

POLAND 1989: THE CONSTRAINED REVOLUTION

On the evening of 4 June 1989, the popular actress Joanna Szczepkowska responded to a TV reporter by saying that “communism has ended in Poland.”¹ She was commenting on Poland’s first free and open, albeit with restrictions, general elections after forty years of communism. In the eyes of many politically engaged citizens, her words reflected the atmosphere of the day. Later the statement became one of the most famous quotes referring to Poland’s transition. While her statement was little more than a *bonmot*, the outcome of that election has been commonly regarded as a critical historical juncture, not only by political commentators and authors of memoirs² and popular accounts³ of Poland’s transition, but also by most historians who have dealt with this period. Regardless of whether they regard Poland’s transition as a success or failure, they all agree that June 1989 was the decisive moment separating communist Poland from either “democratic Poland” (the affirmative version) or “postcommunist Poland” (the more critical version).

There is a wide consensus that the round table talks and June elections were a cornerstone in the Polish transition to democracy, but there is much less con-

¹ Her famous remark can still be watched: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgAiAKNfryg> (accessed 9 July 2013).

² Wiesław Górnicki, *Teraz już można* (Wrocław: Wydawn. Dolnośląskie, 1994); Zbigniew Messner, Aleksander Perczyński, and Andrzej Żor, *Kuglarze i księgowi* (Warsaw: Polska Oficyna Wydawnicza “BGW”, 1993); Mieczysław Rakowski, ed., *Polska pod rządami PZPR* (Warsaw: Profi, 2000); Mieczysław Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1987–1990* (Warsaw: Iskry, 2005); Lech Wałęsa and Arkadiusz Rybicki, *Droga do wolności* (Warsaw: Editions Spotkania, 1991).

³ In Poland it has become a tradition to publish the memoirs of politicians. These memoirs generally consist in (book-length) interviews conducted by a journalist or an intellectual who is supportive of the respondent. Questions are asked about the politician’s career, the decisions he made, and crucial moments in history upon which he or she left their imprint. This interview is usually recorded and then edited by the journalist. This convention, which eases a politician’s burden of writing his or her own memoirs and enables editors to publish books a few months after an important political event, is called a “wywiad-rzeka,” which can be imperfectly translated as “interview-stream” or “interview-river.” Such rivers of questions and answers are available for some of the key 1989 actors: Jarosław Kaczyński, Michał Bichniewicz, and Piotr M Rudnicki, *Czas na zmiany. Z Jarosławem Kaczyńskim rozmawiają Michał Bichniewicz i Piotr M. Rudnicki* (Warsaw: Editions Spotkania, 1992); Bronisław Geremek, and Jacek Żakowski, *Rok 1989. Bronisław Geremek opowiada, Jacek Żakowski pyta* (Warsaw: Plejada, 1990); Paweł Smoleński, *Szermierze Okrągłego Stołu. Zwątpienia i nadzieje* (Paris: Editions Spotkania, 1989); Jan Olszewski and Ewa Polak-Pałkiewicz, *Prosto w oczy* (Warsaw: Inicjatywa Wydawnicza ad astrą, 1997).

sensus about when this transition actually started. According to the mainstream media's interpretation, the transition started with the round table talks and ended with the first entirely open election in 1991. This interpretation is even reflected in the official account of the events of the Sejm, the Lower House of Poland's parliament since 1989 (when the Senate was reintroduced as a second chamber). Here the June elections are counted as the last term of the People's Republic's parliament, whereas the new counting of the Third Republic starts with the 1991 election. But it is often argued that democratization started long before, especially by authors whose biographies are linked to the political and intellectual establishment of the People's Republic. Some of the authors linked to the anticommunist opposition point to the years 1980–81, when Poland experienced the emerging of the Solidarity movement, the first independent trade union movement in the Soviet bloc.

