

Education – civic, national or... none

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Abstract

A new, interesting, although disturbing phenomenon on the Polish political scene is increased - activity of youth groups, which not only defy the existing authorities, but also the democratic values. After the transformation of 1989, attempts were made to promote democracy in the school curricula. The basic objective of this article is to indicate the problems associated with introduction of civic education in schools – the ones, which emerged in the 1990s, as well as those, which are emerging now. In the 1990s, I was involved in development of new civic education curricula. I also conducted research on reception of the new values by schools. In the article, I refer to my experiences of this period, as well as analyses of other researches, concerning these issues.

Consideration of importance of the school curricula makes sense, if we assume that they may influence the attitudes of the youth. However, nowadays, the attitudes of many young people are a proof of failure in communication of democratic values. The question remains of whether the problems, encountered in transposition of the issues of modern social and political life into the school curricula, are too serious for the schools to be able to solve them. To what extent, an opportunity for development of educational curricula, which would be able to reach young people lies in replacement of the democratic values, which are facing a crisis, with national values. In my opinion, this strategy has its far-reaching, but also negative consequences.

Keywords: *civic education, youth, democracy, political activity, political attitudes*

Youth and Politics

A new collective actor has appeared on the Polish political scene. It is the youth aged 19 to 30. It is a big surprise because this group used to be characterised as completely apolitical. The results of sociological research emphasised that young people did not express their political views, were unwilling to get involved in politics and did not view taking part in the elections as their obligation (Raciborski 1996; Grabowska 1998; Sekuła 2003; Koseła, Jondy 2005). This opinion was confirmed by subsequent studies: Krystyna Szafraniec in the study of the age group between 19 and 30 years in

2009 (Szafraniec 2011), and studies carried out by CBOS in 2010 where 44 percent of the 19-year-olds claimed that they were not interested in politics (CBOS 2011).

A few interesting reports and books on political views of the youth were recently published. They not only confirm existing knowledge but also augment it, and allow perceiving long-term trends. In a report entitled 'Youth 2013', the authors compare the results from 2013 with data from consecutive youth research studies since 1994 (CBOS 2014). In contrast, another study entitled '*Interest in politics and political views in the years 1989-2015. Declarations of young people versus all respondents*' dates, as the title suggests, further, and also demonstrates how the views of young people are different from those of adults (CBOS 2015). Few Poles are interested in politics – approximately 10 percent. Forty to fifty percent declare an average interest. Declarations of young people are similar, although even a larger proportion than among adults says that they are not interested in politics.

However, we have seen since 2007 that the opinions of the youth's indifference to public affairs do not apply to everyone. An unexpectedly high number of young people (over 50 percent) participated in the parliamentary elections of 2008 and significantly influenced their outcome. In 2011, young people successfully protested against the limitations of freedom on the Internet imposed by ACTA. The less glorious aspects of young people's activity, such as violent marches on the Polish National Day of 11 November are also worth mentioning. The studies also demonstrate that young people are more likely to approve unconventional political activities, such as manifestations, marches, or actions on the Internet. In the parliamentary elections of 2011, young voters supported Janusz Palikot's struggle against the system. In the 2014 elections to the European Parliament, young people voted for Janusz Korwin-Mikke, an extremely controversial figure. The rock singer Paweł Kukiz became the young voters' favourite in the last presidential election. In the parliamentary elections in October 2015, these politicians, distinctly different from others, gained many supporters among voters aged 18-24 – Kukiz 20 percent and Korwin-Mikke 17 percent of the votes (CBOS 2015).

These young voters' favourites have many common characteristics. They have distinct personalities. They are expressive, eloquent, and original. They look and behave differently from other candidates. Their views are rather extreme: either very conservative as Korwin-Mikke or radical in promoting, for example, far-reaching lifestyle changes as Palikot. On the other hand, their programs are unimportant to their supporters. The basis of their popularity is their ruthless criticism of current authorities and promises of rapid changes. Unfortunately, the ways of introducing these changes boil down to a few slogans, which hardly lend themselves to rational

analysis. Support enjoyed by these politicians is, above all, an expression of resentment against the existing political and social system. It is an indicator of alienation and confusion.

