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## THE 11<sup>TH</sup> NATIONAL PEDAGOGICAL CONGRESS ATTENDED BY UKRAINIAN EDUCATORS

The 11<sup>th</sup> National Pedagogical Congress took place in Poznań between September 20 and 22, 2022. The Congress was organized by the Polish Pedagogical Society and the Faculty of Educational Studies of the Adam Mickiewicz University and was chaired by Prof. Piotr Kostyło, head of the Program Committee and President of the Polish Educational Research Association, and Prof. Agnieszka Cybal-Michalska, Dean of the Faculty of Economics of the Adam Mickiewicz University, Head of the Committee of Pedagogical Sciences at the Polish Academy of Sciences, who supervised the work of the Organizing Committee. In addition to the two Committees mentioned above, the preparations for the Congress were attended as well by the management of three committees: the Polish Pedagogical Society, the Faculty of Educational Studies of the Adam Mickiewicz University, and the Committee of Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

The National Pedagogical Congresses started in 1993 and since the very beginning has referred to the democratic ideal of contact between educators, emphasized the friendly nature of scientific meetings and debates, and emphasized the importance of supporting younger scientists with less experience by older and more experienced colleagues. Such assumptions for the congress organization resulted from the nature of the liberal and democratic culture, which after the fall

of communism in 1989 began to shape life in Poland in all areas, including scientific activities. Pedagogical Congresses were also aimed at integrating the Polish pedagogical community, creating opportunities for individual scholars to go beyond the boundaries of a specific institute or faculty, and meeting colleagues from other universities, getting acquainted with their scientific work, establishing contacts and, if possible, cooperation. Such goals guided the founders of the Polish Pedagogical Society, especially Prof. Zbigniew Kwiecieński, who since the establishment of the Polish Pedagogical Society in 1981, has been in favour of a democratic model of practicing science, and in his texts and activities has promoted an attitude of openness to various paradigms and emphasized that a scientific career is also pursued in order to provide later the younger staff with advice on their way to obtaining scientific degrees and titles. Prof. Zbigniew Kwiecieński has remained faithful to these values to date.

For almost thirty years, the National Pedagogical Congresses have become a permanent institution and clear points of orientation in contemporary Polish pedagogy. They are crucial both for the members of the Society and for the entire group associated with Polish education. The congresses have always been unique meetings of educators and served to develop knowledge about education and strengthen pedagogical practice. They were a forum for the exchange of ideas and cooperation between scientists and educators, created opportunities to get to know and meet well-known theoreticians and practitioners of education. Congresses are usually organized by the authorities of the Polish Pedagogical Society in close cooperation with various academic universities every three years. They are an opportunity to show the scientific achievements of the community that co-organized the Congress, favour community integration, strengthen all participants in a cognitive manner, offer strong impulses for further development of individuals and entire communities. The Congresses have been held so far successively in Rembertów, Toruń, Poznań, Olsztyn, Wrocław, Lublin, again in Toruń, Gdańsk, Białystok and Warsaw. The topics they touched upon, synthetically included in congress slogans, were rich and diverse – starting from the identity of pedagogy, through the democratic context of educational processes, hope and threats of modern times, Europe getting united, inalienable duties of upbringing, the relationship between education and morality and the public sphere, the relationship between educational theory and practice, the educational dimension of differences and inclusions, the concept of a valuable life, ending with the crisis of trust, community, and autonomy.

The 11<sup>th</sup> National Pedagogical Congress, which took place in September, was held under the slogan *A turning point. Let's build a better world in and between us*. This slogan appeared as a proposal at the beginning of 2021 during the talks held at the Presidium of the Polish Pedagogical Society, as well as during the consultations with honorary members of the Polish Pedagogical Society and other people cooperating with the Society. At that time, we thought that the slogan topicality resulted primarily from the exceptional situation that appeared at all levels of human life in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions

resulting therefrom. Having been used to living in a free and democratic society, such freedoms as the freedom to travel, meet, organize various scientific or social projects, publicly express one's views and undertake many other activities were taken for granted – and suddenly we had to face the lack of these freedoms. In the culture of life in the European Union, this was an unprecedented experience. There is no need to show how it affected the functioning of education at all levels. Remote learning introduced in response to legal social distancing requirements quickly became the norm for conducting lessons and lectures. Certainly, it protected children and youth against the risk of contracting the Covid-19 virus, but at the same time it exposed these groups to many other threats resulting from weakening or even breaking direct ties and bonds with their peers, constant presence in the so-called Internet culture or feelings of isolation and loneliness. In our opinions, all this was a challenge, a turning point, an announcement of fundamental changes, in a word – a turning point.

