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**LEGAL STATUS OF TEACHERS AND THEIR ROLE
IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF POLISH EDUCATIONAL POLICY
IN VOLYN VOIVODESHIP DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD**

Abstract. *The purpose of the research is to analyse the main responsibilities of teachers in the field of education and upbringing of local schoolchildren, to outline the legal status of educators in accordance with the legislation of interwar Poland, to characterise their place and role in the state policy of that time, to present the activities of the Union of Polish Teachers in Volyn Voivodeship and its impact on the educational development and pedagogical thought in the region. The methodology of the research is based on analytical, comparative, historical, statistical, problematic, chronological methods. The Scientific Novelty of the article consists in the fact that it was possible to reveal the peculiarities of the legal status of teachers in Volyn Voivodeship during the interwar period for the first time, based on previously unknown archival documents, government decrees, school legislation, as well as the works of Ukrainian and foreign historiography. The role of teachers in the implementation of state policy has been clarified, and discrimination against teachers of Ukrainian nationality in the*

provision of social guarantees and material support has been demonstrated. **Conclusions.** The restored Second Polish Republic tried to spread a unified system of education throughout all the annexed voivodeships, including Volyn. Due to teachers' work, it was possible to implement the above-mentioned task. The functioning of the educational mechanism at all levels of schooling depended primarily on them. Consequently, the teachers were appointed primarily as representatives of the Polish nationality. Teachers were closely monitored by the educational administration and had to perform burdensome reporting work. The shortage of teachers was perhaps the biggest issue in the educational activities of interwar Poland, especially in the eastern Voivodeships. The Polish Teachers' Union played an important role in raising the profile of teachers and improving their financial situation. The organisation tried to make the teaching profession democratic, independent of excessive interference from school inspectors and supervisors.

Key words: teachers, interwar period, Second Polish Republic, Volyn Voivodeship, education system, Polish teachers' union.

ПРАВОВИЙ СТАТУС УЧИТЕЛІВ ТА ЇХНЯ РОЛЬ У РЕАЛІЗАЦІЇ ОСВІТНЬОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ ПОЛЬЩІ НА ТЕРЕНАХ ВОЛИНСЬКОГО ВОЄВОДСТВА В МІЖВОЄННИЙ ПЕРІОД

Анотація. Мета статті – розкрити основні обов'язки, що покладалися на педагогів у сфері навчання та виховання місцевої шкільної молоді, окреслити правовий статус освітян відповідно до законодавства міжвоєнної Польщі, охарактеризувати їх місце і роль у тогочасній державній політиці, представити діяльність Спілки польських учителів у Волинському воєводстві та її вплив на освітній розвиток і педагогічну думку в регіоні. **Методологічною основою дослідження** є аналітичний, порівняльно-історичний, статистичний та проблемно-хронологічний методи. **Наукова новизна** статті полягає у тому, що вперше на основі невідомих раніше архівних документів, урядових постанов, шкільного законодавства, а також доробків української та закордонної історіографії, вдалося розкрити особливості правового статусу вчителів на території Волинського воєводства у міжвоєнний період. З'ясовано роль учителів у реалізації державної політики, показано дискримінацію педагогів української національності у наданні їм соціальних гарантій та матеріального забезпечення.

Висновки. Відновлена Друга Річ Посполита намагалася поширити єдину систему освіти на теренах усіх приєднаних воєводств з-поміж іншого, й Волинського. Реалізація цього завдання була можливою насамперед завдяки діяльності вчителів. Саме від них передусім залежало функціонування освітнього механізму у всіх ланках шкільництва. Тому вчителями першочергово призначали представників польської національності. Педагогічні працівники перебували під пильним контролем освітньої адміністрації і змушені були виконувати обтяжливу звітну роботу. Нестача вчительських кадрів була чи не найбільшою проблемою в освітній діяльності міжвоєнної Польщі, особливо на теренах східних воєводств. Велику роль у піднесенні авторитету освітян та у поліпшенні їхнього фінансового становища відіграла Спілка вчителів Польщі. Організація намагалася зробити професію педагога демократичною, незалежною від надмірного втручання шкільних інспекторів та кураторів.