The attitudes of resentment towards the system and politicians are the strongest among young people. A study in the 'Youth 2013' (CBOS 2014) report mentioned above provides the proof that the perception of Poland in the views of young people is very critical. It was carried out on a random sample of 1,360 students of last year of all types of secondary schools. Therefore, the respondents were mostly 19-year-olds. This study probes the cause of reluctance to engage in politics. The youth accuse politicians of caring only about their careers and not the good of all citizens. They also argue that political parties do not represent the interests of people and do not consider their opinions. Overall – citizens have no influence on what the government does. The overwhelming majority of respondents (between 80 and 90 percent) expressed such views.

There is a growing dissatisfaction with the state of democracy in Poland. Seventy percent of the young citizens are critical of it. For a comparison – there was only fifty-nine percent in 1996. The proportion of those who believe that a non-democratic government could be more desirable is increasing. It is currently at 24 percent. In previous studies, it was slightly lower – 21 percent. People who declare themselves as supporters of the right-wing, most often (47 percent) proclaim this view—the right-wing is gaining popularity among young people. The vast majority of youth (75 percent) also argues that the situation in Poland is heading in the wrong direction, while only 5 percent believe otherwise. For comparison, in 1998 there was only 26 percent of pessimists, and 46 percent of optimists. (CBOS 2014).

A quarter of a century has passed since Poland became a democratic country. A new generation has grown up. For them, the success of the peaceful transition to a different political system is no longer relevant. The wealthy countries of Western Europe, not the communist Poland of the Seventies and Eighties, became the point of reference to them. They have been brought up and educated in the new Poland. However, as you could see, they neither can find themselves in it nor accept it. All these problems are exacerbated by the lack of skills, lack of proper assessment, and lack of understanding of rather intricate social, economic, and political processes. Skills of living in the democratic society were supposed to be taught by schools, which obviously are failing to achieve the objective. Young people are moving from apathy to revolt, from withdrawal to rejection. Their attitudes indicate a lack of confidence in the existing institutions and organisations.

Civic education in Polish schools

The fall of communism in Poland in 1989 resulted in significant changes in all areas of life, including education (Kupisiewicz 1993; Lewowicki 1994; Zahorska 2002;.). There were changes in curricula—in the first place in those for history and civics. Many versions of Civic Education (CE) curricula emerged. Some of them emphasised the need to make the students familiar with the basics of law, others with propaedeutic of political science or sociology. All were supposed to transfer knowledge about the modern society and the rules of the democratic systems. In this context, worth distinguishing is the curriculum developed by the Centre for Civic Education (CEO). It was implemented experimentally in schools where the local governments agreed to extend their curricula and paid the teachers for extra classes. I cooperated in the development of this curriculum. Afterwards, in the mid-1990s, for five years, I worked in a school in my town as a Civic Education teacher. My work as a teacher was a part of research on the reception of the new CE curriculum in schools. (Zahorska 2002)

This curriculum was unique when compared with other programs that were developed then. Ours not only described the content of a lesson but also put even a greater emphasis on innovative teaching methods. They were to introduce a new style of instruction, consisting of discussions, problem solving, teamwork, and students' participation in various educational games. Their objective was not only to make the classes attractive but – first of all – to activate the students. The new form of education was aimed not only at transferring knowledge on democracy but also at developing practical skills. To make it possible, it was necessary to change the role and position of the teacher, who ceased to be a preacher of the unquestionable truth and the only source of knowledge but became the inspirer, and sometimes the moderator of discussions between students. The debates were to concern all problems and issues of social and political life. Moreover, the students were to practice establishment of democratic rules in their schools. They were not only to get familiar with the rules of functioning of the student self-government, based on the act on education but also to become able to organise the elections and enforce the regulations. Similarly, book-based knowledge on the functioning of local governments was to be enriched with direct observation of their operation. The students were to interview representatives of the local government, gather opinions of the inhabitants, indicate the directions of action, perceived as desirable by the local community.

