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Poland: Radicals in power

Since the Kaczynski brothers' political ascendancy at the head of the Law and Justice Party (PiS), there has been a string of developments that have alarmed Poland's EU fellow-members: the election of a civil rights spokesperson who openly advocates the death penalty; plans to close down the body that monitors the independence of the media; a law drafted that would abolish the autonomy of the civil service, to name but a few. To understand how this situation arose, one needs to look more closely at the period of change in Poland since 1989. The "radical" government stems from that section of the Solidarity movement opposed to the route transformation took; for the radicals, the reckoning with the *ancien regime* has been insufficient, leading to a system they view as a pathological symbiosis of communism and capitalism, democracy and a post-communist mafia. The cultural traditionalism of the PiS, writes Smolar, has landed on fertile ground in a contemporary Poland suffering from social alienation, distrust in democratic institutions, high unemployment, and growing income discrepancies.

The political life in Poland in recent years has been fascinating and disturbing simultaneously. Poland is a country that can be proud of its numerous successes, a country that has come through a particularly problematic period of transformation in which democracy and a market economy were successfully introduced, a country that has taken a more than respectable place in the international community. However, it is also a country that today appears to be gambling with these achievements by embarking upon a dangerous political adventure.

The rightwing forces that came to power in the parliamentary and presidential elections in Autumn 2005 stem directly from that current of the democratic opposition that from the very beginning have been critical of the Polish transformation model developed after the victory over the communist regime. Their identity, in a political, economic, and social sense, has been moulded around the rejection of this model. In order to understand the current political situation in Poland, therefore, it is necessary to examine more closely the decisive epoch of transformation.

The radicals' transformation model and why it didn't stand a chance

The radical Right only really came to power with the victory of the Kaczynski brothers in 2005. Why was victory so long in coming? The ideas nurtured by the radicals about the course the revolutionary transformation of Polish society should take were very different to those of the moderates who assumed power after the defeat of communism. According to the radicals, the prerequisite for the creation of a democratic state, for the introduction of the market economy, and for rapprochement with the West was the removal of all relics of the communist regime and a clear squaring of accounts with the past. Tadeusz Mazowiecki's (post-communist Poland's first prime minister 1989–1990 —

ed.) inaugural speech as prime minister contained the memorable words, which were subsequently used against him and other moderates on many occasions: "The government that I am forming bears no responsibility for the inherited debt. [...] We draw a thick line under the past. We will answer only for what we have done to help Poland out of the current crisis." Thus, he inaugurated a transformation policy that was to be implemented along peaceful and evolutionary lines. The radicals, however, demanded a radical break with the pre-1989 past. Worthy of note is a comment by Jaroslaw Kaczynski, talking two years later, about what should have been done and what the moderates neglected to do in Autumn 1989, while one by one the provinces of the communist empire fell: "Communism in Poland should have been attacked and destroyed completely. That's the reason for the origin of [our] concept of 'acceleration', the final break with the 'round table' agreement. Decisive measures should have been adopted: the United Party of Polish Workers (PZPR) should have been banned, the apparatus of repression seized, the heads of the party and the secret police imprisoned, the archives of the central committee, the ministry of the interior, and the defence committee sealed. The process should have been stopped immediately, since it allowed the party nomenclature to commandeer state property; the stolen property should have been systematically reclaimed."¹

Jan Olszewski, in his inaugural speech as prime minister in 1991 (his party would govern for only half a year), famously said that, "Today, the people expect from us an answer, a final answer to the question: When will communism in Poland finally end? My wish would be that the parliamentary ratification of the government I am proposing will mark the beginning of the end of communism in our country."² These words were uttered two and a half years after the opposition that won the — albeit "semi-democratic" — elections, in other words, long after the Mazowiecki government had been formed, after the election of Lech Walesa as president, not to mention the fall of the Berlin Wall and the long since completed economic — and also ultimately social — revolution in Poland.

