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SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION IN POLAND  
AND ITS CONSEQUENCES  
FOR EUROPE AND THE WORLD<sup>1</sup>

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INTRODUCTION

Although 74 years have passed since the end of the Second World War and thousands of books and various types of dissertations have been written about it, scholars, publicists and politicians still argue heatedly about the Second World War, its causes and effects, especially military, political, social, economic and international consequences for individual countries and nations and for Europe and the world. The problem is particularly difficult and at the same time painful for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, for which liberation meant the new Soviet occupation which lasted until 1989 (Fiszer 2016: 780–817). It ended with the outbreak of the so-called autumn of nations of 1989, which had far-reaching consequences for Poland, Germany, the Soviet Union, Europe and the whole world as it led to the fall of communism, the re-unification of Germany, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, the erosion of the Yalta-Potsdam order and the construction of a new, post-communist (post-Cold War) international order

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in the world. Thanks to this, a path of ‘return to Europe’ and membership of the Euro-Atlantic structures, i.e. of NATO and the European Union as well as of other international organisations, opened for also Poland. *Summa summarum*, the year 1989 permanently crossed out the heritage of Yalta and brought radical changes in Europe and in the world that surprised political scientists and futurologists. The satellite regimes in the countries conquered by the Red Army fell at the surprisingly rapid pace. Almost overnight Central and Eastern Europe swarmed with sovereign states that took the road to democracy and freedom. At that time there were great hopes and fears about what the future would bring.

In the article I try to define the ‘autumn of nations of 1989’ anew and show the essence of this process and its consequences for Poland, Europe and the world. I put forward interesting hypotheses and theses, among others I state that thanks to this, the path of ‘return to Europe’ and membership of the Euro-Atlantic structures, that is of NATO and the European Union, as well as of other international organisations, opened for Poland. As a result, today Poland is no longer in ruin, as it was in 1989. It is a sovereign, wealthy and respected democratic country. This is confirmed by various surveys and scientific research, as well as by the publications of historians, political scientists, sociologists and economists.

## 1. THE AUTUMN OF NATIONS OF 1989

In the literature on the subject we can find various attempts to define the essence of the ‘autumn of nations of 1989’ and to show the premises of its origin and effects. In my opinion the ‘autumn of nations of 1989’ was a dynamic, complex process of political changes (transformation) and international changes, which in the years 1989–1991 led to the fall of communism in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the re-unification of Germany, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. It was determined by a difficult internal situation in the Eastern bloc countries headed by the Soviet Union and many events on the international arena, among others, such as the massacre of students at Tiananmen Square in Beijing on 4 June 1989 (Łomanowski 2019: 8A)<sup>2</sup>, Ayatollah Khomeini’s death, which aroused hope

<sup>2</sup> In the square, on the night of 3 to 4 June 1989, tanks run over protesters who demanded freedom of speech and democratic reforms in China. To this day, it is not known how many people died: the estimates range from several hundred to several thousand victims. In today’s China, however, it is forbidden to mention those events.

for the normalisation of relations between Iran and Iraq and the peaceful evolution of Islamic fundamentalism. Its name refers to historical events in Europe in the years 1848–1849 defined as the ‘spring of nations’, which started in post-partition Poland in 1846 with the so-called Galician slaughter (uprising) in the Austro-Hungarian partition. It can also be stated that the European ‘autumn of nations of 1989’ was the anti-communist socio-political and economic transformation that began in 1989 in Poland, which caused the collapse of ‘real socialism’ in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and led to the re-unification of Germany and the collapse of the USSR in December 1991. It should be stressed that the ‘autumn of nations of 1989’ coincided with the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Bourgeois Revolution in France, which contributed to the fall of absolute tyranny in this country, and its slogan of ‘freedom-equality-brotherhood’ had a significant impact on the national liberation struggle of enslaved peoples throughout Europe and the shaping of their national consciousness, including that of Poles (Baszkiewicz, and Meller 1983, Baszkiewicz 1999, Baszkiewicz 2006, Davies 1997).

In his scientific publications on the ‘autumn of nations’, Professor Roman Kuźniar calls it the Eastern European ‘spring of peoples’ ‘89’ (Kuźniar 2016: 101–104, Kuźniar 2018: 37). He writes, among others, that:

‘Initiated by the agreements of the “round table” and the spectacular victory of Solidarity in the parliamentary elections on 4 June 1989, the Eastern European “Spring of Nations ‘89” resembled geopolitical dominoes. First, the communist regimes from Poland to Albania fell, that is the external empire of the Soviet Union. It was an impulse for movements demanding self-determination in the European republics of the USSR. The Baltic States were the first to free themselves, and in December 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed completely. The ‘iron curtain’ disappeared, the East-West division disappeared and the global bipolar balance of power vanished. The collapse of the world communist system could be interpreted only as the victory of the system linking the capitalist market economy with liberal democracy. Not only over the system that challenged it but also in historical terms as a non-alternative development model. In terms of the strategy as well as the development model, the entry into the new phase of the evolution of the international order was most accurately described at the time by two famous texts: of Francis Fukuyama on the “end of history” and Charles Krauthammer on the “unipolar moment”’ (Kuźniar 2018: 35).