Both the programme and its methods came across numerous barriers in Polish schools, as well as the lack of acceptance by various people and institutions. These attitudes are hardly surprising, considering how different were the relations proposed from the customary relationship between adults and children. I remember a friend, a chemistry

teacher, who told her students that in her class, there would be no democracy – she was the one to rule. Many teachers were indignant when the children pointed out that they violated student rights. A hierarch of the Church addressed the local authorities to stop financing the program, which refers to human rights established by the French Revolution, which led to a great human crisis. The parents made objections about us demoralising the children by informing them of their rights. Many members of the local government were not impressed to get critical opinions, gathered from the inhabitants – they suspected a manipulation by the politicians and accused the teachers of “getting the children involved in politics”.

Currently, this programme is still in use, albeit in a very limited version that hardly even resembles what we wanted to accomplish.

Based on my personal experience, as well as a research study, consisting of numerous interviews with teachers introducing the new type of the CE lessons, I identified two most problematic areas. The first one concerned the content of the curriculum where the remnants of the old communist values competed with the new material. The second was related to the authoritarian school culture, which was very reluctant to accept the proposals of making the youth active and granting them the right to act more freely.

1. Legacy of the communist period

- In Polish schools, during the communist era, there was a course called ‘Citizenship’. It introduced some sociological concepts, mostly from Marxist sociology. However, its primary objective was to persuade young people that the communist regime is a democracy but much better than that in the capitalist countries. The subject was extraordinarily dull, the textbooks were full of terms, which were difficult to understand, but most of all, it idealised a system despite its many weaknesses, visible to the majority of the society.
- Resistance towards the new ‘Civic Education’ course resulted from a reluctance towards the previous one and fears that this is going to be another way of indoctrination and manipulation. Many teachers, as well as parents, felt that such a course should not be taught in schools because it only takes away the time needed to study the ‘real’ subjects, such as maths or the mother tongue.
- Then there was a problem with the language. Many of the concepts needed to describe the democratic system and public activity has been appropriated and devoid of meaningful content by communist propaganda. For example, the parliament was a collection of people approved by the communist party authorities, trade unions did not represent the workers’ interests but were controlled by the authorities, ‘Spontaneous

demonstrations' were in fact organised and ordered by the authorities. It is confusing to write and speak in a language that evokes associations opposite to our attempts.

- Another great difficulty in organising the CE classes was the level of knowledge of teachers of this subject. They were educated in the communist system, and they did not know or did not understand many of the issues, or were consciously rejecting them.
- Some elements of the programme proved very controversial. Mainly those related to human rights and the rights of the child. Several teachers were reproached by parents and other teachers who felt that talking to pupils about their rights demoralises them. In a country as Catholic and traditional as Poland teaching democracy turned out to be an occupation bristling with difficulties. Not only the curriculum but also the terms introduced by it or the language used were problematic. As the program was supposed to activate young people and teach them to act independently and to think critically, it had to clash with the principles of the Polish school culture – an authoritarian, or, in the best case scenario, paternalistic one.

2. Autocratic school culture in Poland

- The fundamental principle, underlying the authoritarian school culture, consists of maintaining an appropriate distance between the teacher and the student. Whatever the teacher conveys is indisputable. It is because the teacher's position is associated with authority, while the students are expected to oblige, not only regarding their school duties but also behaviour, clothing and appearance. The school has various regulations; their interpretation and enforcement is up to the teacher.
- Knowledge is transferred by instruction. The teachers do not feel the need to explain the sense and application of the knowledge provided. To say that it is included in the approved curricula is a sufficient argument. It is enforced using awards and punishments, such as grades, diplomas, the prestige of a good student and condemnation of a poor one. Students are motivated by competition for their position in the classroom. Classes are based on bilateral relations: the teacher transfers knowledge, and the student listens, or, the teacher asks, and the student answers the question. The students work individually.
- Of course, this is only a model, pointing to the basic characteristics of an authoritarian school. In reality, relations between teachers and students depend on the teacher's personality, their attitude towards the students, sense of humour, as well as the type of students and their attitudes towards the school. Nevertheless, the lesson scenarios developed by Centre for Civic Education departed very much from customary education. Lessons based on discussions, role-playing, implementation of projects drawn up by student groups changed the position of both the teacher and the student as well as upset the usual routine of lessons. A

part of both students and educators could not adapt to the new mode of lessons. Students treated these non-standard lessons as an incentive to unfettered play, which made running a class an arduous task. More experienced teachers were able to control the students, but they remembered how difficult it was to finish and summarise some discussions, which got the students excited. Engaging in teamwork also proved difficult to students because they do not have experience in this kind of tasks, and teachers are unable to assess the results of teamwork. Often, during these lessons, students who distinguished themselves did not have a good reputation in school, while some otherwise good students could not find themselves in the new environment.

