

## **CULTS AND EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN POLAND**

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*Psycho-manipulative activity of cults constitutes a great problem for every school system. In Polish schools there these are preventive operations that are focused on. They are supposed to protect children and youth from being recruited to cults. These establishments are not openly encouraged to execute these undertakings by education department. There is a lack of coherent policy state authorities in the scope of prevention against cults. The majority of actions in this scope are undertaken by non-governmental organizations.*

**Keywords:** *Cults Educational, System, Poland.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The phenomenon of cults is a general social problem and specific educational challenge. Particularly young people, who need life indicators however not always find them within a family or at school, are prone to be tempted by the words such as 'prophets', 'guru' and 'masters' and seduced by the perspective of better life are recruited to cults. In the Polish educational system there has been emphasized the necessity to analyze this problem (mostly in the context of widely comprehended prevention), which finds its reflection in major normative documents. Its consequence is undertaking by schools and other educational institutions activities directed at preventing young people from joining cults.

In the article herein there has been tackled the issue of legal and practical solutions suggested by the Polish educational sector against the discussed problem.

### **PLACE OF PREVENTION IN POLISH EDUCATIONAL LAW**

School is obliged to run prevention activity against various social risks and dangers (into which the issue of psycho-manipulative activity of cults is to be included). Prevention activity of educational institutions is undertaken on the basis of legal solutions.

The first and fundamental document regulating functioning of the Polish educational system is

*the Act dated 7 September 1991 on education system (Gov. Journal dated 2004 No. 256 sec. 2572 as amended). This normative deed lays upon educational establishments and organizational units the obligation to prepare and execute prevention programs against risks and dangers related to a society. In the Chapter General Regulations I we read that education system grants in particular: execution of the right of every citizen of the Polish Republic to be educated and the right of children and young people to be brought up and taken care of, appropriately to their age and achieved development; support by means of educational role of family; possibility to take advantage of psychological, pedagogical and special forms of didactic work; maintaining safe and hygienic learning conditions, upbringing and caring at schools and establishments; as well as popularization among children and young people of knowledge on safety and shaping appropriate social attitudes against dangers and extraordinary situations.<sup>1</sup>*

A legislator, this particular task—granting education, upbringing and care including social prevention – assigned to the units of local self-government; that is: municipalities (art. 5a. pt. 2 sec. 1); districts (see art. 5a. pt. 2 sec. 2); and provincial self-governments (art. 5a. pt. 2 sec. 3) (Gov. Journal dated 2004 No. 256 sec. 2572).

The obligation of appropriate execution of educational programs (including prevention ones) lays directly upon, in accordance with the Polish educational law, upon teachers. The Art. 5b. of the act on educational system focuses on the source describing in detail right and responsibilities of nursery school teachers, teachers of schools and establishments – it is *the Act dated 26 January 1982 – Teacher’s Charter (Ustawa z dnia 26 stycznia 1982 r. – Karta Nauczyciela)* (Gov. Journal dated 2006 No. 97, sec. 674, No. 170, sec. 1218 and No. 220, sec. 1600, dated 2007 No.17, sec. 95, sec. 80, sec. 542, No. 102, sec. 689, No. 158, sec. 1103, No. 176, sec. 1238, No. 191, sec. 1369 and No. 247, sec. 1821, dated 2008 No. 145, sec. 917 and No. 227, sec. 1505 and dated 2009 No. 1, sec. 1, No. 56, sec. 458, No. 67, sec. 572, No. 97, sec. 800, No. 213, sec. 1650 and No. 219, sec. 1706). Subject to the act are teachers employed in the majority of the above-mentioned establishments and educational institutions (see art. 1 pt. 1). A school is administrated by a principal. The art. 7 pt. 1 sec. 6 obliges the principal to grant safety to students and teachers during activities organized by school, whilst in the first point of the art. 6 (chapter 2 *Teachers’ responsibilities*) we read that a teacher is responsible for conscientious execution of a task related to their profession and basic functions of schools: didactic, educational and caring, including tasks connected with granting safety for students during activities organized by school; supporting all students in their development; taking care of shaping moral and civic attitudes. Moreover, the act clearly states that apart from subject requirements, a teacher should be a person who complies with basic moral principles (see art. 9. pt. 1).

