

Włodzimierz Wesotowski

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology
Polish Academy of Sciences

**PARTIES, POLITICAL ACTORS AND PARLIAMENTS
IN THE TRANSFORMATION PERIOD
IN CENTRAL-EAST EUROPE**

International Conference
The New Democratic Parliaments: The First Years
Ljubljana, Slovenia, 23-24 June 1996

An incoherent political landscape

The variety of approaches that can be observed among Polish politicians leads us to believe that there is some disorder in their thinking about politics and political institutions. Politicians switch from one theoretical **frame** of reference to another, **from** one ideological **framework** to another, they try to combine incompatible ideas into slogans. In this paper, however, I would like to say a little bit more. This disorder can hinder the processes of democratic development (democratization). I do not believe that what is happening in Poland is an inevitable ailment. When we look at the Czech Republic or Hungary, we immediately observe that politics in these countries is more orderly.

On the most general level the situation in Poland may be described as a weak institutionalization of the **political** order. This weak institutionalization has three main features:

- unstable political system which not allows for viable structuring of economic and political alternatives

- unclear division of prerogatives between state organs (confusing provisional constitution is in force)

- influence of extra-political forces on the political arena

- exceedingly high personal animosities between political leaders and lack of commonly accepted "rules of political game"

There is great intellectual uncertainty about everything being said about the Polish political scene, and I am very well aware of that. Although many phenomena appear to be dangerous, things may turn out for the better. One may hope for greater coherence and less fragmentation. One of the factors operating in a desirable direction is the apparent high level of self-criticism found amongst the politicians. Most of them judge their actions as inadequate, sometimes as flawed, and as harmful. Naturally, as individuals and political parties, they are more eager to notice the mistakes made by their adversaries than those they make themselves. Such assessments, nevertheless, do not exclude a high level of awareness of deficiencies. This has been documented by researches on the most prominent MP's and leaders of political parties, amongst others. (Wesołowski and Pankow, 1995). That research will be referred to in this paper

I shall begin by outlining a broader background. That will enable me to grasp the proportions in the deficiencies of the political scene present among **all** those difficulties which are encountered in the process of systemic transformations **from** communism to a privately-owned market economy and democratic political system. At the outset of transformation, the entire area of Central and Eastern Europe lived in a state of euphoria and trust in the speedy

changes that would take place, almost automatically, and which would end successfully. In substance, this meant a considerable approximation to the West European countries. We easily forgot about the inherited distance, both ancient and modern, which had separated us from Western Europe. Moreover, we were not aware of the fact that, notwithstanding our desire to reform, we would encounter resistance from “extant matter” and be afflicted by a lack of resources and instruments needed to effect such grand structural reforms. In another paper I have discussed these “shortages of transformative powers” (Wesolowski, 1992). Broadly put, they encompass the following factors, as specifically applied to Poland:

1. Deficit of investment capital - primarily foreign (domestic is, by the very nature of the former regime, quite limited);
2. absence of mature and stable party structures able to articulate society's wants and demands and produce stable cabinets;
3. provisional constitution with unclear divisions of prerogatives between the president, parliament, and government;
4. lack of dynamic, competitive and self-assertive attitudes among the population; and
5. lack of reliable, competent and efficient state administration.

When we point out the relatively [low political activity] of the society after 1989, we must be aware that this low level of activity has been brought about by a combination of factors. Among the most important was the necessity to reorient one's occupation and sources of income and, for many, to maintain their present employment and ward off pauperization. Almost by necessity, politics became less important, especially since most people believed that political power was now in better hands than those of the communists. One could add that the transition to a free-market economy compelled the emergence of resourcefulness, and, indirectly, proved to be a victory of the liberal - individualist orientation. The everyday primacy of the economic sphere forced political orientations into the background.

A parallel factor was a lack of stimuli coming from the intellectual and political spheres that would compel entire social groups to develop an interest in the matter of reforms and politics understood as their instrument. Most intellectuals appeared to believe in Fukuyama's claim about the “end of history”; were thus eager to consider various ways of pro-capitalist transformation and democratization but only within narrow limits and were inclined to favour “well-

tried" western models (Wesolowski, 1995). Practising politicians of the "Solidarność" bloc were more interested in the formation of governments than in activating different social groups for specific reform activities. As regards the plane of political action, they believed that the society would be satisfied with all-too-general declarations and elections every four years. Therefore they failed to build up a political infrastructure in local communities. Society did not force the new emerging proto-parties to develop stable programs and be reliable.

Society itself produced indifferent attitudes toward politics just as the objective structuration of old interests was collapsing and the structuration of the new was still emerging. The "translation" of a fluid economic situation into group interests simply proved to be difficult. **Thus society gave no stimuli to some definitive structuration of the political scene.** The personal ambitions of the politicians did not find any social "restraint". Neither was there any formation of channels to prove that civil society is, in a relatively transparent manner represented by the political system (Wesolowski, 1994a and 1994b).