The Covid-19 pandemic broke out at a time when culture in its global, European, and national dimensions was already revealing many tensions, which as educators we could not be indifferent to. Globally, the rivalry between the United States and China for world hegemony was intensifying and seemed to lead to an imminent confrontation. Not only was it about who the main beneficiary of global trade for the next decades would be, but also about what concepts of the individual, society, interpersonal relations, human rights, and education would become dominant in the world. The ideological and political struggle intensified in Europe as well. In particular countries the centre parties were being year by year in decline in favour of extreme parties, the “cold” democracy of law and procedures gave way to the “hot” democracy of values and identity. Authoritarian attitudes on the one hand and anarchist attitudes on the other grew stronger. These processes were accompanied by an increased threat in Eastern Europe related to Russia's aggressive policy. Turning point signs could also be noticed in the European Union. Brexit showed that there was growing resistance in the EU against excessive interference of EU institutions in the internal affairs of member states. Opposition to this was most often justified in the concepts of national tradition and identity, which in turn carried the risk of returning to nationalist and xenophobic slogans, abandoning dialogue, and seeking compromises in favour of struggle and striving for domination. The ideological struggle in Poland was also entering its turning point stage. In the eyes of many, the hopes which had been awakened forty years ago to build a civil society based on cooperation, solidarity, and mutual respect turned out to be in vain. After the lapse of decades, the differences between the political parties grew stronger, until they finally reached the level of complete mutual negation. Prof. Marcin Król (1944–2020) summed up this situation by writing that we had already had our chance as a nation and society, and that we lost it. Although most Polish educators did not share this pessimistic diagnosis, we were all aware that the world we had known so far was heading towards a fundamental reconstruction and that, as socially engaged educators, we could not remain indifferent to this process.

In this atmosphere we started preparations for the 11<sup>th</sup> National Pedagogical Congress. When addressing the teaching community for the first time with information about the upcoming Congress, we wrote in the spring of 2021: *A turning point concept directs our attention to the current state of culture in all its dimensions: political, economic, religious, interpersonal relations, art, and primarily scientific, and educational ones. It indicates that cultural patterns cease to function as safe points of reference. The category of a turning point brings to mind the concept of a turning point, re-evaluation, a critical point or a life change. It is revealed today on all levels of life.* The second notice sent at the end of 2021, included the following fragment: *As educators, we cannot be indifferent to this situation, as it has significant consequences for education as part of culture. We should study those changes scientifically, as well as speak out on issues important from the point of view of caring for a human being and human comprehensive development, and preserving his/her dignity. The Polish Pedagogical Society is a community in which various studies are undertaken, taking account of the issues of a turning point and changes, and it is appealed for the protection of every human being, especially children and youth. We are convinced that during the upcoming Congress its participants will be able to share the results of their scientific research, and the climate of respect for people and responsibility for their future accompanying the debates and meetings will become a source of energy to undertake further pedagogical projects focused on these values.*

At the beginning of 2022, preparations for the Congress were already at an advanced stage. We were clear on how to organize the debates, both during plenary speeches and in sections. We adopted transparent rules for inviting members to Scientific, Program and Organizational Committees. We also undertook activities related to the aspect of booking rooms, preliminary agreements with various service providers, as well as the promotion of the Congress with the use of various media. We sent invitations to potential Congress participants, specifying the detailed conditions of registration, payment of fees and sending proposals for speeches. The Congress slogan was officially announced. It seemed to us that the only thing left was to wait for incoming applications and to prepare detailed agendas for plenary sessions and debates in ten separate sections. And then, beyond our Eastern border, there happened something we could not even imagine, something so irrational that we spontaneously compared it to the landing of Martians on Earth, something completely contrary to the values of the European Union, moreover – the values of the entire civilized world. Here the Russian Federation launched a full-scale war against Ukraine, a sovereign, neighbouring state with which it was bound for centuries with so many cultural ties. We followed the reports from many battle fronts, and we could not believe our eyes – how in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the middle of Europe, one country can attack another and strive to conquer, subjugate, and colonize it.

