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Sorbian press towards the liquidation of the secondary schools in Chrósćice and Pancice-Kukow

ABSTRAKT

W 2003 roku została zamknięta serbołujska szkoła średnia w Chrósćicach, a w 2007 roku taka placówka o wiatowa w Panicach-Kukowie. Łużycanie stanęli w obronie swoich szkół, co widoczne było, między innymi, w dyskursie medialnym w tamtym czasie. Prasa relacjonowała akcje protestacyjne, publikowano artykuły związane z tym problemem. Wyżej wymienione placówki były dla Łużycan bardzo ważne ze względu na położenie na obszarach, gdzie mowa najmniejszego narodu słowiańskiego jest wciąż używana na co dzień. Wraz ze zmniejszeniem się liczby i tak już nielicznych szkół serbołujskich, likwidacja wyżej wymienionych placówek, stanowiła dla Łużycan wielką stratę.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: prasa serbołujska, likwidacja szkół średnich, Chrósćice, Panice-Kukow

Introduction

In 2003 a Sorbian secondary school in Chrósćice was closed, and in 2007 the same thing happened with another secondary educational institution in Pancice-Kukow. The reason for their shutdown was a failure to meet the established regulatory requirements relating to the minimum number of students required. The decisions were very unfavorable to the Sorbian people. The schools were in the Catholic part of Upper Lusatia, which is the area where the Sorbian language is still used every day by a significant proportion of the population.

After the two institutions were closed down there have only been four schools in which pupils have been educated in Sorbian¹. The Sorbs took up the cudgels of their schools, which among others was reflected in the media discourse at the time. Newspapers reported the protests, and articles relating to this issue were published. According to the Sorbian writer – Jurij Koch, the fight for a school in Chrósćice was the

¹ „Witaj” – A Language Center website:

<http://www.witaj-sprachzentrum.de/index.php/hsb/serbscina-w-suli/w-sakskej-sule> (retrieved 18. 11. 2012).

biggest action the Sorbs took in previous centuries². However, in his comment on the events of the time Hajko Kozel, a Member of the National Parliament of Saxony, reported that "the fight contributed to strengthening the Sorbian self-awareness"³.

Not only did the Sorbian newspaper provide the public with a comprehensive coverage of the fight for keeping the Sorbian schools open, or report the reactions from abroad, but the also published the comments regarding the issue. The columns were not only filled the journalists' points of view. The articles clearly expressed a more favorable look at the attempts at keeping the Sorbian educational institutions running, as well as deprecation of any actions aiming at closing the schools. The following are examples of the texts quoted in the Sorbian press, which will make it possible to learn the position of respective newspaper editors and readers and their level of interest in the issue.

Published in Lower Sorbian, the weekly "Nowy Casnik" focuses mainly on issues related to Lower Lusatia. Therefore, the newspaper, to a much lesser extent than, for example, the Upper Sorbian newspaper "Serbske Nowiny", informed its readers about events and activities related to the fight to keep the school in Chrós ice. In August 2001, in "Nowy Casnik" there appeared a short note informing the readers about the plans of the Saxon government to close, as it was incorrectly written, a primary school in Chrós ice. The author used the words, which, as stated, were spoken by teachers, children and parents: "To close a Sorbian school - this is to the detriment of the Sorbian people."

The memo also pointed at the fact that the school was renovated by the people and with their money. Next to the text there was placed a picture of people carrying a banner during an international folklore celebration, which was held in early July in Chrós ice and thus protesting against government plans to close down the school⁴. At the same time, in July 2003 it was announced that Domowina had asked the Pope for help in keeping this and other educational Sorbian institutions⁵. The news of John Paul II assuring of his prayers and sending his blessing from Rome was also mentioned by "Nowy Casnik". The newspaper, in addition to informing that the Saxon Ministry of Education had taken a final decision to close the school in Chró cice, it added that the institution had done so despite all the protests. The author the brief note on the first page of the "Nowy Casnik" also stated that people had commented on the decision as being "a shame for the whole of Germany"⁶. In addition, readers were informed about the date of the next protest⁷.

² Chróšcan zbežk 2001. Dokumentacija boja wo zachowane serbskeje šulskeje syce w zwisku z wobsadzenjom pjateje rjadownje serbskeje srjedznej šule „Jurij Chežka“ w Chróšcicach, Drježdžany 2001, p. 2.

³ Op. cit.

⁴ Serbska šula dej wosta , „Nowy Casnik“, c. 31, L. 53, 04. 08. 2001, p. 2.

