

# THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN EDUCATION

Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska<sup>1</sup>

## I. Religious instruction organised during the school hours (in lower and in secondary education) in state funded schools

**I.1 Question: Religious instruction organised during the school hours (in lower and in secondary education) in state funded schools. Is – and if affirmative please refer to the provisions in the law (add the text separately) – the teaching of religion in your country organised during school time in public educational institutions: in primary education, in secondary education.**

**I.2 Question: What choices amongst the religious education possibilities are offered in public educational institutions, e.g. catholic religion, Islamic teaching, ....**

**Answer:**

In Polish state funded schools is organised according to the *Ordinance of the Minister of National Education on terms and forms of organizing religious instruction in public kindergartens and schools* of 14<sup>th</sup> April 1992. In case of primary school (6/7–12-year-olds) and lower secondary schools (gymnasium; 13–16-year-olds) the classes are organised at parents or legal guardians' request, in case of post-primary and post-gymnasium education the request can be expressed by the parents (or legal guardians) or by the pupils themselves, after attaining majority (18 years of age). According to the Ordinance the request shall be submitted as a statement and does not have to be renewed in next years, though it can be changed (§1.2). Pupils can choose between religious instruction and ethics, but they are also free to abstain from any of the classes (§1.3); if needed school shall provide them with guidance (§3.3).

Poland is a homogenous country in terms of its ethnic and religious structure, with 90% Christians (including 88% Catholics)<sup>2</sup>. This translates into the practice of religious offer. Catholic instruction is offered 'automatically' as the religion of the majority of the population. The classes are usually attended by the majority of pupils. Most of them participate in the class for religious reasons, but some might have no other option: there might be no teacher for ethics, or religious classes are organized in the middle of the timetable, so that the pupil would have a 45 minutes of free time between the classes, or participation in the class is a social norm one tends to obey. This might be the case in small cities and villages, especially in Eastern and South-Eastern part of the country, traditionally more conservative and religious. While class attendance used to be very high reaching around 80–90% of all pupils, it started to decrease in mid-00s, when the generation of young Poles born after the transformation of 1989 reached post-gymnasium education. While pupils of primary schools and gymnasiums are still sent to Catholic religion class, after attaining majority they can decide on their own. However, abstaining from Catholic religion instruction by a whole class is still an exception, as such information reaches even national media<sup>3</sup>.

The choices among religious education have not been enumerated in the Ordinance, which only refers to 'religion' and 'ethics'. If there are more than seven pupils of a particular

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Economic Sociology, Warsaw School of Economics, and Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Warsaw

<sup>2</sup> Own calculation basing on the *Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland* (2011: 133).

<sup>3</sup> One of the early examples was a first grade class of a post-gymnasium school in the city of Łódź, which collectively chose ethics, see Hodak (2008).

denomination in a class, a separate religious instruction should be organized for them by the school; if there are more than seven pupils in the whole school – an inter-class religious education should be organized (§2.1). If there are less than seven pupils of a particular denomination in the whole school it shall organize – in collaboration with the respective religious community or Church – an intra-school religious education in so called religious education point, REP (*punkt katechetyczny*). The number of pupils in such class shall not be less than 3 (§2.2). These classes can take place at school after regular classes and the school shall provide the room free of charge to the religious communities or Churches.

The Ministry of Education does not collect the data on the type of religious offer provided at schools. The offer is shaped on the demand of pupils of respective denominations (if willing to apply for a class of their own).

## **II. State funded denominational schools and state supervision**

**II.1. Question: Are there state funded denominational schools in your country? If affirmative, what is the numeric importance of state funded schools. If affirmative, what is the numeric importance of Islamic state funded schools. Please refer to statistical information on-line**

**II.2. Question: Are there non-state funded denominational schools in your country (private)? If affirmative, what is the numeric importance of private schools. If affirmative, what is the numeric importance of Islamic private schools. Please refer to statistical information on-line**

**II.3. Question: How do the authorities control the teaching in state funded denominational schools and are there any special questions about the control of the content of teaching in state-funded denominational schools? Please refer to the provisions in the law.**

**Answer:**

Churches and religious communities, if they acquired the status of a legal entity and have respective regulation in their statute, can run their own schools. This refers among others to the Catholic Church, which signed a Concordat of 28<sup>th</sup> July 1993 with the State of Poland (ratified on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1998). According to §14.1 the Catholic Church has the right to establish and run educational institutions, including schools and kindergartens. However, they have to fulfil the educational standards in obligatory subjects (in other subjects they follow church regulations) and in terms of the teaching staff (§14.3). Their public character is defined by Polish law (§14.2). These schools are funded by the State of Poland or municipal governments (§14.4).