Based on the above, we may formulate a general theorem that, from the beginning of the transformations till today, Poland is in a state of **political actors' crisis: their identity, social role, mutual relationships.** The term actors here denotes, primarily, all the actors organized in political parties. The claim that this is **only a weakness** of the emerging organized forms of activities proves to be less and less tenable. Seemingly, the post-communist party as well as the peasants' party, with their efficiency and election victories, testify to an ongoing normalization since associated with a stability of electoral base and efficiency of local structures. Nevertheless, centrifugal tendencies in these parties are evident. It is uncertain whether merely holding power will diminish these centrifugal tendencies, and already there appears to be the emergence of group conflicts within them. Divergent orientations within these two parties transcend the limits of "normal" h-actions.

The political fragmentation, especially visible in the former greater "Solidarity" bloc is an important fact. In contrast with the situation in Hungary and the Czech Republic, crystallization and stabilization of the parties and the entire political system in those countries is much greater than in Poland, where around 200 parties officially exist, even if only several get constant publicity. In Hungary and the Czech Republic there are only a few. Since 1989, the Czech Republic has had only one prime minister. There was one change of cabinet in Hungary after the general election. During the period of the rule of the post-Solidarity bloc, Poland had four cabinets and, since then, the new coalition has already gone on to appoint its third prime minister (namely the SLD - PSL

coalition, i.e. parties rooted in the old regime). The right-wing and centre parties that emerged from the Solidarity movement are still undergoing splits and transformations. In the last two months, three of those parties changed their chairmen, who then refused to comply with the resolutions to that effect and still *claim* to be their legitimate leaders.

The post-communist party (SdRP) and their political allies grouped under SLD are so diverse in terms of program orientation and ideas that this bloc comprises typical economic neoliberals, as well “sincere” communists of the old kind. The confusion on the Polish political scene has been documented by systematic opinion polls. Since 1990 up till now, even after the SLD and PSL victories in 1993 and 1995, over 50% of Poles say that there is no party which would represent their (“my”) interests (CBOS, 1996)

Excessive fragmentation programmatic *astigmatism* of political parties is not the only malady of the Polish political system. It is also accompanied by another, namely involvement in politics and political influence exerted by forces that do not perform primary political functions. We refer here to the Roman Catholic Church and the NSZZ Solidarność trade union. Their political functions embrace four types of activities:

1. an attempt to achieve certain particular legislative goals;
2. support for certain parties and candidates in parliamentary and presidential elections;
3. promotion of certain visions of man and society with a direct bearing upon political programs;
4. open justification of the necessity of their own institutional influence upon politics.

The Roman Catholic Church and NSZZ Solidarność trade union have well-developed organizational structures and many militants. These two organizations are significant forces and they penetrate the entire society much more deeply and effectively than do the political parties.

Since these two organizations are so *influential* and powerful, one can raise the question whether they would not be able to replace political parties, or become their special substitute. This might be incompatible with the democratic system. Solidarity appears to be gradually turning into trade union cum political party. Solidarity trade union had its own candidates in the parliamentary elections of 1991 and 1993. In 1995 it mobilized enough support to overthrow the Suchocka government (which it previously helped to install). After the victory of

the post-communist bloc in parliamentary and presidential elections of 1993 and 1995, Solidarity is striving very hard to become the unifying centre for all anti-Communist or non-communist parties, which in Poland are called right-wing or centre-right parties. The “grand bloc” it is forming is dominated by confessional, nationalistic and populist preferences.

These attempts, however, appear to contain a certain paradox. The harder the Solidarity trade union strives to be a major political player, the more members it loses as a trade union. It also loses the workers’ trust in its trade union efficiency, and, as a consequence, it is losing the chance to maintain its social importance and so to play the political role it is planning.

The Roman Catholic Church, by its very essence, cannot perform the function of a political party. This obvious statement ought to be supplemented by an important qualification... The Church’s hierarchy does not want Christian Democracy established in Poland, even though such a party would definitely stand a chance of becoming a significant political force. Some analysts believe that it would create an undesirable situation for the Hierarchy by providing too much scope for an autonomous laity within the Church. The sheep, to use a biblical term, could take a different path to that of the shepherds, both at the parochial level and at the level of the Church as a whole. The reluctance of the Hierarchy to countenance the establishment of such a party engenders disappointment among the lay, “liberal and open”, Catholics. There are some signs of changes, however. In January 1996 The hierarchy declared to withdraw from direct political support for definite parties and persons

Another matter is worth mentioning here. The Poles, though almost entirely of Catholic persuasion, have in the last two years failed to follow the specific political recommendations of the Church. Quite a number of Catholics voted for the post-communist party in the 1993 elections. In the presidential election of 1995, many Catholics voted for Kwaśniewski, in spite of Primate Glemp’s prayer for the victory of Wałęsa. In January 1996, only 30% of those eligible to vote took part in the so-called “privatization referendum” initiated by Wałęsa. The Church called the voters to take part in this referendum, whereas the post-communist party displayed a lukewarm attitude. All the experts were unanimous in their opinion that the questions were unclear. Wałęsa's opponents were not far from the truth when they claimed that by initiating this referendum Wałęsa wanted to gain support in the presidential election.