⁵ Op. cit.

⁶ Serby pšose bamža wo pomoc, „Nowy Casnik“, c. 28, L. 55, 12. 07. 2003, p. 1.

⁷ Op. cit.

In a different issue of "Nowy Casnik", dated July 2003, the story of the school in Chró cice was discussed more widely. Besides a front page photo of the protests with a caption making it also clear that the struggle for the school in Chró cice had already taken two years⁸, the following page featured an article fully illustrated with photographs with a title which was a quote saying: "This is a tragedy for the Sorbs"⁹. This article contained important current events concerning the secondary school in Chró cice. It was mentioned that during the meeting of the Saxon National Parliament dedicated to the fate of the Sorbian education institution, opposition PDS and SPD voted in favor of keeping the school, which did not, however, prevent the liquidation voted by the CDU holding the majority. Attitude of a Sorbian, Mark Siman, a representative of the Christian Democrats, was highlighted here as he allegedly "was neither for nor against it"¹⁰. "Nowy Casnik" reported that protests against the closure of the school in Chró cice and other educational institutions where learning takes place in the Sorbian language, are very strong. It also focused on the reactions abroad. According to the newspaper, the closure of the school which was planned two years before were prevented by the protests which had been taking place for months at that time. The article draws on the argument pleaded by the proponents of the liquidation of the school that the institution has and always will have too few pupils. It was estimated that people in favor of the closure of the school "act strictly according to the 'German' regulations, which in this case are unfavorable to the Sorbian culture and especially to the language"¹¹. The author of the article concludes with, what he believed to be a view reflecting opinions of many people, claiming that: "The closure of our school will be a blow for the heart of the Sorbian people"¹².

In the 2003 September issue of the "Nowy Casnik", the editor-in-Chief of the newspaper at the time, Horst Adam, posted his comment on the issue of the school in Chró cice. He gave a historical outline of the fight for saving the educational institution and also mentioned the support received from the Czechs whose parliamentarians and politicians issued a request at the the Saxon authorities to open the school in Chró cice, and also remembering a demonstration organised in Prague at the time when Chancellor Gerhard Schröder was visiting the city. In his comment on the actions taken abroad, Horst Adam said: "We would like to receive such support and assistance also from the Germans who live in Lusatia and elsewhere. We can only hear very little from them, alas. Too bad as, after all, they are the ones who every day see what a treasure the Sorbian language and culture are."¹³ In this way the editor pointed at the reason why he would expect to have received

⁸ *Skoro ko c serbskeje šule?*, „Nowy Casnik”, c. 30, L. 55, 26. 07. 2003, p. 1.

⁹ *„To jo tragedija za Serbow”*, „Nowy Casnik”, c. 30, L. 55, 26. 07. 2003, p. 2.

¹⁰ Op. cit.

¹¹ Op. cit.

¹² Op. cit.

¹³ H. Adam, *A o jo solidarita nimskich?*, „Nowy Casnik”, c. 37, L. 55, 13. 09. 2003, p. 2.

help from the Germans in particular. He also expressed his expectations towards the people inhabiting the banks of Sprewa who neighbor this smallest Slavic nation¹⁴.

Little one could read in a protestant Sorbian monthly "Pomhaj Bóh" about the defence of the school in Chróscice, although, this newspaper also published one article dedicated to this issue. In October 2001, the course of "Action for Sorbian education" – high school students' protest in defense of the Sorbian facility in Chróscicach, was described¹⁵.

Catholic weekly Sorbian "Katolski Posol" published considerably more on the shutdown and the fight for the school in Chróscice. This is undoubtedly, first and foremost, connected with the fact that the educational institution is located in the heart of the Catholic part of Upper Lusatia, in a village inhabited mostly by Sorbs. In July 2001, for instance, there appeared an article describing the actions taken to save the school, such as decorating the building, organizing gatherings and church services. As it was written that "Pastor Clemens Hrjehor celebrated the Vespers, where many people firmly declared: We must work together to prevent the destruction of the network of Sorbian high schools. Closing a school in Chróscice the Saxon government would give the beginning to this process"¹⁶. In this way, the author of the article in "Katolski Posol" applied a similar method to that used in the "Nowy Casnik" – a particular utterance, an opinion, was presented as a statement spoken by many people. One might also assume that the editors of both newspapers identified themselves in these cases with the ideas they expressed, as evidenced by the tone of the articles.

