

ENVIROMENT OF POLISH DEMOCRATISATION CHANGES

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In 1989 a process of democratisation was started in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Democratisation means a change of the social system towards ideals and institutions well-rooted in the countries of Western Europe, the USA and Canada based, *inter alia*, on the principles of: 1. Sovereignty of nation; 2. Republican system of government; 3. Respect for the rules of the state of law; 4. Political representation; 5. Separation of powers and a system of checks-and-balances between them; 6. Political pluralism.¹ Political principles should be, to a great extent, linked to the economic rules. Democracy is said to be the support of market economy, i.e. the economy based on the rules of economic liberty manifested, to a major extent, in the freedom to establish and operate business units and equality before the law. Transition to democracy can be considered on two planes: that of law and institutions and that of the social one.

The political system of post-war Poland was provided for in the Petty Constitution of 19th February, 1947 and then in the Constitution of People's Republic of Poland of 22nd July, 1952, breaking off with the democratic institutions and traditions of the so-called March Constitution of 1921 and creating a political system close to the model of the Soviet Union and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. By April, 1989, 15 amendments were made to the Constitution, of various importance to the political system. A real breakthrough in Poland's post-war history was the debate of the Round Table (6th February – 5th April, 1989) resulting, among others, in changes leading towards democratisation of the country. Further amendments to the basic law were introduced, providing for changes in the electoral law, establishing the new office of the President of the Republic of Poland, stating the mode and principles of adopting a new constitution, etc. Of special importance was the Organic Act of 17th October, 1992 on the Relationships between the Legislative and Executive Powers of the Republic of Poland and on the System of Local Government. Foundations of the current political system are laid down, among others, in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2nd April, 1997. Along with other normative acts being sources of the constitutional law it reflects solutions and ideas which are universally regarded as democratic ones.

Democratic political institutions of Poland's constitutional system, introduced within the last decade, among others, include: the model of government

¹ *Konstytucjonalizacja zasad i instytucji ustrojowych*, red. P.Sarnecki, Warszawa 1997; G.Smith: *Życie polityczne w Europie Zachodniej*, Warszawa 1992.

based on preponderance of the parliament to which the cabinet is responsible, vote of confidence/non-confidence, the ombudsman, the commissioner for protection of children's rights, the Constitutional Tribunal, the Tribunal of State and referendum, to name just some.²

The process of democratisation of political life, taking place now, is a sign of the civilisation changes taking place at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries.³ It was in the middle of the last century that there came the wave of technical revolution. The changes in question are related to the development of mass media and other forms of communication; it is even said that a real revolution has taken place in information techniques. The latter have brought about major changes of social life, human behaviour, ways of thinking. The opportunity to immediately reach individual citizens using mass media has resulted in a new quality of political life. A change has also taken place as regards relations with political institutions. People lose trust in governmental institutions and show reluctance to participation in collective life. Ties with political parties come loose, attendance at the elections drops and constituencies keep fluctuating heavily.

The current rational social order gets replaced by emotional one. All kinds of integrist, fanaticism, nationalism and populism come to life again. Extreme political groups grow in importance.

The intensity of political life keeps growing as well. Mass media (TV in particular) and IT networks increase the speed of transfer of information and its availability to the masses which, in turn, makes political élites pay more attention to their actions. Less and less themes are regarded as taboos, since various spheres of social life are made subject to the control exercised by mass media. The role of the media in modelling political and social life is often stressed. Control of the transfer of information exerts influence on public opinion and is translated into concrete examples of political behaviour. Poland's public TV enjoying almost 73% of social support, which is an important mechanism of shaping human behaviour. Control over public TV and radio becomes thus, oftentimes, a major goal of political struggle. Mass media use to be referred to as the „fourth power”

Diversification of behaviour characteristic of social life is manifested, on the one hand, in the creation of a global society, shaped to a great extent by mass media, and on the other hand in an ever growing activity of local structures.

Localism, consisting in local communities aiming at achievement of a high degree of autonomy and self-reliance is, to a major extent, a reaction to excessive centralisation, concentration and standardisation of the industrial society and

² Z. Witkowski – J. Galster – B. Gronowska – W. Szyszkowski: *Prawo konstytucyjne*, Toruń 1998, p. 55-75.

³ A. Toffler – H. Toffler: *Creating a New Civilization. The Politics of the Third Wave*, 1995.

cultural homogeneity.⁴ The citizen is not satisfied with the effectiveness of actions undertaken by the state mechanism. He is losing a feeling of influence for state affairs.