For the radicals, political power continues to occupy centre stage. The economy is forced into the background — so far, in fact, that in this department Olszewski, like the Kaczynskis today, simply awarded cabinet posts to liberals.

The radicals still consider the policies pursued after 1989 to have been fateful. At a recent congress of the Law and Justice Party (PiS), Jaroslaw Kaczynski said that, "It is plain that a post-communist state has arisen in Poland, a post-communist monster so to speak. A monster in which the social dominance obtained by the nomenclature very quickly turned into political dominance and paved the way for their return to power. A monster with a great many of the pathologies of the previous system. The nomenclature thrived in the new system and created an alternative system of taxation out of various institutions alongside the official order, in particular those involved in the distribution of goods, because it is above all a matter of the distribution of goods."³ This squaring of accounts with the past, therefore, had and has a practical meaning: it is supposed to guarantee internal security and obstruct the pathological symbiosis of communism and capitalism, democracy and a post-communist mafia.

For the radicals, the second argument for clear-cut de-communization and lustration — after the issue of power — was and is formed by moral aspects and the desire for justice. The moral order of the world and the clear distinction

between truth and lies, good and evil must be restored in order to close this chapter of the past and give meaning to the bitter experiences of past generations. The need for a moral and legal squaring of accounts with the past also has an important political dimension for the radicals. In their view, the systemic transformation can only win social legitimacy if based upon a sense of justice. This conviction is founded upon the realization that transitional societies have to bear high costs: unemployment, a decline in standards of living, a drastic rise in social inequality, the jeopardy of the existential bases of millions of people.

In an interview in 1994, Jaroslaw Kaczynski described how things ought to have been dealt with during the difficult period of transformation, "In which everything got mixed up, unemployment rose, the standard of living declined, and so on. [...] Those of us who formed the Central Alliance (PC) went on the basis of the following social diagnosis: that one must not immobilize society, since this would lead to apathy; instead one has to offer it something, since it is exposed to heavy economic debts and feels it has been unjustly treated. On one hand, one must [...] initiate a large-scale reform movement for privatization. [...] On the other hand, one must offer society as much as possible in the moral sphere, and do so as quickly as possible within the scope of current measures. That is perfectly possible, since there are many reasons for social frustration that have nothing to do with the economy."⁴ In the critical period of transition, it was difficult to offer society essential improvements. For that reason, the radicals turned to politics, history, morality and justice. They launched a full-frontal assault on the concept of just society under the conditions of post-communist society. According to the radicals, to acknowledge existing justice is to defend injustice inherited from the old system. "Mazowiecki and his camp," said Jaroslaw Kaczynski in the same interview, "talk constantly of just society, although this justice serves injustice." The permanent attacks by the government camp on the constitutional court, which it accuses of defending the old order and formal justice against society's sense of justice, are essentially a continuation of the strategies of the early 1990s.

Why did the radicals lose the battle over the transformation model? Why did they remain at the sidelines for so long? One has to answer this question if one wishes to understand the Kaczynski's election victory and their return to the political limelight. One reason for their failure back in the early 1990s was certainly that their ideas and strategies completely mistook the social mood. This is demonstrated by the verbal radicalism — which borders on the grotesque — of the then chairman of the Central Alliance, Adam Glapinski, who said during the election of 1993 that, "The third occupation — following the German and the Soviet — continues. Occupation by the secret and public agents of the communist political police."⁵ Occasionally the party leadership also demonstrated an insight into why its own strategies were badly timed. During the radicals' political isolation, Ludwik Dorn, today deputy prime minister and minister for the interior, wrote, "Since 1989, we've had an aimless, sluggish, and apathetic revolution." He characterized the "collective mind" of Polish society by the hunger to accumulate wealth. He defined the government as "bastard-corporatism" (the analogue to bastard-feudalism). According to Dorn, a society had arisen that functioned on the basis of quasi-corporate contracts. The result was the state's loss of autonomy with regard to civil society. "While the goal of the dissidents consisted in building up a civil society, today the basic problem is the state's loss of autonomy to the advantage of a society organized according to the rules of bastard corporatism." This is not the analysis of an extremist; nor is it irrational. It proves that there was indeed no place for the radicals in Poland at that time.

