

	<p><b>Annals of Social Sciences and Perspective</b></p> <p>ISSN (Print): 2707-7063, ISSN (Online): 2788-8797                  Volume 4, Number 2, July-December 2023, Pages 355-366                  Journal homepage: <a href="http://assap.wum.edu.pk/index.php/ojs">http://assap.wum.edu.pk/index.php/ojs</a></p>
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**- From Authoritarianism to Democracy in Poland Catholic church, the Union Movement Solidarity and the History of Democratic Change**

**Zoran R. Jovović<sup>1\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Zoran R. Jovović, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Montenegro, Montenegro. [jovoviczoran70@gmail.com](mailto:jovoviczoran70@gmail.com)

\*Corresponding Author's Email Address: [jovoviczoran70@gmail.com](mailto:jovoviczoran70@gmail.com)

ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
<p><b>History:</b></p> <p>Received: March 10, 2023                      Accepted: November 28, 2023</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b></p> <p>Authoritarianism                      Democratic Transition                      Democratic consolidation                      Semi-presidential system                      Poland</p> <p><b>DOI:</b></p> <p>10.52700/assap.v4i2.257</p>	<p>While focusing on the democratic transition in Poland, the article first discusses authoritarian and democratic politics, as well as the values that are characteristic of both. Starting from them, we focus on the transition from authoritarianism to democracy and in this context we consider: the union movement Solidarity and the contribution of the Catholic Church in overthrowing communism and the development of democratic ideas. In accordance with the above, we consider the position and role of political leaders and political parties, i.e. the party system in the transition process and their contribution to social welfare, that is, the action of both in the direction of democratic consolidation. Both the democratic transition and the democratic consolidation in Poland, as well as in other societies of Central and Eastern Europe, had their own specifics and accordingly there is the interest in considering this problem, more precisely this popular political phenomenon.</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">© 2023 The Authors, Published by WUM. This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Common Attribution Non Commercial 4.0</p>

**1. Introduction**

The main goal of this paper is to investigate the transition from a non-democratic to a democratic regime, as well as the (many) peculiarities of both political regimes in Poland. This implies the investigation of many factors that enable or eventually prevent a successful transition from one state to another. First, we argue that the origin of the democratic transition is more authoritarian than the post-totalitarian regime, although (post)totalitarian intentions were compact. Secondly, we argue that the democratic transition in Polish society resulted from preserving a certain degree of social and even political pluralism during communist rule. This primarily refers to the autonomy of the Catholic Church and science, that is, the intelligentsia. Thirdly, we argue that the Solidarity movement was vital in starting the transition process in which Lech Wałęsa, along with other leaders and groups, played a significant role. Fourth, the authoritarian regime was led by the party's soldiers, and we claim that it initiated a transition explicitly dominated by agreements – an agreed transition. Fifth, we argue that the constituted semi-presidential system with its charismatic leader led to ambivalence towards political society and that it had to be overcome for Poland to begin the process of consolidating democracy. In researching the transition from an undemocratic, authoritarian regime to

a democratic regime in Poland and the consolidation of the government system, we use the comparative method and the method of content analysis.

## **2. Authoritarian Politics and Values that are Manipulated**

An authoritarian regime is an undemocratic political regime. Juan Linz (in Linz and Stepan, 1998: 59) defines it as “a political system with limited political pluralism, without elements of responsibility, without elaborate and obligatory ideology, but with a special mentality, without extensive and intensive mobilizations except at certain points in their development, and a system in which one leader or a small group of leaders exercises power within poorly defined, but in reality easily predictable, borders.” Thus, according to Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1998), it is a political system and/or regime in which pluralism and political participation are limited, power is concentrated in the hands of (cunning) individuals or smaller groups of individuals, there is no responsibility, mobilization is weak, and such a regime has no intention of transitioning to another, better, political regime. It is ruled by an authoritarian subservient culture and a superior-subordinate social relationship. An authoritarian government is not a type of political regime created by incorporating the characteristics of some other undemocratic political regimes (for example, totalitarian, post-totalitarian, sultanist), but, as Linz and Stepan say, a type of *sui generis* regime.

Authoritarian politics manages to manipulate exact values in society skillfully and eliminate the possibility of choosing specific values. It abuses not only the core values, such as freedom, equality, good, justice, human dignity (Čupić, 2002: 29), but also the universal values. It uses them to achieve its differentiated goals. Her goals are complete, yet behind its general purposes lies something different. These are some specific, more permanent goals. Authoritarian politics strives to keep the goal as far as possible because, thus, the manipulation in the social space is much greater. Its goals are not only permanent, but they are also irrational and unreal.

