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The State of Research on the National Education Commission in the Context of Its Anniversaries

Abstract

The aim of the article is to analyze the state of research on the Commission of National Education in the context of its anniversaries, especially anniversary celebrations and scientific achievements in 1873, 1973, 2013 and 2023. The historical-comparative method was used, which is used in research on the course of phenomena and processes taking place in past and is based mainly on the analysis of historical sources. Ceremonies commemorating the founding of KEN provoke increased interest in its merits, because the achievements of this distinguished institution are still in the center of attention, not only of historians, education historians, educators, lawyers, but also of those who treat the Polish Enlightenment tradition as an inspiration for reforming the education system. And this is hardly surprising, because the National Education Commission inspired young people with the spirit of citizenship and patriotism, and thus contributed to the survival of Polish culture and language. Moreover, subsequent anniversary celebrations are also a great way to pay tribute to the members and people cooperating with KEN. Generally, these are activities that serve to consolidate historical memory, because good memory of the past is also a clear awareness of the connection with the present.

Keywords:

Poland, National Education Commission, enlightenment, jubilee, research

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*A nation without historical memory is not a nation,
and when it ceases to be a saint, then it will not
already be worthy of the name it inherited.*

(Kazimierz Brodziński)

1. INTRODUCTION

The article's aim is to analyse the state of research on the Commission of National Education in the context of its anniversaries. Due to the large number of studies on the reflection on the Commission of National Education and the limited scope of the publication, I focus on the topics repeatedly referred to by the authors dealing with the mentioned educational institution. The issues under consideration have been presented in a chronological and problematic order, considering the so-called round jubilees, especially anniversary celebrations, and the resulting scientific achievements in 1873, 1973, 2013, and 2023.

The reason for writing this article is the 250th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education. It could be argued that the anniversary has provoked interest in the achievements of this unique in Europe Ministry of Education, and that it is an occasional enthusiasm for its activities. However, it is not the first time that the ceremonies commemorating the founding of the Commission of National Education, established on October 14, 1773 by the Sejm of the Republic of Poland under the king's protectorate, provoke increased interest in its merits, it is in fact a tradition thanks to which the state of knowledge about its achievements is regularly enriched. The achievements of this illustrious institution are still in the centre of attention, not only of historians, historians of education, pedagogues, lawyers, but also of those who treat the Polish tradition of the Enlightenment as an inspiration to reform the education system. And it is hardly surprising. The Commission of National Education inspired young people with the spirit of citizenship and patriotism, and thus contributed to the survival of Polish culture and language. The Commission honoured the text of the Sejm law *The establishment of the Kommissyi over the education of the youth of the national nobility under the supervision* made public in the Universal of October 24, 1773, according to which the "training and education of young people is the only condition for the state to be happy" (Bartnicka, 2015, p. 23). Moreover, the next anniversary celebrations are also an excellent way to pay tribute to the members and people cooperating with the Commission of National Education. In general,

these are activities that serve to consolidate historical memory, because a good memory of the past is also an awareness of the connection with the present.

As Ignacy Chrzanowski (1923), a literary historian and professor at the Jagiellonian University, wrote, the memory of the past “is one of the most important features of cultural nations, as opposed to non-cultural ones, so all nations celebrate anniversaries of important events”, and which events are important depends on the level and direction of the culture of a given epoch.