CE classes quite often met with criticisms of other teachers. They were disturbed by the noise, which sometimes was coming from the CE classroom. CE teachers were also accused of excessive liberalism in assessing students. Their entering into more partnership-based student-teacher relations and especially teaching about the students' rights were treated as demoralising the students and impeding the work of other teachers.

The classes discussing school student government and local authorities were the most difficult to run. In Polish schools, students of each class elect their representatives who make up the student government. According to the regulation, which is written into the Education Act, these students meant to represent students' interests in disputes between students and teachers. They can issue their own newspaper. They organise various events for students. That is the theory. In reality, the student council is primarily concerned with organising school events. It also quite often maintains order in school by writing down the names of students who misbehaved and passes them on to school authorities. Discussing with students their rights causes either a big excitement and a desire to enforce them, which often ends up with conflicts at school, or discouragement and the feeling that they are cheated. The same happens during the classes about local authorities. Students hear from their parents about various irregularities in the operation of local governments and the clash of their knowledge with theory invokes either their rebellion or discouragement.

It can be expected that after 25 years of democracy, the problems encountered by the creators and implementers of the new CED curriculum have disappeared, or at least diminished. There are several foundations and associations, acting to change the way of functioning of schools. They provide classes for teachers, developing skills in interactive teaching and offering interesting lesson scenarios. Classes are held on how to make group decisions concerning school regulations, how to participate in local government elections consciously and responsibly (Napiontek 2013). It is true that

some of the schools have become much more democratic, relations between students and teachers have become very much based on partnership, project methods requiring team works have entered the curricula, and the teacher no longer display symptoms of allergy when hearing the words “student rights”. Nevertheless, most schools tend to have traditional classes, and the relations between students and teachers are far from a partnership model. Functioning of such diversified school cultures leads to problems. For a student, a shift from a democratic to a traditional school can be a real shock. A description of such situation can be found in interviews, quoted by Bazyli Przybylski (2014). Young people, who are more willing to act, and less – to accept conformism, encounter significant problems in schools. In the research project, referred to above, “Youth 2013”, (CBOS 2014) in the fragment concerning school, we can find information about the participation of students in the school government elections. In vocational schools, 70% students have never participated in such election. In general education schools, where the activity of this kind is usually more popular, the percentage of those, who do not participate, has increased in comparison with the year 2010 to 58% from 40%. Student governments do not play the role, which was assigned to them by education experts, who developed the vision of a democratic school. Instead, they have remained – like before the systemic transformation – an entirely superficial institution, rejected by the youth.

Olga Napiontek, co-managing Civis Polonus Foundation, on the basis of her frequent contacts with schools, summarizes the civic education classes as follows: ‘the students are supposed to learn to discuss issues without engaging in discussions, to learn working in a group by working individually, to enforce their rights without understanding them, to participate in activities of the student government without being able to act independently or influence any significant decisions, they are to get involved in grassroots initiatives by implementing the student government plan established by the teachers and the management and remaining the same year after year’ (Napiontek 2013).

According to research studies carried out in 1990s and the following years, the school culture is very reluctant to change. Only a few schools have changed their teaching style. There is an emphasis on teaching of facts and direct instruction, while debates and developing critical thinking remain underestimated. In terms of learning about democracy, Polish pupils enjoyed a rather spectacular success. In an international research project, organized by the International Association for Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) in years 1999-2000, they took the first place among students of 28 countries, participating in the surveys. On the other hand, they were less successful in terms of understanding of various messages, pertaining to political life, such as articles, flyers, charts etc., and their results for indices of civic activity

were the poorest. They seldom declared participation, as well as willingness to participate, in any civic activity, very rarely. “Emerging from analysis” - as it has been written by one of the researchers in the discussion of results - “is an image of a generation, which, although accepting the formal rules of democracy and perceiving its place within the structures of a democratic state, is not willing to support its institutions actively. At the same time, it shows no tendency to undermine the existing order and promises no revolutionary action” (Koseła 2004, p.229). This image of young people of the turn of the century, however, is no longer valid. More recent research, quoted in the first part of the article, refers to unwillingness to accept democracy and even rebellious attitudes of some of the young people.