Unfortunately, both of these visions of the post-communist democratic order, without wars, built under the auspices of the United States have not come true (Fiszer 2013, Fukuyama 1989: 3–18, Krauthammer 1990/1991). What is more, history has come full circle and today we are dealing with a new cold war, and the world is threatened by the Third World War.

The events in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989–1991 are also referred to in the literature on the subject as ‘1989 revolutions’ with far-reaching political, social, economic and international consequences. At first they seemed exciting, but from the perspective of time they turned out to be colourless. ‘Not a single new idea was created in Eastern Europe in 1989’, remarked François Furet, a great historian of the French Revolution. However, eminent German philosopher Jürgen Habermas disagreed with him. He was not particularly indignant at the ‘lack of ideas that are either innovative or future-oriented’ because for him, Eastern European revolutions were ‘corrective revolutions’ or ‘catching up revolutions’. Their goal was to restore the societies of Central and Eastern Europe to the mainstream of Western modernity, enabling Europeans from the East to gain what Westerners had long possessed. In 1989 the inhabitants of Central and Eastern Europe did not dream of an ideal world that had never existed. They missed ‘normal life’ in a ‘normal country’. As Adam Michnik later admitted:

‘I was obsessed with the fact that we should have a revolution that would not resemble the French or Russian revolutions, but rather the American one – in the sense that it would be for something, not against something. A revolution introducing the constitution, not paradise. An anti-utopian revolution, because utopias lead to a guillotine and the gulag’.

That is why his motto was: ‘Freedom, brotherhood, normality’. And Václav Havel described the Czechoslovak struggle for the overthrow of communism as ‘just an attempt at normalisation’. As well-known political scientists Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes write aptly:

‘After decades of communism spent looking at the supposedly bright future, in 1989 Central and Eastern Europe wanted to live in the present and derive pleasure from everyday life’ (Krastev, and Holmes 2018: 12–13).

However, life was not easy: the economic crisis, widespread poverty and pauperisation of society were ubiquitous here. In 1989, the pace of economic growth slowed down in the European countries of the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). Industrial production fell in Poland by 1.5%, in Hungary by 3.1%, and in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia it stopped growing. Stagnation or a decline in the performance efficiency indicators and the level of real income were observed everywhere. Budget deficits were growing. In relation to the national income, the budget deficit in the GDR in 1989 amounted almost to 2%, in Hungary – 5%, in Poland – 7%, not to mention the USSR where it reached about 10% of the national income.

Investment programmes collapsed, the number of new flats built decreased, trade turnover within the CMEA decreased (Gadomski 1990: 17–32).

The international situation in Europe and in the world, especially the progressive erosion of communism and the offensive, anti-communist policy of the United States supported by the Vatican headed by Pope John Paul II were also conducive to the outbreak of the ‘autumn of nations of 1989’ (Musiewicz 2011: 89–114). President Roland Reagan watched the violation of human rights, he treasured so much, in Poland, noticing in our country an extremely strong – as for the Soviet bloc – position of the Church and pinning on it some hopes of freeing Eastern Europe from the influence of communists. He also knew about the growing Solidarity movement, to which the United States lent considerable support (Musiewicz 2011: 107).

We need to point here especially to the anti-Soviet policy of President Ronald Reagan, the erosion of the communist system from the inside and attempts to rescue it through Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms (*perestroika* and *glasnost*) (Materski 2017: 153–198) and the process of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Reagan and his administration decided that communism was not something to co-exist with, but something that had to be destroyed, and to this end, from the early 1980s, they took steps to accelerate its collapse and at the same time sought agreement with Moscow. On 12 June 1989, the United States and the USSR concluded an agreement on protection against ‘dangerous military activity’, aimed at preventing a military confrontation due to an error, failure or misunderstanding. During this time, a thaw in relations between the USSR and Western European countries was also progressing, which was supported by Mikhail Gorbachev’s visits to Great Britain (12–15 June 1989), Germany and France, where he was enthusiastically greeted as the chief director of international detente. On 13 June 1989, a declaration on strengthening relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the USSR was signed in Bonn, which was a prelude to the later re-unification of Germany, to which Chancellor Helmut Kohl strived at all costs. As Wojciech Roszkowski writes:

‘The dismantling of communism in Central and Eastern Europe did not encounter any major obstacles from the USSR, it gained full support from the US’. In an address given by Mikhail Gorbachev to the Council of Europe on 6 July 1989 he stated that ‘Those who think that only the collapse of socialism will create the foundations of a common European home are wrong’, but he announced that ‘the USSR will not interfere in internal affairs

of its “allies” in Central and Eastern Europe, because the political system is a matter of choice of citizens themselves’ (Roszkowski 1997: 391–392).

In this way, the USSR said goodbye to the ‘Brezhnev doctrine’, which in practice deprived states belonging to the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance of sovereignty (Materski 2017: 133)<sup>3</sup>.