However, the main reasons for this lie somewhere else: the hypothesis upon which the radical's strategy rested had nothing to do with the Polish reality, and in two respects.

First, it turned out that Poland was able to achieve security and world standing and ally itself to Nato and the European Union without undergoing an internal revolution, as the radicals were calling for. Who still views the new constitution as a threat to national security? Poland's international standing, its authority, and its influence in the immediate region is above all thanks to its close ties with the US at the beginning of the Iraq War (which I firmly oppose), the EU accession, and also its open political engagement for the Orange Revolution in the Ukraine. I do not wish here to evaluate the contemporary state of Polish foreign policy. Let it suffice to quote Jaroslaw Kaczynski, who announced in June 2006 that, "The foreign ministry has been reconquered!". This bridgehead was "reconquered" by party that has ruled since last autumn and commands a power that till now no other party since 1989 has managed to achieve. The fact that today their foreign policy has more failures than successes to show for itself is the result of inflexibility, a confrontational attitude, a policy of mistaken values, and a lack of negotiating skills and ability to win allies.

The second, important assumption of the radicals has also proved itself to be mistaken. Like Olszewski, the Kaczynskis assumed that it would be impossible to guide Poland through the transformation without an accompanying process of mental transformation — the inevitable "valley of tears" (Ralph Dahrendorf). The sociologist Hanna Swida–Ziomba, referring to rising unemployment, visible poverty, and drastically increasing social inequality, and the fact that the heroes of the Solidarity movement had not only been robbed of their jobs but also their dignity, summed up the disappointment as such: "People should think of themselves as the heroes of transformation and not as beggars for social security."⁶ Indeed, the arrogance of power, its inability to explain the causes and the necessity of systemic transformation during the decisive years of transition, provides much food for thought: not only did they lie to us, they now insult us too by accusing us of having the mentality of *Homo sovieticus*.

According to the radicals, the growing political and social crisis was not to be cured by appeals to self–enrichment, individual effort, and careerism. Two examples illustrate this: the privatization of the first state enterprise was accompanied by the solution: "Recognize the power of your money!"; the Freedom Union, the leading transformation party in parliament, subscribed citizens to Clinton's slogan, "It's the economy, stupid!". Solutions like these clearly prove the blindness of the technocratic elite of that time. This was not the way to satisfy the sense of justice, to overcome the growing sense of alienation — at a time when survey after survey showed that society believed that it was primarily the new and old elites who were profiting from the transformation at the expense of workers and farmers. What was to be done, then, in order to satisfy the sense of justice? One of the radicals' demands was de–communization and lustration in order to clean up the state and to deliver justice to victims of the old order. Another was the battle for memory, with the aim to demonstrate communism's responsibility for the condition of the country. This, incidentally, is the reason for the popularity among the radicals of the German concept of the "politics of history".

One can say, then, that after 1989 the radicals clearly recognized the drama that transformation would mean for the majority of the population. Despite

this, they lost the leadership battle. First, their course would inevitably have lead back to the past, to conflicts, and to transformation being thrown into question, or at least delayed. Second, it turned out that the moderates were indeed able to implement what politicians on the far-Right, as well as many Western experts, held to be impossible, namely the simultaneous introduction of democratic and economic reforms. I will examine this more closely in what follows. However, as we can see today, the price of victory has been high: a deep-seated sense of social alienation has developed, trust in democratic institutions has plummeted, and the significance of radical parties has increased — decisive factors that led to the political volte-face in the autumn of 2005.

