

The University of Białystok as the leading university and the symbol of the eastern frontier community

Introduction

In the beginning of the third decade of the XXI century we are still posing a question regarding the directions for changes in universities – not only Polish ones, which are being accused of “not generating enough intellectual energy” (Lambert, Butler, 2007, p. 1) and of not taking prominent and worthwhile positions in global university rankings. From among Polish universities only the University of Warsaw and the Jagiellonian University in Kraków retained their position in the fourth hundred on the Shanghai List, i.e., the list of the best higher education schools in the world.

Being aware that knowledge is one of the most important factors shaping economic life as well as the social and cultural values works have been launched since 1990, a year pivotal for Polish education (at that time certain legal regulations were adopted allowing for establishing non-public higher education institutions), regarding permanent “reform” of Polish universities. A crucial proof confirming that universities have become “targets” of excessive ministerial regulation consists in the data of the Sejm of the 14 of February 2008 which indicate that in the field of higher education there were 92 effective acts, 226 regulations and 105 other legal acts with another 286 legal acts regulating science and scientific activity. In 1990 the higher education act consisted of 202 articles (Thieme, 2009, pp. 371–372). *The higher education law of 2005* consists of 277 articles (Act, 2005, No. 164, item 1365). In turn the Higher Education Act of the 20th July 2018 consists of 470 articles (Act, 2018, item 1668). This astounding number of legal regulations results in the universities experiencing restriction of their autonomy and insufficient funding received from the state budget. It is significant as far as in the discussions the quality and competitiveness are constantly being invoked – the requirements which are difficult to meet on the European or global level under the currently effective level of financing and the degree of restriction imposed on scientific and education independence.

Possibly in the context of the continuous reforms and amendments, new rules and regulations and the scale of the institutions exercising control over universities the universities realising their mission consistently with the medieval tradition and the

ideals of *studium general* ensuring commonality, continuity and the general character of education and science, the universities bringing together teachers and students, are an opportunity for development of Polish higher education meeting the standards of the XXI century. However, *this does not mean the return back to the Middle Ages but restoration and rebirth of the academic culture* suitable for modern times (Sztompka, 2014, p. 58). The therapy should result in return to the constitutive principles of the traditional academic culture which guarantee “dignity of a university” under new, modern terms and conditions, in an altered economical and political context. Simultaneously this new university should be a university which fulfils its mission but at the same time it realises it consistently with the cultural code consistent with the environment in which it operates. It is a university which meets the social expectations concerning education and contributes to development of intellectual capital consistently with the social, cultural and economical demands of the country – an institution which realises the mission of a University in the frontier which is founded on struggle for independence of reasoning and the imperative search for truth (Zuziak, 2014, p. 56).

The University of Białystok is a proper example of a university where an individual and the institution meet in the common space – established on the basis of a relationship and the agreement regarding freedom of action and operating above the “national” and “state” borders (Jaksender, 2013, p. 55). Thus the goal of this paper consists in the analysis of the operations and functioning of the University of Białystok as a leading regional university serving as a symbol of the community of the eastern frontier.

The University of Białystok is the largest university in Podlasie which recently commemorated the 25th anniversary of its establishment. In the context of several-centuries old traditions of Polish universities (the Jagiellonian University in Kraków – established in 1364, the University of Wrocław – established in 1702, the University of Warsaw – established in 1816) the young age of the University of Białystok may seem not momentous enough; nevertheless, the development of the UoB is dynamic and progressive. The University of Białystok is the largest university in the north-east Poland, both in terms of the number of employees and students as well as in the terms of the offered courses and forms of education. Currently the university employs more than 1300 persons, including almost 800 academic teachers who work in 9 faculties, 5 institutes and a branch in Wilno. Owing to this fact the University of Białystok is a university with great perspectives, which develops its history through establishing an academic fellowship and care for interpersonal relations.