However, it happened that the anniversary celebrations dedicated to the Commission were the cause of conflicts, even when the time perspective was distant and should have soothed emotions and fostered a rational debate popularising the work and effort of the Commission of National Education’s activists. The disputes that arose in the twentieth century were aroused by almost similar motives as in the eighteenth century, and were primarily related to political arguments.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE COMMISSION OF NATIONAL EDUCATION AND “PERMANENT MONUMENTS”

Within a hundred years since the establishment of the Commission of National Education, as Wiktor Hahn¹ calculated, 39 studies related to this important Ministry of Education in the history of schools were published (Mrozowska, 1971). The situation changed after 1873, when the 100th anniversary celebrated in Lviv contributed to recalling the merits of the Commission and stimulated in-depth research. Even though the atmosphere in which it took place provoked fierce polemics questioning the sense of celebrating the Commission of National Education. It was claimed that it was a ceremony related to the liquidation of the Jesuit Order and the seizure of their property². In order to take over these properties, on April 29, the Crown and

¹ Wiktor Hahn (born on September 9, 1871 in Vienna – died on November 2, 1959 in Warsaw) was a Polish literary historian, bibliographer, professor at the University of Lviv, the Catholic University of Lublin, and the University of Warsaw.

² In 1773, there was an unexpected prospect of taking over the Jesuit estate, the value of which was then estimated at a huge amount of about 32 million Polish zlotys. Thus, the management of the Jesuit property became of paramount importance. In this situation, the creation of the Commission of National Education, and especially the idea of centralised management of the reform, which was considered innovative in Europe at the time, was an excellent way of freely disposing of funds (Urniał, 2020). J. Urniał (2020, p. 21) adds that: “as a result of the robbery policy of the so-called distribution commissions, operating until 1776, when 30% of movable property was appropriated (by clergy and laymen), which led to the collapse of the Commission of National Education’s finances in the 1980s”.

Lithuanian Distribution Commissions were established, whose task was to obtain funds for education from the sale and lease of Jesuit estates. According to Ewa Danowska (2020, p. 10) – it turned out that the members of the Commission, “not without reason commonly called ‘scratchers’, were not entirely reliable and honest, and according to estimates, from the former wealth of the Jesuits, estimated at PLN 800 thousand of annual income, 30% is gone”. The value of the Jesuit estates, even after being “scratched”, was estimated at 33 million zlotys.

On the other hand, the supporters of the celebrations of the Commission of National Education believed that its achievements should be remembered because, as [Kazimierz – note E. K.] Brodziński (1926)³ said, it was the anchor that stopped the ship of the homeland over the abyss. For, as Ignacy Chrzanowski (1923) wrote, the Commission of National Education “educated both the body and the spirit, both the mind and the heart, both Christian and national feelings; It was it that began to inculcate in Polish souls the conviction that neither the state nor the nation can survive long without education” (p. 12). Despite these merits, the 100th anniversary of the Commission of National Education “was almost completely forgotten – only the Pedagogical Society in Lviv remembered it!” (p. 13). For example, the victory at Vienna, the founding of the Jagiellonian University (p. 19), were celebrated.

Initially, the convention was planned in Kraków. Difficulties and obstacles began to appear when the preparations were fully advanced. The organisers were accused of “recklessness” and it was decided that the “whole thought should be abandoned” (Mrozowska, 1971, p. 12).

A week before the scheduled date of the congress (July 17–19), the main board of the Pedagogical Society received information that there were cases of cholera in Cracow (*Na pamiątkę*, 1873, p. 11), and therefore the anniversary should be cancelled. The leading speakers of the anniversary also resigned from participating in the celebrations, e.g., Jan Działyński⁴ and Karol Libelt⁵, justifying themselves

³ Kazimierz Brodziński – Polish poet of the sentimental era, historian, literary theoretician and critic, translator, publicist, and Christian thinker.

⁴ Kanty Działyński, count (born on September 28, 1829 in Kórnik; died on March 30, 1880 in the same place) – Polish social and political activist, insurgent, president of the Literary and Historical Society. He was the son of an insurgent and a member of parliament Titus (1796–1861) [1] and Celestyna Zamoyska (1805–1883). On February 21, 1857, he married Princess Izabella Czartoryska (1830–1899), daughter of the Duke Adam Jerzy Czartoryski (1770–1861) – President of the National Government.