The dilemmas of transformation and why the moderate model was successful nonetheless

Lets stay a while with the problematic of the economic and political transition in Poland after 1989. From a theoretical perspective it is very interesting. There is a widespread opinion in Poland as well as among many leading Western experts that economic liberalization (ie the transformation from controlled economy to a market economy) and democratization (ie the transformation of a one-party system into a pluralist, liberal, democratic one) could not be introduced simultaneously. The sceptics' reasoning was straightforward: the economic reforms would incur high social costs, in other words, they would bring with them unemployment, poverty, fear of the future, and social destabilization and could provide a prospect of a material improvement only after several years. Democracy simultaneously enabled those social forces and alliances that felt threatened by the reforms to organize themselves in order to block them. Many forecasted a catastrophic collision of the principle of equality of citizens within a democratic community with market forces that create inequality and — after the relative equality of the communist period — a subjective sense of deep injustice. In Poland especially, this threatened to be explosive, since those who were paying the highest price for modernization were at the same time those who, together with Solidarity, had contributed substantially to the collapse of the old system.

From among the many pessimistic prophecies of that time, let us look here at one from the Right and one from the Left. In 1990, the well-known Polish-American sociologist Adam Przeworski wrote that, "As soon as the anti-communist euphoria has evaporated and it comes to political organization and conflicts of interests, politics in eastern Europe will take a form that can be characterized as 'poor capitalism'. There is no reason at all why conditions in Bulgaria, Hungary, or Poland should be any different from those in Argentina, Chile, or Brazil. [...] The factors that enable democracy will at the same time work in the interests of economic reforms, like those already underway in Hungary, Poland, or Bulgaria and planned elsewhere. These reforms promise not only to be radical — no less than the transition from communism to capitalism —, but also exceedingly painful. And the experience of other countries teaches us that such reforms are difficult to carry out. They mobilize the resistance of those who have most to lose: the managers of protected or subsidized companies, the employees who face redundancy, and the countless people who fear the dismantling of reserves for income security and social services."⁷ Przeworski was not the only expert at that time to prophecy that Poland would end up, along with other countries in the region, in the Third World.

The British philosopher John Gray (now no longer an enthusiastic supporter of Mrs Thatcher) wrote that, "The human and social costs of the transition to a market economy are for most post–communist countries so high that it would be bordering on insanity to assume that it could be accomplished within the framework of liberal democratic institutions."⁸ He considered the reconstruction of the state, the establishment of order, and compelling respect for the law to be of the highest importance. This does not distinguish Gray from many Polish liberals in the early 1990s. They more or less openly despaired of being able to implement fundamental economic reforms within the framework of democracy.

Here, the question arises as to why, after 1989, the moderates nevertheless achieved an historic victory — despite all the pessimism, and although they had never clearly formulated their strategies? Among their circle there dominated a language of pragmatism, relatively loose moral principles, and the technocratic skills of a Leszek Balcerowicz. There was no political language available whatsoever to interpret what was occurring. Yet, despite this, the intuitive strategies of the moderates won the day! Numerous explanations can be found in scientific literature, in the media of the time, and in politicians' statements as to why it never came to a collision between the logic of the market economy and the logic of political democracy. Lets look at some of the arguments more closely.

An important factor and at the same time the start–up capital for the reformers was *the rejection of the old system*, which in Poland was especially strong. "Real–existing socialism", which had bestowed upon its citizens general misery, empty shelves, hyperinflation, and a martial law since 1981, represented a great opportunity for the reformers. Its defeat contributed towards the discrediting of everything that even slightly recalled socialist thought. Liberalism was thus the undisputed monopolist in the marketplace of ideas. Though it might not have aroused enthusiasm, the opposing forces had no believable programme that could have mobilized people and given them hope. The post–communist Left that governed from 1993 to 1997 and from 2001 to 2005 were unable to offer an alternative ideological alternative and simply continued the liberal programme of reform. Paradoxically, the Left's "betrayal" of socialism to the advantage of democracy enabled it to block the alliance of anti–reformers and contributed to the social integration of the nostalgic, backward–looking section of their clientele.