On the path towards the independent university – historical references

The University of Białystok was established on the grounds of the act of the 19th of June 1997 (Act, 1997). It was established as a result of transforming a branch of the University of Warsaw which was in turn founded on the basis of the Higher Teachers’

School established on the 20th of July 1968 (Resolution, 1968). The Higher Teachers' School was a three-year vocational college established as a result of restructuring of I and II Teacher Training Institutes; it was divided into three faculties: Humanities (on the basis of which the faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology was founded in 1977, currently the Faculty of Education Sciences), Mathematics and Natural Sciences and Primary Education.

The Higher Teachers' School played a particular role in the post-war Białystok – firstly, it responded to the enormous demand for educated teachers and, secondly, it was a major factor in developing social awareness and culture of the region. During the Second World War, the Białostockie voivodeship experienced occupation at the hands of two separate forces – Soviets and Germans. The murderous machine of Hitlerian and Stalinist authorities resulted in terrifying crimes and genocide of population. In terms of the number of casualties among Polish educational community the Białostockie voivodeship was in the fourth place following Pomerania, Warszawskie and Poznańskie voivodeshipp. However, the comparison with employment rate in schools indicates that the personnel casualties in this region were the highest and reached nearly 30% (Kryńska, 2010, pp. 62–64). Therefore the foundation for developing academic education in this part of Poland consisted in training and educating teachers. The circumstances surrounding developing a foundation for the “new authorities” following capture of the Białystok region by the Red Army were equally horrifying. At that time Soviet authorities once again launched widely reaching repressive actions aimed at local populace, particularly against the Polish-speaking inhabitants of the region. The Ministry of Public Security, along with units of NKVD in Białystok, established own detention centres and screening camps, launched pacification and “cleansing” actions and sent pursuit groups into the field (Wnuk et al., 2007, s. XXVIII). As a result thousands of Poles engaged in armed resistance. The activists of the independent resistance were sentenced to long-term imprisonment and death penalty on the basis of overwhelmingly restrictive communist legal acts issued in years 1944-1946 (Code, 1944; PKWN Decree, 1944; Act, 1945).

In terms of the issued death sentences the Military District Court in Białystok was in the sixth place in the country following, in order, courts of: Warszawa, Kraków, Rzeszów, Lublin and Wrocław. However, in terms of the death sentences carried out the Białystok court was third, following the courts of Warszawa and Kraków. However, “the fact of carrying out more than a half of death sentences by the Military District Court in Białystok results in the highest percentage of conducted executions in the entire country” (Łapiński, 2004, p. 65). The high percentage of adolescents, 23% of the total number the executed, among the persons sentenced to death draws attention (Łapiński, 2004, pp. 65–66). Among the great throng of the convicted by the MDC there were teenage girls and young adult women accused of membership

in conspiratorial organisations fighting for independence (Kryńska, 2012, p. 84 and following pages)

Białystok did not resemble a Polish city. In the September of 1944 the confidential reports of the political governance of the First Polish Army reported that in Białystok portraits of Stalin were hanging everywhere, Soviet military songs were blasting from the speakers, Soviet movies were shown and the cultural life was dominated by Russian-speaking artists (Boćkowski, 2005, pp. 11-12, 285). Thus the post-war affiliation of the Białostockie voivodeship established on the 2nd of August 1919 (E. Kryńska, A. Suplicka, U. Wróblewska, 2018, pp. 13-14) and covering with its area nearly entire territory of 3 former governorates: Grodzieńsk, Łomża and Suwałki, aroused concerns for a long time. (Milewski, Pyżewska, 2005, p. 77).