The author of the article in "Katolski Posol" reported that during Vespers in the parish church of Chróscice, there spoke, among others, a Member of the Czech Parliament – Jaromír Kohlíček, and a member of the National Parliament of Saxony, a Sorbian – Hajko Kozel. The text was an illustration of the text was a picture showing the school in Chróscice with banners in front of it. It is noteworthy that the fact of shutting down subsequent Sorbian educational institutions, as reported by "Katolski Posol", proved to be true after the school in Chróscice was closed down in 2003, and four years later, the same thing happened with a similar institution in Panitzsch-Kukow.

In August 2001, the magazine posted a statement by Domowina and Initiative for the preservation of the school, which, among others, was about the court's decision by which the following year the fifth grade class was not supposed to be created. News was also announced of the planned public meeting during which speeches on the subject were to take place together with some artistic performances. The text included a call for readers: "Come here, y'all! The public has to see our will!"¹⁷, or other expressive statements, among others, those relating to the elimination of the Sorbian school network: "He who does something like that, it is as if he gave the

¹⁴ Op. cit.

¹⁵ L. Malinkec, *Akcija za serbske šulstwo*, „Pomhaj Bóh”, . 10. L. 51, oktober 2001, p. 5.

¹⁶ *Wuraz protesta*, „Katolski Posol”, . 28, 15. 07. 2001, p. 171.

¹⁷ *Ze zawrjenjom Chróscianskeje šule so serbskemu ludej woda wotrywa*, „Katolski Posol”, . 31, 05. 08. 2001, p. 183.

Sorbian language a lethal injection"¹⁸. On the front page of "Katolski Posol" of 5 August 2003, on the other hand, there appeared an article by Jana Markowa expressing the author's emotions and thoughts associated with the upcoming issue of closing the school in Chrós icy. Markov wrote: "In my hands, I'm holding the court's verdict – in Chrós icy, for the first time in the history of the school, are there not going to be the students of the fifth grade? (...) I am helpless, I feel powerless"¹⁹. The author, worried about the fate of her nation, also asked: "Where do our children go to school, to other places in the world? How much of religious and national awareness are we able to provide them with, how much hope? (...) God, have mercy, keep our Sorbian nation safe and sound until the end of time"²⁰. The front page of the newspaper also showed a big picture taken at the vespers which were a form of demonstration in defense of the school.

"Serbske Nowiny" is an Upper Sorbian daily. As the newspaper focuses primarily on matters of Upper Lusatia, it paid a lot of attention to the closure of Sorbian schools in Chrós icy and Pancice-Kukow. It published up-to-date coverage of the events associated with the defense of the Sorbian schools, as well as comments regarding the closure of these institutions. The daily reported in detail the various events relevant to the issue in question, among others, actions taken in December 2001 by the commune councilor of Chróscica, Jan Wjesela, leading to sending a letter of protest issued from the Council to a Saxon representative²¹, Andrea Fischer, or an open discussion in Chrós icy in September 2001²².

An announcement in "Srbskie Nowiny" of January 2007 informing that the Saxon State Ministry confirmed the closure of the school in Pan icy-Kukow was another example of information concerning the matters of school. It recalled that no later than March 2006, the District Council in Kamjenec adopted a plan of networks of schools, and thus, as stated in the newspaper, the educational institution was "sentenced to death"²³. The article quoted the position of the spokesman of the initiative group acting in defense of Sorbian schools – Stefan Rjedy, who claimed maintaining three high schools in the district of Kamjenec to be feasible²⁴.

The newspaper also printed some comments of the selected Sorbs regarding the closure of Sorbian educational institutions. It happened so, for example, in January 2006. The editor of the daily, Marko Wje ka, collected the opinions from the President of Domowina, John Nuka, the chairman of the Association of Sorbian Schools, Ludmila Budarjowa, the Mayor of the municipality of Pan icy-Kukow, Pjetaš Franc, the Mayor of the Municipality of Worklecy, Franc Bruska, father Clemens Hrjehora of Chrós icy and Manuela Smolin of the initiative group defending the

¹⁸ Op. cit.

¹⁹ *Smy a bud emy*, „Katolski Posol”, . 31, 05. 08. 2001, p. 181.

²⁰ Op. cit.

²¹ *Za protestny list krajnej rad i elce*, „Serbske Nowiny”, . 241, L. 11, 14. 12. 2001, p. 1.

²² *Dolha lis ina problemow nastala*, „Serbske Nowiny”, . 170, L. 11, 03. 09. 2001, p. 1.

²³ *W Drježd anach wobstawaja na zawrjenju*, „Serbske Nowiny”, . 14, L. 17, 19. 01. 2007, p. 1.

