-war poverty: shortage of fuel for heating school buildings, shoes, winter clothing, and school books. That is why it has been made optional to establish 4- and 5-grade schools while the 7-grade schools were being organised. The subsequent legal acts with the status of legislation regulated the problems of the establishing and construction of schools, education of public and secondary school teachers, disciplinary responsibility, professional stabilisation, service, and, last but not least, remuneration for the teachers at all levels of schooling. What ought to be noticed is the fact that teachers were included into the category of government officials and their wages were equalled with them, which provided them with solid guarantees of stabilisation. It needs to be emphasised that government expenditures on schooling and education rose from 2.74% in 1919 to 8.3% in 1922. The MWRiOP was the fourth important ministry (after Ministry of War, Ministry of Provisioning, and Ministry of Railways). The problems of higher schooling were also regulated quickly, which was the result of the influence of the major lobby of university professors in the government and the parliament.

In the difficult circumstances resembling war what is remarkable are the legislative achievements of the first parliament after the restoration of independence in the field of schooling and education. The aim of the parliament was to give the state a Constitution, which took three years³. Also "it is to be

³ The Constitution was accepted on March 17, 1921 at the 221st seating of the Legislative Parliament. The constitutionally guaranteed articles pertaining to education, during the course of debates among diverse political groups, were ultimately defined as follows:

considered a phenomenon that after 123 years of national enslavement, being torn by contradictions, without established borders the Second Republic of Poland managed to organise a parliament within 100 days”, as Andrzej Zakrzewski writes⁴.

It is a fact that the idea of a reborn Republic of Poland had accompanied generations of Poles throughout the years of enslavement and in the effort of the creation of the vision of a future state the problems of schooling and education had not been ignored. A substantial influence on the character of the changes was imposed by the so-called teachers’ parliament, functioning in Warsaw in April 1919, who would propose the formation of a uniform, hierarchical educational system, as well as limiting the influence of the Catholic church on education⁵. Projects of educational reform were developed by teachers’ organisations and political parties, as well as individuals (Ksawery Prauss, Tadeusz Łopuszański). Despite the limited parliamentary experience of many members of the so-called people’s parliament (the number of MPs representing the people’s movement was significant), it was possible to conduct the unification of schools in the administrative and curricular aspect in the entire Second Republic of Poland in a record time of 4 years, thanks to the previously developed methods and techniques.

Not all the problems could be solved by legal acts. It was not possible to write up an act on schooling for ethnic minorities, necessary because of the national and religious makeup of the Second Republic of Poland, or acts regulating special and vocational schooling. These goals have been undertaken by the subsequent parliaments of Poland. The new system of the organisation of schools was only introduced in 1932⁶.

Art. 117. Research and publication of research results are free. All citizens have the right to teach, to establish a school or an educational centre and to head it, provided they meet the conditions prescribed in the act pertaining to qualifications, safety of the children, and loyalty to the State. All schools and educational centres, public and private, are subject to the supervision of government authorities defined in the act.

Art. 118. As regards public schooling, education is obligatory for all the citizens of the State. The duration, scope, and manner shall be defined by a proper act.

Art. 119. Education in state schools and schools organised by the local administration is free of charge. The State shall provide the particularly apt yet nonaffluent students with stipends received in secondary and higher schooling institutions.

Art. 120. In all educational institutions whose curriculum includes the education of youth under 18 years of age, provided for by the State entirely or partially, or provided for by the local administration, the teaching of religion is obligatory. The supervision of the teaching of religion in schools belongs to the proper religious associations, with the prerogative of general supervision granted to the state school authority.

⁴ *Sejmy drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* [Parliaments of the Second Republic of Poland], ed A. Zakrzewski (1990), Warszawa, p. 12.

⁵ Brzoza, Cz. – Sowa, A. L. (2006). *Historia Polski 1918–1945* [History of Poland], Kraków.

⁶ The bill on school organisation accepted on March 11, 1932, developed by the Minister of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment Janusz Jędrzejewicz.