The communist system had been dying since the early 1980s. Mikhail Gorbachev’s attempts at rescuing it showed that it was irredeemable. Communism turned out to be a utopian ideology that was losing its supporters day by day. An augury and manifestation of the crisis of world communism were the events that took place in Poland in the summer of 1980, ended with the establishment of the Independent Self-governing Labour Union ‘Solidarity’, and then the introduction, under the pressure of Moscow, of martial law in Poland on 13 December 1981 by general Wojciech Jaruzelski’s government, the martial law which eventually ended on 22 July 1984. However, it did not stop the erosion of the communist system in Poland and throughout Central and Eastern Europe. General Jaruzelski and his associates must have realised that without including the democratic opposition centred around ‘Solidarity’ in public life, it would not be possible to overcome the deepening economic stagnation that might have led to another uncontrolled social outbreak in Poland. An important role was also played here by

‘a positive interaction (...), based on the West’s support for the changes, the essence of which was the liberalisation of the communist system. “Partners” for this kind of policy were to a certain extent some of the reformist-minded communist leaders, but above all the democratic opposition circles developing in some communist countries since the second half of the 1970s’ (Kuźniar 2008: 35).

In such a situation, not being able to count on ‘fraternal’ intervention or economic help from the USSR, the authorities had no way out. They had to set the course for a more comprehensive dialogue and compromise. The effect of this course and of cool calculations on the part of the democratic opposition was the consent of Jaruzelski’s regime for talks at the ‘round

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<sup>3</sup> An outline of the ‘Brezhnev doctrine’ was presented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR Andrei Gromyko in a speech at the session of the UN General Assembly in October 1968 and its interpretation supported by the ideological foundation by Leonid Brezhnev in a speech at the Fifth Congress of the Polish United Workers’ Party in Warsaw in November 1968. It was binding until the end of the 1980s, and its main principle was that ‘socialist internationalism’ had supremacy over the sovereignty and interest of states, in other words only the interest of the USSR mattered.

table' that lasted from February to the beginning of April 1989. They led to an agreement between the government of the communist generals and 'Solidarity'. It provided, among others, for the legalisation of 'Solidarity' and the democratic opposition gathered around it, concessions in the sphere of freedom of speech and the announcement of quite far-reaching systemic political and economic reforms. Polish and foreign historians and political scientists agree that it was the Polish 'round table' that initiated the process of changes in Europe, which went down in history as the above-mentioned 'autumn of nations of 1989'. It became the symbol of the end of communism. It inaugurated the process of political transformation in Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Kuzniar 2016: 102, Wielowieyski 2019: A12). However, this event still arouses great emotions. Some perceive it as the foundation of democratic changes, the first step on the way to full freedom and sovereignty, and others as the original sin of Polish democracy.

Scientific research shows that systemic transformation in the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, resulting from the 'autumn of nations of 1989', had a multidimensional character. It coincided with the process of their Europeanisation and preparations for association with the European Communities, and then for membership of NATO and the European Union. Therefore, it was necessary to respond to both the systemic and general-civilisational challenges, determined by growing globalisation and international integration.

## 2. SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION IN POLAND

There is no doubt that 1989 is one of the most significant years in the history of Poland in the twentieth century. It became a symbol of radical changes of the previous socio-political and economic system in Poland, which is commonly referred to as a political or systemic transformation. It began with an agreement reached at the 'round table' (Łuczak 2010b: 7–41, Skórzyński 2009)<sup>4</sup> between the communist elite and the leaders of the

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<sup>4</sup> The 'round table' talks were held from 6 February to 5 April 1989 in three main negotiating teams (economy and social policy, political reforms and trade union pluralism) in the so-called Presidential Palace in Krakowskie Przedmieście in Warsaw. They were preceded by unofficial talks between the government and the opposition, held in the residence of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Magdalenka, about which many legends and contradictory opinions circulate.

democratic opposition (Łuczak 2010b). As Jan Skórzyński, the author of one of the best works on the subject, writes:

‘The Round Table Agreement is one of those events in the history of Poland that still arouse controversy and disputes. Its circumstances, results and political consequences are not assessed unequivocally, which is largely due to the presence of many authors of that compromise in public life. In this situation, historical disputes often turn into political contention, substantive arguments give way to emotions and *a priori* convictions. There is also disagreement as to the reconstruction of the events. (...) Conjectures, journalistic opinions and superficial interpretations prevail in it’ (Skórzyński 2009: 11).

An example of this, and at the same time of falsification, politicisation and ideologisation of the effects of the ‘round table’ may be, among others, the statement of Andrzej Zybertowicz, adviser to the President of the Republic of Poland, who on 5 February 2019, that is on the eve of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the ‘round table’ talks, at the meeting with schoolchildren said that:

‘At that time, we did not realise the real condition of the authorities. Even today many observers of the Round Table do not realise how much truth there was in Andrzej Gwiazda’s commentary after the Round Table talks, who said that during the meeting the authorities had shared power with their own agents’ (Zakrzewski 2019: 16).

In my opinion, there is no doubt that the ‘round table’ talks were the only peaceful way to overthrow communism in Poland. The ‘round table’ has been recognised by psychologists all over the world as a great negotiation success, which enabled solving a very difficult socio-political conflict in a civilised way (Kofta, and Leszczyński 2019). This, opened for Poland a new perspective for the transformation of the political system and the regaining of sovereignty, both in domestic and foreign policy. This thesis finds its conformation in the research of many renowned historians, such as aforementioned Professors: Jan Skórzyński, Wojciech Roszkowski, Maria Jarosz, Antoni Dudek or Andrzej Friszke. It is also corroborated by various surveys and opinion polls, among others the one conducted by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) on 10–17 January 2019, in which as many as 22% of respondents acknowledged the ‘round table’ talks as the beginning of the end of communism in Poland (Public Opinion Research Center 2019: 1–2). An alternative to the ‘round table’ was a civil war, which would perhaps entail Soviet intervention in Poland and the outbreak of the Third World War.