It is not a lack of sources, but rather the lack of competition of paradigms that is to blame for the blind spots in historical research on Poland's transition.⁴ Some of these blind spots concern the international "embedding" of Poland's transition in the wider context of the decline of communist ideology, the rise of the national question in the Soviet sphere of power and the interaction of Poland's negotiated transition with perestroika and developments in other countries.⁵ There is also a lack of recognition for how crucial actors in the transition process overcame their collective action dilemma and for the paradoxes that emerged in the process.⁶ In the light of recently published documents, the timeframe for Poland's negotiated transition should also be given a much wider scale that it has received until now, since actual bargaining started already months before the round table talks began. The Church was involved in these talks from the beginning.⁷ Most of the

⁴ Important and extensive editions of archival sources include (among others): Włodzimierz Borodziej and Andrzej Garlicki, *Okrągły Stół: dokumenty i materiały*, 5 vols. (Warsaw: Zapol, 2004); Krzysztof Dubiński, *Magdalenka—Transakcja epoki. notatki z poufnych spotkań Kiszczak-Wałęsa* (Warsaw: Sylwa, 1990); John R. Davis, Gregory F. Domber, Mariusz Jastrząb, and Paweł Sowiński, *Ku zwycięstwu "Solidarności": korespondencja Ambasady USA w Warszawie z Departamentem Stanu: styczeń - wrzesień 1989* (Warsaw: ISP PAN, 2006); Inka Słodkowska, Magdalena Dołbakowska, and Ewa Wosik, *Wybory 1989. Dokumenty strony solidarnościowo-opozycyjnej*, vol. 1 (Warsaw: ISP PAN, 2009).

⁵ Exceptions to this rule can be found in: Bodgan Góralczyk, Wojciech Kostecki, and Katarzyna Żukrowska, ed., *In Pursuit of Europe. Transformations of Post-Communist States* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych, 1995); Jan Kofman, and Wojciech Roszkowski, *Transformacja i postkomunizm* (Warsaw: ISP PAN, 1999); Radosław Markowski, and Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński, ed., *Transformative Paths in Central and Eastern Europe* (Warsaw: ISP PAN, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2001); Jerzy J. Wiatr, *Europa postkomunistyczna. Przemiany państw i społeczeństw po 1989 roku* (Warsaw: Scholar, 2006).

⁶ Timor Kuran, *Private Truths, Public Lies: The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 261–88.

⁷ Preparations for the negotiations were carried out long before they started. Surprisingly, many of the discussions on the government side were actually conducted in public, in small, but publicly available journals such as *Materials*, *Studia analityczne* and in a newly created weekly called *Kon-*

literature about Poland's transition to democracy fails to put the events between 1988 and 1992 into a broader framework of transition by comparing them to similar events in other parts of the world. There are of course comparisons to other former members of the Soviet block⁸ and there are theoretically informed articles and book chapters that situate the Polish transition within the wider framework of the third wave of democratization, but these are mostly political science approaches and do not refer to primary sources. This might improve once all the archives in Moscow, Washington, Bonn, Paris and London are open for historians, since this will render the possibility of more detailed comparisons.

The path to the 1989 election

The “self-limiting revolution,” as the emergence of the Solidarity movement is often referred to,⁹ ended with the imposition of martial law in December 1981 by a military junta led by General Wojciech Jaruzelski. The introduction of martial law was accompanied by a multitude of activities lacking a legal basis as well as by many human rights violations.¹⁰ The actions of Jaruzelski and his comrades amounted to a coup d'état. But despite the imprisonment of political opponents (among them also former *nomenklatura* members), the use of the army for internal affairs, and the de facto replacement of the communist Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP) by a military government, it was not a total break with the past. The new regime did not touch the basic structure of the economy, it did not (as demanded by some economically liberal intellectuals in and outside the PUWP) use its power to introduce a radically market-oriented reform of the economy, nor did it touch the existing hierarchies in the administration and the economy. In the next years, the workers councils (*radę pracownicze*) in the state companies remained powerful and were occupied by worker representatives who officially appeared as non-partisan. Clandestinely, however, they remained loyal to the Solidarity structures in the political underground. The de-legalizing of the Soli-

frontacje, which printed long interviews with influential actors from both sides of the subsequent round table. For more details, see Borodziej and Garlicki, “Od redaktorów.”