Nevertheless, on the basis of the boundary treaty concluded between Poland and the USSR on the 16th of August 1945, Białostockie voivodeship was returned to Poland but lost in favour of the USSR the areas located in the east which covered the majority of the districts of Grodzieńsk and Wołkowysk as well as small parts of Sokółka and Augustów districts (Journal of Laws of 1947; Journal of Laws of 1945; Journal of Laws of 1946). The area of the voivodeship was expanded by adding the territory of Łomżyński district and three districts from the part of Eastern Prussia incorporated into Poland, i.e., Elcki, Gołdpaski and Olecki districts (Agreement, 1947; Decree, 1945, art. 1, para. 3; Resolution, 1946, § 3, ust. 1). In 1946, the Białostockie voivodeship covered the area of slightly more than 22.5 thousand square kilometres, i.e., approximately 10 thousand square kilometres less than its 1919 area. (*Województwo podlaskie*, 2018, p. 7). This state was maintained until the administrative reform of the 1st of June 1975 when the area of the existing Białostockie voivodeship was divided into Białostockie, Łomżyńskie, Ostrołęckie and Suwalskie voivodeships (Act, 1975, art. 2). In 1999 the Białostockie, Łomżyńskie (with the exception of 5 eastern municipalities of the Ostrowski district) and Suwalskie voivodeships were combined into the current Podlaskie voivodeship which covers nearly 6.5% of the area of Poland (Powierzchnia, 2012). As of the 30th of June 2020 the voivodeship has the population of approximately 1.2 million residents (current studies results).

The uncertain fate of the Białostockie voivodeship and the enormous material difficulties of the region of Białystok, resulting from the colossal personal casualties and material losses incurred during the Second World War and after its conclusion as well as the emerging issues related to national identity and politics resulted in the majority of the surviving scientific and administrative staff and students of Stefan Batory University forced to go into exile and leave Vilnius in the summer of 1945 having no chance of stopping in Białystok and taking actions aimed at establishing and launching the Faculty of Theology of Stefan Batory University in Białystok.

For this reason the staff and students, bearing in mind the memory and tradition of Stefan Batory University, turned to towns located further away from the eastern

border of Poland, many have reached Toruń where they contributed to establishing Nicolaus Copernicus University. The Białostockie voivodeship had to wait for 52 years for the idea of the University of Białystok to come into existence despite the fact that the Night School of Engineering was established in 1949 (later renamed to the Higher Engineering School) and the Medical Academy was established a year later.

The idea of the frontier university and its creator

Despite the fact that the historical and political background and circumstances inhibited establishing the independent University of Białystok the determination in meeting the social expectations regarding university education finally led to establishing the University. It has been deemed that the newly established University was to be, consistently with the medieval customs, a professional fellowship of teachers and student, a peculiar form of “a university covering the entirety of knowledge” (Kiryk F., 2002, p. 211) as well as a “cultural bridge” because Podlasie is an area unique in terms of the cultural diversity and the diversity of natural environment.

It is an area of cultural frontier, plenitude of languages, religions, cultures and customs. It is so because Podlasie is:

a place where the West ends and the East begins. (...) Podlasie is also a place where the East ends and the West begins It is a place where two perspectives, eastern and western, each one “focusing” on different peculiarities and details and accustomed to “picking out” completely different but equally important details, meet and balance each other out In other words it is not yet West and not yet East, not the West anymore and not the East either... It is a place “in between”, an exotic land where for someone something ends and for the other something begins (*Podlasie Zielone Ptuka*, 2006, k. 2).

During the organisational period of operations of the University of Białystok the office of Rector was held by prof. Adam Jamróz – a jurist and a political scientist (*Rektorskie wybory*, 1998, p.2) who claimed that – “he felt the moral obligation” to establish the University of Białystok. The second Rector leading the university in years 2002–2005, prof. Marek Gębczyński – a biologist (Uniwersytet w Białymstoku, *Sprawozdanie*, 2004, p. 39), attempted to “improve the academic *status quo*” (Uniwersytet w Białymstoku, *Sprawozdanie*, 2004, p. 39).