The ‘round table’ talks began on 6 February 1989 with a plenary meeting, followed by a few weeks of meetings and discussions of the governmental and opposition parties at the thematic sub-tables. Anna Machcewicz writes that:

‘These discussions were interrupted when both sides needed to confer among themselves, as these were often tough negotiations. What makes it piquant is that several informal meetings took place in the residence of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Magdalenka, during which the communist politicians and representatives of the opposition sat down at one table and not only discussed, but also ate, drank alcohol, joked. The outcome of the round table sessions was an agreement adopted on 5 April 1989. A partially free election to the Sejm and an entirely free election to the Senate were negotiated’ (Machcewicz 2019: 8).

To this day, historians have been discussing and arguing about the motives of those in power and strategies of the opposition. They are aware of the complexity of the transformation process, divisions in the environment of the ruling camp and inside the opposition as to holding joint debates. They emphasise that both parties came with different goals and each of them won something: the communists – the president, the opposition – free elections to the Senate. They justify informal talks in Magdalenka, which may arouse disgust, but were tactically and psychologically significant. There are also legends which show the same events in different light. The white legend of the ‘round table’ says that the communists voluntarily and nobly gave power to ‘Solidarity’. The black legend builds a myth about communist collusion, a scam aimed at citizens, in which some opposition representatives took part. The mentioned meetings in Magdalenka presented as a conspiracy are an element of this legend. For years more and more details have accumulated in both myths which have played a consolidating role for some political groups (Machcewicz 2019).

Arguing about the role of individual decisions and events accompanying the ‘round table’ talks, historians and publicists, however, have no doubt that this was the beginning of Polish sovereignty and of building democracy in Poland after 1989. The ‘round table’ talks, full of dramatic twists, were laced with the weaknesses of the parties trying to reach an agreement. The economic crisis and chaos in People’s Poland undermined the power of the communist authorities, and ‘Solidarity’, weakened by the years of repression, was a shadow of its power from 1980–1981. On the one hand, most of the Polish United Workers’ Party apparatus feared that this situation was going to deprive them of power and privileges; on the other hand, radical opposition factions, especially Kornel Morawiecki’s Fighting Solidarity, accused the solidarity team of treason, and called the talks ‘disgrace’, sparing only the representatives of the Episcopate. Jacek Kuroń, one of the architects of the agreement, wrote in his memoirs that the ‘round table’ was

‘a national assembly, representation that was supposed to establish something. These were negotiations of the parties, one of which represented power, while the other claimed to represent society, and was also not convinced whether the public would accept the terms of the agreement’ (Beylin 2019: 2–3).

Only the Church felt secure at the ‘round table’. It must be emphasised here that without the Church, the agreement would not have been reached in 1989, and later the peaceful change of the system would not have taken place. The Church supported by Pope John Paul II appeared then as an undisputed national authority and a legitimate representative of society. Aware of its strength, it took advantage of it in negotiations, disciplining either the authorities or the solidarity side which, of course, it supported. Not only during the ‘round table’, but also earlier, trying painstakingly to effect it from August 1988. However, already in the 1990s, it tried to obliterate its own role in these negotiations. A great part of the Church was unable to find its feet in the difficult principles of democracy. In the 1980s and at the ‘round table’, the Church combined political power with social authority. In the 1990s it used its power against the Third Polish Republic, not understanding that instead of upholding its authority, it adopted an attitude which was unacceptable for a growing number of Poles (Beylin 2019: 2).

The ‘round table’ agreement first of all established the institutional shape of the state, including the division of competences in the field of implementing internal and foreign policy. At the request of the coalition and government parties, a presidential office was created, to which on 19 July 1989 the General Assembly elected Wojciech Jaruzelski, the martial law originator, fierce opponent of ‘Solidarity’, chairman of the Council of State and the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party. Historians and political scientists still argue about him and whether he should have become the first president of the Third Polish Republic (Nałęcz 2017, Nałęcz 2018: 220–263, Kowal 2015: 538–543). The Poles abided by this choice with mixed feelings. However, in the world such a solution was accepted with relief

‘For Moscow and Washington, such a decision was convenient: the general well known to all politicians ensured stabilisation on the Vistula’ (Kowal, and Cieślík 2015: 45–46).