In the wake of all the above unpleasant experiences, the Church’s hierarchy has stated that they will never again take the floor on political matters which are not directly related to theology. Sociologists claim that the low political

persuasiveness of the church is a symptom of the secularization brought about by urbanization, the effects of mass-culture and contacts with the West. Others add that it was also caused by an ever present anticlericalism. Poles are a religious people, but they carry the virus of anticlericalism. They detest being given detailed instructions and subjected to close control by their priests.

Having focused on the Polish situation, let us now turn the spotlight on the different situation in Hungary and the Czech Republic. Neither trade unions nor churches (protestant and catholic in the Czech Republic) aspire to play a role in everyday politics. Trade unions operate in alliances with given political parties and do not want to have greater political importance than the parties. In Poland there are no direct links between given political parties and NSZZ Solidarność, since, as we have already said, the trade union wants to be a patron for many parties (or all of post-Solidarity parties). As a result, the political scene is confused. One could be lead to believe that once significant social forces, such as trade unions, are patrons of the actors on the political scene. Such situation is conducive to a multiplication of political actors. It also sustains the antagonisms between the small, minor league players on the political scene.

In Poland, during Wałęsa's term as president, there were two other foci (apart from the Church and Solidarity) which, without **defining** themselves as overtly political, exerted political influence and progressively obtained autonomy from democratic institutions, **parliamentary** supervision and control. This process of gaining autonomy and augmenting influence took place under presidential protection. One of these foci was the military, the other - the secret services (Urząd Ochrony Państwa). For instance, there was a conference of Polish generals, which, inspired by Wałęsa, unconstitutionally "voted" for a change of the Minister of **Defence** at a famed dinner in the **military** training complex in Drawsko. Possibly also inspired by Wałęsa, or at 'least with his permission, the secret services conducted an clandestined investigation of the alleged links of the prime minister (Oleksy) with a representative of Russian intelligence . The prime **minister** was under surveillance although, formally, he oversees the operation of the secret police. The entire operation was disclosed by the President only to a selected persons, probably with the intention of playing for some political advantage or horsetrading a few days before the Supreme Court approval of the results of presidential election.

The possibility of centres of influence, or even of real power, forming outside parliament, government and the formal prerogatives of the president, results from the unclear division between the state organs present in the Little Constitution, which is merely a modification of the old communist one. This Little Constitution, avowedly provisional in nature, makes possible an elastic interpretation of presidential prerogatives that gives the president a nearly exclusive right to appoint and supervise the ministers of defence, internal and foreign affairs. **The entire set of confusions and unclarities in the structures of the organs of power, political party fragmentation, along with the the lack of balance on the political scene between strictly political and non-political organizations, causes a situation where real political influences may remain opaque for a longer period.**

In the overcrowded political scene - what role the parliament plays? It is very difficult to give balanced assessment of its functioning. Certainly, many unnecessary battles take place in the parliament. Reporting at lengths parliamentary discussions in 1990-1993 contributed to antagonizing politicians as public personalities. However, parliament is the only stable structure in Poland which systematically improves its statuses and guards democratic procedures. Not all deputies are angels, not all evident misconducts on their part were condemned by deputy-fellows. Parliament is slow in passing necessary new laws. There are signs of "alienation" from society's wants and desires. People express the feelings that they are not represented by parties, ergo, parliament. Surveys polls show rather low esteem for parliament as the public institution. It seems to me that many complaints may be explained by very high expectation people invested in parliament (as the main institution of representative democracy). The plain truth is, however, that the Polish Sejm functions according to the democratic principles And it seems that it functions democratically to a higher degree than other political institution. Paradoxically, what Atilla Agh calls "overparliamentarization" in Central-Eastern Europe is not the greatest danger for democratization processes in the region (Agh 1994)

Variety of concepts of politics

It can be assumed that, in stable political systems, there emerges a certain dominant type of politics as an activity leading to an articulation of interests, accumulation of political influence, winning elections, or acquiring state power. Politics is a kind of activity which finds its culmination in the exercise of power. In democratic systems, the exercise of power is accompanied by other kinds of activities consisting in contesting, one's political opponents.

Obviously there are many definitions of politics. They range from those which define it as social service aiming at the creation of common good, to those which define it as a ruthless struggle for state power and its exercise, to those which see the essence of politics in the art or knowledge of reaching compromise between conflicting interests. Finally, there are definitions which emphasize the expression of a strong personality or the ability to provide ordinary people with leadership, vital to the existence of any community.

While conducting studies on Polish politics, during the lifetime of the 1991-1993 Sejm, we were expecting to come across different conceptions of politics. We also expected that the individual concepts, preferred by certain leaders would find correlates in the perception of other socio-political phenomena. Our studies aimed at finding typological configurations in which a given conception of politics was involved. We interviewed prominent politicians, recommended by their fellow-MP's as the best parliamentarians. Very often, this choice overlapped with the leaders of political parties with seats in the Sejm.