The resources it uses to achieve these goals are significant. Thus, for fulfilling some purposes, such as, for example, those ultimate or absolute goals, all means are allowed. He doesn't choose them. He approaches them either from a practical or value aspect. When it comes to the public, an authoritarian policy with all these characteristics manages to limit or eliminate it. It uses lies to cover up real problems and strained relations in society. It is a public that is dosed. Through manipulation, through half-truths, authoritarian politics tries to create a society that seems to be filled with democratic content. Such politics manages to impact emotional outbursts with its propaganda machinery significantly. Thus, it achieves an outpouring of emotions for some of its projects, which are not rational but irrational. Authoritarian politics skillfully manipulate this kind of public. It has created a mass and a crowd ruled by ideology. Public opinion is forbidden not to jeopardize the public interest or disturb the public or the “mass” and “crowd.” Authoritarian politics in the social system encourages lies, espionage, cunning. These are just some of the features of this undemocratic policy (Čupić, 2001).

Authoritarian politics is intolerant, all its affairs are concealed, and a unique mental structure characterizes it. Such a policy spreads fear among individuals and groups and can stifle their freedom. Because of it, some customs, which are considered very good, desirable, and essential for the prosperity of individuals, may fail. As pointed out, its goals are permanent and absolute, and all means are justified. In authoritarian regimes, the participation of individuals-citizens in political life is limited, and the essential needs and interests of individual citizens in relation to those in power are put aside (Jovović, 2018). Authoritarian rule, today, also exists in those societies that declare themselves and are viewed as democratic societies – “authoritarian interior,” “magnificent democratic facade.”

## **3. Democratic Politics and the Public of Differences**

Democracy is the rule of the people (Haralambos, 1989). At the same time, this is the shortest definition of the term. Democracy, therefore, implies a political system characterized by the rule of people, not of a totalitarian or an authoritarian leader.

During the development of society, as a community of citizens in which civic ties unite individuals, democracy has changed its course, and especially its content and exact values: from omnicracy (rule of simple majority) to procedural democracy (rule of different procedures) (Čupić, 2002).

The meticulous values on which procedural democracy is based are the ideal of tolerance, the ideal of nonviolence, the ideal of brotherhood, and the ideal of “gradual renewal of society through free discussion of ideas and changes in thinking and living: only democracy enables the formation and spread of silent revolutions. The decade has seen a change in gender relations, which is perhaps the greatest revolution of our time” (Bobio, 1990: 37, 38).

True democracy implies political pluralism and pluralistic autonomy in all other segments of social reality: economy, law, education, culture, and the like (Linc and Stepan, 1998). Of course, essentially relevant is that it implies a free individual, free groups, a free community of citizens. More specifically, democracy refers to policies that are efficient and fully controlled by the community of citizens, responsible executive power (government), honesty and responsibility in various segments of political and social life, political participation, developed political culture, tolerance, exclusion of social heterogeneity in the inclusion of social homogeneity (meaning race, religion, etc.), commitment to the idea of democracy, political equality, civic values, protection of rights and defense of shared values and interests. The essence of democracy is political parties – political pluralism, universal suffrage, free, fair elections, and the government that emerged due to these (and such) elections (Huntington, 2004). All these terms and phrases, in our opinion, form a serious, comprehensive definition of modern democracy as an inviolable ideal of political life.

In modern society, democratic politics is entirely public. It implies freedom, patience, constant critical re-examination, group decisions, compromises in various socio-political actions. It simply implies publicity of diversity. Such a public does not terrorize absolutely anyone, not even minority groups in society. Democratic politics, which is free and open, is first and foremost a politics of choice. Differentiated groups and individuals in such a democratic environment have a developed awareness of choice between differentiated options. Democratic politics relies on rational action, and it takes into account essential values, such as honesty, honor, good, truth. In such a policy, the crucial place belongs to the moral responsibility of both individuals and groups (Čupić, 2001: 24). A moral individual is also a responsible individual. If there is no morality, there is no individual responsibility, and without individual responsibility, there is no group responsibility (Čupić, 2010).