Obligatory on each stage of education sets of objectives and teaching contents as well skills and school educational tasks, which are respectively included into nursery school education and teaching syllabuses (and they enable to establish criteria for school grades and examination requirements), are included into the core curriculum (art. 3 sec. 13, Gov. Journal No. 256 sec. 2572). Realization of these programs was legally regulated by the subsequent ministerial decree based on *the Act dated 7 September 1991 on education system*.<sup>2</sup>

On the basis of the above-mentioned documents just on the lowest level of education (nursery school stage) there are built foundations for prevention activity which will be directed at a young man on higher levels of education.<sup>3</sup>

Core curriculum of general education for primary schools as well as core curriculum for lower and higher secondary schools graduation from which enables obtaining a matriculation certificate after the completion of matriculation examinations depicts necessity to execute prevention programs adjusted to development needs of students as well as to a given environment, including all the contents and activities of prevention nature. For instance, in the scope of social education a pupil graduating from III form of primary school is capable of distinguishing between good and bad things, He/she is aware of dangers coming from people; he/she is able to inform adults of an accident, jeopardy, danger, he/she knows emergency telephone numbers of first aid, fire and police and a general emergency number 112 in every following year of education knowledge and skills acquired by a pupil are revised and expanded. Subsequently (on higher levels of education) a student is taught to take responsibility for himself, to acquire assertive attitude, to substantiate opinions, to express viewpoints, evaluation criteria, in relation to groups and social phenomena – he is able to name them and understands their meaning. Dangers related to cults were not directly depicted in any of the documents, though there was used a phrase: ‘dangers coming from groups’ without defining what kind of groups were meant (see Gov. Journal dated 2009 No.4, sec. 17), however it does not seem to be effective motivation to hold – in educational establishments – prevention related to cults. This is the subject matter of the study herein.

Documents mentioning a role of education system in the context of dangers related to cults.

The first Official Polish document in which the subject of cults have been undertaken was the *Report on the condition of national safety* issued in December 1995 by the President National Security Bureau. In the chapter VII of this report titled: *Cults and some religious associations in Poland* there was strongly emphasized a destructive character of cults’ activity. It was noted that “it is based mainly on using sophisticated and deeply unethical and manipulation methods in order to win new members, to obtrude on them particular stereotypes of psychical reactions, to control their thoughts, behaviour and feelings as well as to shape absolute obedience, to make them addicted both in the material as well as spirituals sphere” (*Raport o stanie bezpieczeństwa państwa*, 1995).

In the document specific danger for children and young people related to this problem was focused

on. In order to decrease the danger connected with the activity of cults in Poland it was postulated to create, following other countries' example, establishments that deal with analysis and exchange of information on new religious associations and cults in professional and organized way, they work out methods to counteract against recruitment of children and young people to cults and help victims. The report focused on the necessity to amend *the Act on freedom of conscience and religion* (what was done in 1997) and – what is of the major importance in the light of subject matter study – to hold meetings for children and young people in educational establishments informing about dangers related to cults, it also emphasized the necessity to offer attractive ways of spending free time for children and young people. In the document there was noticed the need to support parents struggling to save their children recruited to cults and to popularize pro-family model of life with its all consequences (including economic ones) (*Raport o stanie bezpieczeństwa państwa*, 1995).

In October 1998 the department of education and care at the Ministry of National Education prepared internal *Information on observed dangers related to some religious associations* (*Informacja o zaobserwowanych zagrożeniach ze strony niektórych ruchów religijnych*). This document covered the subject of prevention and interventions undertaken by education authorities within pedagogical supervision. Based on this document these were mainly: board of education, then heads of schools, teachers, learning disabilities service centres, advisors on educational matters in provincial methodological centres as well as juvenile delinquency inspectors in Police stations, employees of special education centres, hostels, dormitories, nurses, etc. In the document there was focused a need to carry out such action as: teachers' boards' trainings, training for heads and deputy heads of schools, informative meetings with parents, organization of scientific conferences, etc. (quoting Nowakowski, 1999, p. 98).

Another crucial element was the *Report on some phenomena related to activity of cults in Poland* (*Raport o niektórych zjawiskach związanych z działalnością sekt w Polsce*) worked out in May 2000 by non-existing Interministerial Group for New Religious Movements. Its members belonged to a few ministries: the Ministry of Interior and Administration, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of National Defence, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well