I have, quite deliberately, pointed out the incompatibility of actors and the disorder on the political scene, which results from fragmentation and the lack of clear, comprehensive program orientations. At best, one can discern certain lines of thinking and estimating some problems as more important than others. One cannot claim that the Polish scene is dominated by politics understood as an accommodation of economic interests, or by the pattern of coalition formation typical of consociational democracy (cf. Lijphart, 1968) or by an integrated or polarized party system (cf. Sartori, 1976).

Currently, in Poland, when politicians are asked what politics is and what aims they see for their political activity, they point to a wide array of plausible activities. These are commonly associated and are described under an undoubtedly multi-aspect concept. The different conceptions of politics are sometimes linked to an ideological orientation (liberal, christian, nationalistic), although they very often cut across these orientations.

There are, however, nearly universal motifs, not so much in the conception of politics, as the aims it ought to pursue in times of systemic transformation. It is a shared belief among all **politicians** that we should transform the economy into a private and market formation, and they hold that the totalitarian (or authoritarian) system ought to be transformed into a democratic one. There are, nevertheless, some politicians who supplement the above with one additional purpose, which, in their mind is extremely important: namely, the elimination of all the relics of the communist heritage. The most important feature of this heritage is secularization, treated as a deliberate policy conducted for over 40 years. To such politicians, the re-evangelization of Poland is, today, as important as privatization or democratization. The aim is thus a profound transformation of the nation's spiritual sphere. If we decide that the restricted transformation be called modernization after the liberal model, then the extension of these tasks onto the spiritual and moral sphere, as in the above scheme, ought to be branded modernization associated with a return to the spiritual roots of the nation.

A similar general unanimity, and lesser differences as to details, can be observed as regards another key aim perceived as a primary task of the transformation. In principle, all politicians are in favor of joining the European Union and NATO. However, they are divided into "euroenthusiasts", who would enter the Union immediately, even at the expense of such negative phenomena as increased unemployment and a temporary collapse in some branches of the economy, and the "eurosceptics", who call for caution in these processes and demand tough negotiations. There are also those, although small in number, who are **afraid** of an invasion of foreign customs and patterns from the west, and who would be inclined to put up a barrier to hold them back. Those **MP's** would limit the scope of integration so as to preserve full national identity and protect the interests of domestic **industry** and agriculture.

All these politicians consider politics an instrument of change or preservation of society. The changes are powerfully emphasized: sometimes broadly, sometimes narrowly and sometimes under the rubric of very different conceptualizations.

A different attitude toward politics is exhibited by those leaders who are inclined to **define** it as a **method of action regardless of its purpose**. For many, the substantial aim of politics is, in fact, of secondary importance, while the **primary one is to gain power**. In this context, the methods of gaining power are quite important. These conceptions, articulated by those **MP's** who have read political science books, directly refer to the theorems of **Macchiavelli** and **Max Weber**. Politics is either a game or a ferocious battle, with power being the

stakes. It is quite interesting that similar definitions of politics appear equally often as their opposite concepts concerning the conception of the politician's national service or service for the benefit of society. It could be that, given the GULAG experience, conceptions of politics that would emphasize the element of sheer power (or even violence) would not appear so often as they in fact did. This could be given a certain explanation. Politics as a fight for power is usually attributed to political opponents. "They are contemplating fight, while we are contemplating reforms" - runs the refrain of the "idealists".

Another political orientation is represented by those who treat politics as for group interests. These are the members of parties of a liberal economic orientation and representatives of business circles and trade unions. Characteristically, they can be found in almost all parties, among liberals, social democrats, and Christian democrats. This conception is often connected with a feature that is absent in Polish politics and which many MP's yearn for: the **readiness to compromise**. On the whole, in Poland, on **the declarative plane everybody seeks compromise whereas on the plane of real behavior they engage in ferocious quarrels which undermine any chance of actually reaching a compromise**. One of the most fundamental questions about the future of Polish politics comes down to whether dreams of compromise could be fulfilled.

I shall return to this matter after I have characterized a concept of politics which can be frequently discerned in recent times almost everywhere. It is a conception of politics that consists in providing ordinary people with wise and effective leadership. The adjective "wise" is embraced by representatives of Christian parties, which is hardly surprising, while the adjective "effective" is stressed by liberals and social democrats. The first conceive of leadership personified by one leader, the second in a team of collaborating leaders.

What is more interesting, however, is that there are some politicians, among both liberals and social democrats, who find it desirable to have authoritarian rule in tune of transformation. In order to conduct speedy and effective ownership transformations, some Polish liberals declared their sympathy for "enlightened absolutism". Also, quite unexpectedly, a prominent leader of SdRP - the post-communist party - once said "we could use some authoritarianism". Being one of Wałęsa's opponents, it is hardly plausible that he had in mind Wałęsa's version of authoritarianism.

To provide a somewhat different classification of the utterances of eminent Polish politicians, I would like to point out **three conceptions of politics**, which are not always clearly identified in our material, **but present only *implicitly***. The

first conception of politics treats it as a game with a beginning and an end; once it is finished, the partners still exist, and the result is that one has gained something while the other has lost something. Yet profits and losses do not necessarily balance each other. When there are more than two partners then the profit and loss balance is complicated and not fully equalized. In terms of game theory, this is a variable-sum game. Most bargains between employees and employers about a number of parallel aims (wages, working hours, holidays) belong to this type of game. Here also belong the bargains relevant to forming political and government coalitions, where the final profits and losses are hard to assess in the right proportions. These comments should be concluded as follows: Polish liberals and social democrats have this type of policy in mind (politics as a game) when they talk of it as a compromise.

