

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN POLAND FROM 1989 TO 1991

Introductory remarks

Republic of Poland is a country located in the Central Europe at the Baltic Sea.¹ It borders Germany, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania and Russia (Kaliningrad District). Over the Baltic Sea Poland also borders Sweden and Denmark. The history of Poland has its beginning in the 10th century once the first sovereign of Poland, Mieszko I, admitted the christening in 966. At present, there are the following periods in the history of Poland:²

- The First Republic of Poland history covers the period from the half of the 15th century (the democracy of nobility started in 1454) until the third Partition of Poland in 1795.

- The period: 1795-1918 - Poland had ceased to exist as a country and its territory was divided into three parts by Austria, Prussia, and Russia. In the meanwhile, the subsidiary and dependent on conqueror organizations of the Polish State come to existence like Warsaw Principality (1807-1815), Kingdom of Poland (1815-1918), (Polish) Republic of Crocow (1815-1864), Great (Grand) Principality of Poznań (1815-1848).

- The Second Republic of Poland 1918-1939, the independent country that came into existence after the First World War.

- 1939-1945 - The Second World War, the territory of Poland was divided between The Third Reich and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact) as a result of lost September Campaign and soviet troops invasion.

- The People's Republic of Poland (PRL), 1944-1989, country dependent on The Soviet Union. The leading political system was socialism, according to the constitution that was enacted in 1952, the political system in Poland was the people's democracy.

- The Third Republic of Poland - 1989 - original name, officially it is Republic of Poland. The country after specific political and social transformations that took place in 1989. The political system in Poland is parliamentary democracy that is based on the power divided into three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial powers. Republic of Poland has had the Constitution since 1997 and legally acting local government. Poland is an independent and sovereign country that is a member of many international organizations.

¹ PWN, *Internet Encyclopaedia of the Polish Scientific Publishing House*, Warsaw, 2007.

² Ibidem.

Buletinul Cercurilor Științifice Studențești, 14, 2008, p. 151-157

We could also mention that the period of the Fourth Republic of Poland that is the time when the Party Law and Justice won the elections in Poland. However, we should notice that the names "The Third" as well as "The Fourth Republic of Poland" are only informal ones. Nowadays, since the Liberal Party Civic Platform has won the elections on the 21st October 2007, it is hard to define the informal name of country.

Political and Economic Situation in Poland in 1989

At the beginning of 1989, Polish economy was ruined as a result of socialistic regime. After a view general strikes in 1956, 1960, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1980, 1981³ against the policy pursued by the government and enforcing the Martial Law (1981-1983), the Polish society demanded to bring changes into effect. There was a chaos within the country, Polish citizens were invigilated. The "Solidarity" members were kept on being arrested, the clergy was kept under surveillance, the food, electricity, coal and gas prices were going up. That situation lead to the riots and revolt risen by society.

The Polish economy was about to decline, the Polish national debt reached 31.2 billion USD in the middle of 1980's. That situation lead to referendum in 1987 on the "further reorganization of the country and economy." Next year, in 1988, the Polish government decided to increase the prices of basic products that was supposed to heal the economic crisis. In June of that year the coal mines go on strikes in Crocow, Szczecin, Gdańsk, Stalowa Wola. Lech Wałęsa as the major leader of "Solidarity" starts playing the role of a mediator that calls the workers to end up the strikes and personally starts the negotiations with the Prime Minister Kiszczak. As a result, the "underground" opposition has the opportunity to meet with the government's officials in September. Three months later, in December, the parliament enacts the bill that acknowledged the private business to be run "free and permitted to everyman on equal rights."

Since the early 1989 the situation was improved significantly that was related to withdrawal of the petrol, cars and coal coupons as well as arranging the time of the Round Table debate - negotiations that were conducted by the government with the opposition and the Polish Church officials. The debate of The Round Table⁴ started on the February 6th and lasted until April 1989. Four hundred fifty two individuals took part in those talks. The debate was carried on into two different groups: economy and the social policy affairs team, political reforms affairs team and the unions pluralism affairs team. There are the major arrangements of those negotiations:

³ See: <http://www.polskaludowa.com>.

⁴ Krzysztof Dubiński, *Okrągły stół*, Warsaw, 1999.

- Establishing the Senate with the number of 100 senators from majoritaire elections.
- Paritaire parliamentary elections - 65% seats for The Polish United Workers Party (PZPR - socialist party that exercised power in The People's Republic of Poland), United People's Party, Democratic Party and the post communist catholic organizations; the last 35% seats the non-party members were allowed to compete.
- Forming a post of the President of The People's Republic of Poland - appointed by The National Assembly for 6 years term.
- Modification of the act "Association Law Regulations" that made the legal "Solidarity" Movement registration possible.
- Making the opposition possible to have mass media.
- Agreement as for the "social and economic policy as well as the system reforms" with no effects.