The chaos at the level of insight and value, the complex processes of disintegration and reformation, and the development of social interests contributed significantly towards neutralizing society's opposition to the transformation. Stephen Holmes has described the "cognitive legacy" of Marxism as a "buffer" that "allayed fears bound up with the new situation and reduced public demand for paranoid narratives of blame".⁹ The Marxist image of "predatory capitalism" was by no means a bad description of the worst excesses at the beginning of the transformation.

Opposition and dissatisfaction were also dampened by the relatively *low level of societal expectation*. After communism, utopian ideas did not stand a chance. People accepted the transformation full of hope; they may have been discouraged and angry, but they didn't expect miracles from those in government.

There is no doubt that *fear of the spectre of violence* played an important role in the maintenance of social and political stability in the country. It should be

recalled that in all post-communist countries, even where the social price of transformation was disproportionately higher than in Poland, the only serious instances of social unrest, revolt, or civil war were not connected to social or political issues but to national, ethnic, and religious ones.

Another factor contributing substantially to the systemic transformation in Poland was that *hopes were directed at the West* and that Poland was increasingly becoming part of the Euro-Atlantic world. The near mythical "return to Europe" was a target that tamed even the most radical parts of the elite, since they were aware that beyond their own society there were further — foreign — authorities: the US government and the EU states, the European Council and the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Only after the successful EU accession did the new rightwing elite feel confident enough to reveal their opposition and even hostility towards the EU without caring about the public mood. Paradoxically, as EU member, Poland is today more independent of the EU than during the accession phase, during which it had to respect the conditions required of it.

There were also ambiguous factors in the transformation. Among these was the *atomization of society*, a heritage of the communist era. As sociologists are able to demonstrate, this extended further into Poland than in other countries in the region and expressed itself in a low level of mutual trust amongst Poles and even less trust in those in power, as well as in a low degree of social organization — despite a Catholic Church and the Solidarity tradition. The inability to get involved in collective activity, together with fear about the future and the feeling of a lack of alternatives with regard to the reforms led to a "diffusion of the conflict". Therefore, the socially expensive reforms could also be carried out because the opportunity for opposition to them offered by the democratic institutions was not fully taken up.

Another factor of a negative type leading to stabilization was the de-politicization of the decision-making process. The reform plans were not the result of a broad social debate in which the various group interests were negotiated and in which the different political powers confronted one another. They were far more the result of voluntarist policy-making by the elite who were advised by Western experts (the role of Jeffrey Sachs, which cannot be overestimated here, is deliberately hushed up by the heroes of the transformation). Although the democratic institutions formally performed their functions, the governments could make decisions without being controlled by the public and political forces. Karol Modzelewski, one of the most important and worthiest representatives of the opposition of 1989, and later a radical, leftwing critic of the course policy had taken, wrote lucidly and without illusions: "The Solidarity group of 1989, which shortly after was destroyed by the activities, the pressure, the control, and the interests of its social basis, but at the same time still had enormous authority, was able to opt for and realize the Balcerowicz plan."¹⁰ In general, the underdevelopment of the political sphere was a major prerequisite for the elite's "free hand" in post-communist countries. It was the weakness of the political parties, of the social organizations, and of the interest groups and the social movements that gave those in power enormous room for manoeuvre for, in Poland too.

The factors mentioned partially explain why the dreaded vicious circle of self-destruction, prompted by the simultaneity of democratization and economic liberalization, never occurred; why it was possible to maintain, and even to strengthen, democratic institutions under the difficult conditions of

transition. It could be said that during the early stages a "democratic theatre" of the elite existed that did not place democracy in doubt, despite attempts here and there. As long as the democratic content of the democratic institutions was weak, the real power and initiative lay with the modernizing, pro-Western elite. This dualism made it possible to bring off a genuine economic and social revolution while retaining the institutions and in time strengthening them.