There are two types of schools in Poland – public and non-public. The latter have started to emerge from late 80s, after the transformation. *The Law on the education system of 7<sup>th</sup> September 1991* regulates the conditions which a non-public school has to fulfil in order to obtain the entitlements of a public school (i.e. issue school certificates recognized by the state), which are: fulfilling the curricula in scope and time not shorter than in the respective type of a public school, classification and promotion of pupils – as defined by the respective minister (except for the entrance exam), collect documents on the teaching process like in public schools, and employ teachers of obligatory courses, who have proper qualifications (§7.3). Since education is obligatory up to the 18 years of age, and not below the level of gymnasium, in practice all primary schools and gymnasiums – regardless if public or non-public – have to fulfil the regulations of the Law of 7<sup>th</sup> September 1991. Their denominational character can only be reflected in their educational guidelines which might refer to a particular value system.

Most of denominational schools are Catholic, what reflects the dominant position of Catholic Church in the society. There are currently 539 Catholic schools with around 58 thousand pupils, all assembled in an umbrella organization Council of Catholic Schools (*Rada Szkół Katolickich*, a church organ established in 1994, see: <http://www.rsk.edu.pl>). They constitute only a small fraction of around 28.5 thousand schools in Poland (primary, up to secondary level)<sup>4</sup>. Other denominations run only a dozen or so of schools Poland-wide, e.g. the second biggest denominational group in Poland, the Orthodox community, established its first school only in 2007 (a non-public one in the city of Białystok); on the other hand the Evangelic education is quite well developed, comprising around 15 schools on all levels, mostly in southern Poland.

Around half of all denominational schools constitute private (non-public) schools. There are neither any Islamic public or private schools. There used to be at least two schools at embassies of Islamic countries (Iraq, Libya), which provided Islamic educations, but they are closed now, due to lack of pupils and funding. Islamic instruction is apparently offered to Turkish pupils at Meridian International School (a non-public bilingual school with Turkish capital seated in Warsaw, with a branch in Łódź), however no mention about religious instruction as such, nor about Turkish language class is to be found on the school's website.

### **III. Refusal or limitations on the number of pupils of another conviction/belief by the governing board of a confessional (catholic) school**

**III.1. Question: Does the head of a state funded denominational (e.g. Catholic) school has the right to refuse pupils from other religious beliefs? Please refer to the provisions in the law.**

**III.2. Question: Does the head of a state funded denominational (e.g. Catholic) school the authority to limit the number of pupils from other religious beliefs (e.g. Muslim pupils) in order to support the specificity of the project?**

**Answer:**

As mentioned above (II) denominational schools have to follow the same rules as the state ones when it comes to learning outcomes, grading and enrolment; they only differ in the 'ethical added value'. Therefore they cannot refuse any pupil basing on his/her denomination. However, while being enrolled pupils of other denominations are aware of this 'added value', reflected in the school approach (even if there is supposedly no compulsion to religious observance at school, as stated in one interview; however, another interviewee mentioned that at one Catholic school every class started with a prayer and that they were compulsory).

### **IV. Point of views of the authorities concerning the teaching of Islam in denominational (Catholic) education, Islam instruction or instruction on other convictions/beliefs in denominational (catholic) schools for (a number of pupils requesting it) and alternative ethical course**

**IV.1. Question. Is there a legal obligation to organise, if parents ask for, classes of Islamic religion in denominational (Catholic) education funded by public authorities? a. for any pupil for whom a request has been made? b. from a minimum number of pupils for whom a request has been made?**

**IV.2. Question. Does the same obligation exist for the offer of (a) other religions and/or philosophical convictions, (b) an alternative class of conception of life, philosophy, ethics**

**IV.3. Question. Can you shortly mention the pro and contra standpoints that have been expressed concerning the respect of fundamental rights (among others, freedom of education and right to education) in relation with this obligation?**

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<sup>4</sup> Own calculation basing on the *Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland* (2011: 234).