Under the amended Constitutional Act of 7 April 1989 (Ustawa z dnia 7 kwietnia 1989 r. o zmianie Konstytucji PRL) President W. Jaruzelski had a wide range of competences: he was ‘the highest representative of the Polish State in internal and international relations’, he ‘guarded the sovereignty and

security of the state, the inviolability and indivisibility of its territory, and the observance of interstate political and military alliances'. In addition, he had supremacy over the Armed Forces, appointed their Supreme Commander and presided over the National Defence Committee. The president decided about the state of war, martial law and a state of emergency. Only the president was given the competence to present to the parliament a candidate for the prime minister's office. Moreover, no minister could be designated without the consent of the head of state. An additional attribute of the presidency was the possibility of convening the Council of Ministers and presiding over its sessions. The lack of trust between the prime minister and the government could therefore completely paralyse the work of the latter. The constitution of April 1989 did not provide for any political responsibility of the president, nor the rule of countersigning his official acts by the prime minister or a relevant minister. Apart from that, as a result of the six-year term and the possibility of being re-elected, this office was the strongest element of power. Thus, both in domestic and foreign policy, W. Jaruzelski had a wide range of competences, which he initially tried to use, to keep as much power as possible for the members of Polish United Workers' Party. To this end, contrary to the concept of 'your president, our prime minister' (Kowal, and Cieřlik 2015: 311–316), adopted at the 'round table', he designated general Czesław Kiszczak as the prime minister, who, however, failed to form a new government. Eventually, Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the first non-communist prime minister, which meant the beginning of the end of Wojciech Jaruzelski's presidency. Nevertheless, he managed to introduce to Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government four high-level representatives of the Polish United Workers' Party, including general Czesław Kiszczak as a deputy prime minister and minister of internal affairs, and general Florian Siwicki as a defence minister. The disbandment of the Polish United Workers' Party on 27 January 1990, preceded by the amendment of the constitution of 29 December 1989, which put an end to the socialist political and economic system existing in Poland, accelerated Wojciech Jaruzelski's decision to resign from the post of the president of the Republic of Poland, which he held until 22 December 1990 (Nałęcz 2018: 230–257, *Ustawa o zmianie Konstytucji PRL z 29 grudnia 1989*).

As Daria Nałęcz writes,

'In the spring of 1990, he clearly lost the desire to confront the winners, although his surroundings urged him to do so. He was more and more inclined to resign from his post. He did not want to use any of the suggested tricks to defend his office. In his own way, he realised that his role was over. He said that he wanted to be a guarantor of a peaceful transformation, and it is difficult to argue with such an assessment. He did nothing to the

detriment of the government. He often actively supported the new authorities' (Nałęcz 2018: 257).

A similar assessment of W. Jaruzelski's role in the process of political transformation in Poland can be found in the valuable work of Roman Kuźniar, who writes:

'Although General Jaruzelski facilitated the transition from communism to democracy, the fact that the martial law originator remained in office in reborn Poland was rightly perceived as political and moral dissonance' (Kuźniar 2008: 41).

In the Polish political transformation, started at the 'round table', the features of radicalism characteristic of a revolution were intertwined with evolutionary changes controlled by both the opposition and the government side. It should be emphasised that both sides 'respected' the internal and international order. This combination created a mixture of revolutionary and evolutionary changes, the penetration of transformation and reform of controlled and uncontrolled processes. The symbolic, bloodless transition from the Polish People's Republic (PRL) to the Third Republic of Poland (RP), which happened in December 1989 together with the amendment to the Constitution, opened a new period in the history of the Polish state and nation. There is an extensive literature on the subject (Dudek 2007, Jarosz 2005a, Kołodko 2007, Kuźniar 1992, Łuczak 2010a, Morawski 1998, Sadowski 1994, Słomka 2009: 89–104, Staar 1993, Trembicka 2003).

### 3. ELECTIONS TO THE SEJM AND SENATE IN 1989 AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

As I have already mentioned, as a consequence of the unfavourable economic situation and numerous resulting strikes, the 1980s were a difficult period for Poland. Both the authorities in Poland and the opposition were aware of the need to carry out thorough reforms aimed at democracy, whose success to some extent was possible thanks to Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power in the USSR. For the authorities, the strategic interlocutors in this area were opposition activists of 'Solidarity', who on 18 December 1988 formed a Citizens' Committee with Lech Wałęsa as the chairman (Dudek 2007: 25). For the Polish society the Committee was a voice not only of 'Solidarity' but of the entire opposition, which was supposed to improve the situation in the country. It was also an important step on the way to the future

‘round table’ talks in which the opposition was supposed to participate. In the ‘round table’ talks, which began on 6 February 1989 in the Presidential Palace, 54 representatives of the government and opposition sides took part, of which 26 participants represented the solidarity side. The selection of the representatives of the opposition had been strictly controlled by special services, which had interfered in its composition until the very last moment. The talks can be divided into three topics, including political reforms, economic and social reforms and reforms related to trade union pluralism. The greatest objectives were achieved on the political plane, thanks to which the concluded agreements facilitated building a new political system. The most important effects of the ‘round table’ talks include the restoration of the Senate with its majority elections and the quota elections to the Sejm, which would include 35% of non-party candidates and 65% of the members of the Polish United Workers’ Party, the United People’s Party, the Democratic Party together with pro-communist organisations of Catholics (Dudek 2007: 26–33).

The election to the Sejm of the 10<sup>th</sup> term, which took place on 4 June 1989, showed a high voter turnout, which on that day amounted to 62.3%. In the second round this rate dropped to 25.1%, and the reason for such a significant decrease was the fact that representatives of the government side competed for vacant seats (Dudek 2007: 33–46). The election to the Sejm turned out to be a success of the Independent Self-governing Labour Union ‘Solidarity’, which in both rounds of voting won 161 seats, i.e. all that fell to the opposition candidates (35%). In the election to the Senate of the 1<sup>st</sup> term representatives of the ‘Solidarity’ Citizens’ Committee won as many as 99 out of 100 seats (Dudek 2007). As Adam Michnik writes:

‘also the Catholic Church played an important role in this election, supporting – for the sake of common good – democratic solutions. Pope John Paul II’ great authority assisted us at the time. The role of the Church was important, although not entirely unambiguous: already then the candidates supported by some bishops appeared who wanted to take over the place of the outstanding figures of the democratic camp, such as, among others Jacek Kuroń, Bronisław Geremek, Jan Józef Lipski. It was an augury of later divisions’ (Michnik 2019: 1).