⁸ Jerzy J. Wiatr, *Europa pokomunistyczna: przemiany państw i społeczeństw po 1989 roku* (Warsaw: Wydawn. Naukowe Scholar, 2006).

⁹ Jadwiga Staniszkis, *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). “Self-limiting” describes the reluctance of Solidarity to strive for power and use violence, which, of course, was also a reaction to the permanently present, but often implicit threat of a Soviet intervention in case the movement went too far.

¹⁰ Among other things, Poland was not in a state of war, which could have justified the imposing of martial law. And a law facilitating the imposition of a state of emergency had not been passed by the Sejm. Many measures were carried out against the opposition that were without a legal basis and that violated legislation already in force (as for example the internment of dissidents without the consent of a judge and without any formal charges). Also the main decision body of the junta was entirely unconstitutional.

darity movement deprived the trade union of its main assets as well as access to the media, but it also created a strong, vibrant, clandestine and decentralized illegal opposition movement. This was much more difficult for the state to control than Solidarity had been.

Confronted with an embargo by the Western world (the European Community and the United States) and weaker support from the Soviet Union (whose ability to support its allies was in decline due to the pressure from the arms race with the United States and the war in Afghanistan), Jaruzelski's generals faced a kind of state bankruptcy. Unable to serve even the interest payments on Poland's foreign debt, the government on one hand had to keep prices down in order to prevent workers and townspeople from rioting and, on the other, to subsidize agriculture in order to provide enough food to the population and prevent farmers from protesting. Caught between these constraints, the government increased the supply of money and caused hyperinflation. Every attempt to establish a new balance between demand and supply ended either with protests against higher prices or strikes against attempts to increase competitiveness. In 1987, the government even resorted to a referendum to discover whether the population preferred higher prices or the regulation of supply. But due to an exaggerated threshold, the result of the referendum had no legal relevance.¹¹

During the years following the abolition of martial law (on 22 July 1983), Jaruzelski's regime undertook a number of attempts to co-opt moderate opposition members into state structures. These attempts followed a double strategy. They were officially labeled "agreement and struggle" (*porozumienie i walka*) and aimed on one hand at dividing the opposition and, on the other, to gain more legitimacy for the regime's inefficient reform policy. In 1986, all political prisoners were set free. In December of the same year, a Consultative Council at the President of the State Council (*Rada Konsultacyjna przy Przewodniczącym Rady Państwa*) was created, which aimed at including moderate members of the opposition and independent intellectuals. It was boycotted by almost all leading members of the political underground and became a discussion body for academics and Catholic activists.

The creation of the Council was one of a series of institutional innovations that changed the institutional landscape of the People's Republic. In the end, the institutions it created survived the later transition. In 1985 a constitutional court was founded and in 1988, the position of an ombudsman for citizens' rights was

¹¹ The government actually received a relative majority of the votes for its reform agenda. But since the threshold that the government had set for the validity of the referendum had not been reached, the result was not legally binding. See: Włodzimierz Borodziej, *Geschichte Polens im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Beck, 2010); Antoni Dudek, *Reglamentowana Rewolucja. Rozkład dyktatury komunistycznej w Polsce 1988–1990* (Cracow: Arcana, 2004); Dariusz T. Grała, *Reformy gospodarcze w PRL (1982–1989): Próba uratowania socjalizmu* (Warsaw: TRIO, 2005); Sergiusz Kowalski, *Narodziny III Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1996).

created. In 1988, the elections to the so-called National Councils (*Rady Narodowe*) were liberalized, allowing independent candidates to run. Nonetheless, all of these steps proved too hesitant to overcome the impasse between the opposition and the regime. The more the government and the Sejm liberalized the election procedures for the National Councils and (in 1985) for the Sejm, the fewer voters showed up at the ballot boxes.

At the end of the decade, the regime was strong enough to prevent the opposition from overthrowing the government, but too weak to improve its legitimacy. On the other side, the opposition was strong enough to control every move of the regime, but too weak to take power.