To sum up: the success of the Polish transformation was based upon the discrediting of communism, the fascination for and dependence upon the West, the demobilization and alienation of society, and the de-politicization of decisions that were justified by necessity and widely accepted. The radicals failed because they wanted to offer the people a revolutionary spectacle without having a convincing plan. Appealing to history, they wanted to force a split in society between ex-communists and their dependents one hand and good Poles on the other; meanwhile, people were concentrating on their daily existence and battle for survival, dreaming of letting the wounds of history heal, and abhorring any form of violence, verbal included. The radicals wanted to thrust upon a newly liberated society strictly interpreted Catholic ethics.

The return of the radicals

There are many different reasons for the change in recent years in Polish society's overwhelmingly positive attitude towards the social transformation after 1989.

The major successes of past years are today taken for granted and no one throws them into question. The massive support for EU accession also shows that the policies of recent years have met with widespread approval. Nevertheless, this goes along with a pessimistic perception of the state, the administration, the political class, and the legal system. The political system is perceived as being far removed from citizens. High unemployment, growing income tax differences, and general corruption reinforce this feeling.

The numerous political scandals in the last three years have contributed to the collapse of the former communist Left and have put wind in the sails of radical forces with para-revolutionary programmes. This goes for the Law and Justice Party (PiS), lead by the Kaczynski brothers, but also for the two smaller but more radical formations, which flatly reject the changes after 1989 and the EU accession: the populist Self Defence party (Samoobrona) and the traditional, Catholic nationalist League of Polish families (LPR). After six months of PiS minority government, these three groupings today form the government, thereby commanding a solid parliament majority. [On the 22 September 2006, the leader of the Self Defence Party, Andrzej Lepper, was sacked from the coalition, along with his party. At the time of writing, the PiS is seeking to form a new coalition with the Polish Farmers' Party (PSL). If this fails, new elections will be held in November 2006 — ed.]

Those parties, however, that since the era of the "round tables" have driven forward the country's modernization have been swept aside by the electorate, or been decimated to such an extent that they now lead a peripheral existence. Affected are above all the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS), the Democratic Party (formerly the Freedom Union), and the post-communist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). Politically foremost today are the PiS and the liberal conservative Civic Platform (PO) in opposition. The marginalized SLD, the LPR and Samoobrona on the Left, as well as the small Polish Farmers' Party (PSL) complete the picture. Of these parties, only the morally discredited SLD

claims credit for past reforms, while the PiS, the LPR, and the Samoobrona radically reject them. The second largest parliamentary faction, the PO, campaigned with the radically critical slogans of the post 1989 era — despite the fact that more than a few PO leaders had been involved in the reforms —, however nuanced their position after the elections. Overall, then, one can say that Polish politics today is dominated by parties that reject the transformation carried out between 1989 and 2005, even if the Kaczynski brothers cannot avoid paying at least verbal tribute to some of the achievements of that period.

Otherwise, their critique has not changed significantly over the course of time. At the beginning of the 1990s they concentrated on dealing with the communist legacy. Their main argument was that the communists, in the absence of a clear break with the past, were intent on "trading their collective monopoly on power with private property". Allegedly, the latter had understood how to exploit the mechanisms of democracy and the market economy to their own ends. They had taken control of public administration and occupied key positions in the army, the police, the media, and the economy. Whoever had no connections to the nomenclature, however, had disproportionately fewer opportunities. While this critique of the communist legacy still features high up in the radicals' policy, the brunt of their attack is now aimed at the aberrations of the transformation period, above all in the areas of the economy, the law, and institutions. The critique is no longer directed at the post-communist elite and the associated business circles, but against the elite that emerged from the democratic opposition that had significantly contributed to the transformation process of the 1990s.