Without individual and collective responsibility, is no sound democratic political system. The democratic political system implies such a form of organization, management, and leadership of socio-political life in which the leading role is played by the capable, and above all, the intelligent majority. Democracy, in the formal sense, is a guarantee “for all individuals in the community. This means that it implies and guarantees the existence of different ideas – a range of ideas. It does not stifle them, but it is difficult to impose radical ideas in it, ideas against reality and life, without questioning and abolishing them. In terms of content, it is a pluralistic policy. Democracy allows all ideas and forms of organization but resists domination of any. It is dominated and governed by only the most reasonable, sober, and tolerant ideas. Morally autonomous individuals and groups dominate democratic politics. Because democracy means freedom for all, freedom of choice, freedom of action, and people of free will” (Čupić, 2001: 53). It is evident that “elements” such as free, responsible, moral individuals and groups, range of ideas, political pluralism, public diversity, and capable, intelligent but also cunning managers necessary and even sufficient conditions for the existence of a good democratic political system.

#### **4. Catholic Church, the Union Movement Solidarity and the History of Democratic Change**

An authoritarian rather than post-totalitarian regime has embarked on a complex process of democratic transition. Many political entities participated in it, and it took place through negotiations at the Round Table. Simultaneously with the beginning of the democratic transition, economic growth began. All this required consideration of issues related to the market economy, which caused great enthusiasm among the citizens. This is precisely what makes Poland different from other post-

communist countries. The leadership in Poland enthusiastically accepted “the introduction of a market economy immediately after the handover of power. Under the leadership of radical Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz, Poland soon became known within Central and Eastern Europe as a country of economic ‘shock therapy’... Balcerowicz accepted a pictorial – albeit cruel – metaphor: ‘although a cat's tail should be cut off anyway, it hurts less if it is done at once and not a little every day.’ Initially, this therapy caused a dramatic rise in inflation and unemployment, while economic growth was still negative, and shock therapy seemed to be a bad investment in betting. But the turnaround in economic performance came to Poland sooner than anywhere else in Central and Eastern Europe, so by the end of the 1990s, proponents of shock therapy were defending their honor” (Drajzek and Holms, 2003: 218).

The Catholic Church played a significant role in transitioning from an undemocratic to a democratic regime. It has preserved its autonomy, which is one of the indicators of the existence of social pluralism. She managed to distance herself from the existing communist government. Even the communist government, we are free to say, was afraid of the church (Linc and Stepan, 1998). An indicator of the existence of social pluralism was evident in an essential sphere of society, and that is Polish agriculture. Nationalization in agriculture, which took place through labor cooperatives or groupings, was significantly slow even during the Stalinist era. The village cooperative, which had an extremely compact tradition, managed to easily overcome agricultural goods that were collectivized (which is one of the essential elements of communist rule), which means that in Polish society, “in fact, private and independent farms never covered less than 70 percent of the total property. This is another sign of incomplete penetration and an indicator of social strength and independence outside the reach of a totalitarian state” (Linc and Stepan, 1998: 310). On the other hand, the vital role of the Catholic Church in Polish society was not reflected only in the fact that it prevented the establishment of complete undemocratic communist rule, but it later retained the same, if not far greater, importance in the introduction of democracy in Polish, but also other societies of Central and Eastern Europe.

According to Ivan Berend (2001), Polish society is almost entirely (96 percent) a Catholic society. The Catholic Church is equated with the Polish nation, and the autonomous Catholic Church has integrity, prestige, and recognition. The head of the Catholic Church in Poland was Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński. When Władysław Gomułka came to power, Wyszyński became an essential partner in the stabilization process. The political autonomy of the Catholic Church was a “powerful counterweight to the ideological and political activities of the party-state” and even prevailed. Polish state socialism, despite the significant concessions made by Gomułka's enormous popularity at the time, never gained even temporary legitimacy” (Berend, 2001: 145, 146). In Poland, compared to other societies in Central and Eastern Europe, the most vital Catholic organizations appeared, “where Gomułka's compromise in 1956 led to the founding of the magazine *Znak* [Sign]... The Catholic Church had twenty publishing ventures, with nearly one and a half million printed copies of eighty-nine different newspapers and magazines. These organizations and publications played an important role in forming the Catholic opposition. Uniquely, until 1976, the ‘*Znak* movement also had five representatives in the Sejm,’ something almost like the opposition party in all of Eastern Europe’ (Bugajski and Pollack, 1989, 146)” (Berend, 2001: 285, 286). It is evident that the Catholic Church had an important position and role in the transition. This primarily refers to the freedom of expression and freedom and the art of publishing (which is one of the indicators of the preserved autonomy of the Catholic Church). This distinguishes Polish society in its “essence” from other societies in Central and Eastern Europe. Also, the Catholic Church played a major role in the creation and development of civil society with elements of political opposition. It contributed to the gradual “disintegration” of the undemocratic communist regime (Jovović, 2018: 161).