as the Ministry of National Education. This group also included representatives of General Police Headquarters and the Plenipotentiary for Family Affairs. The document also included the content of the report dated 1995. It was stated that the government felt it their duty to protect their citizens from dangers related to cults and with reference to this they mentioned action undertaken by government agencies in a few categories: diagnosis of dangers from cults and consequences of their activities, help provided for victims and their families, struggle against crime, illegal and harmful activity of cults as well as prevention. The report defines a notion of a 'cult', describes with it "any group, which has developed structures of authorities and it is characterized by remarkable discrepancy concerning declared objectives and those actually realized and by hiding of norms significantly regulating the life of its members; which violates basic human rights and principles of community life and its influence upon members, fans, family and society is of destructive nature" (*Raport o niektórych zjawiskach...*, 2000, p. 16-17, 55). It was stated that cults' violation of rights and freedom granted to citizens by the Constitution of the Republic of Poland is a prerequisite authorizing government agencies to deal with this issue. The document also defined national strategy against this problem that leads to the diagnosis of dangers from cults and consequences of their activities, help provided for victims of cults and families, struggle against illegal and harmful activity of cults as well as prevention. For this purpose the group cooperated with non-governmental agencies, local Police stations and even the Secretary of Polish Episcopate and the Polish Ecumenical Board. Special role was assigned to the Ministry of National Education, which by means of education boards carried out the observation of active cults in the area of educational establishments and special education service centres, supported non-governmental organization in struggle against cults – within prevention activity – they monitored the realization of environmental educational programs by the mentioned entities. The activity of the Ministry of Education was to be supported by other ministries. For example the Ministry of Justice (Department of Family and Juvenile Affairs) ran numerous trainings for employees of juvenile detention, family diagnostics and consultation centres and probation officers with allowance for social dangers resulting from cults' activity (*Raport o niektórych zjawiskach...*, 2000, p. 56-58). Within preventive activities of the group

there were undertaken the following measures: trainings for inspectors, school pedagogues, class teachers, methodological advisors, school and environment nurses; meetings with parents (lectures and discussions); trainings and seminars for school pedagogues, class teachers, heads of schools; psych-educational and therapeutical classes for young people, run in special education centres; specialists' service (in information centres); publications in magazines; including the issues related to religious movements into the syllabus of post-graduate studies and qualification courses for teachers; undertaking this issue into weekly class meetings at school; as well as starting a help line. In order to improve the efficiency of preventive activities the necessity to cover the issue of dangers related to cults into school educational programs was focused on (*Raport o niektórych zjawiskach...*, 2000, p. 58-59). Based on the above-mentioned and other solutions and legal solutions in Polish educational system, particular agencies and didactic, educational, care and penitentiary institutions (most often schools) realize measures, among which prevention against dangers related to cults is dominant.

#### **ASSUMPTIONS OF THE POLISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM RELATED TO COUNTERACTING AGAINST CULTS IN PRACTICE**

In the Polish educational system cults' activity has been in the centre of wide interest within the last decade of XX century. At this time – as it has been presented above – it has been observed in education documents, focusing on the role of prevention related to social security (its younger part in particular) from psycho-manipulation used by destructive groups. In practice the major steps in this matter included: cooperation of the ministry of education with other ministries in the scope of the solution of problem with cults in Poland; similarly – cooperation with scientific environments, non-governmental agencies dealing with cults; educational activity (trainings) of education boards, heads of schools, teachers, school pedagogues, etc.

Since that time there has not been observed any greater interest of the Ministry of National Education related to this issue. Probably infrequency of activities undertaken by the ministry of education results from the marginalization of this problem by subsequent government groups, for example by the former Prime Minister Leszek Miller (who dissolved Interministerial Group for New

Religious Movements) and the lack of cohesive national policy related to the counteraction against their activity, shortcomings of national government agencies in cooperation with local self-governments, non-governmental organizations and scientific establishments which had been already focused on in *Raport o niektórych zjawiskach związanych z działalnością sekt w Polsce*, 2000, p. 60).

Such initiatives as: creating in the whole Poland information and therapy centres for cults' victims, specialists' services, starting a help line (of representatives of information centres and educational organization employees) were above all a result of non-governmental agencies' efforts,<sup>4</sup> undertaking issues related to common well being. With respect to cults such activities cover providing analysis and expert opinions serving as mechanisms of early warning, propagation of pro-social and civic attitudes and cooperation with schools and other educational institutions in the scope of prevention (Nowakowski, 2008).

Also apart from educational system there was medial action carried out in Poland (e.g., publishing of leaflets, guide books, articles in the local press, TV programs<sup>5</sup>); involvement into the struggle with this problem institutions and people who may support its diagnosis, prevention, elimination (psychologist, doctors, therapists, priests, pedagogues, etc.). In the last decade one of reactions on the side of the ministry of education to the problem of cults' activity was the voice of minister of education, Krystyna Łybacka (Ministry of Education and Sport). It was a response to the disclosure made by media in 2003 of the fact that in one of the schools in Bydgoszcz, Polish language was taught by a member of Himavanti Brotherhood. After the intervention the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Education Board held a training for inspectors on the subject of cults' presence at schools. There was also worked out a demonstrative material on 'principles of dangers recognition', which was sent to heads of schools (see *Po kadzidełkach ich poznać?*, 2003).

