

The attitude of state authorities to the development of physical culture in the Second Polish Republic

Stosunek władz państwowych do rozwoju kultury fizycznej w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej

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Summary

Physical culture in the Second Polish Republic took an important place in state policy. It covered physical education, physical recreation along with active forms of tourism, mass sport, competitive sport and military training related to physical education syllabus. The state played an important role in popularizing sport. Infrastructure was being developed among others, by building mountain huts, ski jumping hill, indoor swimming pools, local playgrounds and modern large stadiums. Sports institutions, associations and affiliations made a significant contribution to the development of physical culture in Poland before WWII. The purpose of the article is to outline the attitude of state authorities to physical culture during the two decades between WWI and WWII. The text has a problematic structure, presenting the state's policy in financial, organizational and legal terms.

Keywords: physical culture, military training, physical education, Józef Piłsudski

Introduction

After regaining independence, the Second Polish Republic struggled with economic, political and social difficulties. Sport was an extremely important issue to get regulated in organizational and financial terms. Over time, it can be seen that the popularization of physical activity in Poland before WWII was the great achievement. Physical culture located itself above political divisions. Not only social activists noticed its advantages, but also political and intellectual elites. Physical culture was associated primarily with the defense of the country. The fitness, health and vigor of the young generation gained additional importance. Between WWI and WWII period, there were two paths for understanding physical culture. The first one referred to the ancient times, perceiving it as *a system of values and harmonies of spiritual and physical development* [1]. In the following years many advocates found this way of thinking. The second path was different, because it narrowed the concept of physical culture to sport. In 1921, Dr. Władysław Jarecki published an article in the magazine "Physical Education" entitled: *The power of physical culture*. The author wrote, among others,

that due to the civilization threats to health and the interruption in the right balance between mental and physical development: *this physiological balance of a white-collar worker can only be ensured by sport, that is, properly utilized physical culture, which sport is the equivalent of. There is no physical culture without sports* [2]. Jarecki, through his articles, tried to convey the system of physical culture values to sport.

First sports organizations and associations

After regaining independence, sports activists came up with the idea of creating organizational structures. In 1918, the Section of Physical Education was established at the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment (MWRiOP), and was headed by Władysław Osmolski. A year later, the Faculty of School Hygiene and Physical Education was established at this ministry [3]. The purpose of their activity was to strive to strengthen the position of physical education in school syllabus. At the same time, starting from 1919, the sports movement forms were being created and developed: institutions and organizations. In October 1919, the Polish Athletics Association was established in Kraków (Tadeusz Kuchar became the first president) and the Polish Olympic Committee, whose first pres-

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ident was Prince Stefan Lubomirski, while the Vice-President was appointed by the Temporary Chief of State Józef Piłsudski. The association's task was to prepare Polish athletes to take part in the Olympic Games in Antwerp [4]. However, due to the Polish-Bolshevik war, the Polish team did not appear in the most important sporting event. During this period, the first sports associations (football, rowing, skiing) were established. In 1921–1922 further associations were founded (Polish Tennis Association, Polish Fencing Association, Polish Swimming Association) [5]. In 1922, the Association of Polish Sports Associations was established, which was to cooperate with the state authorities, support the development of amateur sport, coordinate the activities of associations and represent Poland abroad. The first Polish Sports Congress in Warsaw, which took place in 1923, played a significant role in the process of integration and joint action for physical education [6].

In the first years of the functioning of the resurgent country, the Ministry of Public Health took care of physical culture. The State Council for Physical Education and Body Culture was established at the ministry. The tasks of the organization operating in the years 1919–1922 were primarily to give opinions on matters of physical education and sport at the Ministries of Public Health as well as Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment. In 1925, the Supreme Council of Physical Education and Military Training (RNWFIPW) was established at the MWRiOP. The main purpose of the body was to give opinions on matters related to military training and physical education, presenting proposals to individual ministers, popularizing ideas in the field of state defense and supporting the activities of state or local government bodies.