The communist regime in Poland was established by force. On the other hand, specific segments have preserved their autonomy. Given its presence, the communist regime, although established by force, could not take root entirely, as was the case in other societies in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition to the mentioned independence of the Catholic Church and the attention turned to

agriculture, the army as an organization had a pronounced patriotic line. Also, higher education's intelligence – science – was anti-systemic “or emigrated after establishing the pro-Soviet regime” (Darmanović, 2002: 139). All the elements we have mentioned, which refer to the existence of social pluralism, starting from the church's independence to the intelligentsia, favor the fact that Poland managed to come into being, that is, “assembling civil society from opposition elements.” The reality of the communist authoritarian system, if it was to be effective, also meant that resistance had to be based on civil society because opposition parties, as an expression of political culture, were never formally allowed or informally tolerated” (Linc and Stepan, 1998: 315, 316). The existence of civil society is only one link in the chain, which is necessary for the transition to be completed and for democracy to be consolidated.

Polish society in Central and Eastern Europe is recognizable by numerous and, at the same time, mass strikes (first in 1956, then in 1968, 1970, 1971, 1976, and 1980). Thus, in 1970, there were an incredible thousand strikes in Poland, all due to the dissatisfaction of the working population. Although massive and at the same time recognizable outside the borders of Poland, the strikes failed to cause major upheavals on the socio-political stage. This was the case until 1980 when the trade union movement Solidarity was officially formed, which caused the desired upheavals on the socio-political stage in Poland (Jovović, 2022). At the very beginning, it had ten million members. Lech Wałęsa was at the head of this trade union movement. He was an electrician by profession and was 37 years old when he took office. He had a great charisma that was simply a “magnet” for attracting the masses. Solidarity, as Berend (2001: 303) says, “was basically a set of quite different anti-regime elements, but also a united front in such circumstances.”

With the strengthening of the popular trade union movement Solidarity, the communist government weakened. It still survived by controlling only specific segments of Polish society, both formally and informally. However, significant changes took place in 1981. Completely distanced from the Communist Party, General Wojciech Witold Jaruzelski said that a state of emergency had been imposed in the society and that a new body of the Military Council of National Salvation had been constituted. Given the fact that Jaruzelski was a soldier and that the ministers, those “most important” individuals, were the party's soldiers, the Communist Party (all the individuals who made it) realized that it had lost the critical position and role in society. From 1981 to 1989, Polish society was run by the army as an organization – Wojciech Witold Jaruzelski was the Prime Minister and served as Minister of the Army (Linc and Stepan, 1998). Jaruzelski's leadership was focused on reforms in the system and was very close to the new Kremlin leader. According to Ivan Berend (2001: 310), in addition to Jaruzelski's leadership, “the opening of the system by Gorbachev dealt a final blow to the Polish regime, which could no longer justify remaining in power, not even to its elite. All this led to the last phase of complete disintegration and apathy.” In that period, the liberalization process began under Wojciech Witold Jaruzelski, and Solidarity became an active political player. In addition to the army and Solidarity, the security service, the party affiliated with the Soviets, and, as we have pointed out earlier, the highly influential Catholic Church, both in Poland and in other European societies, also participated in political life.

In the process of liberalization, political prisoners were released, more space was created for independent action of individuals and social groups, individual and group freedoms were guaranteed, freedom of expression and association was guaranteed, civil society was renewed, political opposition became more active, and public censorship information was reduced (Huntington, 2004). Liberalization in Poland was helped by the autonomous Catholic Church, which distributed newspapers and magazines, as we pointed out. As part of civil society, the Catholic Church has supported its development (Jovović, 2018). This development implied that the citizen should be active, “follow politics, discuss politics, be a more active party supporter... Confident citizen should show commitment to the values that are associated” with democracy (Almond, Verba, 2000: 193).

The Catholic Church also played an important role in diffusing the ideas of the Solidarity movement, so touching scenes were recorded where workers protested and knelt and prayed to God Jesus Christ. Pope John Paul II said: Do not be afraid, our nation is waking up, and other nations are waking up.

He inspired the people of Poland and many others outside the borders of Poland (Jovović, 2018). The Pope's contribution to overthrowing communism and establishing democracy was 50 percent.