In turn, the third Rector managing flourishing development of the *Alma Mater* of Białystok, prof. Jerzy Nikitorowicz – a pedagogist (*Zarządzanie to wiara w ludzi*, 2006, p. 4), had a vision of developing “the most significant university in the eastern Europe region” (*Zarządzanie to wiara w ludzi*, 2006, p. 5) which would serve as a cultural bridge on the eastern frontier. The reasoning of professor Jerzy Nikitorowicz regarding the University of Białystok as a strong academic centre in the region, engaged in “the dialogue of cultures (...) oriented at the broadly understood issues

of the borderland”, was tightly connected to his scientific interests. These interests focused on the studies of multiculturalism within the framework of which Podlasie and its culture was understood holistically and the frontier tradition of which was considered a cultural heritage which could enrich and inspire, serve as a source of “the great reflection” for the entire Europe. Thus the idea of the University of the Frontier was born in which the entire academic community became engaged; the ideas of the “identity open” to “the surrounding diversity” begin their development followed by the research, culture-forming and education projects based on one or more natural or socio-economic qualities of the region and responding to the needs of the geographically distinct region being developed. On the ground of such understanding of region the category of the frontier, which according to Stanisław Uliasz “significantly eases the repressive character of the border, which serves as dividing and isolating agent, guards inviolability and protects against isolation and appropriation of space, serves as a sign of the forward stronghold or bastion” was defined more precisely (Uliasz, 2001, p. 15). The category of the “frontier” is not only a spatial formula but also a wide discipline of culture. Taking into consideration the culture component results in the “frontier” being treated in spatial categories but also in cultural categories as the “cultural frontier”. In turn, in the “Pogranicze, Studia Społeczne [The Frontier, Social Studies]” journal, an annual published by the University of Białystok, which is primarily preoccupied with the eastern frontier of Poland, the category of the “frontier” was expanded and defined in its three basic meanings:

Firstly, this category covers the area, the territory where a particular type of cohabitation of two or more culture-ethnic groups exists. (...) in its second understanding the frontier is related to various forms of cohabitation between representatives of two or more ethnic-culture groups. (...) in its third understanding the category of the frontier is related to a new type of a man as well as corresponding individual and collective consciousness (Sadowski, 1992, pp. 5–6).

As a member of the editorial council professor Jerzy Nikitorowicz emphasised that the frontier:

inherently involves tolerance as a social regulation mechanism enabling interaction between two culturally distinct individuals. (...) the frontier and its inherent diversity provokes conflicts but also presents an opportunity for developing openness, respect and understanding of others, establishes a natural circumstances for developing positive interpersonal relations despite differences (Nikitorowicz, 1955, p. 15).

The frontier defined in this manner – activating and generating creativity, based on mutual trust, “developing identity motivated internally, on the basis of multi-dimensional values – turned to be effective; the border or the borderland may be divisive agents instead of bonding (Nalaskowski, 2022, p. 84) but they can also be a factor

stimulating divergent reasoning, i.e. “perception of multiple possible answers to the defined problem” (Nikitorowicz, 2015, p. 206, 209).

Therefore the University of Białystok engages in historical, sociological, political science and ecology research related to the issues of the frontier. The fauna and flora unique on the European scale constitute a rich and interesting research workshop for biologists and environmentalists whereas the economical specificity is a major and engaging research field for economists as well as management and marketing specialists. Also the geographical location defined the shape and venues for development of the University of Białystok. The scientific and teaching staff participate in international research projects implemented on the basis of the agreements concluded with universities operating in central and eastern Europe (Belarus, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine) and elsewhere.

Owing to Rector Nikitorowicz and his conception of developing the University of the Frontier it has been indicated that higher schools can be innovative and open to changes, **if the school themselves will be the driving force of fundamental restoration** i.e. the schools will be “the agents of reform and will educate reformers, develop critical awareness within the academic community and society as a whole” (Pilch, 2009, p. 997). In turn, reforming higher education on the basis of legal acts, without participation and contribution of employees of universities and other higher education institutions, results in the introduced changes not yielding the expected results. When in 2005 prof. Jerzy Nikitorowicz took over the office of Rector, it was decided at that time that higher education would be reformed on the basis of the *Higher Education Act* adopted on the 27th of July 2005 (Act, 2005). Executing this act required from authorities of the university to make difficult decisions and take backbreaking actions because the proposed systemic and logistical support of the reforms was insufficient. The manner in which operations of universities were managed and organised through regulations and control mechanisms resulted in universities being treated as tools.