As a matter of fact, the talks resulted in political system changes in Poland, mainly because of forming the post of the president, changing the parliamentary electoral law and establishing the Senate.

The first free elections for Parliament in Poland took place on June the 4th 1989. The attendance was 62% and "Solidarity" collected 252 out of 261 possible seats. A very significant and historical role played at that time the article written by the editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Adam Michnik entitled *Your President, our Prime Minister* that definitively shattered the arrangements of The Round Table. On July 19th 1989, The National Assembly elects Wojciech Jaruzelski (the First Secretary of the Central Committee of PZPR) for a President of The People's Republic of Poland and for the Prime Minister is appointed Czesław Kiszczak (PZPR), who resigns of the office after the coalition of "Solidarity", Democratic Party and United People's Party was formed. For the mission of forming the government Tadeusz Mazowiecki was assigned. That was him who used the slogan "thin line" for the first time, separating the age of communism and the new political system. At the time, the new Polish government started analyzing the crime against humanity in Katyń, dissolving the troops of militia and their assistance branches - ZOMO and ORMO as well as removing the statue of Feliks Dzierżyński.⁵

As soon as the first non-communist government after The Second World War took power in Poland, the changes in economy became noticeable. The Minister of Finance Leszek Balcerowicz⁶ started the changes in economic system. It was an attempt to start building the capitalism on the ruins of socialist system. The inflation rate in PRL reached about 250% a year and the currency reserves were extremely low. Leszek Balcerowicz had a very difficult

⁵ See: <http://www.polskaludowa.com>.

⁶ III RP, Polska dekada, www.polityka.pl.

task to do. As I mentioned, the hyper-inflation was high and the foreign indebtedness reached the amount of 42.3 billion of USD. Ten bills were performed to introduce reforms.⁷ As a result, the inflation and budget deficit as well as the lack of market products and the reduction of foreign indebtedness were decreased. The Balcerowicz Plan surely contributed to the economic growth and the transformation of the economic system from centrally planned into the free market.

On December 29th, 1989 the PRL parliament enacted a bill changing the Constitution that was amended in 1976:⁸

- The introduction and two first chapters concerning the leading role of PZPR and its connections with ally parties were removed.
- The name: The People's Republic of Poland was changed into Republic of Poland.
- The wording referring to the socialist country was changed into: "a democratic country, governed with the rule of law and following the principle of social justice."

Transformations in 1990-1992

In January 1990, during the 11th Party Congress (Convention),⁹ it was decided to finish the party activity. One should notice that by the end of 1990, about 150 new political parties had been registered. It was a clear sign of political changes. In February, a consensus was reached between Poland and the creditors of the Paris Club¹⁰ – the 14 countries that agreed to apportion 10 billion USD of the Polish national debt for ten years. In April the government restored the national holidays¹¹ that were in force in The Second Republic of Poland – The Third May Constitution holiday and The Independence Day (November 11th) simultaneously annulling the holiday of the July 22th, the National Holiday of Rebirth of Poland and the most important holiday in PRL. In July the censorship was also abolished as well as the press law was amended. In 1990 relations with the Soviet Union aggravated after the TASS¹² agency had released the following statement:

"[...] The whole of released archival materials allows to draw the conclusion on the direct responsibility of Beria, Mierkułow and other individuals like them for the crime committed in the forest of Katyń. The Russian part, expressing sorrow at

⁷ Leszek Balcerowicz, *Socjalizm, kapitalizm, transformacja, Szkice przelomu epok*, Warsaw, 1997.

⁸ Notice: *Ustawa z dnia 29 grudnia 1989 r. o zmianie Konstytucji Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej*, Dz. U. 1989, nr 75, poz. 444.

⁹ See: http://polityka.onet.pl/3rp/r_1990.html#zjazd.

¹⁰ See: www.finance.egospodarka.pl.

¹¹ See: www.polityka.pl.

¹² See: <http://www.pamietamkatyn1940.pl/218.xml>.

connection with this tragedy that took place in Katyń, declares that this is the one of the heaviest crimes of the age of stalinism [...].”

It took place during the official visit of the President of The Republic of Poland Wojciech Jaruzelski in Moscow from 11th to 14th April.

November of that year was an attempt of stabilization of the relations between Poland and Germany. In November the Foreign Ministers of Poland and Germany signed a treaty confirming the existing border between these two countries. Germany eventually confirmed the border delimited on the Oder and Nysa. However, more significant was the Great Polish-German Treaty concluded in 1991¹³ that opened the chapter of the new history between Federal Republic of Germany (after unification) and Republic of Poland. It included the postulates concerning the cooperation, good neighbourhood and the mutual regard for the minorities. It still introducing and therefore keeps on improving the relations between international entities.