In Poland, before the transition began, there was no place for a pre-dominant figure, as there was, for example, in Yugoslavia (Josip Broz Tito) or Romania (Nicolae Ceausescu). The main reason is that the general secretaries at the head of the Communist Party changed very often (Jovović, 2018). All this, as we will see, directly influenced the course of the round-table negotiations. Polish society had solid political opposition, so the ruling party had someone to talk to seriously at the Round Table.

When Wojciech Witold Jaruzelski was the prime minister, together with his government, he managed to achieve certain successes, especially in the system of economy and agriculture. Inflation was significantly reduced (16-17 percent). In 1986, Polish society entered a new phase of economic crisis, and the existing government (mild military dictatorship) did not use force to preserve power. More than half of the citizens, despite frequent financial problems, agree on one thing: the takeover of power by Wojciech Witold Jaruzelski and other groups of soldiers was the only and best possible way to protect society from Soviet invasion, and the state of emergency was above all a patriotic act of self-defense (Berend, 2001).

From 1987 to 1988, the opposition became more active, so the existing authoritarian regime faced several problems. In addition, the current authoritarian regime knew that the economic system was not stable and did not work very well (frequent crises) and that it was necessary to make certain changes. Thus, Jaruzelski and his associates drafted a proposal of economic changes and submitted it to a referendum in mid-1987. However, it was not accepted. This unexpected defeat in the elections was a prominent political and social event that resonated outside Poland and meant nothing more than a drastic decline in the power of the authoritarian regime. In May 1988, "Solidarity strikes were initiated by a new generation of younger and more militant trade unionists. In a sense, Jaruzelski, as a moderate figure of the regime and Walesa, as the figure in the opposition, faced their radical elements. Later, there was a classic game with four players in the process of transition (regime radicals, moderate currents in the regime, moderates in the opposition, and radical elements in the opposition)" (Linc and Stepan, 1998: 321). Lech Walesa begins to use stronger rhetoric, looking back to an earlier period. Tolerance started spreading in society towards those who were thinking differently, criticism was not stifled, and Walesa was gaining the masses with his memorable speeches, which emphasized that Central and Eastern Europe, and Poland with them, are moving fast towards democracy (Jovović, 2018).

At the beginning of the summer of 1988, general Kiszczak, acting Minister of the Interior, proposed to Lech Walesa initial talks, which Walesa agreed to on July 21, while on August 26, during the second wave of strikes, Jaruzelski proposed a Politburo meeting negotiation with Solidarity" (Linc and Stepan, 1998: 321). The talks among the key factors that participated in the government took place at the Round Table. The talks lasted from February 6 to April 5, 1989, and in addition to the roundtable talks, most of those more sensitive discussions took place in the Magdalen Palace. The results of the Round Table negotiations were (Darmanović, 2002; Jovović, 2018; Jovović, 2022) as follows: to legalize Solidarity, the government sought the participation of the political opposition in the elections; the opposition accepted the proposal, which means that Solidarity became legalized. The current government submitted an agreement on the legalization of Solidarity; Solidarity leaders were to participate in the elections, which was to take place in peace, without any obstacles; the polls were to provide a majority of seats in the parliament for the Liberal Party and the Peasants' Party, and a minority for Solidarity; the hunger strikes were to be stopped; the office of president was to be introduced. The political opposition accepted almost all the proposals, but the proposal related to the function of the president. After the proposal was rejected, the government sent a new one, and it referred to the reintroduction of the second house (Senate) in the parliament (Sejm). Elections for the lower house were to be free. Of course, the proposal was accepted by the opposition.

A final agreement was reached at the famous Polish Round Table, and it referred to (Darmanović, 2002; Berend, 2001; Linc and Stepan, 1998; Jovović, 2018; Jovović, 2022): legalization of Solidarity; legalization of certain structures within Solidarity, such as peasant and youth; enabling

these structures, which exist in Solidarity, to operate freely; that free action, even expression, were to be secured within a framework that not going beyond the newly established democratic order; taking certain economic measures to overcome the crisis as soon as possible; organization and holding of “semi-free” (Dreisek and Holmes, 2003: 217) parliamentary elections on June 4 and 18, 1989; that the division of seats in the Parliament (Sejm), in which decisions are made, be uncompetitive; the division of seats were to be such that out of a total of 460 seats in the Sejm, the majority was to be held by the Communists and their allies (about 65 percent) and the minority by the opposition (about 35 percent); elections for the Senate (second house in the Parliament) was to be absolutely free, and the division of seats was to be competitive; the division of seats in the assembly (meaning both parliamentary houses) was to be such that the introduction of the institution of the president could be verified in the end. The time interval in which all the previously mentioned elements of the agreement were to be realized was also determined: semi-free elections were to be held in June 1989; with no organization and holding of hunger strikes (two years in total); four (4) years were to elapse after the parliamentary elections to allow for new elections to be held; the presidential term was to last six (6) years.