Tab. 1.

| <i>In your opinion, do people like to have an influence on public affairs of:</i> | Yes | No | Difficult to say |
|---|-----|----|------------------|
| | % | | |
| State | 16 | 82 | 2 |
| Region in which you live | 17 | 80 | 3 |
| Municipal structure in which you live | 31 | 67 | 2 |
| City or village in which you live | 43 | 54 | 3 |

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Localism is a sign of objection against overblown bureaucracy and the increasing distance between those governing and those governed. Being aware of the problem, Poland's political élites undertook an administrative reform of the country. Foundations of the reform, aimed at considerable decentralisation of the authority, proved to be a mere fiction. It is still the central government that remains the real centre of decision, a proof of that being found, among others, in distribution of financial resources or relatively strong position of the *wojewoda*, or governor, representing the central government in the field. The newly established administrative division of the country has made the latter composed of 16 provinces (Polish *województwo*), 308 counties (or *powiats*) and 2489 communes (Polish *gmina*), including 65 municipalities enjoying the powers of a county (*powiat*).

The traditional system of representative democracy raises objections, as its organisation favours the majority and puts it at an advantageous position.⁵ A question is thus raised: does the government, established by a decision of Poland's *Sejm*, or Parliament, composed of 460 MPs, actually reflect opinions of Polish society and does it, consequently, have social title to take all those important decisions concerning individual parts of the country or groups that are unable to win a sufficient number of seats in the Parliament to express their needs and positions on individual issues? Does the president, appointed under a system of universal elections by a majority of 1 or 2% of votes, have the social title to exercise power? There are few legal solutions in Poland protecting minority

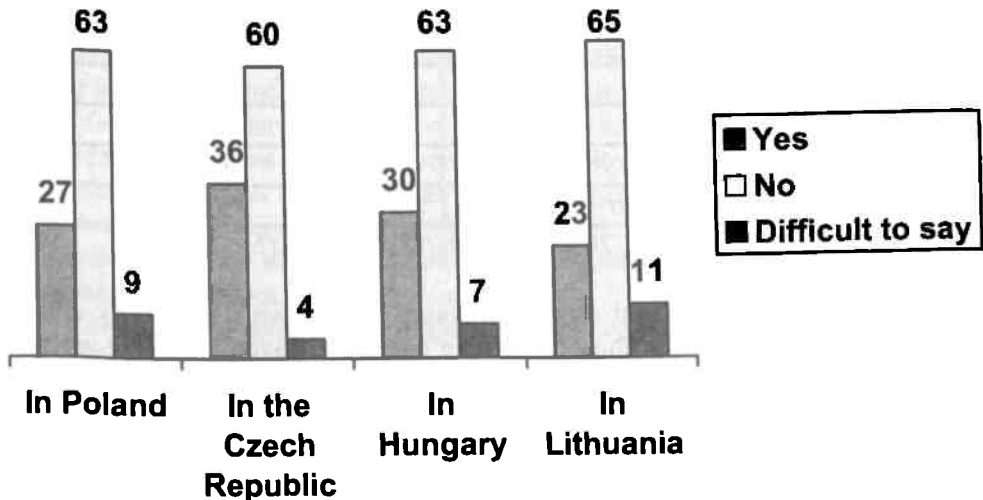
⁴ E. Polak: *Przemiany cywilizacji współczesnej w sferze kultury materialnej*, Gdańsk 1996, p. 144.

⁵ J. Naisbitt: *Megatrends*, New York 1984, p. 197-210.

interests. The only effective ways of mitigating many conflicts seem to be decentralisation of power, introducing rules of local government and forms of direct democracy.

Tab. 2.

ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE FUNCTIONING OF DEMOCRACY



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An ever increasing crisis of democratic institutions is taking place. The basic elements of the Polish democratic system are political parties competing for access to power, bicameral parliament elected for a period of 4 years, president appointed under a system of universal elections for 5 years, government bearing political responsibility to parliament, agencies of local government and local agencies of the central government. Two characteristic features of the political system, identical with those of many political systems existing in democratic countries of Europe and the world, should be noted in passing: the concept of the term of office and the concept of elections. The system, shaped to a great extent as early as in the 19th century, is now obsolete and does not actually suit the contemporary complicated realities.