Ключові слова: вчителі, міжвоєнний період, Друга Річ Посполита, Волинське воєводство, система освіти, Спілка вчителів Польщі.

Problem Statement. One of the consequences of World War was the incorporation of the Volyn Voivodeship into the revived Polish state under the terms of the Riga Peace Treaty of 1921. The political forces of the Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth considered their right to possess Western Volyn legitimate, so they began to implement administrative, socio-economic, and cultural and educational changes, which were accompanied by discrimination against the local population. The development of schooling was to be subordinated to the national legislation, since the issue of education, according to researcher Yuriy Kramar, "was an important component of the assimilation policy of the Second Polish-Lithuanian

Commonwealth in the eastern voivodeships of the state” (Kramar, 2011, p. 2). The Board of Trustees of Volyn School District was established in May 1922, whose task was to manage the educational processes in the region. The main administrative functions were performed by the trustees and school inspectors, but the teachers were responsible for the effective and coordinated work of the school as an educational institution. Since the level of education in Volyn Voivodeship was one of the lowest in all of Poland, the tasks assigned to the teachers were almost overwhelming. In this study we have tried to cover the problems Volyn teachers faced, what social guarantees they claimed and how they tried to implement the Polish state policy in the educational sphere.

Review of Recent Research. It is worth noting that the education issues during the interwar period were studied by both Polish and Ukrainian historians. For example, there should be mentioned among the Polish scholars the following ones: Włodzimierz Mędrzecki (Mędrzecki, 1988), Karol Sanojca (Sanojca, 2014, 2020), Iwona Michalska (Michalska, 2014, 2019), Andrzej Smolarczyk (Smolarczyk, 2020) and Piotr Gołdyn (Gołdyn, 2021). Due to the above-mentioned works, it is possible to understand the main aspects of the Polish school management and their consequences, to reveal the specifics of teachers’ duties. Taking into consideration the studies carried out by the following Ukrainian scholars as Lesia Aleksiiievets (Aleksiiievets, 2011), Albert Venher (Venher, 2011), Olena Volontyr (Volontyr, 2013), Tetiana Zavorodnia (Zavorodnia, 2007), Yuriy Kramar (Kramar, 2015), Andriy Nahirniak (Nahirniak, 2018), Oksana Ruda (Ruda, 2019), Roksolana Mazurok, Andriy Smyrnov (Mazurok, & Smyrnov, 2024), we come to the conclusion that the educational policy of the Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth led to the elimination of education for the national minorities in Volyn Voivodeship, discrimination against the Ukrainian teachers, etc. Valentyna Dobrochynska (Dobrochynska, 2004) studied certain areas related to Volyn intelligentsia activities, and also analyzed the features of teaching staff of the Law of God teachers (Dobrochynska, & Lenartovych, 2025). The studies by Daniel Fedorowycz (Fedorowycz, 2021), Stefan Corrsin (Corrsin, 1998) were of utmost importance in order to understand the Polish state policy towards the ethnic minorities during the interwar period. However, the issue on the legal status of teachers, their place and role in Volyn education system was covered fragmentarily and requires more detailed research.

The research purpose is to clarify the main responsibilities of teachers in the field of education and upbringing of local schoolchildren, outline the legal status of educators in accordance with legislation of the interwar Poland, characterize their place and role in the state policy of that time, present the activities of the Union of Polish Teachers in Volyn Voivodeship and its influence on the education and pedagogical thought development in the region.