At the Round Table, there were extensive discussions about the role of the president in society, especially regarding his powers, which, although initially disputed, were later verified at the assembly session through amendments to the constitution. With the verification, the president of the Polish society simultaneously became the president of the Committee of National Salvation in Polish society and represented Polish society before other societies (abroad). Furthermore, by his powers, he is the one who proposes the candidate for the Prime Minister of the Polish society, and also his removal, and declares a state of emergency. A state of emergency lasts only three months and can be renewed in need (Linc and Stepan, 1998). The President nominates the President of the National Bank of Polish Society. In addition to these powers, the President of Poland may convene a session of the executive branch, that is, the government, especially when it comes to some critical issues. When it comes to foreign policy, his powers are to ratify international agreements, as well as to publish them regularly, then to appoint Polish representatives, i.e., diplomats abroad, and to receive foreign diplomats in Poland (Boban, 2007).

“The Round-table talks are of the utmost importance in the history of Poland. Their name symbolically confirms the parity of the two opposing camps and the implementation of goodwill in creating compromises. These negotiations between the communist apparatus and the unprecedented workers initiated the transformation of the Polish political and economic order, and the reforms that resulted from them were the basis for the restoration of democracy in this country.” (Szafranec, 2008: 67).

Parliamentary elections were held (as foreseen by the final agreement reached at the Round Table) in June 1989. “Opposition candidates for the minority part (35 percent) of the seats in the Sejm received about 16.5 million votes, while only about 9.1 million voters voted for the communist candidates for the majority part (65 percent) of the seats. Of the 299 seats in the Sejm that were ‘reserved’ for regime candidates with the so-called national lists, only 2 of the 35 representatives of the PURP and 3 representatives of the Peasant Party received enough votes to be elected in the first round. When this is compared to the fact that 160 of the 161 opposition candidates were elected in the first round, the scale of the defeat of the ruling communists, even in semi-free elections, becomes quite clear. And, where free elections for the Senate were held, Solidarity won 99 out of 100 seats!” (Darmanović, 2002: 145)

The June results of the parliamentary elections were a surprise for everyone, both for the position and the opposition and society. The Communists did not get the thirty-three seats that belonged to them based on the initialed Agreement because Solidarity, although at first willing to abide by the Agreement, later withdrew from it. However, Solidarity’s victory in the elections was convincing; it was historic. Thanks to the opposition in the parliament, Wojciech Witold Jaruzelski became the President of Poland (Ibid.). He had to accept Tadeusz Mazowiecki (Solidarity candidate), who was to perform the function of the Prime Minister. He was the first prime minister who was not a

communist. “Although the Agreement specifically mentions a coalition government, with a communist president and a communist majority in the Sejm, it was only a matter of time before Solidarity took full power” (Berend, 2001: 312). We completely agree with the statement of Linz and Stepan (1998) that Solidarity, which gained great popularity and support of Polish citizens, and whose legalization was first supported by Pope John Paul II, agreed to an agreed-upon democratic transition. On the other hand, the Polish communist regime handed over its power peacefully and with dignity – it negotiated peacefully with the leaders of Solidarity.

The democratic transition in Poland, in addition to being amicable, has ended peacefully. “Poland has become democratic again – without the violent turmoil of Romania – and thus launched a wave of freedom that shook the whole of Eastern Europe and led to the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the end of more than forty years of communist rule in this part of the world” (Szafraniec, 2008: 67). In 1990, the constitution was amended at a parliamentary session, and it clearly defined that the president of Poland would be elected exclusively in elections for a full five years. This ended a transitional phase in which the president was not elected through elections and held office for six years. This phase has lasted since 1989. The period from 1989 to 1990 was marked by both “parliamentarism and semi-presidentialism: there was a dual structure of executive power and a fixed term for the president who was not politically accountable to parliament, but he was not elected in general elections but parliament. In addition, after the defeat of the Communists in the June 1989 parliamentary elections and the formation of the first non-communist government in Eastern Europe, President Jaruzelski refrained from fully exercising his constitutional powers, and Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the leader of the executive branch” (Boban, 2007: 67).