In the light of what was happening in Ukraine at that time, the slogan of our Congress took on a new, more dramatic, but also more real meaning. Here,

a turning point became a state in which the future fate of Europe and the world was to be really decided upon. Here a call to build a better world in and between us became a call for support for the attacked state, its citizens and culture. From the beginning of the war, the Polish teaching community, in line with the activities of the entire Polish society, began to support Ukrainians, especially women with children, who crossed the Polish border to escape the war. From the first days of the war, Europe and the world watched with the greatest appreciation and admiration the actions of Polish women and men who provided space in their homes and apartments to refugees from Ukraine, supporting them both materially and emotionally. This extraordinary wave of solidarity with the attacked and persecuted society of Ukraine entered the institutions of the Polish state and local government, non-governmental organizations, churches and religious associations and foundations, and above all – individual families, women and men who, with commitment and resourcefulness characteristic of us, took care of the arriving refugees. An important aspect of the assistance and aid provided to them was organizing education for Ukrainian children and youth, opening Polish schools and educational institutions, preparing appropriate classes, and looking for optimal ways to overcome language barriers. On the one hand, these activities had to be agreed upon with the competent authorities of the Ukrainian state, and on the other hand – regulated by Polish law. It was necessary to find both people who would put them into practice and funds to conduct them.

As the Congress organizers, we could not remain indifferent to these historic events. In March 2022, the Committee of Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Polish Pedagogical Society adopted an official stand on the war in Ukraine and declared i.a. that *The Polish Pedagogical Society strongly condemns both the initiation of the war and the way the war is being conducted by Russia. At the same time, it expresses its solidarity with the heroic Ukrainian nation, which took up a defensive fight against the invader and, with huge numbers of casualties, continues to stop its offensive. We want to emphasize that the Ukrainian army together with the entire Ukrainian society are fighting a war not only to defend their own state, but also to defend European values – freedom, sovereignty, security, and a happy life in peace, both at the level of the national community and each individual family and unit. The freedom of individuals and entire societies to decide on the directions of their own development lies at the heart of European culture, determines its creativity and vitality, as well as its exceptional attractiveness.* We also prepared the third notice which was addressed to the entire teaching community, which included i.a. the following message: *When last year the Polish Pedagogical Society and the Faculty of Educational Studies of the Adam Mickiewicz University proposed the above Congress slogan “A turning point. Let’s build a better world in and between us”, no one thought that the beginning of 2022 would confirm its topicality in such a dramatic and painful way. The war caused by unsatisfied in its imperial ambitions Russia, and the suffering*

*of millions of attacked Ukrainian citizens show that not only Europe, but even the entire world, now reached a turning point. The huge number of refugees from Ukraine seeking and finding safety and help in Poland and other countries is a phenomenon we have never seen before, and at the same time a clear challenge to build a better world in and between us.*

Since that moment it has become clear to us that the Congress, apart from the topic of the war in Ukraine and the threats it poses to the civilized world, must also include representatives of Ukrainian scientists and educators who face dramatic daily challenges living and working in a war-torn country. At first, we did not know how to reach them: whether through individual or institutional contacts; who to invite in particular; what issues to concentrate on. We had yet to find answers to these and many other questions. The key moment in our activities was reaching the list of members of the Ukrainian Academy of Pedagogical Sciences with whom the institutions associating Polish educators had already cooperated, especially the Committee of Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Scientific Society "Poland – Ukraine". We invited a total number of eleven scholars from Ukraine, six of whom were present at the Congress, and four of whom recorded their short speeches and sent them to the organizers. One person had to cancel his/her arrival at the last moment. All invited Ukrainian professors were asked to take part in a discussion panel entitled *Education in time of war*. Nevertheless, Prof. Wasyl Kremień and Olha Hordiichuk, PhD, were invited to deliver their papers in the Congress plenary sessions, while Prof. Swietlana Sysojeva and Olha Honcharenko, PhD, had the opportunity to address to the audience in two congress sections. It should be added that the Ukrainian delegation was also received by Her Magnificence Rector of the Adam Mickiewicz University, Prof. Bogumiła Kaniewska, while the music concert prepared for the Congress participants was dedicated to Ukraine.

The key scientific part of the Congress referred to debates in ten thematic sections. These sections, including the topics they concentrated on, were separated already in 2021, at the initial stage of the Congress preparations. When doing so, we followed two important guidelines. Firstly, we took account of the spectrum of scientific interests of our colleagues. The idea was that every important area of scientific considerations developed by Polish educators would be reflected in the Congress program, so that every scientist could find an opportunity to share their research with other scientists during the Congress sessions. Secondly, we also wanted to avoid such a construction of the Congress program in which individual sections would correspond exactly to the division of pedagogical faculties and institutes into departments and other units. We wanted the Congress not to recreate the organizational structure of our universities and not to create sections intended only for social educators, care educators, educators dealing with social and cultural animation, social rehabilitation educators, etc. Pedagogical congresses traditionally avoided such an approach, as it is in a sense – routine focused and closed, it fails to provide opportunities for meetings and

scientific exchanges between scientists with different interests and intellectual sensitivity, and especially it limits the interdisciplinary approach.