Once again – in 2018 (Act, 2018), the opportunity for “turning the higher education and the science sector into the primary mechanism for becoming competitive in comparison to world’s best” was wasted (Pawłowski, 2009, p. 37). This form of reforms, without a uniform social vision, goals and policy of higher education, results in universities becoming objects of changes instead of a subject of the conducted reforms. The postulates demanding for a university to become a community oriented at search for truth and exploration of knowledge, with simultaneous preservation of the tradition of independent research, the voices demanding for a university to be an institution combining cultural and intellectual mission, meeting the modern expectations and social needs, remain unheard. These postulates are important because modern universities, according to Agnieszka Lekka-Kowalik suffer from “split personality, on one hand universities are still considering acting in the service of truth but on the other hand universities are attempting to turn into service businesses which are incapable of fulfilling

this mission” (Lekka-Kowalik, 2009, p. 66). In turn, Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak has observed that “commercialisation of education generates the culture of conformism which remains in direct opposition to the traditional role of a university as a source of social criticism. In this context the academic freedom becomes a luxury” (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2010, p. 61). The academic freedom:

exists in the ethical space, which expresses the tensions between the ideal of independent search for understanding the reality and the specific (historical, institutional and political) factors which restrict such efforts (Melosik, 2015, p. 26).

In this context invoking a lecture titled “On the dignity of a University” delivered by Kazimierz Twardowski in relation to him receiving on the 21st of November 1932 the honoris causa doctorate of the University of Poznań appears justified (Twardowski, 1933). This lecture is one of the most beautiful speeches on the subject of a mission of a university and its place within the community which remains topical until today. Kazimierz Twardowski called for the “dignity of a University”; he even wrote the word “university” with a capital letter to emphasise the dignity of a university. He claimed that the dignity of a university “stems not only from the venerable and esteemed age and commendable traditions of higher education institutions bearing this name but from the source of the very idea behind a university” (Twardowski, 1933, pp. 6–7). A university “radiates dignity” and fulfils its tasks when it enjoys “**absolute spiritual independence** (...) because scientific studies can develop and bear fruits only when they are not bound by or threatened by anything” (Twardowski, 1933, p. 9). Therefore the spiritual independence is the essence of the university “radiating dignity” and is a proof of significance of the function it serves:

[the university] bears the light of pure knowledge, enriches and expands sciences, achieves new truths and probabilities – in short, a university develops the greatest intellectual values a man can enjoy (Twardowski, 1933, p. 7).

Kazimierz Twardowski argued that a university should have all rights to demand “spiritual independence” as well as to contra-pose: (...) all explicit or deceptive attempts at subjecting scientific work of a university to anyone’s control or authority (Twardowski, 1933, pp. 9–10).

[a university] must isolate itself from anything that does not serve obtaining scientific knowledge, must distance itself from the current of the everyday life passing beside its walls, from the bustle of the clashing social, economical, political and all other trends (Twardowski, 1933, p. 10).

In order to avoid new forms of “enslavement” “the openness of a university as its inalienable quality” (Nalaskowski, 2013, p. 68) is exceptionally desirable and should

be symbolically protected by a certain form of an absolute immunity, as if its interior was sacrosanct (Nalaskowski, 2013, p. 55).

Therefore we may present a claim that the basic requirement for a proper implementation of the “idea of a university” consists in university’s spiritual independence and freedom from all ideological (political) influence which could restrict university’s operations (Śliwerski, 2015, pp. 349–350) as well as the freedom from new restrictions and legal and administrative prohibitions imposed upon organisation of the academic life.