**IV.4. Question. Reference to the legal basis, with Website address, and also if possible to the parliamentary preparation of texts.**

**Answer:**

Considering the marginal number of denominational schools in Poland and the marginal number of Muslims (around 35 thousand in a country of 38 million citizens, i.e. less than 0.1%) it would be hard to imagine a significant number of Muslim pupils entering a Catholic school. The whole Islamic education in Poland takes place outside the classrooms, in REPs. For that reason there has not yet been any debate in Poland on teaching other religions or convictions in denominational schools. The debate focuses rather on the place of Catholic religion in the educational system. The argument is whether religion should be taught at schools or outside the school system (which was the case before the transformation till 1990), and whether Catholic religion ought to maintain the dominant position (there are some voices raised that one has to declare unwillingness to participate in religious – i.e. Catholic – instruction, against regulation states in the Ordinance, which was mentioned in point I). Another angle of the discussion is the decreasing ratio of pupils participating in religious education.

**V. Teaching of Islam in denominational (e.g. Catholic) schools at their own initiative**

**V.1. Question: Is there in your country a general guideline for teaching of Islam in denominational (e.g. Catholic) schools at their own initiative defined by (a) the Bishops' Conference, (b) another body, namely. . .**

**V.2. Question: If affirmative, does the guideline implies that (a) the teaching of other religions is organised when: one parent asks for, or a sufficient number of parents ask for (how many?), (b) only teaching of Islam is offered as alternative religion when one parent asks for or a sufficient number of parents ask for (how many?)**

**V.3. Question: There is no guideline and: (a) in fact, teaching of Islam is never proposed in Catholic schools, or (b) the teaching of Islam is organised in some schools, which have taken themselves the initiative. If possible, explain the importance of this option**

**Answer:**

As mentioned above the marginal number of Muslim pupils in Poland and small number of denominational schools in Poland makes it unnecessary to propose Islam in a Catholic (or any other denominational) school. Current efforts are rather focused on developing teaching materials for Islamic education carried out by the two Islamic religious communities with the status of legal entities, that is the Muslim Religious Union (MRU, *Muzułmański Związek Religijny*) and the Muslim League (ML, *Liga Muzułmańska*).

**VI. Religious symbols in public schools**

**VI.1. Question: Are religious symbols (e.g. crucifix) in public schools compulsory, allowed, or forbidden?**

**VI.2. Question: Is a teacher allowed to wear the Islamic headscarf and manifest her religion? Please explain if not allowed on which grounds.**

**VI.3. Question: Is a pupil allowed to wear the Islamic headscarf and manifest her religion? Please explain if not allowed on which grounds.**

**VI.4. Question: Who decides on the dress code in schools. Please refer to the law.**

**VI.5. Question: Can a pupil and/or a teacher be exempted from the dress code when she considers it her religious duty to wear the Islamic headscarf?**

**VI.6. Question: Who is the regulatory authority in this sphere?**

**VI.7. Question: What kind of disciplinary measures and proceedings are taken if the pupil or teacher fails to comply with the rules on dress codes?**

**VI.8. Question: Please describe the case-law in your country.**

**Answer:**

A crucifix is allowed in schools according to the *Ordinance of the Minister of National Education on conditions and ways of organizing religion in public kindergartens and schools* of 14<sup>th</sup> April 1992 (§12). There might also be prayers said at the beginning and end of each class, at pupils collective wish. The Ordinance doesn't mention symbols of any other religion.

There are probably not more than two dozen or so teachers wearing Islamic headscarves in Poland, what has to do with the marginal number of Muslims in Poland and the fact that many of them tend to assimilate (i.e. women don't cover their hair). The majority of teachers wearing a headscarf are native Polish converts to Islam (most of the Tatars don't cover their hair except for religious purposes, while the immigrants do not speak Polish fluent enough to work in Polish schools, and many of the second generation immigrants are assimilated and don't cover their hair). Teachers are allowed to wear the Islamic headscarf and there are no legal restrictions. However, the practice depends on individual situation. In several cases the teacher came to the interview wearing the headscarf, got the position and still could wear the headscarf. However, at least in one case the teacher had to remove the headscarf while entering the school building.