Research Results. Having annexed Volyn Voivodeship, the Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth began the construction of the public schools to improve the level of education of the local population, since the previous government of the Russian Empire did not contribute to the expansion of educational institutions and educational process intensification (Czepczyńska, 2016, p. 34). Due to the scarcity of teachers, the implementation of this task was often hampered, and it was manifested not only in quantitative terms, but also in qualitative terms (Smolarczyk, 2020, p. 234). The search of additional personnel was carried out by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education (MViNO) and the Employment Centres jointly, but the increase in teachers at the beginning of 1920s in Volyn school district was weak. According to statistics, in the 1920/21 school year the number of teachers was 986, in 1921/22 – 2077, in 1922/1923 – 2086, in 1923/1924 – 2192, in 1924/1925 – 2098, in

1925/1926 – 2311 (Falski, 1938, p. 126). Volyn Voivodeship was ranked as the second to last in terms of the number of teachers, compared to other voivodeships of the interwar Poland (Polissia Voivodeship was in last place).

Due to the lack of qualified teachers, especially in the south-eastern voivodeships of the interwar Poland, there was an issue regarding the educational tasks implementation (Michalska, 2019, p. 34). Equating teachers in status with civil servants influenced the growth of their role in society, but did not change the existing state of affairs. I. Michalska, Polish scholar noted that it was required to spend reasonable time in order to implement teachers' professional training and the situation improved only at the end of the 1920s (2019, p. 34). There were created the professional development courses and teacher seminaries rapidly at the beginning of the first decade of the revived Polish state (Sanojca, 2014, p. 278). If a teacher graduated from the teacher seminaries with a non-Polish language of instruction, it was required to pass an additional exam in the Polish language proficiency, as well as the methodological and pedagogical subjects. The above-mentioned innovations were introduced by a resolution of the Sejm of the Second Polish Republic of May 27 of 1919 and, according to O. Ruda, contributed to stabilization of teachers staff supply (Ruda, 2019, p. 167).

The results became noticeable gradually: there were only 60% of teachers, who had professional training as of 1923, and in the early 1930s – 80%, which is evidence of a trend regarding an increase in the number of qualified workers (Galaj, 2011, p. 282).

According to the study, the social security: free medical care, discounts on public transport, and primary school principals was guaranteed for teachers, as civil servants, and they were given two tithes of land for use (Mazurok, & Smyrnov, 2024, p. 125). The largest land plots were received primarily by the principals of state comprehensive schools. For example, there were mentioned figures ranging from 200 square meters (in the village of Matsyeiv) to 6 hectares of land (in the village of Holoby), when there was the announcement regarding a competition for a school principal's vacancy in Kovel povit of Volyn school district (SARR, f. 248, d. 1, c. 2, p. 138). It should be stated that almost all the heads of rural schools were provided with their own housing with a kitchen and two or three rooms in the same povit. The Polish researcher K. Sanojca mentioned in his study that the forestry authorities were obliged to sell the wood for the construction and repair of schools at a discount of 25–50%, and in order to heat school premises and teachers' apartments – at a discount of 50% (Sanojca, 2014, p. 285).

In addition to the above-mentioned privileges, teachers had the right to protection, since they were equated with civil servants. There were entailed sanctions provided for by the Criminal Code (fine, arrest or imprisonment from 6 months to 5 years) in case of insulting a teacher during the performance of his or her official duties, indecent behaviour towards him or her, using threats or violence against him/her, attempts at bribery, etc. One can agree to the opinion of the Polish researcher Jerzy Mizgalski that “the legal acts of the early 1920s clearly raised the social prestige of a teacher compared to the legislation of the Austrian and Russian times” (Mizgalski, 1994, p. 86).

It should be noted that social guarantees and privileges concerned teachers and principals of the Polish nationality, not the Ukrainian nationality mainly. There was the discrimination in salaries of the Ukrainian teachers, which was especially noticeable. According to the small statistical yearbook of 1939, the initial and lowest salary of a teacher was 130 zlotyh, but the figure of 210 zlotyh could be also seen (Mały Rocznik Statystyczny, 1939, p. 129). However, we came across an excerpt from an article, which was called “The Teachers and Cigarettes” on the pages of the periodical “Selianska Dolia” issued in 1931, which mentioned the following:

“Just think: the Ukrainian teachers’ salary, all with higher education, in today’s times for 20-30 hours of work per week costs as much as a heavy smoker needs for the cigarettes. At the same time, the Board of Trustees throws its Polish teacher into the gymnasium and orders him to pay ten times more” (“Selianska doli”, 1931, p. 2). The above-mentioned examples of discrimination against the Ukrainian teachers in Volyn Voivodeship in 1921 – 1939 were part of the general policy of the Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth aimed at the national assimilation of the Ukrainian population.