Activity of the political parties is focused on elections. This is fostered by the electoral calendar, with elections to certain segments of government taking place almost every year (the presidential elections in 1995, parliamentary elections in 1997, municipal ones in 1998). Many a decision of parties belonging to the ruling coalition is aimed at winning friendly attitude of the voters. Political élites

are blamed for giving their own needs a priority before those of the state and society.⁶ It is only in the period preceding the elections that constituencies are canvassed for votes. After winning them, the constituency is oftentimes ignored, promises made before the elections becoming forgotten and partisan interests being looked after. The concept of tenure of office also results in a kind of stagnation among politicians who are not interested in making long-term decisions, including many reforms with high social costs attached to them. Nor does it seldom happen that politicians abuse governmental positions to gain considerable financial resources. Highly controversial is the system of financing political parties, which parties – in return for financing their election campaigns – become dependent on certain pressure groups making them take the desired economic or political decisions. Issues of key importance to the country are similar in programmes of individual political parties, stress being put on secondary problems, like attitude to abortion. Those busy in election headquarters often focus on launching a so-called negative campaign, consisting in weak points of the opponents being identified and shown to the public, rather than present an election programme of their own, in which issues important to the country could be resolved.

The society loses trust in democratic mechanisms.⁷ The fact is manifested in decreasing attendance at the elections. People become passive and sceptical about events of political life and do not identify themselves with processes taking place. Election of a candidate becomes dependent not on his/her knowledge, experience, skills, but much more on how his/her specialists can present him/her in the mass media or at the rallies, and how many posters have been placed in the streets, or on various deformations of the election system. It is even more frequently a small group of people who cannot actually make up their minds and settle the outcome of the election. They are people who make their final decision quite often at random, or guided by emotional factors, or yield themselves to the pressure of their environment, or base their decision on results of the polls which are published not without manipulation. The political élites selected in this way are oftentimes incompetent and compromise themselves with their behaviour, lack of adequate knowledge or just poor manners. The society is losing trust in politicians. The higher a politician's position in an authority society, the bigger his fall may be.

⁶ S. P. Huntington: *Trzecia fala demokratyzacji*, Warszawa 1995, p. 168-279.

⁷ A. Toffler: *Trzecia fala*, Warszawa 1997, p. 584-590.

Tab. 3.

| <i>Do you think, that there are people, who care about your affairs and needs:</i> | Yes | No | Difficult to say |
|--|-----|----|------------------|
| | % | | |
| In the local authorities' structure | 47 | 41 | 12 |
| In the regional government | 33 | 47 | 20 |
| In the parliament | 32 | 55 | 13 |
| In the government | 31 | 57 | 12 |

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It was also the legal system under which political parties were institutionalised that had contributed to the evolving of the attitude to the political life in the mid-1990s. The required social support for a registration of a political party was merely limited to 15 persons. Easy legalisation of the parties brought about a situation in which the political stage of the country got crowded with a few hundreds of political groups, including so exotic ones like Polish Party of Friends of Beer, Congress of Polish Eskimos, or Party V (Party of Friends of VCRs). The situation has changed now, since aiming at legalisation of a political party one has attached to the application, among others, a list with a minimum of 1,000 of supporters. As a result of such changes there are some tens of political groups now, ephemeral ones or those arousing laughter and embarrassment among spectators of political life being eliminated.

It should be also noted that a major cause of civilisation conflicts are economic problems. Economic inequality of regions of the country, redistribution of income exercised by the central government, dependence of economic situation of individual regions on decisions taken at the central level, changes of ownership and management within the economy, poor quality of public services, low financial standing of municipalities and rural communes, lack of adequate infrastructure, unemployment, insufficient amount of real capital etc. are just some of the problems contemporary authorities have to cope with.⁸ An important correlation can also be noticed between economic standing of households and acceptance of governmental structures. The loss of hope for better economic situation is connected with falling support for the government. Decreasing the standards of life and a growing sphere of poverty result in people losing trust in the governing circles and becoming alienated from political life of the country.

⁸ R. Majewski: „Decentralizacja życia politycznego jako zjawisko cywilizacyjne”, in *Tradycja i współczesne odmiany samorządu*, red. D. Walczak-Duraj (Zeszyty Naukowe, vol. 11), Płock 1999, p. 76-77.