The international environment

The narrative concerning the “self-limiting revolution” and the strong inclination of the main strands of the opposition not to use violence are often presented as the result of normative considerations and were later presented as proof of the relative maturity of the opposition. In contrast to the tradition of armed uprising, which was frequent during the nineteenth century and led to the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, the stalemate in 1989 did not end in a violent confrontation between the regime and the opposition. But this was not only due to maturity on both sides of the conflict, but also a consequence of the international setting in which transition took place. By 1988, when a first wave of worker protests took place, the Soviet Union had engaged in a major endeavor of internal reform, which required the new leadership under Mikhail Gorbachev to concentrate resources within the country and to scale down the USSR’s foreign engagements. Neither side of the Cold War was interested in a violent conflict in Central and Eastern Europe. The efforts of all—the United States, NATO, the EC, and the USSR and its East European allies—aimed at keeping the liberalization efforts in Poland peaceful. On different occasions, Gorbachev himself called upon Central and East European leaders to speed up their reforms, since the success of a reform policy in a bloc country could be used to strengthen the reform tendencies within the Soviet administration, the government and the Party. In contrast to earlier times, supporters of system liberalization within the opposition as well as within the ruling establishment were able to arouse Gorbachev’s calls for reform. This mechanism strengthened the reform movement on one hand, and contained radical forces on the other. The messages from East and West that were sent to Poland during the late 1980s were extremely similar. Gorbachev paid a visit to Poland in July 1988 and George Bush, Sr. to the Polish capital in July 1989. Their messages on those occasions could be reduced to a common denominator: Poland needs more market-oriented reform and more democratization, and this should take place step by step, without any violent moves or revolutionary escalation. Both (!) stressed the

constructive role of General Jaruzelski during the transition and suggested that he run for president in the upcoming elections in the National Assembly.¹²

The round table and the elections

The round table talks finally started in February 1989, after another round of grassroots strikes, which proved detrimental to the economy, but also weakened the position of the Solidarity leadership, which in many cases had tried to prevent them.¹³ They had been prepared long before by certain Warsaw intellectuals connected to the opposition (Bronisław Geremek played an important role) and party intellectuals who knew each other through academic contacts. Public opinion had been prepared for the negotiations by a number of measures that were meant to demonstrate the government's commitment to reform. Among these steps were licenses to publish new media outlets run by moderate opposition figures,¹⁴ a public debate in the mainstream media, decisions about who would or would not be a decent partner for the government to talk to about compromise and reform, the factual de-penalization of samizdat (whose products were sold openly on the streets of Warsaw) and of oppositional parties, which started to spread like mushrooms. However, due to the monopoly on information distribution that the government and the Polish United Workers' Party maintained, these measures were unable to attract public attention beyond the opposition circles.

The round table talks, in which the same number of participants from the PUWP, the government, and from the opposition took part (whose members were co-opted either by General Jaruzelski and his comrades or by Lech Wałęsa and

¹² Antoni Dudek, *Reglementowana rewolucja. Rozkład dyktatury komunistycznej w Polsce 1988–1990* (Cracow: Wydawn. Arcana, 2004), 363–64; Paweł Kowal, *Koniec systemu władzy: polityka ekipy gen. Wojciecha Jaruzelskiego w latach 1986–1989* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo TRIO, ISP PAN, 2012), 320.

¹³ Many of these strikes, including the most spectacular one in the Gdansk shipyard, had been organized against the will of the leadership, which had planned to organize a disciplined and targeted one-time strike wave in the autumn that was hoped to coerce the government into concessions. While Lech Wałęsa and his advisors were unable to prevent small and dispersed protests, they also could not afford to reject them and abandon the protesting workers.