The most recent shift of accentuation goes in the direction of anti-modernism. This tendency becomes clear in cultural traditionalism, in the emphasis on particularly close ties with the national-conservative part of the Catholic Church, in the declaration of war against permissive practices, in attempts to limit artistic freedom and the freedom of expression in the name of a healthy national sensibility. An anti-liberal orientation can also be seen in economic policy, for example in measures against privatization or in support for tax reductions. Their suspicion towards the EU can also be understood in this connection.

The rightwing government's criticism of the years 1989 to 2005 represents an attack on the foundations of liberal democracy in Poland. If one is to believe the PiS and their associates, Polish democracy is based on economic and social inequality. The developmental model of egoistic capitalism has damaged the nation, destroyed the sense of community, and contributed to the spread of anti-social attitudes. It is first and foremost the nation, and not the individual, that is to be protected against growing criminality and all manner of social pathologies, and this through a strengthening of the state. It is the responsibility of the latter to clean out the Augean Stables, to clear up after the sinful post-1989 era as well as after the communist heritage. This entails the following plans: the creation of special police units for combating corruption, which are to be beyond any kind of parliamentary control; the formation a special commission with an almost unlimited warrant to investigate the abuse of office in the last sixteen years, including in the area of privatization; the creation of an investigative body for the development of the banking sector since 1989 — which could quickly grow into a prosecuting authority for past reforms; and the creation of a special committee that would monitor the objectivity of the private media.

The philosophy of the new leadership is based on an anti-liberal foundation. The hypertrophy of human and civil rights, the creation of politically independent institutions, the legal limitation of state autonomy — all this allegedly disables the state and its ability to fight the symptoms of social pathology. Hence the systematic attempts to undo the numerous institutional achievements of the last sixteen years.

Today, the defence of human rights no longer mobilizes as much energy as it used to. Symbolic of this is the appointment of a lawyer as civil rights spokesperson who openly advocates the death penalty, who calls human rights "the opium of the people", and who supports the government's stance when it bans gay rights demonstrations, since these allegedly cause a public nuisance.

The constitutional drafts of the PiS propose the abolition of the fiscal board, an independent institution that shields this sensitive area from the moods and fluctuations of the executive. The radio and television council that monitors the independence of the media is also to be shut down and not replaced. A law has also been drafted that would get rid of the autonomy of the civil service, which until now has headed off the politicization of the civil service.

The public denunciations of well-known personalities who dare to criticize Radio Maria, including lawyers, journalists, and even bishops, are intended to undermine the trust held in these groups by large sectors of the population. Anyone who sets about trying to limit the government's mandate also ends up in the firing line. In many areas, the government instrumentalizes the legal system in order to assert its aims. Thus Jaroslaw Kaczynski candidly announced that the constitutional court is to be staffed by politically appropriate lawyers, which in one to two years will lead to this institution, which is the guarantee of the rule of law, coming entirely under the control of the government.

With their close relations to the most conservative and nationalist circles of the Catholic Church, for whom Radio Maria acts as a propaganda organ, the government throws into question the separation of Church and State peacefully enacted in the 1990s and approved by the majority of the population. This policy even causes consternation in the Polish episcopacy, which fears the politicization of the Church and a possible split. This explains the clear statements issued by the Church criticizing the political engagement of Radio Maria, and thus indirectly also the government, which deploys the radio station as an instrument of power and thus fuels tension within the Church and jeopardizes the Church's unity. This aim was shared by a missive from the Vatican concerning the political engagement of the Catholic media, which many understood as a criticism of Radio Maria and circles within the Polish Catholic Church associated with the station.

Although now in office, in many respects the radicals continue to bear the features of an opposition party that exploits the population's dissatisfaction and deliberately paints an apocalyptic picture the country's situation. In setting up an opposition between liberalism and the vision of a "solidary Poland", the PiS appeals to deep-rooted traditions and the need for community and security. It awakens old fears connected to the difficult and sometimes tragic history of neighbourhood with Russian and Germany. The vocabulary of mistrust, suspicion, and confrontation is emphasized as soon as talk turns to these two countries. The PiS and their associates bank on national pride and Poles' identification with their country. The activity of the PiS and their associates is marked by a patriotism based on a highly traditional conception of national

sovereignty and above all communicated via the public media. Sometimes this patriotism crosses over into outright nationalism.