Bills on the general obligation of physical education and military training

In the 1920s, the elite tried to bring about statutory regulations regarding the obligation of physical education. On 20 October 1920, senior officers of 3rd Division of the General Staff of the Ministry of Military Affairs came out with the initiative of their own bill on *compulsory physical education and military training of young people* [7]. Most of the clauses concerned military training, which is why the concept presented a military point of view. In the years 1921–1922, further work was continued in 3rd Division of the General Staff on the development of a new bill *On compulsory physical education and general training for the defense of the Polish Republic*. In the light of the proposed changes, the obligation of physical education was to apply to young people of both sexes. Secondly, the physical education was included in the syllabus of all schools, moreover, schoolchildren aged 14–21 were to use body training courses and camps organized by local governments or social organizations. However, the introduction of military training for male young people (from 16 years of age) was associated with adequate physical

preparation for military service. The idea of compulsory physical education dominated in military societies. It was believed that, thanks to appropriate exercises, young people could possess the appropriate spiritual and physical abilities that were needed to become a persistent and needed citizen of the Polish Republic. However, the proposed solutions were not supported by sports or medical organizations. The cause of the dispute was the link between physical education and military training. Formal separation of the physical education from the training did not satisfy critics of the bill. The lack of consistency was also due to political reasons. Under the proposed bill, military training included national minorities, among which were nationalist groups hostile to Poland [8].

At the end of 1924, another bill was prepared *On the general obligation of physical education of young people and on military training*. The Minister of Military Affairs, Władysław Sikorski, sent it to the Sejm on 12 October 1925. Governmental societies and the army emphasized that the goal of the bill was *to increase the physical development and moral strength of all citizens and to provide the state with defense capability*. The bill, like the previous ones, was rejected. It was criticized primarily by sports activists, emphasizing that it did not separate the physical education from the military training [9]. As a result of the May Coup in 1926, the Act lost its supporters.

After taking over the reign by Piłsudski, on 1 July 1926, the new government withdrew the bill of 12 October 1925. Then on 10 November 1926, the Council of Ministers adopted a proposal to introduce *by means of the Act on general obligation of physical education of young people of both sexes as an organic part of public education*. On 30 November, a conference was held during which Lt. Col. Juliusz Ulrych announced to the gathered representatives of sports organizations and the press, a plan to implement the resolution of the Council of Ministers on *raising the physical education*. The bill was to be based on eight principles:

1) *physical education of young people of both sexes is compulsory in all state, local government and private schools, starting from the age of 6 for every child,*

2) *young people who graduated from public schools and do not attend others – will receive physical education in associations authorized for this type of work and according to syllabus developed by state authorities,*

3) *compulsory physical education provided with the help of full-time instructors is introduced in universities,*

4) *supervision over physical education will be organized, both professional as well as hygienic and medical. Young people will be subject to compulsory medical examinations and fitness tests. Personal control will be based on introducing physical education logbooks accompanying each citizen throughout the entire period of physical education,*

5) *presentation of certificates from completed physical education program will be required at the issue of all diplomas and at*

admission to government and local government positions,

6) municipalities according to established standards will be obliged to provide the authorities, upon request, with areas necessary for arranging sports grounds, playgrounds and pedagogical therapy grounds. In addition, they should care for the maintenance of these areas,

7) sports-related associations will benefit from the State support consisting of instruction and material assistance,

8) associations authorized to conduct physical education among non-school young people as well as sports associations benefiting from the State aid will be subject to the inspection of state authorities and will conduct physical education according to the government syllabus [10].

Sports and military training organizations were obliged to submit their applications for developing or supplementing the presented guidelines by 1 January 1927. Lt. Col. J. Ulrych, director of the PUWF and PW, speaking at the first meeting of the RNWF on 15 February 1927, acknowledged the introduction of the Act on the general physical education as a key issue in the work of the government in the area of physical education. In the same period, consultations and talks with military training organizations were undertaken. On 1 May 1927, Lt. Col. Ulrych, at an organized second conference on matters of military training, stated: *We understand physical education as the means to increase the physical fitness of the nation to improve its defense readiness. Military training is to maintain this military readiness at the same level [11].*