Implementation of the idea of the University of the Frontier – developing identity of the University

Despite economic-market and corporate reality penetrating the walls of the university and the process of parametrisation which “destroyed creativity and dehumanised academic work” (Sztompka, 2014, p. 38) the University of Białystok continues to successfully implement the idea of a university with shape and directions for development defined by geographical location and social and cultural demands. The academic community became actively engaged in establishing a university which, according to the former Rector Jerzy Nikitorowicz:

has an important mission to serve – to protect common heritage, the frontier of culture developed and shaped since the time of Jagiellonians, as well as the mission related to preservation of natural environment, education of the youth, academic and administrative staff oriented at the broadly understood issues of the frontier and the eastern gate to the European Union (*Pomost między Europą Zachodnią*, 2006).

In the context of developing life based on dialogue and enriching knowledge concerning others, their history, traditions and spirituality, the increase in the scientific level of the academic staff and the realised education offer are of the utmost importance. The foundation for development of cooperation with the closest neighbours, based on openness, tolerance, respecting social and cultural diversity, consisted in taking into consideration the needs of Poles in the east. A measurable result of respecting these needs consists in e.g. launching studies in Grodno for citizens of Belarus of Polish origin who knew Polish language and maintained Polish traditions and customs.

One spectacular initiative related to establishing community relationships and responding to educational demands was establishing a branch of UoB in Wilno in 2007. “In the city radiant with the fame and glory of Stefan Batory University” the faculty of Economy and IT was launched, the song of *Gaudeamus* was heard in the academic year 2007/2008 (*Inauguracja roku akademickiego*, 2008, p. 17). It is the first branch of a foreign university in Lithuania and the first foreign branch of a Polish university. It is an initiative primarily aimed at Poles in Lithuania developed due to the care for the

level of education of the youth from Polish families. Poles are a national minority in Lithuania. Establishing a university educating adolescents in their native language was one of the most important postulate of Poles living in Lithuania. In the period up to 2021 more than eight hundred students graduated from the Faculty and contributed to the local labour market and bolstered Polish intelligentsia in Lithuania

Taking into consideration both the “traditional Polish interest in the eastern affairs” (Mironowicz, 2010, p. 7) as well as “the studies regarding close and far *neighbourhood*” (Zawadzka, 2008, p. 21) in 2010, upon the initiative of Rector Jerzy Nikitorowicz, the Institute for Eastern Studies was established, a research unit bringing together high-class specialists from numerous fields of science, engaging in activity for the benefit of the cooperation between European countries, particularly the Central and Eastern Europe. Additionally the decision was made regarding launching a new field of studies – Eastern Studies.

Furthermore, consistently with the “special tasks [of the university], among which engaging in the dialogue of cultures is of particular significance” (*Pomost między Europa Zachodnią*, 2006), Rector Jerzy Nikitorowicz provided support to the Department of Catholic Theology and the Department of Russian Orthodox Theology operating at the University since the 14th of October 1998. It was been recorded in the commemorative book of the University that the indicated departments “are of (...) major ecumenical significance and emphasise specificity of the University” (Nikitorowicz, 2008, p.16).

It must be mentioned that in recognition of the contribution to science and political and social life the University of Białystok awarded in the first decade of its existence the title of doctor honoris cause to 8 exceptional individuals: creator of the Paris “Kulture [Culture]” journal – editor-in-chief Jerzy Giedroyc; the president of the Republic of Poland in exile – Ryszard Kaczorowski, professor Andrzej Waczyński; professor Andrzej Stelmachowski; the head of Polish autocephalous Orthodox Church – metropolitan bishop Sawa; professor Marcel Morabito; the metropolitan bishop of Białystok – fr. prof. Edward Ozorowski and professor Keiichi Yamanaka (Nikitorowicz, 2008, p. 18).

As they were, the actions related to establishing “cultural bridges” were crowned with establishing in the October of 2013 the Network of Frontier Universities bringing together academic centres from Poland, Belarus, Lithuania, Russia and Ukraine.