¹⁴ One of these steps was the launching of the newspaper *Konfrontacje* by a Warsaw businessman with good contacts to both sides. It served as a platform for a debate about the limits and ramifications of a so-called compromise. The first issue of *Konfrontacje* highlighted an interview with Geremek, who proposed an “anti-crisis pact” (*pakt antykryzysowy*) between the opposition and the government. The businessman who organized this new journal (together with the press-spokesman of the Ministry of the Interior, Wojciech Garstka, who regarded it as a private initiative) was Marek Goliszewski. He was not the only one who gained a concession to publish a new journal. Marcin Król, a professor at Warsaw University, was permitted to launch *Res Publica* (which, in contrast to Goliszewski's paper, survived the transition and is still published today. Kowal, *Koniec*, 110–12.

his advisors), ended late at night on 5 April. In the lengthy documents that had been produced, of which many were contradictory and resembled protocols of discrepancies rather than joint conclusions, both sides had agreed to a constitutional settlement aimed at giving the regime control over the legislative process and the state institutions while granting the opposition the power to control the government from the streets by reinstating Solidarity as a mass movement and trade union independent from the government. This system of mutual checks and balances was refined by a complicated agreement concerning so-called non-confrontational elections to the parliament, which would guarantee the communists and their vassals, the “bloc parties,” at least 65 percent of the seats in the Lower House, the Sejm, and open the newly created Senate to unrestricted competition. As an additional safeguard against offensive, non-consensual moves by one side, the position of a president was created, who would be elected by the National Assembly, which would comprise all the members of both the Sejm and the Senate.

There are strong indications that Jaruzelski and his aides thought they knew the outcome of the elections. According to opinion polls that were carried out during the weeks before the June elections (but were not published before the vote), the PUWP and her allies had every reason to believe that they would obtain about 25 percent of the mandates (Senate and Sejm) open to competition. Together with the guaranteed mandates, this would have given them the necessary power to veto any major opposition bill in parliament. On the other hand, it would have given the opposition enough influence to prevent constitutional changes (which required a two-thirds majority). Nonetheless, for the opposition, it was no problem to give the government control over these governmental institutions. With a strong and legal mass movement outside the parliament, the opposition knew it would be able to block any major move by resorting to strikes and popular protests. Thus, at this point in time the institutional part of the round table compromise was not much more than the institutionalization of the status quo ante.

As we now know, both sides underestimated the level of popular frustration with the status quo. Most probably, the media monopoly of the PUWP and the government had created a distorted picture of the population’s mood—a picture that not only the opposition and regime leaders had believed to be true, but also the respondents in the opinion polls used by the government. But when voters arrived at the ballot boxes and cast their votes, it turned out that the general mood about the PUWP and the government was much worse than the opinion polls had indicated.¹⁵ When the ballot boxes closed and the first exit poll results were shown

¹⁵ More about the issue in Klaus Bachmann, “Pluralistic Ignorance in Action. The Puzzle of Unintended Consequences during Poland’s Transition to Democracy,” in Adriana Mica, Arkadiusz Peisert, and Jan Winczorek, eds., *Sociology and the Unintended. Robert Merton Revisited* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 219–36.

on television, it appeared that almost all of the seats open to competition had gone to the opposition. The PUWP and her allies, which had ruled the country since the late 1940s, had been defeated in the first competitive elections the People's Republic of Poland had seen since the war.¹⁶

Tab. 1: The result of the 4 June Sejm elections in Poland¹⁷

| | Mandates reserved according to the round table agreement (in absolute numbers) | Mandates reserved according to the round table agreement (in %) | Mandates obtained in the election | Mandates obtained as percentage of all mandates |
|-------------------|--|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| PUWP ¹ | 299 | 65 % | 173 | 37.6 % |
| ZSL | | | 76 | 16.5 % |
| SD | | | 27 | 5.9 % |
| PAX | | | 10 | 2.1 % |
| UChS | | | 8 | 1.7 % |
| PZKS | | | 5 | 1 % |
| OKP | 161 | 35 % | 161 | 35 % |