The IEA research also encompassed teachers. During the CED lessons, instead of managing discussions and analysis of current events with young people, which could serve as a safety anchor, the teachers simply delivered their knowledge. Asked, what should be emphasized during CED lessons – ‘absorption of knowledge’ or ‘learning critical thinking’, they were much more eager to point to the first option. When selecting the lesson topics, the teachers avoided controversial issues, preferring those, which required formal knowledge. (Zielińska, 2008). General principles of functioning of democracy were taught, instead of real problems of social and political life.

Civic education and problems of modern societies

Not only the teaching methods in most schools discourage young people from ‘practising’ democracy. The curricula offer an idealised vision of the democratic system. Any CED course teaches the principles of democratic society: the importance of freedom of expression, separation of powers, the multi-party system, and finally the role of the elections. The problem is that today's political system is very different from that functioning in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries¹. There are several important factors, which changed politics, economy and social life:

- Today, due to globalisation, the importance of nation-state and democratic institutions, which were aligned with the nation state, diminished. The economic situation of individual countries, and thus the living conditions of people are strongly influenced by factors, which are under little or no control of constitutional authorities of a given country.
- Neoliberal world economy intensified economic inequalities both within individual countries and between them.
- People in power cannot resist the power of money. In almost every country, we hear about corruption and the ruling elite getting richer in many ways – more or

less legitimate. On the other hand, large groups of people find themselves in a very difficult financial situation, especially because of the economic crisis of 2008 caused by bank speculation. A sense of injustice and animosity against the elites discourages them from taking part in the elections.

- Huge conflicts arise when different cultures clash. Immigrants from Africa and Asia come to wealthy countries with a stable political situation. Difficulties with accepting immigrants, who are different in terms of appearance, religion, and customs, are mixed with fear of terrorism.

Complicated political, social or economic situation due to the relationships between states, corporations, and banks evokes a sense of chaos in society, as well as fuels speculations about secret, hidden forces that govern the world. The result is, on the one hand a sense of helplessness leading to passivity and withdrawal, and on the other hand, radicalisation. We can see a growing importance of populist parties and the phenomenon of increasing aggression of various youth groups. Democratic systems are now undergoing a serious crisis.

This framework is useful to understand the processes in the Polish context, because the phenomena presented exert impact on the life and social attitudes in Poland. When, after year 1989, Poland became a capitalist state, it joined the mainstream of global economy. The basic institutions, warranting peaceful life that can be planned, such as work (Gardawski 2009) and family (Sikorska 2012) have been destabilized. Even for people of the West, transformations associated with globalization are a challenge (Giddens 2000) – nevertheless, this challenge is much greater for an isolated, traditional society that lived under the communist rule for fifty years. After year 1989, when many plants went bankrupt due to opening of the borders, unable to withstand the competition of Western economy, the phenomenon of unemployment – unknown in Poland for the last half a century – emerged. For many young people, education became the opportunity, which was supposed to give them good jobs.

Education and work are the factors that traditionally formed a stable way of living for the young people. Both education and work have ceased to play this role. Since the mid-Nineties for another ten years, with an increased intensity in 2002-2005, the ‘educational boom’ took place in Poland. It upset the educational system’s status quo that was in place throughout the entire post-war era. In previous years, the vast majority of young Poles went, after the completion of compulsory education, to vocational schools, most often basic vocational schools. Only about 20 percent went to secondary schools, and only half of graduates of those got into universities. The collapse of many industrial plants in the early Nineties, and job cuts in those that survived, led to liquidation of numerous vocational schools that were linked to