In that transitional phase, according to the old constitution, we had a system between semi-presidential and parliamentary, while in practice, it was more of a parliamentary system (Boban, 2007). Lech Walesa won the 1990 presidential election, and compared to Wojciech Witold Jaruzelski (who resigned), he entirely used all the powers that belonged to him under the Constitution.

After winning the parliamentary elections in June 1989, Solidarity began to weaken. The weakening was contributed to by divisions within Solidarity and by the reckless, non-political decisions of its leader Lech Walesa. These divisions created many political parties, which wanted to participate in the following elections as independent political entities. The extent to which Solidarity weakened was shown by the convincing victory in the 1993 parliamentary elections of the coalition of the Democratic Left (former communists and allies) and in 1995 when Alexander Kwasniewski, a former communist, ran and won the presidential election. Lech Walesa did not focus his attention on what was needed, namely enriching his political role, strengthening Solidarity, taking care of its integrity and position in the Parliament (Sejm) and society, or simply focusing on winning Prime Minister’s office. This was his first apolitical decision. He remained outside political society (and it is a political society that represents the interests of individuals and social groups) and acted as the people’s tribune of Polish civil society (Linz and Stepan, 1998).

In Solidarity, as a whole, the relationship between Lech Walesa and Tadeusz Mazowiecki gradually began to deteriorate. An indicator was when Tadeusz Mazowiecki decided to form a government without consulting Lech Walesa. On one side, we had Walesa (Solidarity as a movement) and on the other Mazowiecki (Solidarity around the current government). Lech Walesa has made another wrong step in the key political institutions of Polish society – the legislature and the executive- which is the illusion of striving for new parliamentary elections, which would be free. This is his second apolitical decision. The Communist Party, a partner at the Round Table, was dissolved in January 1990, while Lech Walesa expressed his desire to run for president of Poland, which he did. There was a possibility that both the presidential and parliamentary elections could be held simultaneously (in fall 1990), but this did not happen. Members of Solidarity in the Sejm and the government sought to prolong the parliamentary elections. This aspiration provoked even bigger divisions in Solidarity. Both leaders, Walesa and Mazowiecki, ran in the presidential election. Walesa represented civil society (Solidarity as a movement), while Mazowiecki stood for political society (Solidarity in



parliament, government, and around the government) (Linz and Stepan, 1998; Jovović, 2022). He defeated Lech Walesa in 1990.

Victory in such an atmosphere, with him being for a non-partisan figure, can be attributed to his earlier much greater influence, both in the period before the democratic transition and in the democratic transition itself, especially in 1989, when Solidarity as a whole (and he as its influential leader) enjoyed a great reputation in Polish society and when it “easily” defeated the then ruling undemocratic party in the elections (Jovović, 2018: 170). Lech Walesa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1983, and in 2017 he was accused of collaborating with the secret police during the communist regime.

Lech Walesa made decisions that simultaneously threatened Solidarity and democracy in Polish society. His behavior, his strategy, his ambitions, and above all, how he saw himself (whether as an inviolable charismatic leader or something else) stemmed from the “very nature of Solidarity, as a political movement. Solidarity, in a decade-long struggle with the ruling communist regime, had developed a culture and methods of action, called ‘anti-political policy.’ It is, in fact, about rejecting the state and government as an instrument of change and developing an alternative culture of resistance and civic autonomy about the state. ‘The policy of anti-politics’ is a symbol of the magnificent resistance of various enclaves of Polish civil society in the fight against the communist regime and, following Michnik’s slogan ‘we live as if we were free,’ was perhaps the only possible pacifist way of fighting in Poland” (Darmanović, 2002: 147) that could have been effective.

Although Lech Walesa won the 1990 presidential election, it is important to note that the percentage of votes he received was not at the appropriate level, while in the second round, he received 74.3 percent with a turnout of 53.4 percent. Despite these results, which clearly show what individuals and groups in Polish society think of Lech Walesa’s “politics” or “non-politics,” he continued to act as if nothing had happened – he continued to view himself as an influential, charismatic leader who, as such, was above political institutions – political parties and parliament. Differentiated conflicts between Lech Walesa (non-partisan president) and the prime minister, which concerned differentiated political and social issues, influenced Lech Walesa’s decision to announce ‘that he would address the Sejm with a demand for greater rights for the president, as the Prime Minister would become subordinate to him, as in the French system ...’ He further stated that after the experience that Poland had gone through, there was probably a consensus that it was best for the country to get a government above the parties, a government that will bring together experts” (Linz and Stepan, 1998: 338). Such actions by Lech Walesa, the differentiated conflicts between Walesa and his former close colleagues, and the essential divisions in Solidarity significantly affected the process of democratic consolidation in terms of whether democratic consolidation in Poland was to be slowed down or accelerated.