The scholars, who studied the education systems in the authoritarian European nations in the 1920s and 1930s, where the national minorities rights were disregarded, found a solution in giving the minorities autonomy, so they could run their own schools, funded by the state budget (Ansell, & Lindvall, 2013, p. 510).

The ideas brought by D. Fedorowycz should be highlighted, who considered the interwar Poland to be a state that often violated obligations to protect the rights of the national minorities. Even though “the Polish statesmen could not completely ignore the national minorities aspirations of, they made sure that the centre of gravity in the interwar Poland was its ethnically the Polish core” (Fedorowycz, 2021, p. 78).

Due to the fact that the curricula provided for the mandatory study of religion, an important role was assigned to teachers of the Law of God. They were entrusted with a high social mission, which consisted in the moral education of virtuous citizens. Taking into consideration the instructions of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education, the professional qualifications were determined for teachers of Religion, including the Orthodox, at state and private schools. They could have a Master’s Degree in Theology with mandatory knowledge of the Polish language. According to V. Dobrochynska, there was a shortage of the religion teachers at schools in Volyn Voivodeship, since the lessons of the Law of God were conducted by the parish priests (Dobrochynska, & Lenartovych, 2025, p. 61). Due to the fact that there was the scarcity of teachers, which was especially noticeable in the rural areas, the classes were combined into common groups. Consequently, the quality of information acquisition was adversely impacted by the disregard for the students’ age and psychological traits.

The focus should be on the didactic and educational duties performance by teachers. There had been the following pedagogical workload since 1934: 30 hours per week – for employees of the state comprehensive schools, and 20–28 hours – for the heads of such institutions. In addition to the lessons, teachers were burdened with other activities, for example, attending church services with tudents on Sundays and holidays and holding parent-teacher meetings. On the other hand, there could be some professional benefits, which included (in addition to the usual annual leave) the annual paid leave for health reasons, the paid leave (duration: two months) for resolving important personal, family or property issues, leave for advanced training in the specialty (five months for 20 years of work), as well as the paid leave in connection with the studies or scientific activities (Sanojca, 2014, p. 281).

The Law issued on July 1 of 1926 “On Professional Relations of Teachers” (amended in 1932, 1933, and 1938), known as “Teachers’ Pragmatics” was the basic document regulating the legal status of teachers. It defined the rules for admission to teaching service, the rights and obligations of teachers, including issues on salary levels, educational and administrative tasks, and professional advancement.

The chief focus was on the role of teachers regarding the Polish educational policy implementation, which was aimed at strengthening the state unity and assimilating the

Ukrainian population. The governments of the Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth considered education to be a vital tool for the political and national integration of the annexed territories, hence, teachers were supposed to become the main driving force in the above-mentioned policy implementation on the ground. It is common knowledge that the Ukrainian teachers defended the right of Ukrainian students to study and master their native language and culture. The national education was intended to revive the centuries-old hopes of the Ukrainian people to restore and build their own, independent and united state (Czepil, & Karpenko, 2020, p. 113). It's clear that Volyn curatorship did everything they could in order to stop this and made the teachers of the Polish nationality work as agents for the state education system.

There prevailed the educators without proper professional training at the Polish schools in the early 1920s, who focused on earning a living and daily material existence. It should be mentioned that the focus was on the peculiarities of the teaching profession, the educational and educational activities of teachers on the pages of the Polish press of the interwar period. The revived Poland tried to make teachers the paramount builders of the new state through work with children and youth. The educational component in the educational process was one of the key directions (Ruda, 2021, p. 35). There was no doubt that the above-mentioned work was not easy and required talent and sincere dedication in order to achieve successful results. Every teacher, who tried to take their duty as an educator seriously understood this.