¹ The PUWP had several smaller allies in the parliament, all of which had run in the elections prior to 1989 under a joint umbrella organization (whose name changed over time) and a joint election platform. These small parties, which recognized the PUWP's "leading role" (as enshrined in the Constitution) assured the symbolic representation of specific social and religious groups. These were: the United Peasants' Party (*Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe*, ZSL), the Democratic Party (*Stronnictwo Demokratyczne*, SD), which was meant to represent bourgeois interests, PAX, an authoritarian nationalist party rooted in the prewar Falanga movement whose leadership had decided to break with the Catholic hierarchy and to support the rule of the PUWP during Stalinism and whose task it was to organize pro-regime Catholics, the Christian Social Union (*Unia Chrześcijańsko-Społeczna*, UChS), which assembled Orthodox Christians and members of the Belorussian minority in Poland), the Polish Catholic-Social Union (*Polski Związek Katolicko-Społeczny*, PZKS, a small party of lay Catholics). The abbreviation OKP (*Obywatelski Klub Parlamentarny* or Civic Parliamentary Club) refers to the parliamentary representation of the Citizens' Committees, the joint platform of those who gathered behind Lech Wałęsa during the election campaign and used the symbols of the Solidarity movement when campaigning.

The results of the Senate election were even more devastating for the regime: Here, regime candidates did not obtain a single mandate. Of the 100 seats, 99 were won by candidates supported by the opposition, and one went to an independent businessman who had outfought both, the local candidate of Lech Wałę-

¹⁶ Antoni Dudek, *Reglamentowana Rewolucja. Rozkład dyktatury komunistycznej w Polsce 1988–1990* (Cracow: Arcana, 2004); idem, *Zmierzch dyktatury* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej - Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2009).

¹⁷ Data retrieved from the website of the State Election Commission, which is responsible for organizing the election process (*Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza*, PKW, www.pkw.gov.pl) and the Polish Parliament (www.sejm.gov.pl).

sa's Citizen Committee (*Komitet Obywatelski*) and the candidate supported by the government and the local PUWP structures. The first session of the National Assembly demonstrated how unpredictable the situation had become for the PUWP and its allies. Instead of a stable and solid majority for Jaruzelski (who ran for president without a competitor), when he was elected by the Polish Parliament on 19 July 1989 this was by the narrowest majority possible.

The landslide victory for the opposition was so huge that it shoved aside many of the previous calculations concerning checks and balances, mutual control and consensus-based legislation. After an unsuccessful attempt by General Czesław Kiszczak to form a government without the opposition (whose representatives had gathered in the Civic Parliamentary Club) in the summer of 1989, the leadership of the opposition managed to form an all-party government under the first non-communist Polish prime minister since the communist takeover in 1946, Tadeusz Mazowiecki. It formally included all the former PUWP allies and confined the PUWP fraction (which dissolved some months later) to the opposition, although three high ranking PUWP leaders (among them two generals) kept control of the Ministry of the Interior (General Czesław Kiszczak, who thus controlled the secret services and the police), the Ministry of Defense (General Florian Siwicki), and Marcin Świącicki (a member of the PUWP Central Committee), who became minister of foreign commerce and therefore kept control of the crucial sectors of the economy that dealt with external trade and foreign currency flows.

In parliament, the PUWP faced strong centrifugal tendencies—the leadership was less and less able to control the agenda of its members of parliament, who had often been elected against the will of the local party leadership and demonstrated strong social democratic tendencies and anti-establishment attitudes. January 1990 saw the PUWP's last party congress: one opposition fraction left the congress on the first day, others tried to assemble the remaining protesters who wanted to get rid of the old leadership. In the end the congress decided to abolish the PUWP, whereupon a new party was immediately created, the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (*Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, SdRP), whose new leader was the former president of the Polish Olympic Committee, Aleksander Kwaśniewski. The members of the former communist trade union umbrella organization¹⁸ and the officers of the army, who, during the People's Republic, had almost automatically been party members, stayed away from the new party. The PUWP ministers in Mazowiecki's government and General Jaruzelski stepped down a few months later, which facilitated new presidential (25 November and 9 December 1990) and parliamentary (27 October 1991)

¹⁸ The umbrella organization's name was All-Polish Federation of Trade Unions (*Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych*, OPZZ), which comprised all of the officially recognized trade unions in the different branches of the economy, which, in return, recognized the "leading role" of the PUWP in politics.

elections, elections that were now fully competitive. On 19 September 1990 Jaruzelski had initiated the legislation of a bill concerning the direct election of the president, which at the same time cut his presidential term short. The bill was accepted by parliament and new elections were held. Jaruzelski no longer participated as a candidate. After Lech Wałęsa had been sworn in, Jaruzelski's term expired automatically.