Poland’s social and political situation has changed significantly since the 1993 parliamentary elections and the 1995 presidential elections. The Communist Party was transformed into a coalition of the democratic left, filled with democratic content, absolutely accepted the rules of the democratic competition and democratic functioning, and, as such, overcame other political parties in the Polish party and political system, i.e., won the most votes in parliamentary elections (20, 41 percent). The Coalition of the Democratic Left became the best organized political party in Poland, with “150,000 members” (Dreisek and Holmes, 2003: 219). However, their victory did not have much of an impact, as it was thought, on political and even economic reform. In the next elections, in 1997, they lost, “and the coalition of electoral action of conservative nationalist Solidarity and the Liberal Union of Freedom” (Dreisek and Holmes, 2003: 219) came to power in 2001 (new parliamentary elections), when the coalition of the Democratic Left and the Workers’ Alliance joined and managed to win. Together, they received 42 percent of the vote (Milardović, 2006). Alexander Kwasniewski won the 1995 presidential election. Although a consolidated majority government was created at that time, and a “period of presidentialism” was to begin (Boban, 2007: 72), Aleksandar Kwasniewski had a different style of government than Lech Walesa (Boban, 2007: 72). Until those elections (that is, until 1995), Aleksandar Kwasniewski was the president of the Constitutional Commission and

advocated reducing the president's powers. When he officially took office, he advocated greater powers for the president, which means that he changed his, although initially firm, position. But only partially. He was "more ready for consensus with other authorities than his predecessor" (Boban, 2007: 72).

In the 2001 presidential election, Aleksandar Kwasniewski won convincingly again. While he was in power in Poland (until December 23, 2005), both the left and right governments took turns. Despite numerous difficulties, which is especially true for all countries that belong to the center or semi-periphery of the world system, democracy in Poland was consolidated. "Both state and non-state forces in the entire territory of the state, out of a well-established habit, are subject to methods of conflict resolution within specific laws, procedures, and institutions established by the new democratic process" (Linz and Stepan, 1998: 18, 19). In the presidential elections in October 2005, the mayor of Warsaw, Dr. Lech Alexander Kaczynski, won.

A new constitution has been adopted, and it will continue to have a semi-presidential system. What has changed, which is very important to point out, are the relations within the state government, that is, the bodies. "There are four elements of the dual structure of executive power left: two poles of executive power (one head of state and the other prime minister), substantial constitutional powers of the president" (Boban, 2007: 72), and then the responsibility of both government and prime minister to the assembly.

## 5. Conclusion

The specificity of the democratic transition in Poland, in relation to other transitions in Central and Eastern Europe, is reflected in the nature of the non-democratic regime, which was more authoritarian than (post)totalitarian. Hence, while the communist regime was in force, social pluralism managed to be preserved to the highest possible extent. Preserved social and even political pluralism later contributed to success in the transition process. The military-party regime in Poland, after Gorbachev came to power in the USSR, applied the strategy of getting out that took the form of negotiations between the political position and the political opposition at the Round Table. The compromise ended the negotiations and brought about semi-free elections, on one, and the controlled democratic transition in Poland, on the other hand. The event was accelerated when, in semi-free elections, the popular Solidarity movement defeated the then-ruling communist group. The provisions of the Agreement were fully respected by both sides. In the end, after the Second World War, it was Poland whose citizens were the first to overthrow at the regular elections. The Round Table Agreement established the function of a strong president, who was directly elected. That function was first used by Lech Valensa, the leader of Solidarity. The extreme proportional election method and the fragmentation of Solidarity, in terms of the creation of several political parties, resulted in the establishment of a multi-party semi-presidential system. The change in the electoral system and the inappropriate tactics of the political parties that emerged from Solidarity enabled the left-wing government to come to power and ensured the post of president to a post-communist candidate (Darmanović, 2002; Jovović, 2022; Jovović, 2018). The transfer of power from Solidarity to their former rivals, who fundamentally changed, managed to end peacefully and Poland slowly entered the phase of consolidation of the government system.

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