industries, and caused loss of interest in others. Vocational schools even got the name of ‘unemployment incubators.’ Looking for career opportunities, young people were choosing previously neglected comprehensive secondary schools and subsequently colleges and universities. The school system was adapting to the expectations of young people. In place of vocational schools, the secondary schools were opened, although the infrastructure of these schools was pathetic. There were neither any libraries, nor properly equipped classrooms for specific subjects. The needs of young people also created favourable conditions for the ‘private education business’. Numerous private higher education schools were established. The programmes offered required no costly equipment, and the faculty were solicited from existing universities. Thanks to these changes, young people found ways to fulfil their aspirations, the academic teachers were able to make some extra money to add to their modest salaries, and investors made quite a profit. Problems started, when the first wave of graduates entered the labour market. For many years before the transformation, 10 to 13% young people with diplomas searched for jobs every years. After the changes, as many as 50% young people with university education were looking for jobs. Moreover, those were the baby boomers of the 1980s. Problematic was not only the number of graduates, but the quality of their education as well. In many higher education schools, the basic duty of the students was to make tuition payments, while acquisition of knowledge was perceived as less important. Furthermore, the study programmes were not synchronized in any way with the needs of the labour market, but usually resulted from calculations concerning low education costs. It is not surprising that this period, instead of being referred to as an ‘educational boom’ is often called an “educational lie”.

Disappointment in university studies as a path to professional career resulted in visible weakening of aspirations among young people. Vocational schools are becoming popular again, while universities are losing candidates. Moods of the young are perhaps best illustrated by a fragment of the interview with a 17-year-old student of the Lifelong Learning Centre, which was dismissed from lover secondary school for bad behaviour and lack of educational progress. He wants to stay at the LLC until he turns 18 and is no longer obliged by school duty:

B: I’ll be 18 in November, so I’ll just finish this year and that’s it?

And if you fail?

B: Well, I won’t be attending any longer....

Why?

B: I don’t feel like it.

Like learning in general?

B: Like going to this school.... I just don’t feel like going to this school. I’d rather go to work and make some money.

K: Hey, but wait. When I complete secondary school, I should go to another school, because, after secondary school, what kind of job can you get? Nobody will hire you, not even to dig holes in the ground.

B: You're stupid. You think there are no jobs? People have, like, finished primary school and they find jobs somehow.

K: Well, I guess. And they make more than...

B: That's right. Like my sister, she's earned her M.A. and she has no job. And, when she gets a job, she'll make PLN1500. The minimum wage.

(A fragment of an interview with two lower secondary school students (B and K) at the Lifelong Learning Center, conducted by sociology student in 2015)

Numerous examples of young people, who, having graduated from university, are forced to work at call centres or in sales, at low positions, discourage those, who would like to study. It is true that it has become somewhat easier to find a job lately; however, the salaries are still short of expectations. It is not sufficient to ensure stabilization or make further life plans.

The level of frustration of young people is even higher because of the pressure for consumption, exerted by the modern society (Barber 2008). The author of the government report „The Young 2011” underlines that the consumer society „changes [...] in general, the context of socialization of the young generation, which builds the projects for its life and own identity in the space dominated by consumption” (Szafraniec 2011, p. 224). The ‘to have for to be’ attitude: "causes that consumer aspirations are becoming the primary driver of life's activities of young people. They are also a source of frustration when the purchasing capacity is disproportionate in relation to the needs. The majority of Poles finds themselves in such a situation, but the young, because of the context of growing up, feel it in a more severe way " (above, p. 230).

People, who have money, are those, who count; the less affluent are perceived as losers. The proper financial status is a valued social objective; meanwhile, many young people lack the proper, socially acceptable means to achieve it. This situation can also be described as anomie, although its consequences were analyzed not by Durkheim, but by Robert Merton. They consist of either ignoring the available means and choosing to employ others, which may be associated with illegal activity, or – withdrawing from one's aspirations, which results in desistance, apathy or protest (Merton 1982). The Polish youth often chooses yet another solution: going abroad. Among the students examined in 2013 (CBOS 2014), 15% planned to leave the country permanently or for a long period of time; among those, who expected it would be problematic to find a job – as many as 33%.