In April 1928, the second meeting of the Scientific Council took place, and one of the items on the agenda was the *bill on the general obligation of physical education*. The clerk Władysław Kiliński demanded that the main part of the Act was to concern physical education, not military training, and that the resolution was real to get into force. In a further statement, he stated that the Act was not ready for discussion and requested that it was to be forwarded to the committee. Mieczysław Orłowicz, who also proposed the separating of the management and control function of the State from the executive function of the social factor, and also demanded the participation of “Sokół”, “Strzelec” and ZPZS in the development of the bill as well as increasing the role and importance of the organization in the implementation of compulsory physical education and military training. However, the design has not been approved by sports societies. The reluctance of sports activists to change their laws was due to several reasons. According to the bill, sports associations benefiting from the State aid would be subject to the supervision and control of state authorities and conduct physical education according to government syllabus. Undoubtedly, the assumed supervision of state authorities over sports organizations aroused resistance from the presidents of clubs and sports associations. Further RNWF meetings were held in 1929 and 1932, but no compromise was reached. In turn, during the fourth meeting, the clause concerning the bill was omitted from the agenda.

Consequently, by 1939, the reigning camp failed to bring about statutory changes involving the general obligation of physical education of young people and military training.

Physical culture after 1926 – change of attitude

The coup in May 1926 changed the political scene. At the same time, it marked the beginning of a gradual stepping away from parliamentary democracy. There was also a change in the importance of the army in the country, which has since become one of the pillars of the authoritarian reigning system. After the coup, the rank of physical culture increased significantly. Its development and popularization resulted from political goals. The Second Polish Republic was in a difficult foreign situation, so it became necessary to increase the strength of the State by raising the level of health and physical fitness of the social masses and engaging the largest possible part of society in military training. Polish education had traditions in this area, dating back to the days of the Duchy of Warsaw. In Poland, from the very beginning, the system of training reserves was based on young people in schools. Military training was carried out voluntarily in corps intended for this purpose. Any student over the age of 16 could belong to the corps. The training program took place in two stages and provided for 3–4 weeks of classes and a lecture on every military subject.

From the beginning of the Second Polish Republic, the military training of young people was treated very seriously. However, after 1926, the state authorities, including Piłsudski as the leader, were much more interested in this area, undertaking various activities and initiatives aimed at raising the level of physical education among citizens. In this case, it is worth emphasizing the role of paramilitary organizations and scouts, including: Rifle Association ‘Strzelec’, ‘Sokół’, Polish Union of Fire Brigades, Airborne and Antigas Defence League, Maritime and Colonial League or Railway Military Defence. It should be remembered that most of the organizations were of proorganizational nature. It is worth noting that military training also included girls who were prepared for auxiliary work in defense of the State, including in rescue, first aid and soldier care [12]. The program concerned young people aged 16–18. Teachers were responsible for supervision and management of the corps. On 28 January 1927, the appointment of the State Physical Education and Military Training Office (PUWF and PW) was established by the Regulation of the Council of Ministers. The tasks of the newly established institution included activities related to military training and education, popularizing physical education and sport among young people, taking over by the state authorities, in particular the army, of all extracurricular civil education [13]. Employees from the Department and Ministry of Military Affairs, as well as the Military Institute of Science and Publishing were directed to the appointed office. The gov-

ernment's assumption was to create an organization that would establish new relations between the state bodies and society. This role was to be played by the Scientific Council for Physical Education (at the central level) and voivodship, district, city committees for physical education and military training. Implementation of the military training in the field and physical education in the ranks of the army was subordinated to the commanders of ten military districts, the Border Protection Corps and the Navy, at which the district offices of physical education and military adoption operated. Commanders of areas, regions and districts were subordinated to precinct office commanders [14]. At the same time, the district centers supervised the activities of army representatives in the field committees of physical education and military training. Double subordination was to serve better organization and control of the implementation of the office's tasks. Whereas voivodes and starostes of district committees headed the voivodship committees, and their secretaries were professional officers acting as heads of WFIPW precincts and districts PW command offices. The committees were responsible for controlling the activities of local sports or paramilitary organizations and forced local authorities to take a serious approach to the tasks they performed regarding the promotion of physical education and military training.

