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ANALYSIS OF THE “NATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMANITIES”

I would like to take a closer look at the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education’s “National Programme for the Development of Humanities” that came into effect on 5 November 2010. Since it is hailed by the Ministry as answering the demands and expectations of Polish scholars and researchers of the humanities, I am interested in analysing how it defines and divides this field, the criteria it employs, as well as what it considers to be the weaknesses of Polish humanities and how it intends to address them (although the weaknesses and solutions overlap to some extent – the identification of a problem is the first step towards its solution). I should add that the entire budget of the project is approximately 50 million zlotys (or 12.5 million Euros).

When announcing the programme in June, the Polish Minister of Science, Barbara Kudrycka, pointed out that “humanistic research, particularly in reference to the national culture, would receive less support from EU structural funds (directed mostly towards “bio, info and techno” research) and other foreign funds”, which is why the humanities “need particular support from the State”. Let me add that in the more general “National Programme for Scientific Research and Development” (introduced by the Ministry in October 2008), humanities were also almost invisible. The Programme’s main aim was “the intensification of the role of the academic community in the shaping of rational, modern and long-term goals for the balanced development of society and the economy” encompassing “five interdisciplinary priority research areas: society in the conditions of a secure, accelerated and balanced economic development; health; energy and infrastructure; new technologies for the economy; environment and agriculture”. When the Programme came into force, the National Centre for Research and Development (NCBiR) was established to “manage and implement strategic scientific research and development programmes that translate directly into the development of innovation.” As claimed in its statement, “the tasks of NCBiR include support for commercialization and other forms of transferring scientific research results to the economy.”

As to the “National Programme for the Development of Humanities”, the aim of the Programme is expressed as follows – 1) to ensure the development of humanistic research key to the preservation of the Polish national identity, including national culture; 2) to support the international dissemination of Polish research results in the humanities; 3) to provide stable conditions for the realization and financing of key long-term documentation, editing and research projects; 4) to provide conditions for the academic development of young researchers in the field of humanities by supporting PhD projects and providing scholarships for PhD students and post-doctoral researchers.

The Programme also specifies scientific disciplines that it recognizes as “humanities” – history and archaeology, linguistics and literary studies, philosophy and religious studies, art history, bibliology (meaning books, not Bible studies), archival studies, ethnology, cultural anthropology, musicology, as well as “those scientific disciplines, research and projects, which involve humanistic content and use of humanistic methods”. We will revisit this theme later. It is clear that (although there is a margin) the disciplines recognized as “humanities” are coherent with the first general aim of the Programme.

The Programme is divided into three modules: 1) research; 2) support of young humanists; 3) the dissemination of Polish research results worldwide. The research module aims to: 1) support long-term documentation, editing and research work of fundamental relevance for Polish culture and heritage; and 2) support interdisciplinary and international research collaboration. The support of young humanists aims to: 1) support academic team research conducted by PhD students in interdisciplinary, international and inter-institutional collaboration; and 2) finance research grants for doctoral and post-doctoral students participating in relevant research projects of key relevance to the humanities in Poland or abroad. The dissemination of Polish research results aims to: 1) fund the translation and publication of research works of the highest relevance and academic quality to ensure their

presence in the circulation of international research; and 2) support foreign language electronic editions of the most important Polish journals in the humanities, especially most in English.

The funds will not be allocated to individual institutions as such, but to individual projects that cannot be financed by any other source. All funding will be allocated based on the basis of bids. The funds will augment those funds already allocated to research programmes in the humanities.

Part of the first module ("support of long-term documentation, editorial and research activities of fundamental relevance for Polish culture and heritage") is to be managed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MNiSW), i.e. around 30% of the total allocation, and the remaining modules are to be implemented by the newly-established National Research Centre, which is to be a counterpart to the National Centre for Research and Development (NCBiR). While the latter is responsible for applied research, the National Research Centre (NCN) will be set up to distribute funds for basic research, including social sciences and humanities, as well as to sign agreements on international research programmes. As it was stated in one of the Ministry's announcements, it will be an "independent and professional body" run by "scientists-managers".

As we can see, the Programme is based strictly on bid procedures. It is part of a larger strategy of the Ministry, which, in its own words, wants "to radically change the way research and academic institutions are financed. The government plans to reduce the subsidies for research organisations' statutory activities, which are funds allocated to cover their day-to-day expenses, maintain their research capacity, as well as to carry out their 'own research projects', usually constituting fragmentary research that is not anchored in any specific research programme. There has been no systemic evaluation of such activities so far. Only the best research centres will continue to receive such subsidies. After the reform, financial resources for research and jobs at research institutions will be distributed by way of bids and the winners will be selected on the basis of their research results rather than academic degrees or titles. Funds will no longer be distributed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, but by the aforementioned National Centre for Research and Development (NCBiR) and the National Research Centre (NCN).

According to the Ministry, on 10 March Minister Kudrycka sent a letter to the majority of Polish scholars and researchers in the field of humanities, requesting them to submit proposals for the Programme (unfortunately, it has not been announced how many of them actually responded to the letter). The proposals were thoroughly analysed and presented to a team of professors: Stanisław Mossakowski, Jerzy Axer, Grażyna Borkowska, Karol Modzelewski, Ryszard Nycz, Henryk Samsonowicz, Andrzej Szostek and Jerzy Wyrozumski.

Therefore, to summarise, humanities in contemporary Poland are positioned somewhere between Scylla and Charybdis. On the one hand, the humanities are considered a strictly conservative practice (also in the root meaning of the word – "to keep, preserve, keep intact, guard") and as such, are supported by the State. The humanist as a custodian, guardian of Polish national heritage (librarian, archivist, museum conservator). On the other, the humanities as a creative industry – competitive, measurable, adapting to the market changes and focused on the end product (competition, evaluation, flexibility, graduate skills are the key terms of the discourse on higher educational reform).