Financial problems are not the only ones – and, perhaps, not even the most significant ones, determining the moods of young people. Not everyone finds it difficult to grow up. The world of adults and young ones has been divided into “those, who succeeded” and “those, who did not”. The division line is strong, the status of those, who are affluent, is often associated not with their merits, hard work and talent, but connections or origin. Karolina Messyasz conducted research, identifying four generations, which matured in years 1968, 1989, 2000 and 2010, and on the basis of data from PGSS, she has analyzed the significance, ascribed by them to various determinants of success in life. The younger they are, the more often they tend to mention, as a component of success, coming from a wealthy family and having the proper connections; in the generation of 1968, 57% mentioned wealthy family; among the generation of 2010, it was as many as 73%. The role of connections has also grown; formerly, they were mentioned by 63% respondents, and presently – by 73%, respectively. Zbyszko Melosik, characterizing the youth, points to the division between children representing the middle class and those of the working class. Peers of his teenage son, as he states, find it easy to establish relationships with their colleagues having similar status, coming from various European countries, while they perceive their compatriots of “lesser” origin as being strange. (*Młodzież a przemiany...*, 2005). The paths of social advancement, which opened in the 1990s, either via education or financial careers, established by novice businesspeople, who started by selling shoelaces, then got their own money exchange offices making big (although rarely lasting) fortunes, are now closed. The youth of generation 2010 – according to Karolina Messyasz – perceive the world as unfriendly and petrified.

It is very difficult to run the CED course today according to programmes depicting of an idealistic vision of democracy as a system, in which the citizens are able to influence their fate by participating in the election procedures, and thanks to election the society is able to choose the proper people to rule, without discussing problems associated with these processes, creates fiction (Barber 2013). Today, even children, let alone the teenagers are very critical of the system of power created by the adults. It seems that in the face of all these disturbing phenomena both the CED and the institution of school are helpless. They more often avoid the problem than they try to face it.

Therefore, it is necessary to go beyond the existing civic education framework. In Poland, the present curricula put emphasis on getting familiar with the rules of functioning of the democratic society, and – as it was demonstrated in studies – most schools can transfer this knowledge quite effectively (Dolata, Kosęła, Wilkomirska, Zielińska 2004). More ambitious schools, supported by NGOs, do their best to teach the civic skills such as organising and participating in elections, taking action on

behalf of students, and promoting activity in the local community (Napiontek 2013; Murawska 2013). The present political situation in Poland, requires a curriculum, which would not only make it easier to understand and adapt to certain rules of society, but also to diagnose social problems, assess the effects of political activity and search for new solutions (Barber 2013).

Conclusions without conclusions

Several curricula were developed in Poland after 1989 to teach how a democratic system works. They emphasised a concept of civic duty. Unfortunately, they were unsuccessful. In fact, they can be considered a failure. Neither they transformed schools into democratic institutions, nor had young people understand the meaning of democracy. Most young people are hostile towards politics and politicians. They emphasise the weaknesses in the functioning of democracy. Increasingly often they express a view that a system other than democracy would be more desirable. Increasingly often the right-wing views are gaining popularity. and these tend to get dangerously close to nationalistic sympathies, full of intolerance, glorifying power and abuse.

Declarations of present education authorities indicate that they would aim at emphasising in schools the significance of Polish history and pride of belonging to the Polish nation. This may suggest that ‘civic education’ will also become ‘patriotic education’. This may significantly strengthen the nationalistic and anti-democratic tendencies, including turning away from the ideals of the European Union and make it difficult for young people to understand and adapt to the modern, globalised world. It may also result in withdrawal from the present efforts to create a school which promotes democracy.

Schools can do little to influence the political or social reality. Both their curricula and the methods of influencing students reflect the dominant tendencies in politics, social relations, and the level of culture. They are more of a litmus paper of the condition of the society than a possible stimulus for changes. This litmus paper indicates difficulties in the political transformation, the growing social conflicts, the absence of decisive, generally accepted standards. This condition of uneasiness and chaos may lead to authoritarian solutions being exercised, which should be a cause of concern.

Notes

¹ Extensive literature has been developed on the modern political, social and economic changes cause by globalization, discussing its consequences and emphasizing both the development factors and threats (cf. Martell 2010).

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