The June elections became a hope for the Polish society for the upcoming reforms that were to lead to the total fall of the current regime and enable development that would translate into an improvement in the living conditions of the whole society. When asked about what the Poles voted for on 4 June 1989, Adam Michnik answers:

‘For rejecting the dictatorship – both foreign and domestic. They voted for Poland of agreement, but not of revenge’ (Michnik 2019).

On the other hand, Antoni Dudek writes that:

‘The June elections were decisive for the collapse of the communist regime and the birth of the Third Polish Republic. This happened despite the attitude of the leaders of Solidarity, essentially completely unprepared to take advantage of the enormous wave of public support that was revealed on 4 June. Fearful of the authorities’ reactionary response and the outbreak of an uncontrolled social movement, they paralysed all attempts to depart from the round table contract. The price of avoiding this risk, the probability of which is still the subject of numerous controversies, was high. The consent to the manipulation of the electoral law proved that the leaders of the Citizens’ Committee were inclined to treat the will of the majority of society instrumentally in the implementation of their political plans. For many Poles it meant betrayal of the ideological foundations on which “Solidarity” was built, and the beginning of the era of moral relativism, which has reigned in Polish public life in the following years’ (Dudek 2007: 45–46).

In the first general and direct presidential election, which was guaranteed by Resolution 398 of 27 September 1990 *On the Election of the President of the Republic of Poland* (Ustawa z dnia 27 września 1990 r. o wyborze Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej), Lech Wałęsa and Tadeusz Mazowiecki competed for the office of the head of State. The first round of the election took place on 25 November and the second on 9 December 1990, when the Polish society chose Lech Wałęsa as the President of the Republic of Poland. Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the prime minister of the first non-communist government in Poland in 50 years, and Leszek Balcerowicz – deputy prime minister responsible for economic and financial affairs. It was the duty of the deputy prime minister to create a new economic system that would allow market economy principles to be introduced in Poland (Wilczyński 2005: 92–93). The purpose of the economic transformation plan, called Balcerowicz’s shock therapy, was to attain three priority goals. The first of these was to stop hyperinflation, which in 1989 reached a drastic level of 700% (Żukrowska 2009: 278). To a large extent it was caused by the marketisation of agriculture by the last communist Prime Minister Mieczysław Rakowski. *Notabene*, the transformation of Polish agriculture was poorly carried out, and its effects are felt even today. The tool to fight the hyperinflation were huge constraints on budget spending, among others by the liquidation of subsidies to prices, for state-owned enterprises and the introduction of a tax on excess wages (so-called popiwiek). The second goal was to effect a smooth transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy in a short period of time (half a year). As a result of the lack of experience of other former Eastern Bloc countries in this area and the wide

range of changes necessary to introduce, this goal was achieved only in 1995, that is after about five years, and its enormous costs were borne by the public (Żukrowska 2009: 278–279). The third goal, the pursuance of which began in the autumn of 1990, was the start of the process of privatisation of the Polish economy, which has continued to this day. The reform plan was accepted in autumn 1989 by the International Monetary Fund and on 17 December 1989 it was submitted to the Sejm for approval. The set of 11 acts, called the ‘Balcerowicz Plan’, was adopted by the Sejm on 27 December, ten days after their submission, which proves a hasty irrational action without careful consideration (Kołodziej 2015: 80). Balcerowicz’s plan initially enjoyed huge public support, which after the change of government enthusiastically accepted all reforms, in particular those that were identified with ‘Solidarity’. In addition, the sense of confusion and loss of Polish society influenced absolute confidence in the rightness of the shock therapy which would raise the standard of living. People were deluding themselves into thinking that an ‘economic miracle’ would occur in a short time. It was also important that the society was cut off from reliable information provided in the mass media about threats resulting from the Balcerowicz Plan. Only positive opinions about the shock therapy appeared on the radio, television and in the press, there was no room for criticism and public debate (Kołodziej 2015: 84–85).

The process of economic transformation initiated in Poland necessitated the introduction of an immediate process of adapting the production structure to meet competition requirements. Obsolete production methods required huge financial outlays to implement innovative solutions not to lead to the collapse of domestic enterprises in the face of foreign competition. The transfer of innovative technological solutions was to be accelerated through the mass sale of national wealth to foreign capital. This led to a number of negative consequences, which, combined with the lack of experience in functioning in the capitalist world, was a threat to domestic enterprises, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (Woźniak 2017: 16–18).