THE DECREES AND THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTS PERTAINING TO
SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION ACCEPTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE
PARLIAMENT (FEBRUARY 10, 1919 – NOVEMBER 27, 1922)⁷

DECREES		
1	Decree on obligatory education	Issued on 7. 02. 1919 by the Chief of State, ratified 22. 07. 1919.
2	Decree on disciplinary accountability of regular teachers of public state schools and disciplinary proceedings	Issued on 7. 02. 1919 by the Chief of State, ratified by an act 21. 07. 1919.
3	Decree on the education of public school teachers in the State of Poland	Issued on 7. 02. 1919 by the Chief of State, no constitutional ratification
4	Temporary decree on stabilisation and remuneration in public schools	Issued on 18. 12. 1918 by the Chief of State, (amended and supplemented with temporary regulations, see below)
5	Decree on changes to temporary regulations to the decree on stabilisation and remuneration in public schools	Issued on 8. 02. 1919 by the Chief of State, ratified by an act 27. 05. 1919.
6	Decree on the introduction of Polish as the language of instruction in the 2 nd Gymnasium in Lwów	Issued on 7. 02. 1919 by the Chief of State, constitutionally ratified 11. 07. 1919.
7	Decree on schools with German as language of instruction	Issued on 7. 02. 1919 by the Chief of State, no constitutional ratification
8	Decree on the appointment of the first professors on the University of Warsaw (annulled by the act of 18. 07. 1920)	Issued on 7. 01. 1919 by the Chief of State, constitutionally ratified 13. 01. 1920.
9	Decree on the appointment of the first professors on the Warsaw University of Technology (annulled by the act of 13. 07. 1920)	Issued on 8. 01. 1919 by the Chief of State, constitutionally ratified 13. 01. 1920.
10	Decree on extension of the decree on the appointment of the first professors on the University of Warsaw to the Department of Theology	Issued on 7. 02. 1919 by the Chief of State. After the modification of the articles pertaining to the appointment of the first professors of the University of Warsaw it would become its integral part
11	Statute of the Main School of Farming (with the power of a decree)	Issued on 7. 02. 1919 by the Chief of State, no constitutional ratification
12	Decree of the Leader of the State on the establishment of the Stefan Batory University in Wilno	Issued on 7. 02. 1919 by the Chief of State, no constitutional ratification

⁷ On the basis of: Szablicka-Żak, J. (1997). *Szkolnictwo i oświata w pracach Sejmu Ustawodawczego II Rzeczypospolitej* [Schooling and education in the works of the Legislative Parliament of the Second Republic of Poland], Warszawa, pp. 173–175.

ACTS		
1	Act on defining and remunerating public state school teachers	Accepted on 21. 05. 1919, amended by the act of 18. 12. 1919
2	Act on the benefit of 4.5 m koronas for the schools of the Management Board of the Society of People's Schools in Kraków for the Polish minorities in Galicia	Accepted on 9. 07. 1919
3	Act on disciplinary accountability of regular teachers of public state schools and disciplinary proceedings	Accepted on 21. 07. 1919
4	Act on temporary school authorities	Accepted on 4. 06. 1920
5	Act on people's farming schools	Accepted on 9. 07. 1920
6	Act on remuneration of professors, other teaching and assistant staff in higher state schools	Accepted on 13. 07. 1920, amended by the act of 31. 03. 1921
7	Act on remuneration of teachers and principals of comprehensive education secondary schools, teachers' seminars, and school inspectors	Accepted on 13. 07. 1920, amended by the act of 31. 03. 1921
8	Act on remuneration of teachers and principals of state vocational schools, and seminars for vocational school teachers	Accepted on 13. 07. 1920
9	Act on remuneration of public state school teachers, school inspectors, and deputy school inspectors	Accepted on 13. 07. 1920
10	Act on higher schools	Accepted on 13. 07. 1920 amended by the acts of 29. 07. 1921 and 26. 09. 1922
11	Act on the erection of the People's Home of the Republic in Warsaw by the state	Accepted on 17. 03. 1921
12	Act on the establishment and maintenance of public state schools	Accepted on 17. 02. 1922
13	Act on construction of public state schools	Accepted on 17. 02. 1922
14	Act on the School of Fine Arts in Warsaw	Accepted on 23. 03. 1922
15	Act on the professional qualifications to teach in comprehensive education secondary schools, private and state teachers' seminars	Accepted on 26. 09. 1922