⁵ Karol Fryderyk Libelt (born on April 8, 1807 in Poznań; died on June 9, 1875 in Brdów) – Polish Messianic philosopher, political and social activist, President of the Poznań Society of Friends of Sciences.

with poor health. Although Józef Ignacy Kraszewski did not cancel his participation, he eventually sent his lecture in writing (*Na pamiątkę*, 1873, p. 15)⁶.

The Pedagogical Society showed great determination and moved the congress to Lviv. The celebration of the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education took place on July 17, 1873, despite many obstacles (Hahn, 1923, pp. 8–10).

In the summary of the meeting, attention was drawn to the enormous merits of the Commission of National Education rendered to the Polish nation. It was noted that the Commission had undertaken the enormous work of “lifting the nation out of the age-old moral misery in which the nation was plunged, and it had fulfilled this task brilliantly and victoriously, as well as to the great benefit of the nation” (*Na pamiątkę*, 1873, p. 16).

A lasting result of this jubilee was, m.in, a publication entitled *Na pamiątkę stuletniej rocznicy ustanowienia Komisji Edukacji Narodowej*, published in 1873 by the Main Board of the Pedagogical Society.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, according to Stanisław Krzemiński (1908, p. 6) – historian, literary critic, publicist, secretary *Wielka encyklopedia powszechna ilustrowana*⁷, he wrote: “The time has finally come to start working on history”. This time for archival research was initiated by Teodor Wierzbowski. He published an extremely rich collection of documents of the Commission of National Education. According to Julian Dybec (2014, p. 39), Teodor Wierzbowski’s book *Komisja Edukacji Narodowej* is the “most conscientious compilation and discussion of the international literature on the Commission up to 1911. This collection is all the more valuable because after it, no one has attempted to examine various publications in Russian, Ukrainian, and Lithuanian, in which references were made to the history of education of that epoch”. Knowledge of these sources contributed to a colossal enrichment of historical knowledge about the history of the Commission of National Education. The enormous publishing output of Teodor Wierzbowski (1921)⁸ was also referred to by Antoni Karbowski (1983;

⁶ Józef Ignacy Kraszewski’s dissertation, entitled *The Commission of National Education, Its Work and Merits in the Field of Public Education*, presented by Dr Karol Benoni (former President of the Main Board of the Pedagogical Society in Lviv, died on January 6, 1904) (*Na pamiątkę*, 1873).

⁷ *Wielka encyklopedia powszechna ilustrowana* – published by Saturnin Sikorski in 1890–1914 in Warsaw; the largest Polish universal encyclopedia, unfinished (55 volumes, to the item *Patroklos*) because of the outbreak of World War I.

⁸ For the historians of education, particularly valuable are sources published in 1901–1920, such as: “Raporty szkół” (until 1907 he published eight notebooks), “Raporty Wizytatorów” (two), “Raport Szkół niższych i o szkołach parafialnych” (all from the Crown; 23 notebooks, 12 inspection notebooks and reports of the meetings of the Commission from the years 1773–1794 [seven notebooks]). Two

1902; 1905; 1907), a historian of education, who also dealt with the history of the Commission of National Education. To this day, the works of A. Karbowski are a valuable “testimony to the emergence of a new direction in research in the field of the history of education in general, and in relation to the Commission of National Education in particular” (Mrozowska, 1971, p. 18). Antoni Karbowski (1905, p. 247) pointed out that the “educational system of the Commission will be absorbed (...) by all progressive and pedagogical ideals (...), was based on the achievements of experience and science (...), was the result of thorough scientific deliberations and prudent criticism (...). These are the virtues to which they have given a solid, inexhaustible foundation to the educational system, and place it among the educational systems of today”. Antoni Karbowski also noted that “What is good in Herbart’s system and in the pedagogical aphorisms of Mrs. Ellen Key, which are famous today, and in all the latest didactic and pedagogical works, has already been in the educational system of the Commission and is the scientific reason for its famous glory”.