In macroeconomic and microeconomic terms, an inseparable element of transformation in all post-communist countries was the change of ownership relations in which the prevalence of private ownership over state ownership was sought. The privatisation of state-owned enterprises was to translate into an increase in their efficiency, and the very idea of ownership change to the creation of new private plants. The role of the state in this process was to be limited only to shaping and ensuring compliance with the imposed conditions of business activity. Thanks to this, fiscal goals were to be achieved, which would provide income to the budget from the sale of national property,

and additionally limit budget expenditures on financial support for these enterprises. Social goals were also important, thanks to which access to the property being privatised was guaranteed to the whole society, and not to specific groups, e.g. the elite of the previous regime. An inseparable element of the privatisation of state-owned enterprises was the implemented restructuring, which was to be offset by the creation of posts in new private plants (Bałtowski, and Kozarzewski 2014: 106–112). The beginning of the 1990s was not an easy period for the development of entrepreneurship of Poles who had very limited knowledge about competition and the functioning of business in a market economy. It was not preceded by learning through action and experiences of the previous generation (Woźniak 2017: 18–19). The formation of the new system, completely different from previous management, the lack of sufficient knowledge, and thus the fear of the unknown, aroused in most of society the aversion to risk that the entrepreneur could have incurred when starting his activity. Thus, the image of the Polish entrepreneur in the first years of transformation shows him as a creative person, intensively working to achieve a professional success. However, this is not the only image of the entrepreneur from this period, because there was also a group, which included employers taking advantage of their employees, or often engaged in illegal activities (Goszczyńska 2010: 197).

## CONCLUSION

The process of political transformation, which started in Poland in 1989, undoubtedly had a huge impact on Poland's future membership of the European Union. Reforms aimed at building a democratic state brought our country closer to the countries of Western Europe, at the same time loosening the dominant political and economic ties with the Soviet Union. In the process of these changes one should not forget about huge help of the West, especially the United States and the European Communities, which supported the initiated transformation and strengthening of the democratic system in Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. As early as in July 1989, the Commission of the European Communities started implementing the PHARE programme (Poland and Hungary Assistance for Restructuring their Economies), the aim of which was to support economic and political reforms in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary (Fiszer 2002: 9–30). This support was a perfect example of long-term investment, since the blurring of differences between the developed West and the countries

of Central and Eastern Europe was to translate in the future into closer cooperation, bringing benefits to both sides (Kołodziej 2015: 102).

Although the inflow of foreign capital and investors was a threat to domestic enterprises that had to face the rules of competition, it was also a valuable time to get to know and implement free market principles and rules. Also the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund contributed immensely to overcoming the transformation difficulties. Undoubtedly, this beneficial cooperation resulted from the fact that Poland belonged to the founding countries of both organisations, from which it had to withdraw in 1950 as a result of international conditions. In August 1990, Poland received a USD 300 million loan from the World Bank, the purpose of which was to support the structural reforms. In addition, the World Bank actively participated in activities involving government expenditure management, healthcare reforms, anti-corruption and initiatives related to the social sphere and environmental protection (Żukrowska 2009: 584). The support in the possibility of taking loans was not a form of one-off aid, as evidenced by the fact that since 1990, as many as 66 loans for Poland were approved, the total value of which amounted to USD 4.8 milliard (Żukrowska 2009: 585). From 1990 until the end of 1994, Poland received financial assistance in the form of loans granted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the total worth of which amounted to SDR 1.224 milliard. However, the amount of loans alone was not the most important value of the IMF support. Poland gained the possibility of taking further loans from the most developed countries and creating a stabilisation fund supporting the internal convertibility of the zloty.

The path that Poland followed from a state fully subordinated to the economy and politics of the USSR to become an independent, democratic state was extremely difficult and time-consuming. This process required the introduction of thorough political and economic reforms, but also changes in the way of thinking and acting of Polish society. Free elections of government representatives, gradual ousting of the elites in power in the previous regime and finally the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, passed on 2 April 1997, strengthened forging of democracy, which inhibited the possibility of the extension of the functioning of the previous system. In the economic sphere

‘the ratio of the relative level of the Polish economy increased (...) from around 30% in 1988 to around 50% in 2013’ (Gomułka 2016: 64).

Great attainments of this period were the construction of the foundation of the private enterprise sector, raising the qualifications of employees and the average GDP growth rate by approx. 4% per annum (Gomułka 2016: 65).

Today Poland is almost five times as rich as 30 years ago. The economic transformation, despite the costs, in total turned out to be successful. In 2018, 82% of Poles polled by CBOS assessed that they live on a medium or good level (including very good), and only 19% thought they lived modestly or very poorly. For comparison: in 1993, when CBOS first asked about it, over half of Poles considered themselves poor. Only 3% of respondents lived well and very well. The level of wealth calculated as the value of GDP per one Pole (in the purchasing power parity) is today almost five times as big as 30 years ago, and the real purchasing power of the gross domestic product per capita has increased threefold. Today, over 22.5 million cars drive on Polish roads, 30 years ago – there were only 5.2 million. According to many economists, the success of the transformation of the Polish economy is a combination of many factors, but the most important thing is that we virtually owe it to ourselves. An important role was played by Poles' growing awareness that Poland and its citizens were facing a chance for better future, which must not be wasted. It mobilised Poles to sacrifice and bear considerable transformation costs, such as high unemployment persisting over the years, escape into professional inactivity, income stratification of society, etc. Reforms of higher education, so that it would be at the world level or the justice system have not been entirely successful (Cieślak-Wróblewska, and Siemionczyk 2019: 3, Jarosz 2005b).