Pupils are also allowed to wear Islamic headscarves and some of them do so. The individual practice is also worked out by the school and the parents, e.g. in physical education, at swimming pool etc. No cases of bullying have been officially reported (what doesn't mean they don't exist), even though pupils wearing headscarves or looking ethnically different do stick out (see e.g. Grzymała-Moszczyńska and Trojanek 2011).

There are no universal regulations on dress code in public schools. The dress code might be regulated by school's statute (e.g. a school uniform), but this refers to non-public schools (if at all). In any case there are no regulations prohibiting the Islamic headscarf and it has never been a direct reason of exempting a teacher or a pupil. In the above-mentioned case of the teacher, who had to remove the headscarf, her work contract has not been renewed (despite of good teaching results as she claimed) without mentioning the reason. There was also one case of a teacher wearing headscarf who wanted to run for elections for the school director but was told not to do so. In this case the scarf/Islam argument was used, but in an informal setting.

So far there have been no court cases in this matter, nor any other school problem related to Muslims. The community is too small and the adopted strategy – form what could be observed from the few interviews conducted on this purpose – is to adjust as much as possible and negotiate individually with school authorities. This refers predominantly to the converts and immigrants, comparing with the Tatars who have been living in Poland for over 600 years and grew into local communities.

**VII. After-school education in private religious institutions. Islamic instruction organised after the school hours (age 6-18)**

**VII.1. Question: Is there any form of Islamic teaching (for children and youngsters of age 6-18) in your country organised after school time in private religious institutions:**

**VII.2. Question: Is there any form of Islamic teaching in your country organised in primary education age (6-12)**

**VII.3. Question: Is there any form of Islamic teaching in your country organised in secondary**

**education age (12-18)**

**VII.4. Question: How many such institutions are there in your country providing Islamic instruction organised after the school hours?**

**VII.5. Question: How many children take part in the activities of Islamic instruction organised after the school hours?**

**VII.6. Question: How is the pedagogical quality of Islamic instruction organised after the school hours safeguarded?**

**VII.7. Question: How would you characterize the public debate about this form of Islamic instruction organised after the school hours?**

**Answer:**

Every religious community that enjoys the status of a legal church entity is entitled to teach religion. The community itself designs the teaching programme and provides its own teachers. The programme is forwarded to the Ministry of Education, but only for information, since the Ministry is not entitled to interfere in the teaching content.

There is at least one (but not much more) private Islamic religious institution that provides religious instruction – the Iqra Foundation based in Warsaw. The foundation started its activity only recently. It combines Arabic classes with Islamic instruction and serves the youngest (around primary school age).

Most of the Islamic teaching (if not whole) takes place in REPs in several Polish cities. It is based either at schools or in local Islamic centres and carried out by two biggest religious communities with legal entitlement (MRU and ML). Since the number of REPs is limited, and the points serve also pupils from surrounding areas, cover all educational levels (from primary to secondary), and sometimes even organise parallel classes for the parents. Pupils who live far from the closest Islamic education point take part in the classes occasionally and study more on their own.

In at least one case Islamic education takes place in a private house, even though the class is subscribed to a religious educational centre in other city. According to one of the informants, the parents tried to established a REP in their own city, but were refused by the respective department of education, even though they fulfilled the criteria of having over 7 pupils interested in such class. These pupils are subscribed to an existing religious education point in a city over 70 km away from the city in which they live. The parents had tried to drive their children to the religious instruction for around a year, but gave up and decided to set up the class on their own. It is the only known case of refusal to establish a REP.

MRU provides after school Islamic education in the cities of Białystok, Bydgoszcz, Gdańsk, Poznań and Warszawa (two communities – at the prayer house in Wiertnicza St. and Warszawa-Fatih community), and in the village of Bohoniki. The courses take place either on Saturdays or Sundays, usually 2 hours per week at local schools or in prayer houses. In some cases, as in Białystok and Bohoniki (where the largest Tatar community lives) there are also activity clubs and courses on Tatar history and culture. In Warszawa classes are attended by non-Tatar students, while in Warszawa-Fatih – by local Turkish community. In other places Tatar and other Muslim pupils are attending the class together. The ML runs currently five REPs in the cities of Lublin, Katowice, Poznań, Warszawa and Wrocław. In all cases except for Warszawa, education takes place in local Islamic centres; in Warszawa it is a primary school (Kopeć 2010).