Comparing the period before the May Coup, there was a clear change in the approach to physical education. Earlier, the government and parliament did not undertake major initiatives and actions aimed at regulating the issue of physical activity of the society. The Sanation camp propagated so-called state education, i.e. it sought to shape young people according to the model of a citizen-soldier: physically fit, prepared to perform military service, loyal to the State and its traditions, ready to sacrifice for the homeland and taking part in various social initiatives. This became particularly evident in the 1930s, when the model of shaping loyalist behavior towards the Sanation dominated, the merits of the legions in regaining independence and the role of Marshal Piłsudski were brought to the fore. The system was in place at all levels of PUWFIPW, sports organizations, especially those benefiting from financial assistance. It should be mentioned that in 1928 a section was created, later renamed to the department of physical education of women. The organization was implementing programs for the popularization of physical activity and sport as well as was preparing for auxiliary military service. In the same period, the Design and Technical Research Office was established, which was developing programs, construction plans and development of sports facilities. In 1929, the Central Institute of Physical Education was established in Warsaw. The Institute has become an important research center on physical culture in the country. It played an important role in educating qualified staff and preparing sports physicians. Władysław Osmolski became the first director of the Institute.

The shortage of staff, inherited from the Partitions, prompted the office to organize instructor courses in selected sports disci-

plines and sports training. At the beginning of the young State's operation, Poznań was the center of training of qualified staff. The Central Military School of Gymnastics and Sports played a significant role in the Greater Poland. In 1927, the School of Physical Education at the Jagiellonian University was established in Kraków [15].

After 1926, propaganda for sport and physical culture began on a large scale. Sports construction played an important role in the process of progress and popularization of physical activity among the society. In the beginning of independence, the development of the material base was in the hands of local governments. Despite the adverse conditions and the difficult material status of the population, expenditure on sports facilities was visible. After the May Coup, sports construction was paramount for the Sanation. In the years 1927–1931, thanks to the efforts of state and local authorities, over 100 sport grounds, 900 running tracks and tennis courts, 15 ski jumping hills and 40 luge tracks were put into use [16]. It should be emphasized that despite the difficult financial conditions of the Polish Republic in the field of sports base, significant success and progress were achieved. In addition to construction of sports facilities, the state authorities also took other initiatives to support the development of physical culture. On 27 June 1930, pursuant to the Regulation of the Council of Ministers, the State Sports Badge (POS) was established. The badge was divided into three classes: bronze, silver and gold and was given the state rank. The right to grant it was vested in the chairmen of voivodship physical education and military training committees. It was available to Polish citizens who were over 14 and 16 years old (in the case of girls) and underwent periodic physical fitness tests, obtaining a positive result [17]. According to the columnists of the monthly magazine "Physical Education" POS has become a new ally and means in the fight to improve physical education in society: *In any case, however, we must point out that at the moment it is not only the means of rationalization but a link in the rescue operation* [18].

The culmination of the authorities' policy towards sport was the National Festival of Physical Education and Military Training organized on 12–14 June 1931 in Spała with the participation of the President Ignacy Mościcki. During the ceremony, cavalry performances, collective gymnastics shows and mass sports competitions took place. The weekly magazine "Stadion" described the event as follows: *Spała Festival being a review of the development of the idea of PE and MT. throughout Poland, it was also a manifestation of young people and society in honor of the President. The strongest expression of this was the spontaneous ovation at the stadium and backfilling the lodge of the President with flowers by several thousand young people* [19]. The years 1927–1931 should be recognized as beneficial for the development of physical culture, scientific research and progress in the construction of sports facilities.

The following years, 1932–1935, proved less favorable for the development of sport. This was mainly due to the economic cri-

sis limiting state expenditure on offices and local governments. The group of colonels in the government, dissatisfied with the declining public support, interfered in the activities of social organizations. This was evidenced by the Regulation of the President Moscicki Association Law of 27 October 1932, which gave the government the right to control organizations and allowed their dissolution [20]. In 1935, representatives of RNWF, PUWF, FIPW, ZPZS and PKOL signed an agreement called the „Sports Constitution”, under which the sports movement lost its independence and was subjected to the control of the authorities. In the issue of 20 April 1935, „Przegląd Sportowy”, commenting on the concluded agreement, wrote: *To take care of and generally manage sport on behalf of the State, PUWF is appointed primarily as a state professional body. Direct management of the affiliated sport, according to the guidelines established jointly with PUWF, belongs to the ZPZS (PKOL), which is the supreme social body of the affiliated sport and the PUWF's expert advisory body* [21].