The second type of understanding of politics is not as game but a “tight for arsenals”. The arsenals of political action are finances, the number of activists and members, local party organizations equipped with telecommunication devices, as well as the number of dailies, weeklies and friendly radio stations. In modern times arsenals maybe a decisive factor for the outcome of political struggles. Preparation for decisive political struggle very often consists in liquidating or weakening the opponent’s arsenals.

The third type is the war **for annihilation** of the opponent as such. This can be metaphorically called political annihilation, as it is not about physical killing of anybody, but the annihilation of the opponent’s organization. One Polish political leader spoke in favor of such an understanding of politics as plausible practice. Being a political scientist himself, he could have known the writings of Carl Schmitt and Max Weber. These two thinkers often considered politics jointly in its external and internal dimensions. For both, the killing of the enemy of “our nation” was morally justified in time of war. On the basis of our interviews, political annihilation on the domestic front could also prove morally justifiable. If it is revolution, then it concerns physical killing of individuals: if transformation, it may concern annihilation of political organizations.

In our interviews with politicians we sometimes sensed a certain affinity of the types of political practice under consideration with the considerations on the legitimacy of individual actors on the present political scene in Poland. If read carefully, the casual utterances of our respondents reveal a conviction about **three kinds of political legitimization** of the actors on the Polish political scene.

The leaders of *Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej* suggest that only they have a full legitimization to wield power in contemporary, independent Poland. Their party was formed in the late 1970’s in the underground, and their illegally

published leaflets demanded that Poland be liberated from Soviet domination. In their interviews, the representatives of this party sharply divided the political scene: "KPN and the rest".

The second type of legitimization is claimed by most of the opposition which was formed as the Solidarity Bloc. It originated in the circles of the Catholic opposition (mainly grouped around Tygodnik Powszechny, Kluby Inteligencji Katolickiej), informal clubs of the liberal intelligentsia, or the Komitet Obrony Robotników - KOR. In their opinion, their title to power stems from systematic work to change the social awareness in communist Poland, organizing various forms of "small" but effective resistance at universities against communist indoctrination, as well as uniting the intelligentsia and workers in the grand Solidarity movement of 1980-1981; mainly, though, by their participation in the Round Table Talks of 1989 that resulted in the peaceful and effective taking over of power from the communists by the democratic bloc.

The third type of legitimization, of a different type, is claimed by SdRP (and its SLD coalition) and PSL - the peasant party which also existed under the *ancien regime*. This is electoral legitimization. Those parties won the election of 1993, therefore, by the will of the people and the laws of majority rule, they should form the government and construct the program for society. Yet it is additionally a program outlined by the Solidarity bloc which claims legitimization on the basis of a historic victory over communism. The contested problem, however, consists in whether one should observe the electoral legitimization of the post-communists, whose power was overthrown by a popular revolution, and remove from power those who were victorious in the uprising. The undisputed fact mentioned above is the basis for many right-wing politicians, now in the minority, who insist that the post-communist party - SdRP - ought to be delegalized, its "neck should be broken", and a new revolution should be organized against it; possibly also a continuation of the revolution of the 1980's.

For those who share this belief, a mere electoral victory does not provide the legitimization for wielding power, since the legitimacy of power must be based on something more than the ballot. Legitimate power must be rooted in certain socio-political philosophy; it must be grounded axiologically.

Once we become aware of the fact of the three types of politics and three types of legitimization, the sources of the high degree of conflict in the Polish political scene become more readily understandable. The antagonisms between some parties are so deeply-rooted that it is very hard to overcome them, even if the need for compromise is verbally and publicly articulated.

The presidential election of 1995 provided an example of how easily antagonisms can be mobilized as a psychological weapon in politics. True, it does not always lead to victory, but its partial effectiveness is undisputed. Antagonism usually refers to sentiments and symbols, and not to economic rationality. In short, one could say that Wałęsa, in his election campaign, tried to divide society into the post-communists, who lacked legitimization and those who had been wronged or underestimated in the course of the reforms - those who were the real actors in the anti-communist revolution. A division thus constructed did not bring him final victory, but at least revealed a temporary inclination of Poles to accept the relative validity of the suggested division. Aleksander Kwaśniewski won by 600,000 votes out of 10 million voters. Wałęsa lost but constructed the axis of antagonism.

Polarization or Consensus?

Consensus is now one of the most popular words in political science. It is usually said that is necessary for the functioning of democracy. Higley and Burton (1987 and 1989) in their influential theory of political elites, ascribe to the consensus the constitutive role in the emergence and maintenance of stable democracy. Contesting parties have to reach definite settlement. Can we say that there is a political consensus in Poland? The matter appears to be too complex and difficult to judge unequivocally.