Thirty years after the elections to the Sejm and the Senate, the successes of the political transformation in Poland are overshadowed by the value of the still growing public debt, reaching at the end of 2018 PLN 1.035 billion. Over three years, the Law and Justice government incurred the debt amounting to PLN 111 milliard, but the Civic Platform-Polish People's Party government was a record holder in the term during the world financial and economic crisis. Economists comfort that, although the debt is nominally growing, fortunately it has been falling in relation to the size of the entire economy for two years (Cieślak-Wróblewska 2019: A21).

Summarising the above considerations, it should be noted that the transformation that was initiated in 1989 opened Poland to the West and gave it a chance to participate in free of divisions, democratic Europe. It enabled the start of Poland's operation in the free market, which became the basis for starting efforts to create the Weimar Triangle and join the European Union.

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## THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SEJM AND SENATE ELECTIONS IN 1989. SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION IN POLAND AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR EUROPE AND THE WORLD

### Abstract

This article is devoted to elections to the Sejm and Senate on 4 June 1989, about which historians and political scientists have argued to this day. Some think that they had historic, profound significance in the struggle for sovereign and democratic Poland, and others claim that they were the result of a conspiracy between communists and the opposition centered around Solidarity, headed by Lech Wałęsa. The indisputable fact is that they were the result of negotiations and agreements reached at the ‘round table’, which inaugurated the process of radical changes in Europe. It went down in history under the name of the ‘autumn of nations of 1989’.

The author tries to redefine the ‘autumn of nations of 1989’ and shows the essence of this process and its consequences for Poland, Europe and the world. He puts forward interesting hypotheses and theses, among others he states that thanks to this, the path of ‘return to Europe’ and membership of the Euro-Atlantic structures, that is of NATO and the European Union, as well as of other international organisations, opened for Poland. As a result, today Poland is no longer a state in ruin, as it was in 1989. It is a sovereign, wealthy and democratic country respected in the world.

Keywords: Sejm, Senate, election, political transformation, ‘autumn of nations of 1989’, Poland, Europe, world

## TRZYDZIESTA ROCZNICA WYBORÓW DO SEJMU I SENATU W 1989 ROKU. TRANSFORMACJA USTROJOWA W POLSCE I JEJ KONSEKWENCJE DLA EUROPY I ŚWIATA

### Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł jest poświęcony wyborom do Sejmu i Senatu w dniu 4 czerwca 1989 roku, wokół których po dzień dzisiejszy toczą się spory między historykami i politologami. Jedni bowiem uważają, że miały one historyczne, przełomowe znaczenie w walce o suwerenną i demokratyczną Polskę, a inni twierdzą, że były one efektem spisku między komunistami i opozycją skupioną wokół Solidarności na czele z Lechem Wałęsą. Bezsprzecznym faktem jest to, że były one efektem negocjacji i porozumień osiągniętych przy „okrągłym stole”, które zainaugurowały proces radykalnych zmian w Europie. Przeszedł on do historii pod nazwą „jesieni ludów 1989”.

Autor próbuje tutaj na nowo zdefiniować „jesień ludów 1989” i pokazuje istotę tego procesu oraz jego konsekwencje dla Polski, Europy i świata. Stawia ciekawe hipotezy i tezy, m.in. stwierdza, że dzięki temu otworzyła się też dla Polski droga do „powrotu do Europy” i członkostwa w strukturach euroatlantyckich, czyli w NATO i Unii Europejskiej oraz w innych organizacjach międzynarodowych. W efekcie Polska nie jest już dziś państwem w ruinie, tak jak było w 1989 roku. Jest to suwerenny, bogaty i szanowany na świecie kraj.

Słowa kluczowe: Sejm, Senat, wybory, transformacja ustrojowa, „jesień ludów 1989”, Polska, Europa, świat

## Тридцатая годовщина выборов в Сейм и Сенат в 1989 году. Политическая трансформация в Польше и её последствия для Европы и мира

### Резюме

Настоящая статья посвящена выборам в Сейм и Сенат, которые проходили 4 июня 1989 года и о которых до сих пор ведутся споры между историками и политологами. Одни считают, что они имели историческое, переломное значение в борьбе за суверенную и демократическую Польшу; другие же утверждают, что они были результатом заговора коммунистов

и оппозиционной организации, связанной с движением «Солидарность» во главе с Лехом Валенсой. Неоспоримым фактом является то, что эти выборы были следствием результатом переговоров и соглашений, достигнутых за «круглым столом», которые положили начало процессу радикальных перемен в Европе и вошли в историю под названием «Осень народов 1989 года».

Автор предпринимает попытку переопределения «Осени народов 1989 года» и представляет суть этого процесса и его последствия для Польши, Европы и мира; выдвигает интересные гипотезы и тезисы; в частности, заявляет, что благодаря данному процессу Польше также открылся путь к «возвращению в Европу» и к членству в евроатлантических структурах, прежде всего в НАТО и Европейском союзе и других международных организациях. В результате Польша в настоящее время уже не является разрушенной страной, как это было в 1989 году, а суверенным, богатым и признаваемым во всём мире государством.

Ключевые слова: Сейм, Сенат, выборы, политическая трансформация, «Осень народов 1989 года», Польша, Европа, мир

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