The combination of educational activities in the work of teachers was aimed at instilling in students, as future citizens of Poland, a sense of national belonging. Therefore, there were organized the educational hours of a patriotic nature at school after the core subjects. For example, in Rivne povit, the curatorship obliged teachers to involve students in listening to the radio talks on the topic "School and Defense of State". In the curator's address to the educators of Rivne district, it was emphasized that young people should realize the drastic need to defend their homeland in the event of the armed conflicts (SARR, f. 248, d. 1, c. 2, p. 26). As the patriotic education was an integral part of educational process, there was introduced the military training in accordance with the order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine issued on February 4 of 1931 along with the study of the subjects in the humanitarian, natural science and mathematics, and art and technology cycles (Zavhorodnia, 2007, p. 108).

The Boards of Trustees/curatorships and school inspectorates supervised work at schools and the educators' activities (Gołdyn, 2021, p. 234). The most serious cases of misconduct by the teachers were referred to the disciplinary bodies. However, in accordance with the offers brought in by the Ministry of Education, efforts were made in advance to exhaust all other possibilities of administrative influence. Disciplinary Committees were established as early as 1919, and the rules of their functioning were laid down in teacher pragmatism. In addition to the Committees, there were also appeal bodies under the Ministry of Education (Nahiriak, 2018, p. 94).

It could be stated that teachers' fate was in the hands of a school inspector after analyzing the publications of the government journal of Volyn school district curatorship for the period 1925 – 1930. He presented to the curator his position on the applications for appointment, transfer or dismissal of teachers of general education schools, and with the curator's consent he could appoint, dismiss or transfer teachers at his own will within a povit (Gołdyn, 2021, p. 229). A teacher, who worked on a permanent basis could not be dismissed from the service without his consent (this required a decision of the Disciplinary Committee or two unsatisfactory professional evaluations). On the other hand, it was much easier to dismiss a

teacher, who worked on a temporary basis (Sanojca, 2014, p. 285). Since Poland's personnel policy in the educational field was aimed at increasing the number of the Polish teachers, it was logical that one of the first circulars of the curator of Volyn school district should have been issued, according to which all teachers, without exception, had to obtain the Polish citizenship within two months. Otherwise, they were threatened with the dismissal from their positions from July 1 of 1922 (Kramar, 2015, p. 84). As a result, many Ukrainian teachers lost their jobs due to the inability to obtain the Polish citizenship. In addition, teachers of the national schools were sent to work in Poland. Instead there were appointed the Polish teachers, who not only did not know the local language, but also did not have the appropriate professional training (Venher, 2011, p. 2013). The population met them unfriendly. There were many cases when parents refused to send their children to such a teacher. The Ukrainian Parliamentary Representation of Volyn (the representation of the Volhynian Ukrainian ambassadors in the Sejm) received hundreds of complaints from villagers about new teachers (Mędrzecki, 1988, p. 141). There were involved in schooling 1,300 Poles and almost half as many Ukrainians in Volyn by the end of 1922. It was indicated that personnel policy became a means of the indirect Polonization of the Ukrainian schooling in Volyn (Volontyr, 2013, p. 11). Despite the shortage of qualified teachers, the authorities closed the Ukrainian Teacher Training Seminaries in the early 1920s: two for men (in Dederkaly and Derman) and one for women (in Zymne). They trained mainly teachers for schools where instruction was conducted in Ukrainian (Kramar, 2015, p. 92).

There were many cases when teachers voluntarily resigned. In particular, there were 91 teachers, who abandoned their profession in Volyn in 1921 – 1922. In total, there were hired 792 teachers, the vast majority of whom were of the Polish nationality by Volyn School District Board of Trustees at the beginning of its creation (Kraeutler, 1923, p. 528). In his study V. Panasiuk mentioned that there were 3,446 teachers in 1932, of whom 81,1% were the Poles, and only 13% were of the Ukrainian nationality (Panasiuk, 2003, p. 129). The statistics provided emphasized the subordinate status of the Ukrainian teachers.