Nowadays – as it is claimed by P.T. Nowakowski (based on the interview run on August 16, 2010) – schools often initiate prophylactics against cults on their own and they are not so openly encouraged by the ministry of education as they used to be. Great emphasis is put on counteraction against attempts made by cults to infiltrate schools (for example self-government authorities issue decrees forbidding hiring school classroom to cults, headmasters control people entering schools and verify offers and

leaflets; teachers carefully analyse sponsor offers, book purchase for school library by other people and companies, etc.); there are organized trainings, meetings, lectures for teachers, class teachers, parents as well as students and pupils (on the subject of psycho-manipulative activity of the discussed groups as well as their methods of entering institutions and recruitment (see Nowakowski, 2002, p. 47-53; 2006, p. 17). In the activities of this type there are involved: Police, non-governmental organizations and associations, training centres for teachers, etc.

In school practice a problematic aspect of counteraction against dangers related to cults are difficulties in defining mechanisms of content control and methods used by invited lecturers – teachers as well or ‘specialist’, but as it sometimes occurs – also teachers (Dudziński, 2003a, p. 9; Dudziński, 2003b, p. 9). Similarly, some difficulty is related to few extra classes, which in addition to didactic and educational process would enable to develop students’ interests as well as the skills to spend time constructively. Also too much concentration on so called negative prevention, thus emphasizing undesired behaviour (in consequence may be perceived as a common rule of behaving) is an obstacle in execution the above-mentioned task (Sikorski & Bukalski, 2004, p. 162).

### CONCLUSION

Educational environments are of major importance in all preventive measures protecting young people from cults’ influence. Among them special role belongs to parents, school, mass media and formal peer groups (Zwoliński, 2004, p. 301). It seems that their common involvement in counteraction against dangers imposed by cults may bring expected results. However – as it is commonly known- these in upper position that should set example for others. Thus a greater interest should be demonstrated by national agencies. A first step could be raising the importance of psycho-manipulative groups in Polish legislative system, as well as supporting already existing information net created by NGO (Non-Governmental Organization). Realization of pro-family policy, making people more sensitive to superficial propaganda of cults, these are further elements of counteraction against children and young people being absorbed by them. We should not fail to remember about the problems of young people, not to ignore but to support them in overcoming difficulties, to give them sense of safety. Otherwise they will find it somewhere else. Maybe in cults.

### Notes

1. In accordance with the content of the act (art. 2 and 3.), obligation to realize such tasks is to be fulfilled by all the links of educational system. These are among others: nursery schools, schools, school units (e.g., in health care centre or in welfare centre); special education centres; continuous education centres, practical education centres and centres of trainings and professional development; pedagogical and psychological counselling centres, including specialist centres; educational centres for young people, youth centres of socio-therapy; establishments granting care and education in the scope of long distance learning away from their place of permanent residence; pedagogical libraries and welfare employees centres. Public administration agencies supervising and running school and establishments (such as minister, self-government units, other legal and physical persons) cooperating with entities (art. 2a. pt. 1), such as: non-governmental agencies, including scout organizations as well as legal persons running statutory activity in the scope of education and upbringing in execution of the tasks mentioned in the art. 1 (Gov. Journal dated 2004 No. 256 sec. 2572).
2. The above-mentioned documents include the latest document in force: *Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 23 grudnia 2008 r. w sprawie podstawy programowej wychowania przedszkolnego oraz kształcenia ogólnego w poszczególnych typach szkół* (Gov. Journal dated 2009 No. 4, sec. 17).
3. In *the core curriculum of nursery school education, nursery forms in primary schools and other forms of nursery education*, emphasis is put on child safety and adopting by them proper organization of their free time. In the pt. 6 of the document it is postulated: “implementation of children into care for their own safety as well as of other people . . . a child knows dangers related to the world of people, plants and animals and avoids them . . . tries independently and safely organize his/her free time in nursery school and at home, is able to recognize where he/she can play safely and where not” (Gov. Journal dated 2009 No. 4, sec. 17).
4. Counteraction against cults’ activity involves self-governments, e.g., self-government of Ruda Śląska city and editors of the magazine *Cults & Facts* organized International Seminar ‘Terrorism in Cults’ (see Puchała, 2002, p. 14-17).
5. The problem of cults was undertaken in television programs *Uwaga* and *Superwizjer*, e.g., [http://uwaga.tvn.pl/7011,news,sekta\\_himawanti\\_dziala\\_reportaz.html](http://uwaga.tvn.pl/7011,news,sekta_himawanti_dziala_reportaz.html) (25 July 2011).

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