I would begin by specifying four factors which, in my opinion, are presumed in the conception of political consensus:

1. agreement reached by the previously contesting parties as to the basic features of the political system;
2. agreement as to the issues and methods to resolve them, which would become a common striving and action;
3. acceptance of the rules of the political game between partners, both in conducting disputes and the methods applied to reach agreement;
4. mutual observance by the partners as being legitimate participants in negotiations; this, however, **recognises** the possibility that not everyone is always considered a legitimate partner.

The specification of these points makes us aware that consensus in a given country and at a given time can be broader or narrower, and also deeper or

shallower. It is wider especially when more features of a political system are accepted, more issues considered urgent and calling for common solutions, more concrete rules of consensus and cooperation are agreed upon and given space for practical application .

Consensus can be considered deeper, if more social partners participate in its production, that is the partners represent a wider spectrum of classes, social groups, ideological orientations and points of view. It is also deeper when there are fewer doubts as to the social legitimization of individual partners. Moreover, it could be considered deeper if the partners act, thoughtful, without getting involved in conflicts, to solve problems the reality has posited for them.

The Polish consensus of 1989 could be defined as relatively shallow. Its manifestations were the general agreements of the Round Table, encompassing many areas of like without, however, thoughtful designs for long-run changes. The acceptance of reforms of the political and economic system in the direction of the free market and democracy, as well as the involvement of the elites in the initiation of changes proved to be insufficient to accomplish quickly specific reforms that required particular legislative actions. So the first parliaments were preoccupied with declarations of intentions and minor amendments to existing laws rather than a design of a new system. Even though, disagreements on specific small issues emerged quickly and increased political conflicts that started separating the former Solidarity bloc. We see this shallowness and lack of decisive political action better today than in the period 1989-93. Some analysts see this state of affairs as a necessary price for securing a mutual acceptance by the partners who sat at the Round Table, and even those who did not (like KPN or Union of Real Politics).

How can we define the present state of affairs after five years of serious disintegrative processes on the political scene? In particular, how do we grasp the events of the last few months, among which two seem to be particularly significant. The first is the sharp division into communists and non-communists promoted, above all, by Wałęsa, in his election campaign. If we treat seriously the cutting words of many leaders who defined themselves as declared anticommunists, then what we have in Poland is a *phenomenon of polarization (in Sartori's terms)*. In Sartori's model a sign of polarization is that the opponents opted for different general economic and political systems. For instance, in Italy in the Togliatti times some political parties opted for capitalism, some for socialism (the Communist Party of Italy). In Poland during the presidential election campaign of 1995 postcommunist party was publicly accused of a willingness to restore "socialism" and of having the political motivation of making

the communist party a class bent on taking over national property via quasi-technocratic management of economy. They were also accused of taking over all organs of political power, and trying to restore their entire domination of the past. The new domination, according to this predictions, is looming on the horizon.

These predictions are, in part, justified by the tendencies displayed by SLD and PSL to take over some already privatized companies, the most influential position in the privatizing agencies and board of directors in those companies that will have mixed capital (state-owned and private) soon, and taking over the most influential posts in local and central administration. Therefore the post-Solidarity parties do not perceive them as trustworthy. Voices are also heard demanding the withdrawal of their political legitimization.

The situation is even more complicated in the scattered post-Solidarity bloc. Some parties accuse others of secret contacts with the communists and thus these parties somehow lose their legitimization. On top of that, leaders accuse one another of a complete lack of understanding of what "good" ways and methods should be chosen for the development of the economy or the political system. It is worth noting that in January, Wałęsa invited all the leaders of the post-Solidarity bloc to a meeting so as to discuss a common anti-communist strategy. The leaders turned the invitation down because they did not want to make Wałęsa the commander of the whole bloc. The current attempts to reunite the anti-communist right-wing parties by many tactical alliances are not very successful. Popular reactions to such alliances are hardly to be predicted. The public stays sceptical.

The phenomenon of "refusing to meet" is an important indicator for any verdict about consensus; in the Polish case it is a negative one. In this context, one more fact has to be mentioned, namely the difficulties to meet by those who participated in the Round Table talks - the old-time communists and the former Solidarity opposition leaders. Shortly before leaving office, Walesa initiated referendum on the "popular privatization" scheme. After a debate in parliament the referendum took the form of five not-to-clear questions. The referendum turned out to be invalid because less than 50% of eligible voters participated. In order to decide what to do next, President Kwaśniewski invited the leaders of all significant parties to a conference. However, they did not turn up, but sent their technical experts. Beyond doubt, this response was a slap in the face for the President and a clear sign of some parties' reluctant attitude toward consensus.

The above illustration prove how difficult it is for politicians of different orientations to meet; especially for those politicians who belong to two opposite

camp: the post-communist and the post-Solidarity leaders. Without meetings, to talk of consensus is meaningless.

At the same time, however, one may ask whether consensus can exist without meetings between the political leaders. This is the problem posed by the contemporary Polish experience. Such consensus obviously cannot be considered deep or broad. It is definitely unstable and easy to upset. It also provides conditions for an erosion of the ground on which stable consensus could be built. What could, therefore, be a manifestation of such consensus without meetings?