Simultaneously, it was a time to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education. The year 1923 was considered to be the year of remembrance of the Commission (Mrozowska, 1971), because, as Henryk Rowid (1923, p. 129) claimed in the pages of the “Ruch Pedagogiczny”, the memory of the ancestors and educators of the Nation should be honoured primarily with “permanent monuments”. Nevertheless, this time there were some skirmishes. The celebration of the anniversary was questioned by the clergy, pointing out that the “Commission of National Education was an imitation of Austrian Josephinism, acted to the detriment of the Church, robbed it of its goods, deprived it of education, which should be an undeniable property” (Czapliński, 1923).

Although the progressive ideas of the Commission of National Education provoked opposition even in the 20th century, anniversary school celebrations were held all over the country and were subsidised by Stanisław Głabiński, the Minister of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment (Marszałek, 1995, p. 72).

The most lasting souvenirs of this anniversary were the publications and articles published on this occasion. According to the bibliography collected by Wiktor Hahn, the following should be mentioned: 60 titles of daily newspapers (*Ku uczczeniu*, 1923) and periodicals (Mrozowska, 1971), as well as monographs. Among the latter, special attention should be paid to the study by Hanna Pohowska

of these contained the Society’s Protocols for the Elementary Books. The last work, published by Teodor Wierzbowski, was a book entitled *Szkoły parafialne w Polsce i na Litwie za czasów Komisji Edukacji Narodowej, 1773–1794*.

(1925): *Sprawa oświaty ludu w dobie Komisji Edukacji Narodowej*, Zygmunt Kukulski: *Pierwiastkowe przepisy pedagogiczne Komisji Edukacji Narodowej z lat 1773–1776*, and the later published work *Pierwsi nauczyciele świeccy w szkole wydziałowej lubelskiej w dobie Komisji Edukacji Narodowej*. Since the second mentioned monograph of Zygmunt Kukulski was published just before World War II, it did not arouse the attention it deserved. It was the first work dealing with the important problem of the policy of the Commission of National Education – the secularisation of education. Also interesting is the work of Melania Skorzeplianka (1935) *Feliks Oraczewski, rektor Krakowskiej Szkoły Głównej*, although according to Kamila Mrozowska (1971, p. 31) many of her assessments, after a detailed analysis of the sources, “should be revised”.

On the other hand, according to Beata Topij-Stempińska, the dissolution of the Jesuit Order was discussed in publications on the Commission of National Education and textbooks on the history of education: Franciszek Majchrowicz, *Wielka reforma szkolna ks. Stanisława Konarskiego i Komisji Edukacji Narodowej* (1923) and Stanisław Kot (1923), *Komisja Edukacji Narodowej 1773–1794* and *Historia wychowania*. Stanisław Kot (1924) described the manner in which the Commission was appointed: “It [the Sejm delegation] was forced to do so only by a sudden, unforeseen fact; suppression of the Jesuit Order by Pope Clement XIV. The famous papal briefing [...] caused confusion in Warsaw: the bishops of the Party to submit to the Pope and suppress the order, the nobility adoring the Jesuits wanted to maintain the order in spite of Rome, and finally the leaders of the delegation, tempted by the hope of being caught in Jesuit goods, decided to carry out the will of Rome” (pp. 392–393).

Also in historical publications published on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education, the theme of the dissolution and the contribution of the Jesuits to the work of the Commission of National Education appeared (Majchrowicz, 1923; Dąbrowska, 1932; Bednarski, 1933).

On the other hand, moral issues were the subject of interest of Stanisław Tyniec (1922), while Jan Poprawski (1923) focused on the establishment and significance of the Commission of National Education.

An in-depth analysis of the legislation of the Commission of National Education was also of interest to Jan Lewicki, who collected materials and correspondence of Hugo Kołłątaj concerning his organisational and pedagogical activities. The World War II interrupted this work, the materials were destroyed, and the “distinguished historian of education and historiographer of the Commission of National Education died during the occupation. His fate was shared by many

others” (Mrozowska, 1971, p. 31), including Ludwik Kamykowski, the publisher of Jędrzej Śniadecki’s correspondence. Kamykowski died on November 13, 1944, while Stanisław Bednarski, a great expert on Jesuit education, died in Dachau on July 16, 1942.