After Marshal Piłsudski passed away, in 1936–1939, the decomposition of the Sanation Camp took place. There was, among others, an attempt to take over PUWFIPW by competing centers. Despite the difficult international situation, in the years 1935–1939 state authorities and society showed interest in military training or organizations. Funds for this purpose were financed from various sources, assistance was also provided by the army.

Józef Piłsudski and physical culture. Relations and attitude of the Marshal to physical education

Józef Piłsudski attached a special role to physical education and military training of young people. The Commander often spoke about physical culture. The Marshal's relations with physical culture concerned especially the years 1926–1932, i.e. during the term of the chairman of the Scientific Council for Physical Education (he was its founder and first chairman). He supported the idea, that: *University students, being heralds of knowledge and imagination, will become the most active troops of creators of this great work, while sport, through its powerful physical and moral action, will be in their hands as the invaluable instrument of restoring and strengthening social peace.* That is why he wanted *that students would be able to use it with the best possible outcome* [22]. Piłsudski called for individualization: boys and girls doing exercises matched to their needs and abilities. According to the Commander, physical culture was popularized through designing the development of facilities and designing the strategic development of the Polish Republic [23]. It is worth quoting a fragment of Piłsudski's speech delivered during the first RNWF meeting: *Human physical education cannot have any other purpose than to use its body, its physical structure for the purposes set out above. That is why the army, which trans-*

forms the weak, into a man using its body for one or other purposes, is the most important area of physical education in Poland and all over the world. He was sorry for the fate of children and their treatment in schools: *That is why in physical education I would like to feel sorry for children who, in a stuffy school atmosphere, must necessarily straighten their poor legs, even after doing things that are not always acceptable at school* [24].

Ending

The attitude of state authorities to physical culture in the Second Polish Republic went through various phases and depended on many factors. In the years 1918–1926, the elites did not pay due attention to physical education. After the May Coup in May 1926 and taking the reign by Józef Piłsudski and the Sanation Camp, broader actions started to promote physical activity and military training. The establishment of PUWFIPW and CIWF had a considerable impact on the development of physical culture, scientific research, financial support for sports organizations, and construction of facilities, etc. However, the help of state authorities for sports organizations, associations and tourism was primarily associated with the instrumental treatment of physical culture. In addition to institutions and the State, an important role in the popularization of physical culture was played by the press as well as sports associations and social activists, especially teachers. In this case, Władysław Osmolski and Eugeniusz Piasecki should be mentioned here. The development of physical culture depended on two most important factors: economic situation of the country and the inherited legacy of the Partitions. On the one hand, the Partitions contributed to the civil impoverishment and backwardness of Polish territory compared to the developing European countries. On the other hand, however, the difficult economic situation of the Polish Republic often prevented the implementation of ambitious plans in the area of physical culture.

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Streszczenie

Kultura fizyczna w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej zajęła ważne miejsce w polityce państwa. Obejmowała wychowanie fizyczne, rekreację ruchową wraz z aktywnymi formami turystyki, sport masowy, wyczynowy oraz przysposobienie wojskowe powiązane pod względem programowym z wychowaniem fizycznym. W popularyzacji sportu istotną rolę odegrało państwo. Rozwijano m.in. infrastrukturę, budując schroniska górskie, skocznie narciarskie, kryte pływalnie, lokalne boiska oraz nowoczesne wielkie stadiony. Duży wkład w rozwój kultury fizycznej w przedwojennej Polsce położyły instytucje, związki oraz stowarzyszenia sportowe. Celem artykułu jest zarysowanie stosunku władz państwowych do kultury fizycznej w okresie dwudziestolecia międzywojennego. Tekst ma układ problemowy, prezentując politykę państwa pod względem finansowym, organizacyjnym i prawnym.

Słowa kluczowe: kultura fizyczna, przysposobienie wojskowe, wychowanie fizyczne, Józef Piłsudski