It must be said that, at present, there are no such parties or political centres that would not in fact accept the road to an economy based on private ownership and a democracy as broad as possible. Moreover, in the last two years the acceptance of a prompt integration with Western Europe has been growing steadily, even by its previous opponents. There is unanimity as to joining NATO.

One can say that there is agreement as to the basic systemic contours of the state and the rules of economic and social order. There is also agreement as to foreign policy interests, on which international alliances should be built. Even when these matters are discussed only in everyday and pragmatic terms without referring to the entire philosophy of **European unity**, these are, nevertheless, **important dimensions of a nationwide consensus.**

Can we speak of consensus in two fundamental matters when there are important differences as to three other important issues? Maybe it is a broken consensus? Or maybe it is a consensus entangled in historical diversions? The lines of division are the following: the attitude toward religion and atheism, toward communism and the heritage of the PRL, as well as toward self-government and centralization.

Here is a handful of examples. Can we stop the heated debates on abortion, on the manner of religious and lay ethical education in schools, incessant accusations in the media clericalism or, to the contrary, libertinism and atheism? Can we reach agreement as to the so-called *decommunization check* (the Polish term *ustracja* - lustration), or as to the punishment for those who initiated and conducted staged political trials and introduced brutal methods of treating political prisoners? Will we have consent as to the degree of centralization/decentralization of state power?'

As regards the last issue, Poles differ in a manner which is confusing and their motives are hardly discernible. One specificity that is worth mentioning here is that as regards decentralization, there are more serious differences between the peasant and the post-communist party (now coalition partners), than between the

post-communist party and Unia **Wolności** (Liberty Union, former Democratic Party fused with former Liberal Democratic Congress) Liberty Union is, possibly, the most typical representation of the political Solidarity movement of the 1980's.

Contemporary details from contemporary Polish history must make us aware that consensus is a graded phenomenon. What is more important, however, during the post-communist transformation, at least in some countries, is that the process of transferring power by the communists into the hands of the democrats can be **annulled** by a number of strictly political conflicts. The question I formulated in another paper was: is it possible to preserve democracy without consensus? It is quite plausible that a democratic majority and coexistence with the opposition would be **sufficient**. I believe that we must reconsider the following issue: majority rule and consensus. This should be connected with the issue of political legitimization of the majority.

The Polish example shows that the type of morally grounded and 'historically meritorious' legitimization does not necessarily overlap with majority legitimization. Moral-historical legitimation of the Solidarity-rooted parties seems to belong to "another reality" than legal-procedural, electoral legitimization of the postcommunist party. Moreover, in Poland, this situation is conflict ridden. The paradox consists in the fact that communists, the guardians of the authoritarian (in some aspects **totalitarian**) regime, destined to be destroyed by the revolution, have been emerging as a victorious force under democratic regime.

When we look at the variety of Polish specificities, we can say that more chances of conflict and dangers for consensus can be found on the political scene than among the members of the society. Most people are more ready to embrace consensus than are the politicians. Certainly, Poles do notice the growing social differentiation and many are dissatisfied with this. The workers employed in factories and mines that are threatened with liquidation go on strike, petty farmers are afraid of the future and are inclined to support some demagogues. Among the intelligentsia there are some debates on the shape of democracy (mostly on the great prerogatives for the President or Prime Minister) but they do not take sharp forms. The majority of society is working, accepting market reforms, and in everyday life cooperates in solving local problems. It does not demand that the politicians carry out an unrelenting revolution or a sentimental return to the PRL. Generally speaking, society is much more peaceful than the politicians.

This last statement indicates a large social indeterminism as to the events on the political scene. **This** scene can develop its own conflictual dynamics, and, to some extent, can extend to the whole society. I did not discuss in this paper the

results of research concerning the politicians' perception of social divisions. I must add one more thing here. The politicians display a clear tendency to carry over the political differences onto their picture of society. For many of them, ideological divisions are worth mentioning and emphasizing, while economic division often escape their attention. Such a political bias appeared as the answer to this question: what significant divisions do you see in our society? (Gortat , 1995) Ironically speaking, **there is a lack of consensus between the political elite and society** as to the perception of the most vital problems and the pressing demands of the newly forming society.

The above quoted example can testify to **the** growing autonomy of the economic and political spheres. Obviously, it would be a wrong conclusion to say about separation of them, as in time of transformation, the mutual dependency between the economy and politics is enormous and multifold.

The purpose of my analysis, above all, has been to show the dependencies that could appear on the purely political plane. Three spheres of phenomena call for a logical connection here:

- 1 dominant understanding of politics at a given time and in a given place;
- 2 the identification of various kinds of meanings attributed to legitimization, both in the political elite and the society at large;
- 3 the differentiation between the numerous aspects of consensus, as well as their possible configurations and the gradation of "consent".