In order to prepare the entire University of Białystok for active participation in the social and economical development of the region through improving quality of human resources, i.e. improvement of skills and professional qualifications of academic and teaching staff as well as graduates of the University, Rector Jerzy Nikitorowicz took intensive actions related to developing a modern education and science-research base for the University – the campus located at Ciołkowska street in Białystok (*Druga umowa*, 2010, p. 5). The initiated construction works were concluded by Rector Leonard

Etel, professor of legal sciences, whose term of office (2012–2016) was immensely difficult due to drastic reduction in state financing for the university. Despite financial difficulties the first stage of development of the campus was concluded and in the fall of 2014 education of students of faculties of: Physics, Mathematics and IT and Biology and Chemistry began in four new, modern facilities. Professor L. Etel also continued the idea of his predecessor – the concept of establishing the University of the Frontier. Since 2016 the University has been led by prof. Robert Ciborowski, an economist, who along with his coworkers, serving as deans of 9 faculties and directors of 5 single-discipline institutes, has been facing various difficulties, including: treating the university as a business enterprise based on market mechanisms, promoting competitiveness at all costs or the progressing “fragmentation of scientific disciplines” resulting in development of artificial organisational and structural barriers, including obstacles related to study programmes. As prof. Cezary Kuklo, a historian of the University of Białystok, rightfully indicates that the question regarding the nature of a university at the threshold of the XXI century i.e. whether a university should become a nursery of national elites or simple graduates of higher education institutions is becoming increasingly topical (Korotkich, Kuklo, 2022, p. 37).

In search for the answer to the question formulated in such manner we must ascertain that the University of Białystok, in the year of its Silver Anniversary, is a:

fellowship of Masters and Pupils [whose] struggle towards objective truth motivates our activities as scholars. Through its scientific life, definitely exceeding the borders of institutions and countries, our university fits in with the international character of research and education (Kortokich, Kuklo, 2022, p. 37).

The University of Białystok is an education institution which fosters interpersonal relation in the eastern borderland, tackles scientific initiatives which fall into the area of comparative research related to the *Polish Frontier* and provides education in the spirit of intertwining and supplementing cultures of bordering regions; the university teachers dialogue, recognition, respect and maintaining traditions. Owing to its location in the eastern borderland of the Republic of Poland the University of Białystok is “a cultural bridge” between the East and the West where two perspectives, eastern and western, each one focusing on different peculiarities and details and accustomed to picking out completely different but equally important details, “meet and balance each other out”

Developing life based on dialogue and through expanding knowledge on the others, their history, tradition and spirituality “the University of Białystok has developed own identity based on the multi-cultural character and specificity of the region and its borderland location”; the University of Białystok evolves from a regional university to the most prominent and significant university in the Eastern Europe region.

Thus the University of Białystok, as a university prominent on the Polish map and offering high-quality scientific studies, education and partnership cooperation with its environment and community, may become a source of “the Great Reflection” for the entire Europe.

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Abstract

The goal of this paper consists in analysis of the activity of the University of Białystok as a leading regional higher education institution which at the same time serves as a symbol of the eastern frontier community established on relationships and the agreement regarding the freedom of action and operating above the “national” and “state” borders, consistently with the constitutive principles of the traditional academic culture. The goal of the paper is closely related to the adopted premises. Possibly in the context of continuous reforms and changes, new rules and provisions and plenitude of institutions exerting control over higher education institutions the chances for developing Polish higher education meeting requirements of the XXI century lie with universities realising their mission consistently with the medieval tradition and the idea of *studium generale* and which simultaneously meet the social demands regarding education consistent with the social, cultural and economic demands of the region – the universities fulfilling the mission of a university in the frontier.

The historical-comparative method has been utilised which was applied during the research concerning progress of events and processes occurring in the past and which is primarily based on the analysis of historical sources. The conducted studies indicate that the developed conception for functioning of the University of Białystok as a university in the frontier was successful. It is so because the University of Białystok is a university which maintains interpersonal connections in the eastern frontier, tackles scientific initiatives which fit in within the context of comparative studies related to *the Polish Frontier* and educates in the spirit of intertwining and supplementing cultures of the bordering regions, teaches dialogue, respect, recognition and maintaining traditions. It is an institution which evolved from a regional university to the most prominent and significant university in the Eastern Europe region.

Keywords: a university, Białystok, an idea, the frontier