In November 1990, the first democratic elections took place also in independent Poland. The first as well as the second round was won by the active “Solidarity” member, the builder of independent Poland – Lech Wałęsa. In the first round Tadeusz Mazowiecki was already defeated, a very successful politician, The First Prime Minister of non-communist government. The second round in tandem with Lech Wałęsa was gained by the businessman from Canada – Stanisław Tymiński. This fact may be justified with the tiredness of the Polish society with hard economic reforms in adapting to the free market and democratic system. On the 22th of December, the last President of The Republic of Poland in exile, Ryszard Kaczorowski handed over the insignia of power and the original of the Constitution of The Republic of Poland from 1935 to Lech Wałęsa.

A very popular term of 1990 was “Poland of Exchange offices.” The Polish currency had been already convertible into the western currencies within Polish territory that for the economists meant the most spectacular step in the first stage of the economic reform. American dolar became the fully available currency in banks and exchange offices. The dollar exchange rate had been on the level of 9,500 zł for a view months and stabilized the Polish currency. The black market slowly started vanishing and the possibility of free money transfer abroad attracted attention of the investors from West. Owing to commonness of the American currency, the number of deposit accounts in Polish złoty started to increase.

In 1991 the next economic reforms were introduced and the foreign policy was being strengthened. In January the currency booklets that evidenced the purchase of the foreign currencies were withdrawn from

¹³ *Traktat między Rzeczpospolitą Polską a Republiką Federalną Niemiec o dobrym sąsiedztwie i przyjaznej współpracy z 17.06.1991 r.*

circulation. In February, the Wyszechrad Triangle¹⁴ was formed – V4 (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, at present the Czech Republic and Slovakia). The major goal of the group was the cooperation with the European Union and NATO. On the 31st of March 1991 Poland officially broke off the activity within The Warsaw Treaty and in July, Poland signed the dissolution of the Council of the Common Economic Cooperation (RWPG). “According to the 1st article of the charter of RWPG, that organization aimed at supporting the development of the national economy, fastening the technological progress, uplifting the standards of industrialization, growth of work efficiency and increasing the prosperity of the member countries.”¹⁵

In May, the Parliament of Republic of Poland enacted the electoral law for parliamentary and Senate elections. In June, the Pope John Paul II made a pilgrimage to the independent motherland. On October 27th, the elections to Parliament and Senate took place in which the attendance was 43.2%. The largest number of seats acquired The Democratic Union – 62, however a very astonishing fact was that the post-communist party, the Alliance of the Democratic Left obtained 60 seats. After two months, Jan Olszewski was appointed to the post of the Prime Minister. Constituting the proof of the independent foreign policy of Poland was acceptance of the Ukraine independence in December 1991. Poland was the first country that accepted the independence of the ex-Soviet Union republic.

An interesting phenomenon in 1991 was the foreign trade, so called “the charm of market place” that meant the “businessmen from Eastern Europe wearing training suits who were buying the whole stuff that they were not able to buy in their native countries. They were saving the negative balance our foreign trade, simultaneously supporting the black economy. The market places reached their highest prosperity in 1996-1997 when the amount of informal export reached 6 billion USD that was the equivalent of the ¼ official exportation. In 1998 our neighbours from behind the eastern border were impeded to enter the Polish territory. Since then the international transactions in the large market places started to civilize and became weaker.”¹⁶

Conclusion

The date June 4th 1989 is considered to be the symbolic beginning of The Third Republic of Poland. The political transformation had been a long-term process of falling apart of communism which course was initiated by the arrangement made in the Round Table. Two outstanding activists of 1989 – Lech Wałęsa and Wojciech Jaruzelski lead to the great breakthrough. Since June 4th the history carried on fast and it seems, logically in one way. We have

¹⁴ Wyszechrad Declaration 1991.

¹⁵ See: <http://museum.defa.ru>.

¹⁶ See: http://polityka.onet.pl/3rp/r_1991.html#wybory.

been living in the independent Poland for 18 years, country that does not resemble the one before 1989, although brings many traces and marks and of the past.

I would like to end this essay with a quotation of the outstanding German sociologist and political scientist, Lord Ralph Dahrendorf:

„No one has ever invented a name for the new version of doctrine *separate but equal*; in private we live separately, but in the common, identical for everyone, public space.”

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TRANSFORMĂRI ISTORICE ȘI POLITICE ÎN POLONIA (1989-1991)

Rezumat

Ziua de 4 iunie 1989 este considerată a fi simbolul celei de-a treia Republici a Poloniei. Transformarea politică a fost posibilă datorită unui proces îndelungat, prin căderea comunismului, și inițiată de aranjamentele făcute de așa numita Masă Rotundă. Se poate spune fără a greși că, în cursul anului 1989, s-au remarcat două personalități politice, Lech Wałęsa și Wojciech Jaruzelski. Evenimentele ce au avut loc în anul 1989 au avut ca drept rezultat crearea unei noi Polonii, ce diferă mult de cea care exista în perioada comunistă, dar care mai păstrează încă multe urme ale trecutului.

Keywords: Republic of Poland, Wojciech Jaruzelski, Lech Wałęsa, “Solidarity”, The Round Table.