During the World War II, on the 170th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education, a significant part of the collected and published materials, e.g., concerning the Commission, deposited in the Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw, was lost. It was the anniversary when, during the war and occupation, the Polish Teachers’ Union, operating under the code name of the Secret Teachers’ Organisation, fought for the survival of Polish education and culture. All this reminded of the time of the partitions, when the memory of the Commission’s actions helped survive the time of captivity.

The work undertaken after the war had to be started on a very depleted and dispersed source material, but during the 25 years of the Polish People’s Republic, the achievements of the Commission of National Education were enriched by 15 source publications and 13 monographs on the activities of the Commission of National Education. Moreover, articles have been published in various types of journals, studies, notebooks, etc. The work carried out by the Enlightenment Team of the Department of History of Science and Technology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Laboratory for the History of Education of the Polish Academy of Sciences headed by Professor Łukasz Kurdybacha, as well as the Committee on Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Mrozowska, 1971, p. 34) contributed to the deepening of this research.

On the other hand, during the Polish People’s Republic, the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education became an opportunity for general discussion and activities for the benefit of schools and youth education, dissemination of pedagogical culture in society, popularisation of the teaching profession, and social deeds for the benefit of schools and education. It was also a period that was an important turning point for the popularisation of the ideas and history of the Commission of National Education. Before 1973, the Commission’s achievements, as Józef Brynkus (2014) claims, were referred to fragmentarily, without any permanent programme of their dissemination. It is worth mentioning that a year before the celebration of the bicentenary, the Commission of National Education Awards for outstanding achievements in the field of education were established. A number of works were also published at that time, in which the achievements of the eighteenth-century Ministry of Education were evaluated “from the perspective of communist ideology. An almost classic example of such an approach was the work of Łukasz

Kurdybacha and Mieczysława Mitera-Dobrowolska” (Brynkus, 2014, p. 485). Its authors, in their work *Komisja Edukacji Narodowej*, published in 1973, argued that the Commission of National Education had to be established not only because of the systemic and economic conditions that forced the adaptation of education to the new economic, social, and political needs (Brynkus, 2014, p. 485). Łukasz Kurdybacha and Mieczysława Mitera-Dobrowolska (1973, p. 219) concluded that what remained “good” after the Commission of National Education was the result of its adoption of the “desacralised” model of Polish education. The authors also noted that the Commission developed a modern model of the teacher-educator, “so different from the figure of the monastic pedagogue, who was characterised by pedagogical primitivism, and whose symbol was the rod”.

The course of the celebrations and the popularisation campaign took on impressive proportions. An attempt to assess and present the entire publishing output related to the 200th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education was made by, e.g., Kalina Bartnicka (1975) in an article published in *Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty*. According to the analysis, the authors of the publication tried to refer to the benefits of anniversary celebrations. Although Beata Topij-Stempińska (2014) is tasked with the bicentenary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education, the “largest number of publications dealing with this issue [the dissolution of the Jesuit Order – E. K.] were created. The authors, many of whom mention only that it was the dissolution of the Society of Jesus that hastened the formation of the Commission” (pp. 412–413). Nevertheless, Beata Topij-Stempińska, reviewing the dissertations devoted to the Commission of National Education on the 200th anniversary of its establishment, claims that “it is difficult to resist the impression that most of these works were created under the influence of the prevailing ideology” (p. 416). This is also supported by Agata Wdowik’s (1973, p. 416) analysis of the Polish press of that period. The author in the article *Edukacja – laicyzacja – polskość. Wokół dwusetnej rocznicy kasaty zakonu jezuitów I powstania KEN na łamach prasy w roku 1973* states that the main determinant of the interpretation of these events was the ideological overtone.