The PiS is expressly Eurosceptic. Although they are well aware that Poland is the largest beneficiary of EU support, in European matters they count the Czech president and Eurosceptic Vaclav Klaus among their allies. Relations between Poland and Brussels have undergone a marked change since Poland's EU accession. As already mentioned, the paradox is that prior to the accession of the new members, the EU had a far wider-ranging scope than it does today for control over their policies and was able to better supervise the transformation in politics, the economy, and the legal system. One section of the political class perceived this as a humiliation; according to them, the regime change of 1989 should have brought about long-awaited national sovereignty. After accession, however, the EU was dealing with full members over whom it was no longer able to exert so much pressure. The more radical sections of the political class experienced this as liberation, something expressed for example in the rejection of the EU constitution. This was shown even more clearly in domestic policy. When the PiS formed a coalition government with the Samoobrona populists and the LPR extremists, they could reliably assume that the other EU members would not react with a boycott. The unfortunate outcome of sanctions against Austria when the chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel formed a coalition with Jörg Haider's populists is still fresh in the memory.

The most recent change of government in Warsaw provides cause for concern. How Poland will develop in the coming years is difficult to say. How should one presume to predict the distant future when the radical's first few months in power have thrown up so many problems? The defining characteristics of this government are its verbal radicalism, its untiring attacks on various different groups of society, and the announcement of all-decisive changes at the same time as inaction in the economic and social sectors. The latter explains why for a long time the PiS did not command a parliamentary majority. This changed since the 5 May 2006. Also unpredictable is the outcome of the tension between the Poles' growing satisfaction, despite all the difficulties, with their individual lives, their country, and its integration into the EU on one hand, and, on the other, a government whose legitimacy and programmes are based upon the rejection of precisely those changes that have led to these positive results.

The current government have a choice: either they accept the Polish reality or they continue to dream their dream of an unblemished, rebellious Poland, one that declines to recognize either the absence of "communists" or the dominance of the West, with its postmodern, relativist, post-Christian values. Many Poles may well continue to dream along with their government a while longer — until they renounce their willingness to be led and return to the arduous and necessary task of moderation and modernization.

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¹ "Czas na Zmiany" [Time for a change]. Michael Bichniewicz and Piotr M. Rudnicki in conversation with Jaroslaw Kaczynski, Warsaw 1993, p. 26.

² *Rzeczpospolita*, 23.12.1991.

³ *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 4.6.2006.

- ⁴ Jarolsaw Kaczynski, "Nowa Polska czy jeszcze stara?" [A new Poland or the same old one?], interview with Teresa Toranka in: *My [Wir]*, Warschau 1994, 115.
- ⁵ *Zycie Warszawy*, 16.8.1993.
- ⁶ *Zycie Warszawy*, 7.10.1993.
- ⁷ A. Przeworski, "Spiel mit Einsatz. Demokatisierungsprozesse in Lateinamerika, Osteuropa und anderswo" [Playing for stakes], *Transit — European Review* 1 (1990), 190–211. Cf. the equally sceptical contribution by Janos M. Kovacs, "Das große Experiment", *ibid.* 84–106. (ed.)
- ⁸ John Gray, "From Post–Communism to Civil Society: The Reemergence of History and the Decline of the Western Model", *Social Philosophy and Policy* 10, nr. 2 (1993).
- ⁹ Stephen Holmes, "Cultural Legacies or State Collapse? Probing the Postcommunist Dilemma", in: Michael Mandelbaum (ed.), *Postcommunism: four perspectives*, New York: 1996.
- ¹⁰ Karol Modzelewski, *Wohin von Kommunismus aus? Polnische Erfahrungen* [Where to go from communism? Polish experiences], Berlin: 1996, 37.

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