The sections separated by the organizers were called in the following way:

Section 1: A turning point. Circles of crises of education contexts – challenges for pedagogy

Section 2: A human and society facing turning point challenges – opportunities and threats

Section 3: Education policy, school, upbringing, care – towards commitment to creating a better world

Section 4: A turning point – a metatheoretical and methodological pedagogical thought

Section 5: Identity, community, moral space – to understand, build and take responsibility for (your) world

Section 6: Multiculturalism, pluralism of values and changes in contemporary culture

Section 7: Labour market, professional career, and educational function of work – towards the society of the future

Section 8: Mission, and servitude of the University

Section 9: Pedagogy towards negative social phenomena, threats, and pathological behaviour

Section 10: Pedagogy and education in the face of factors responsible for human fate in the era of civilization turning points and global crises.

The manner in which individual sections were to debate depended on the three-member Presidium. Taking account of the number of applications for the section sent by the participants, as well as the proposed topic of speeches, the Presidium members could decide whether the section debates would take the traditional form, i.e. they would present their prepared speeches one after another, or the form of a discussion panel, i.e. the participants, based on their prepared speeches, would refer to a problem or problems predetermined by the Presidium in a discussion. Most sections followed the traditional way of presenting speeches, but there were also several discussion panels. One of these panels organized in the second section was interesting not only because of its topic, but also because it was organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science. This panel was devoted to inclusive education, a nationwide program currently promoted by the Ministry of Education and Science aimed at building a model of education in which every student, regardless of their age, needs and abilities, will be able to find a place for themselves in a universal education system. The work dynamics in individual sections was different. In smaller sections, speakers or debaters had more time to present their research or opinions, whereas in larger sections, the time for speeches was shorter and the chairpersons had to remind the participants more rigorously about the passage of time. In terms of the number of participants, the attendance of the third section was particularly impressive, the debates of which concerned among other things educational policy. A very large

number of applications for this section showed how important the problem of the interface between education and politics is for the Polish pedagogical community.

It is difficult to sum up the three-day Congress on several pages, during which so many participants took up so many topics. It is also difficult at this point to make a comprehensive assessment of the Congress. Certainly, we do not know everything about the Congress yet, e.g., there is still an important aspect of preparing the post-congress publications ahead of us. They will also make a significant contribution to the final event evaluation. Based on the opinions we heard from the Congress participants, we can conclude that the Congress was very successful. We share the same opinion, not only because we know how committed and devoted this large number of people, who took part in the preparations of the Congress, was, but also because we observed how our entire community was looking forward to the Congress, how much after a long period of pandemic restrictions colleagues wanted to meet again in the so-called real world, talk to each other, sit at one table, exchange important information and make jokes. All those little pleasures, which we had been deprived of for almost two years, could finally be present during the Congress. When we look at the Congress, reaching back to the first weeks of its preparations in the spring of 2021, we are deeply satisfied that we managed to organize a huge scientific and social event, although then we were full of doubts and anxieties related to the predictions regarding the pandemic development. The decision to join the Congress organization in a situation of uncertain prognosis regarding the pandemic turned out to be the right one. We are glad that we took it then.

After the end of the Congress, we sent a letter with acknowledgements to all participants expressing our gratitude for their participation, saying:

*On behalf of the Organizers of the 11<sup>th</sup> National Pedagogical Congress: the Polish Pedagogical Society and the Faculty of Educational Studies of the Adam Mickiewicz University, we would like to thank you for your participation in this important scientific and social event. We are glad that for three days – between 20–22.09 – we had the opportunity to host you in Poznań, and reflect together on the current state of culture, and in particular education, in global, European, national, and individual dimensions. Thank you for your good energy and creative ideas you shared with us, and we shared with each other. This positive atmosphere was clearly felt throughout the entire Congress, it accompanied us all at every stage, at every point of its rich program.*

*The positive atmosphere was also accompanied by serious events. We met during dramatic moments in the European and world history aptly described in the congress slogan as a turning point. Many speeches concentrated on war – the subject almost absent during previous Congresses. We organized a separate discussion panel devoted to educational problems in today's Ukraine, as well as in Poland due to the presence of numerous Ukrainian refugees in our country, including children and teenagers. We were impressed by your involvement in these issues, as well as your unequivocal support to our Ukrainian guests. We*