It is worth considering the fact that the state administration tried to have influence on the results of the population census in the direction of artificially increasing the Polish majority, when analyzing the nationality of teachers (Corrsin, 1998, p. 144). The above-mentioned led to significant distortions of data on the national identity of the teaching staff.

The teaching profession was dependent on burdensome administration and school reporting. The district inspectors required school principals to submit reports on the activities of all teachers in the form of observation sheets from time to time. These were to contain information on the professional qualities of teachers, which included: conscientiousness in performance of official duties, methods and results of educational and didactic work, teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships, teachers' attendance at the professional development courses, knowledge of school curriculum and administrative rules and regulations (SARR, f. 248, d. 1, c. 2, p. 238).

An important role in the educational system functioning in the 1920s and 1930s was played by the Polish Teachers' Union, which contributed to the creation of a new Polish statehood, spread progressive pedagogical thought, organized courses for teachers, and published many pedagogical periodicals (Michalska, 2014, p. 60). Jakub Hoffman, a teacher, and local historian was the head of the district branch of the Union in Volyn Voivodeship.

The Union of Polish Teachers in Volhynia resolved various issues, including financial issues of schooling. During the Union's Congress in May 1932 in Rivne, a plan for a fund

for the construction of new schools was adopted, according to which voluntary parental contributions amounted to from 2 to 10 zlotyh annually. In this way, the total amount of funds in Volyn Voivodeship could amount to 200,000 – 300,000 zlotyh per year (SARR, f. 184, d. 1, c. 6, p. 153). At the same time, J. Hoffman emphasized that in the matter of the voluntary contributions, teachers only had to convey information to parents, and one of the members of the Union had to collect the funds. The purpose of this decision was to preserve the teachers' authority, avoiding accusations of misappropriation of funds by them.

In Volyn the Union representatives also identified a number of issues in the functioning of schools and position of teachers. Firstly, the results of the Congress indicated the negative consequences of the education system dependence on school authorities. Excessive interference by supervisors and inspectors in the educational process, according to the participants of the Union, will lead to a decrease in the educational level of the school, minimize a teacher's enthusiasm and make it impossible for a school to develop normally. Second of all, attention was paid to respecting the rights of the teachers of the Orthodox faith (on the days of Orthodox holidays, Orthodox teachers should have a day off). Third of all, children from rural areas should be able to go to lyceums and gymnasiums (SARR, f. 184, d. 1, c. 6, p. 156). It should be noted that the Union of Teachers of Poland tried to take an apolitical position throughout its existence (Szczuchura, 1957, p. 213). Such kind of feature contributed to a growing popularity of this organization in all regions of Poland. Volyn Voivodeship was no exception: as of 1933, in the Union there were 2,034 members. During the study, it was found that among the members of Volyn District Board of the Teachers' Union of Poland, the Poles predominated, but there were also the Ukrainians, in particular, ambassadors Stepan Skrypyk and Yevhen Bohuslavsky (SARR, f. 181, d. 1, c. 6, p. 141).

Conclusion. During the interwar period, the legal status of teachers in Volyn Voivodeship was regulated by the regulatory legal acts adopted by the Polish government. Teachers had certain rights and obligations, were subordinate to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, curators and school inspectors, who represented state authorities. Teachers were tasked with implementing the educational policy of the Polish authorities in Volyn. They implemented curricula, educated students in the spirit of the Polish national identity and contributed to the Polonization of the local population.

Despite the problems with the insufficient number of schools and national contradictions, teachers of Volyn Voivodeship sought to provide quality education for children and youth and to shape their comprehensive development. The Professional activity of teachers was important for the socio-cultural transformation of the region in interwar Poland.

An important organization that supported the educational tasks implementation in Volyn Voivodeship was the Union of Teachers of Poland. Its members tried to monitor compliance with the legal status of teachers in the region and promote their professional development. The research on the legal status and role of teachers in Volyn Voivodeship in the 1920s – 1930s provides an opportunity to better understand the features of the Polish educational policy in the Ukrainian lands, as well as to see the contribution of the teachers to the socio-political processes of this period.

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