Tab. 4.

| <i>Do you think that the politics of the government are good, give hopes for improvement and make the economic situation better:</i> | IX | X | XI | XI I | I | II | III | IV | V | VI | VI I |
|--|------|----|----|---------|----|----|------|----|----|----|---------|
| | 1999 | | | | | | 2000 | | | | |
| | % | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Yes | 23 | 21 | 25 | 24 | 26 | 19 | 17 | 16 | 19 | 15 |
| No | 67 | 69 | 64 | 62 | 62 | 71 | 69 | 72 | 67 | 74 | 68 |
| Difficult to say | 10 | 10 | 11 | 14 | 12 | 10 | 14 | 12 | 14 | 11 | 15 |

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Obsolete and rather inefficient is also the structure of the government itself, based on branch ministries and vertical ties between them and the economy. Mechanisms co-ordinating operation of the ministries are inefficient, and as a result decisions taken on identical or similar issues by various centres of decision happen to be incoherent and misleading.

Tab. 5.

| <i>Opinion about government's politics</i> | Czech | Hun- gary | Lithua -nia | Po- land | Czech | Hun- gary | Lithua -nia | Po- land |
|--|----------|--------------|----------------|-------------|--------|--------------|----------------|-------------|
| | VII 1999 | | | | I 2000 | | | |
| | % | | | | | | | |
| Very good | 1 | 4 | - | 1 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| Good | 18 | 32 | - | 31 | 22 | 29 | 23 | 27 |
| Bad | 46 | 35 | - | 38 | 49 | 38 | 32 | 40 |
| Very bad | 16 | 16 | - | 16 | 12 | 18 | 9 | 18 |
| Difficult to say | 19 | 13 | - | 14 | 16 | 12 | 35 | 14 |

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One of the factors reducing efficiency of government is the expanding technosphere. Bureaucracy has become an element considerably slowing down decision-making processes in governmental agencies, international structures etc. Low level of competence, a long way of information transfer, „omnipotence” of public officials, licensing system limiting economic liberty are just some of the adverse phenomena appearing in that area. Other factors in question include extension of central agencies of the state. Under the guise of reforms aimed at decentralisation of the state new agencies are being created, also for the purpose of conducting the reforms, which agencies are not dissolved after the reform has been introduced but change their name instead, remaining a part of the central structure of the state.

In Poland, just like in other countries, amount of trust to the government is determined by civilisation processes. Politics, as a sphere of social activity, is tied to almost all aspects of life. Changes taking place in individual areas influence political behaviour and the shape of processes. A major role in the process is also played by Polish political culture. An important factor modelling the culture was adoption of Christianity in accordance with the Western patterns. The patterns have stamped themselves on the system of law and education. They did not mean a mere reflection of the Western system, though, but were adapted to Polish conditions and formed a specific system of standards and values.

Christianity has shaped Polish Catholicism, the features of which are expressed in such values, like: (1) respect to authorities; (2) socio-political hierarchy; (3) special mission and charisma; (4) great importance attached to symbols.⁹

In the world Poles are viewed as carriers of many romantic features. Stressed are, in particular, their (1) individualism; (2) readiness for making sacrifice; (3) high level of political involvement; (4) attaching great importance to the past; (5) pro-social activity, in particular as far as underground and liberating activities are concerned.

Another image present in the world is the cliché of the Pole as an anarchist. The picture includes megalomania, lack of perseverance, addiction to drinking, lack of discipline, but also hospitality, emotionality, flexibility, openness to the world.

Highly specific is Polish political culture. It is determined by elements like Polish Catholicism, Polish romanticism, Polish anarchism, Polish democratism, Polish apologetics of progress.¹⁰

Polish democratism has a special meaning. It is connected with the slogans of liberty, equality, fraternity. The perception of Polish democratism includes frequent changes in attitudes and opinions, rushing to get involved in social and political activities regarded as a single event. Meaningful is also the objection of Poles to strong executive power.

A marked feature of Polish culture is preponderance of politics over other aspects of life. Determined by politics are many aspects of life. It influences attitudes towards life and leads towards neglecting anything that is not politics.¹¹

⁹ A. Chodubski: „O tożsamości cywilizacji zachodnioeuropejskiej”, in *W kręgu cywilizacji Europejskiej*, red. A. Chodubski – A. W. Sobociński – W. Tłokiński, Toruń 1996, p. 30-32.

¹⁰ A. Chodubski: „Kultura polityczna współczesnej emigracji polskiej”, in *Kultura polityczna w Polsce. Przeszłość i teraźniejszość*, red. M. Kosman, Poznań 1996, p. 161-167.

¹¹ R. Majewski: „Korzenie kulturowe na drodze integracji Polski z Unią Europejską”, in: *Edukacja Menedżerska a społeczne i prawne otoczenie biznesu*, red. B. Garbacik, Gdańsk 1998, p. 32-33.