²⁴ Op. cit., p. 2.

school in Pan ıce-Kukow. While all of these people are Sorbian, their opinions on the behavior of the Sorbian educational institution were divided. John Nuk remarked that officials do not understand the expectations of the Sorbian and that everything is judged only by the criterion of the number of students. Also Lyudmila Budarjowa negatively assessed the decision to close down the school. In her view, such a move would "seriously threatens the border areas inhabited by the Sorbian, because parents would then opt for German schools"²⁵. In a similar tone, Manuela Smolina commented: "We can not give up even a single Sorbian school, because we need the Sorbian language space"²⁶. Father Hrjehor, in turn, concluded that "closing any Sorbian educational institution causes great harm to the linguistic substance of our nation"²⁷. Moreover, he drew attention to the negative role of the authorities, saying: "Politicians do what they want, without it they would listen to the Sorbian Members of Parliament"²⁸. The mayors, to the contrary, took a different position. Franc Pjetaš stated, inter alia that: "Bearing in mind the small number of students, we have felt the threat of the closure of the school for a long time. I do not believe it could be saved even by all the successive compromises. Even then we would have classes with an extremely small number of students"²⁹. Pjetaš went so far as to claim that the entire nearby area would be better if it had only one school, as agreed by the Sorbian mayors, and also commented that "the behavior of school in Pan ıce would be unfavorable for the school in Worklece"³⁰. In turn, according to Franc Bruski, it would be much worse if the educational institution in Worklece was closed, because children of Njebjel ıce would rather go to Kamjenca, so a German school, rather than to a more remote school of Pancica. Moreover, according to the mayor, "Behavior of the school in Worklece and Ralbice is a good ruling for the Sorbs"³¹.

Among the papers cited above certainly the most extensive coverage of the issue of closing the Sorbian schools in Chrós ıce and Pancice-Kukow appeared in "Serbske Nowiny". It is obvious, since it is the only Sorbian daily newspaper, and as it is published in Sorbian it focuses mainly on issues related to Upper Lusatia. As far as the way of presenting certain events and issues and comments to them is concerned, you can see the differences between the Sorbian periodicals. Editors of "Nowy Casnik" and "Katolski Posol" clearly indicated their negative attitude towards closing schools, using, for example, comments allegedly made by many people, or simply presenting their own views, very often using expressive sentences, appeals, or stating questions. In turn, "Serbske Nowiny" focused more on reporting the events and directly quoting their participants. Among the comments uttered by those of the Sorbs opposing the closure of the schools, you could also hear the views of people not expressing their

²⁵ M. Wje ka, *in*ja, *štož chced a*, „Serbske Nowiny”, . 14, L. 17, 20. 01. 2006, p. 1.

²⁶ Op. cit., p. 2.

²⁷ Op. cit., p. 2.

²⁸ Op. cit., p. 2.

²⁹ Op. cit., p. 2.

³⁰ Op. cit., p.1.

³¹ Op. cit., p.1.

disapproval of the closure of the Sorbian educational institutions. In turn, one could really find very little coverage of the events in "Pomahaj Bóh". This paper, however, in contrast to the previously mentioned, is a monthly. What is more, the educational institutions in question were all located in the Catholic area, and therefore not in the scope of interest of this Evangelical newspaper.

It may be noted that the case which is extremely important for the Sorbian nation, namely keeping the two high schools, was covered by particular Sorbian newspapers in a slightly different manner. In all of these papers, however, the voices in defense of these educational institutions prevailed. To a lesser or greater extent, could also be affected by the same editorial attitude towards the closing of schools in Chrós icy and Pan icy-Kukow.

Sorbian press towards the liquidation of the secondary schools in Chróscice and Pancice-Kukow Summary

The events related to the liquidation of the Sorbian schools in Chrós icy in 2003 and Pan icy-Kukow in 2007 and the actions taken in defense of these educational institutions were reported by the Sorbian press. There are differences between the descriptions of this topic in various Sorbian newspapers. Upper Sorbian newspaper „Serbske Nowiny“ for example, focused mainly on reporting of the events and quoting their participants, mostly opponents of the liquidation of schools, but also people, who presented a different view. In the weekly magazine „Nowy Casnik“ and „Katolski Posol“ the reader could find a number of articles whose authors have used expressive sentences defending these educational institutions. Monthly evangelical magazine „Pomhaj Bóh“ mentioned the action against closing the school in Chrós icy only once.

Key words: Sorbian press, liquidation of the secondary schools, Chróscice, Pancice-Kukow