The dangers for the democratic transition can be located in an unhappy combination of these three tendencies: an enduring disagreement on what politics is about ("politics as political killing" prevails over politics as the **accomodation** of interests) lack of agreement on the "standards" of legitimacy, the very narrow consensus, limited to the selected features of international policy (*raison d'etat*) or even lack of this. The actual combination/gradation of the three elements in each particular country I consider very important aspect of any analysis of political transition to democracy. In this respect, different experiences of Central-East European countries seem to me worth studying.

I would like to stress one thing : it is not true that politics has one unchangeable "essence" in every country and in every period. The common practice of politicians in a given country **defines** the content of politics by their actions, whether as accommodation of interests or, conversely, as political annihilation). **Politics is what politicians really do**, regardless of the efforts made by scientists to build a universal definition. The period of transformation in Poland is, among others, transitory as it has not produced a dominant type of understanding of politics and political practice.

Nevertheless, transition has produced a certain relationship between the understanding of politics and legitimization. The politics of compromise has its affinity with legitimization understood in the Weberian sense as legal-rational, which in democratic systems is based on elections and plurality of organized actors. Such a notion of politics and legitimization normally has its counterpart in a limited range of commonly accepted solutions. However, legitimacy linked to such a procedural understanding must be rather strong and broad as far as acceptance of partners is concerned. If any of the potential partners is categorized as unacceptable and thus ineligible for negotiations, this engenders a polarization of the political system.

References

- Agh, A. 1994. *The First Experience of the First Democratic Parliaments in East Central Europe*, Budapest Papers on Democratic Transition. Hungarian Center for Democracy Studies Foundation. Budapest
- Baczynski, J. 1996. *Martwy sezon*. *Gazeta Wyborcza* 17 April 1996
- Burton, M. and J. Higley. 1987. *Elite Settlements*, *American Political Science Review*. Vol 52 pp. 295-307
- CBOS (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej). 1996. *Wyborca słabo reprezentowany, SLD ciągle na czele*. *Rzeczpospolita* 6 March 1996
- Curry, J. L. and L. Fajfer (eds). *Poland. Permanent Revolution: People vs. Elites 1956-1990*, The American University Press, Washington DC
- Dobry, M. 1992. *Sociologie de crises politiques*. Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques. Paris
- Dom, L. 1996. "Wojna Żydowska" *Polski posierpniowej*, *Rzeczpospolita* 27 February 1996
- Gortat, R. 1995. *Obraz społeczeństwa polskiego*. in: Wesolowski W. and I. Pankow (eds.) *Świat elity politycznej*, Wydawnictwo IFiSPAN, Warszawa
- Grabowska, M. 1993. *Political Parties in Post-Communist Poland: Disenchantments and Uncertain Chances*, *Sisyphus - Sociological Studies*. Vol. 1 pp. 55-74
- Higley, J. and M. Burton. 1989. *The Elite Variable in Democratic Transitions and Breakdowns*, *American Sociological Review*, Vol 54 pp 17-32
- Jarecki, P. 1996. *Akcja Katolicka będzie kuznia meżow stanu*, *Zycie Warszawy* 2 January 1996
- Kuron, J. and K. Modzelewski. 1996. *List otwarty*, *Gazeta Wyborcza* 18 January 1996
- Lijphart, A. 1968. *Typologies of Democratic Systems*, *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol 1 pp 3-44
- Machiavelli, N. 1970. *The Prince*. Discourses on Titus Livy, Penguin, Harmondsworth
- Nosowski, Z. 1996. *Porazka na płaszczyźnie sumien*, *Rzeczpospolita* 18 January 1996

- Orlos, K. 1996. Co z nasza **inteligencja**? Gazeta Wyborcza 7 March 1996
- Paczkowski, A. 1996. Czy obrachunek został **dokonany**? Rzeczpospolita 30-31 March 1996
- Rokita, J. 1996. Wielkosc **Polski** me jest utracona Tygodnik Powszechny 4 February 1996
- Rychard, A. 1996. Czy transformacja sie skonczyla? (**manuskrypt**)
- Sartori, G. 1976. Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis, Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Vol 1
- Smith, G. 1979. Western European Party Systems: On the Trial of Typology. West European Politics. Vol 3 pp 128-142
- Smolar, A. 1996. Polska Kwasniewskiego. Tygodnik Powszechny 7 January 1996
- Stepan, A. 1988. Rethinking Military Politics: **Brazil** and the Southern Cone. Princeton University Press, Princeton
- Weber, M. 1968. Economy and Society, Bedminster Press, Chicago, Vol 1,2
- Wesolowski, W. 1994. The Destruction and Construction of Interests Under Systemic Change. Polish Sociological Review 1994. No. 4 pp 273-294
- Wesolowski, W. 1995. The Nature of Social Ties and the Future of Postcommunist Society: Poland **After** Solidarity, in: J. Hall (ed.) Civil Society Theory. History and Comparison. Polity Press. Cambridge
- Wesolowski, W. 1993. Formation of Political Parties in Post-Communist Poland. Sisyphus - Social Studies, Vol 9 pp 9-13
- Wesolowski, W. and I. Pankow (eds.). 1995. Swiat **elity** politycznej, Wydawnictwo IFiSPAN, Warszawa