According to Fr. Ludwik Grzebień (1975), the celebrations of the 200th anniversary of the Commission of National Education celebrated in 1973 took place “in an atmosphere of the clash [...] of two tendencies – ecclesiastical and secular”.

Nevertheless, Kamilla Mrozowska (1973), in her numerous publications prepared on the occasion of the mentioned anniversary, emphasised that the Commission of National Education was the beginning of modern and secular Polish education. Her publications included source publications (*Pisma*, 1973) and popular studies (Mrozowska, 1987).

After a period of very intensive research on the Commission, especially in the 1970s, according to Katarzyna Dormus (2014, p. 13), interest in the Commission “slowly waned, and researchers – historians and historians of education – turned their attention to other issues”. This is a statement with which we must agree, but we must also remember what the political and economic situation of the country was in the early 1980s and 1990s. And let me just remind that on December 13, 1981 martial law was introduced throughout the Polish People’s Republic, which was not lifted until July 22, 1983. And in the 1990s, it can be said that we were dealing with the “changeability” of personnel in the Ministry of National Education, but in 1996, after another jubilee, the 220th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education, it was possible to present the most interesting and representative documents concerning the dissolution of the Jesuit Order and the matter of taking over their property and creating the foundations for secular education in the collection “Education Nationale”. These documents were stored in the Scientific Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Polish Academy of Sciences (5 volumes) and in the Czartoryski Library in Krakow (one volume) (Danowska, 2020). The significance of these documents and their importance is evidenced by the fact that the “Education Nationale” team was among 31 objects recommended by the Scientific Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Polish Academy of Sciences in 1996 to the UNESCO “Memory of the World” Programme. In 2014, it was included in the UNESCO national list (Grodziska, 2015).

In order to continue to popularise the achievements of the Commission of National Education in the 21st century and teach how to look at contemporary phenomena as the development and result of historical processes, in 2013, the 240th anniversary of the establishment of this educational institution, valued in the country and in the world, was celebrated. The nationwide conference “Commission of National Education – Work and People in the Dialogue of Generations”, organised on October 15, 2013 by the Pedagogical University of Kraków, the Institute of the History of Science of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Society for the History of Education, was particularly popular. The symposium was actively attended by leading historians of education, e.g., Prof. Julian Dybiec (Jagiellonian University), Prof. Adam Massalski (Jagiellonian University), Prof. Karol Poznański (APS), and Prof. Irena Szybiak (University of Warsaw). According to Bogusław Śliwerski (2013) – the University prepared with dignity for these anniversary celebrations of the Commission of National Education, unfortunately no one from the Ministry of Education participated in the meeting: The Ministry of National Education neglected them.

Meanwhile, everyone who participated in the conference of historians of education could see that specific mechanisms of exercising power, including education, have not changed for 240 years, compared to what took place more than two centuries ago. Today's concern of the Ministry of National Education for education, especially elementary education, appears as sabotage against the nation and the Polish society (blog). From November 18, 2011 to November 27, 2013, the function of the Minister of National Education was held by Krystyna Szumilas from the Civic Platform party.

Three days later, on October 18, 2013, the Committee on Science, Education, and Sport of the Senate of the Republic of Poland, the Ludwik and Aleksander Birkenmajer Institute for the History of Science of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and the Society for the History of Education organised a conference in the building of the Senate of the Republic of Poland. The purpose of the conference was to celebrate the 240th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education. The conference was attended by many well-known historians of education and pedagogical thought from all over the country. An extensive report on this debate was described by Witold Chmielewski (2013).