*know that this support meant a lot to them, as they returned to Kiev and other Ukrainian cities strengthened and grateful for Polish solidarity.*

*The Congress came to an end, but the scientific debate that we conducted during it has not finished. The intellectual and moral impulses that were triggered in your speeches and discussions continue to animate the imagination of many of us and encourage further reading and research. The issue of building a better world in and between us still calls for educational realisation, which in turn requires pedagogical wisdom and sensitivity. We hope that this positive congress energy will accompany you at the next stages of your scientific work, during contacts with students, as well as in your everyday life. We were able to experience our strength in Poznań, with its sources lying not in uniformity, but in diversity. To be able to develop this power, freedom in its all dimensions is needed. We wish you to experience this freedom from the bottom of our hearts.*

*We are sincerely grateful that you created a wonderful atmosphere during the Congress. We hope that this atmosphere will stay with us for the next months and years and will also accompany us in the preparations for the next Congress in Olsztyn. As educators, we can be proud of our scientific and social achievements.*

Separate acknowledgements were sent to our Ukrainian guests:

*On behalf of Prof. Agnieszka Cybal-Michalska, Dean of the Faculty of Economics of the Adam Mickiewicz University, Head of the Committee of Pedagogical Sciences at the Polish Academy of Sciences, and on my own behalf, I would like to thank you for your participation in the 11<sup>th</sup> National Pedagogical Congress in Poznań held between September 20–22, 2022. As the Organizers of the Congress, we would like to thank you for accepting our invitation to the Congress and for your participation in the debates. We are glad that we could meet you, talk to you, share our common concerns and hopes, and express our deep and unwavering solidarity with the community of Ukrainian educators, scholars, and all Ukrainians, especially those who are currently fighting to preserve independence and sovereignty of their homeland.*

*The invitation we sent to you this spring came from the depths of our hearts. We could not imagine that as educators we could reflect on the current problems of European and world culture, especially in its educational dimension, having disregard to the war waged by Ukraine with the Russian aggressor. This war, which is the most dramatic expression of the turning point of our times, was understood by us from the beginning as a conflict that went far beyond the clash of two states. It is a war of two civilizations, on the one hand – a civilization based on democracy, freedom, human rights, and human dignity, and on the other – a civilization of authoritarianism, enslavement, lawlessness, and human humiliation. We can clearly see that the victory of this first civilization now depends on the heroic resistance of Ukraine.*

*We do not know how long your heroic fight will last. But we do know that you are not and will not be alone in this fight. The entire community of Polish*

*educators supports you – so does the entire Polish society. It is not just moral support. During the meeting with Rector of the Adam Mickiewicz University, Prof. Bogumiła Kaniewska, and Vice-Rector, Prof. Rafał Witkowski, you could see how the fate of Ukrainians, especially those studying in Poland, is close to the hearts of Polish scientists. Please remember that the same commitment expressed by the rector's authorities of the Adam Mickiewicz University will be shown at any other Polish university. Academic teachers and students are involved in helping Ukraine. We are convicted to do it as the experience of our history has shown us more than once what Russian imperialism is.*

*We are very pleased that you had positive feelings when being accompanied by the Congress participants. We were all impressed by the unusual, friendly, and even family atmosphere that was created between your delegation and Polish educators. The gratitude expressed by you on various occasions and acknowledgements have given us energy and strength to become even more consistent in supporting the Ukrainian fight to stop Russian aggression. From the point of view of the Polish Pedagogical Society, a particularly important event during your stay in Poznań was the awarding ceremony of the Hryhorij Skoworoda Medal to the Polish Pedagogical Society. This unique distinction shows the convergence of our views on research and education. Both activities require freedom and autonomy, and people who devote themselves to science and teaching must follow their understanding of the truth and the voice of conscience, not the orders of any political or religious authority. Hryhorij Skoworoda is the patron of such people. By accepting the Hryhorij Skoworoda Medal, we also recognized him as the patron of our Society.*

*For the upcoming months, we wish you inner and outer peace, safety, and good health. Let's stay in touch. Let's undertake pedagogical activities together. Let's strengthen scientific relations between Poland and Ukraine. Let's build a better world in and between us.*

We are going to keep the time of fruitful debates during the 11<sup>th</sup> National Pedagogical Congress in our memory. We are deeply convinced that responsibility towards scientific knowledge, safeguarding the values which this knowledge depends on, and servitude towards society in times of social, political and climate crisis have brought scientific satisfaction to the academic community of educators, and will be the promise and announcement of many scientific initiatives.