The number of institutions providing Islamic after school education in Poland is probably around five, but only two (ML and MRU) run a network of REPs (five and seven

respectively). The other are the Iqra Foundation and Meridian International School both seated in Warsaw.

The number of children is hard to estimate, since no institution collects data on the types and number of religions taught at schools or by private institutions. In fact, even both Islamic religious unions don't have any accurate data on the exact number of pupils. These numbers are known only on the local level of a particular REP. From the data collected it seems that each religious education point has from around 15 up to 70 pupils<sup>5</sup>, i.e. around 400 pupils in the whole country. The number used to be far higher in the case of the Tatar population – e.g. in Białystok there used to be over 200 pupils in early 90s. After the general decline of population began the number of pupils shrank to around 50.

Both Muslim religious communities developed their own curricula only recently. In the case of the MRU it was in 2009. A group of Islamic religion teachers, an imam and an educator prepared a curriculum which was accepted by the Mufti of Poland and the Highest Council of the MRU (Nalborczyk 2011: 172). The ML also developed its own curricula (the main difference is the lack of focus on Tatars, since the League unites mostly immigrants and converts to Islam) and published a textbook.

A REP it is a joint initiative of a school and a legal church entity, in which the religion teacher is sent by the religious community, but employed by the school. Both MRU and the ML state that their teachers are university graduates (often in pedagogical studies) with religious knowledge. In order to secure the quality of education the ML provides their teachers with a (facultative) course. The teachers are appointed by the Highest Council of the MRU or the Board of Imams of the ML. Therefore the quality is maintained predominantly at the level of the religious community itself, but also partly on the school level – since it employs the teacher.

So far there has been no public debate on teaching Islamic instruction after the school hours or about Muslims pupils in the educational system. Most of the current debate on Islam can be qualified as 'transplanted discourse' (Górak-Sosnowska 2011) – i.e. referring predominantly to issues and events related to Muslims living in Western Europe and/or countries with Muslim majority.

### **VIII. Additional comments**

This survey provides rather an insight into theory than diagnoses the reality. With around 35 thousand Muslims constituting less than 0.1% of the total population there are not many Muslim pupils entering the educational system. Moreover, out of the 35 thousand 3–5 thousand are Tatars (assimilated, perceived as autochthonous population) and around 5 thousand – Chechens (who fit into the category of 'refugee'). This means that the number of cases involving interaction between Muslim pupils and non-Muslim school environment is limited and the legal framework not fully explored and tested in practice yet.

There is hardly any written information on contemporary Islamic instruction in Polish schools (except for Nalborczyk 2011). That is why a significant source of information were interviews carried out by phone or e-mail with representatives of the Ministry of Education,

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<sup>5</sup> For Muslim League: 70 in Warsaw and 30–40 in the four Islamic centres; for Muslim Religious Union: 30 in Bohoniki, 50 in Białystok, 15 in Bydgoszcz, 15 in Gdańsk, and 20+10 in Warsaw.

Catholic Schools Council and two Islamic religious communities which – as legal church entities – have the right to conduct religious education in Polish schools. They are:

- Iwona Abi Issa, plenipotentiary for education of the Muslim League, 12.12.2011 (phone).
- Musa Czachorowski, spokesman of the Muslim Religious Union, 7.12.2011 (e-mail).
- Jolanta Kopacz, head of the Women and Children Department of the Muslim League, 8.12.2011 (phone).
- Grażyna Płoszańska, Department of General Education, Ministry of National Education, 8.12.2011 (phone).
- Dagmara Sulkiewicz, Islamic religion teacher, Muslim Religious Union, 14.12.2011 (e-mail).
- Halina Szahidewicz, head of the Islamic community of Białystok, Muslim Religious Union, 8.12.2011 (phone).
- Sister Maksymiliana Wojnar, secretary of the management board of the Catholic Schools Council, 8.12.2011 (phone).

Since the interviews have not been recorded (just noted down) or authorized, none of the interviewees is mentioned in the main text, or directly quoted. As additional source an online Internet forum for Muslims on Facebook was used.

## **XI. Bibliography**

Legal documents:

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