The speeches pointed primarily to the traditions and contribution of the Commission of National Education to the development of the Polish educational system. It was also pointed out that despite many years of research and analyses devoted to the Commission of National Education, many areas of its activity are still little known. For this reason, the conference saw the opening of a series of research projects under the grant entitled "The Commission of National Education – School and Citizen Model – Concepts, Experiences, and Inspirations", carried out at the L. and A. Birkenmajer Institute for the History of Science of the Polish Academy of Sciences, obtained under the National Programme for the Development of Humanities, headed by Prof. Kalina Bartnicka (Chmielewski, 2013).

It is worth mentioning that the ongoing discussions were complemented by an exhibition illustrating the work and outstanding artists of the Commission of National Education, presented in the lobby of the Senate.

On the occasion of the 240th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education, papers devoted to the origins and activities of this institution were also published, among which, a special mention should be made of the monograph which is the aftermath of the nationwide conference "Commission of National Education – Work and People in the Dialogue of Generations", which was published as part of the series "Libraries of Contemporary Pedagogical Thought", entitled *Komisja Edukacji Narodowej. Kontekst historyczno-pedagogiczny* (Dormus et al., 2014).

The monograph opens with two papers – lectures delivered at the current University of the Commission of National Education, during the ceremonial inaugurations in the academic year 1993/94 by Prof. Czesław Majorek, and in 2013/14 by Prof. Katarzyna Dormus. Czesław Majorek (2014) in his lecture “The Message of the Commission of National Education for the Present”, delivered on the 220th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education, posed a bold question, provoking reflection and re-analysis – “is this monument [i.e., of the Commission of National Education – E.K.] deserved” (p. 16). Since the Commission was neither the first secular educational authority nor a ministry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries sense of the term. Czesław Majorek, answering the question “about the value of the Commission of National Education”, states that one should not be “ashamed of its name”, because “it gave rise to modern educational thought in Poland, disseminated a new, rationalistic philosophy in school legislation and textbooks, reformed universities in the spirit of the Enlightenment, initiated the education of secular teachers, created the foundations of a national school” (p. 17). This position is somehow “sealed” by Katarzyna Dormus (2014), who emphasises that the “establishment of the Commission of National Education is undoubtedly a bright spot in the dramatic Polish history, and what is important and does not lose its relevance – it is an example of constructive work carried out beyond ideological or political divisions in the name of the good of the state and the nation” (p. 13).

In order to join this nationwide initiative to honour the achievements of the Commission of National Education, the Centre for Continuing Education of the University of Białystok has also undertaken a discourse on the future of Polish education at the threshold of the next millennium, using the achievements of our culture. This social engagement resulted in an anniversary study submitted on the 240th anniversary of the establishment of the first secular educational institution in Europe (Kryńska & Głoskowska-Sołdatow, 2014).

The celebration of the 240th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education was also intended to prepare well for the “great anniversary” – the 250th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education. An excellent opening of this event was the International Scientific Conference entitled “Fr. Stanisław Konarski, SchP – Pedagogue, Writer, Politician”, organised by the Department of Social History and Education of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, the Laboratory of Enlightenment Literature of the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and the Polish Province of the Piarist Order in Warsaw on October 4–5, 2023. It is worth recalling that in 1771, the king awarded St. Konarski with the inscription “Sapere

auso”, meaning “He, who dared to be wise” (the medal was designed by Jan Albertrandi, it bears the date 1765).

An unquestionable success in the research on the Commission of National Education is a 14-volume series of books published by the L. and A. Birkenmajer Institute for the History of Science of the Polish Academy of Sciences, comprising a total of 300 publishing sheets. The series is 4600 pages long. The work is the result of research carried out as part of a research grant obtained under the National Programme for the Development of Humanities, led by Prof. Kalina Bartnicka. The initiative evokes appreciation and admiration for Prof. Kalina Bartnicka and the entire research team, without exception all its performers (Poznański, 2019). Due to the limited scope of publication, I list the authors and titles of the books that make up the entire 14-volume series only in the bibliography.

A valuable addition to the series is volume XV, which consists of all summaries in English and Lithuanian, entitled *Research on the Commission of National Education and its schools. Achievements and perspectives*, edited by Professor Kalina Bartnicka (2018).

Karol Poznański (2019) noted that this work will certainly “constitute a fundamental position in further research on the model of school and citizen created in the last years of the independent existence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth” (p. 34).

Momentous events related to the anniversary have taken place. The 250th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education was celebrated with particular solemnity at the University of the Commission of National Education in Kraków. One of the main points of the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education in Kraków was the International Scientific Conference under the motto: “Whatever constitutes the special happiness of man (...) it is all a matter of education...” An equally important event, which was included in the celebrations of the anniversary events of the Commission of National Education, was the Second Congress of Historians of Education, during which, on November 5–7, 2023, a reflection was undertaken on the work of the Commission in a broad historical and contemporary perspective, as well as the broadly understood achievements of Polish education in the European context.

Summing up the presented considerations, it can be stated that starting from 1873 onwards, successive anniversaries of the establishment of the Commission of National Education have contributed to the intensified production of publications dealing either with the Commission itself – its history, structure, and impact on the development of education in Poland, or with more general problems of the

history of education, particularly, they focus on various aspects of the Commission of National Education's activities, such as:

1. History and origins of the Commission of National Education: Research on the establishment of the Commission of National Education, the historical and political context that led to its creation, and the role it played in the times in which it was founded.
2. Structure and functioning of the Commission of National Education: Research on the organisational structure of the Commission of National Education, its members, the way decisions are made, and the impact on education policies and curricula.
3. Educational reforms: Research on educational reforms that have been initiated or inspired by the Commission of National Education, such as the modernisation of curricula, the development of higher education, or the improvement of the quality of teaching.
4. The impact of the Commission of National Education on the development of education: Research on the impact of the Commission of National Education on the development of the educational system in Poland in the past and the present. Both the positive effects and possible limitations or controversies related to the activities of the Commission of National Education are analysed.
5. Prescriptions and teachings for contemporary education: Research that draws lessons and conclusions from the activities of the Commission of National Education to contribute to the discussion on contemporary educational challenges and the needs of education system reform.

I am convinced that the celebrations of the 250th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education will also result in lasting scientific achievements, as well as trigger new research initiatives, which is not a trivial matter in the times of neoliberal educational discourse. All the more so because, according to Eugenia Potulicka (2013), the “category of citizenship is being abandoned because the dominant (...) neoliberal rationality exposes above all individualism, which, by its very nature excludes, citizenship. Although it is associated with a sense of justice, politeness, tolerance, a common sense of loyalty and solidarity, in the course of universal education the tradition of education for participatory citizenship is no longer continued⁹”. For this reason, among others,

⁹ An excerpt from Prof. E. Potulicka's lecture *On civic education in Poland and abroad*, delivered at the XXVII Summer School of Young Pedagogues of the Polish Academy of Sciences, organised by the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław, September 27, 2013.

it is worth recalling the words of Czesław Majorek, who believes that the message of the eighteenth-century achievements of the Commission is to place hope for a better future in education. However, according to Czesław Majorek (2014), it is important “if only the arrogant mythomaniacs of destruction and their own ignorance, in which our public life was born, would be willing to understand this truth. How often do they cry out: «Europe is mine, the world is mine», but at the same time, they have no idea what kind of Europe and what kind of world they live in and where they are going” (p. 24).

In a way, this thought is continued by Katarzyna Dormus (2014, p. 35), who, on the occasion of the celebration of the 240th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of National Education, formulated an extremely correct thesis, speaking about myth in the theory of culture, stating that: “It is the duty of historians to study history – to seek the truth, to doubt and to discuss. Scientific knowledge, on the other hand, functions differently in the social consciousness, often taking the form of mythical thinking, which satisfies not only the need to know how things really were, but also the need to participate in values that are timeless. Myth, therefore, can reinforce social values”.

We can only hope that this assumption will be fulfilled and that these social values will be strengthened!

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