The dispute about the causes and reasons of Poland's transition

From today's perspective, the round table talks and the June elections were only two of a number of important steps in the transition process from a mono-party system with a centrally planned economy to a liberal democratic market economy. Other important events had preceded it and others would follow, including Poland's radical economic reforms, which shifted the focus of Poland's economy from huge state-owned firms to small trade and services, and from its dependence on the Soviet-led Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA, the Soviet version of a common market) to incremental integration into the European Community. Nevertheless, 4 June has been regarded as the most important break between the old and the new, comparable only to the significance of the fall of the Berlin Wall for Germans or the release of Nelson Mandela for South Africans.

This interpretation of history, which highlights 1989 as the end of communism in Poland, was never entirely uncontested however. Certain political scientists whose biographies are closely linked to the pre-transitional political establishment, as well as a number of economists from the liberal left have always pointed to those elements of continuity that one can identify when looking at the economic and social history of Poland during the period between the emergence of the Solidarity movement in 1981, the imposing of martial law, and the second half of the 1980s.¹⁹ As Dariusz Rosati has shown, many elements of the economic and social reforms that were introduced between 1980 and 1981 were not abolished (although they often turned out to be quite problematic and uncomfortable for the governments after 1981). Indeed, in many cases these reforms were even reinforced by similar measures that the subsequent governments tried to implement during and after martial law.²⁰ Rosati has identified a number of measures that strengthened political and economic decentralization, and he points to

¹⁹ Jerzy J. Wiatr, "Polska droga do demokracji," in idem, Jacek Raciborski, Jerzy Bartkowiak, Barbara Frączak-Rudnicka, and Jarosław Kiliński, eds., *Demokracja Polska 1989–2003* (Warsaw: Scholar, 2003), 13–56; idem, *Europa postkomunistyczna. Przemiany państw i społeczeństw po 1989 roku* (Warsaw: Scholar, 2006); Mieczysław Rakowski, ed., *Polska pod rządami PZPR* (Warsaw: Profi, 2000); Andrzej Antoszewski, ed., *Demokratyzacja w III Rzeczypospolitej* (Wrocław: Wyd. Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2000).

²⁰ Dariusz K. Rosati, *Polska droga do rynku* (Warsaw: Polskie Wydaw. Ekonomiczne, 1998).

the slow, half-hearted democratization that makes the wave of social unrest, the round table talks and the elections of 1989 appear to be the culmination of a transition that actually started much earlier.

As widely found in popular accounts as well as in respected textbooks on Poland's recent history, the period following December 1981 is often described as one of political stagnation, economic crisis and general hopelessness that could not be overcome by either the subsequent governments or the attempts of the political opposition to coerce these governments into political liberalization.²¹ The general deadlock was slowly removed by two mutually reinforcing factors. Within a relatively small sector of Polish society, one can detect a rise in political interest and readiness to engage in politics. This bottom-up trend coincided with the start of Mikhail Gorbachev's reform policy in the USSR that later became known as perestroika. Both—Gorbachev's top-down measures and the prudently developing trend toward more engagement in the politically interested segments of Polish society (whose precise characteristics still need a deeper analysis)—put increasing pressure on the Polish political system and its political establishment. The then-leadership of the Polish People's Republic responded to this challenge by introducing half-hearted, step-by-step reforms. While they failed to solve the basic problems of the country, they later facilitated the radical measures introduced by the governments after 1989.

Recent research, based on unpublished opinion polls carried out on behalf of the government, shows an increasing readiness of citizens for protest and political engagement during the second half of the 1980s.²² The ruling political establishment responded to this tendency by increasing the scope of participation: At the election of (the rather powerless) municipal councilors in June 1988, citizens' committees were given the right to nominate their own candidates and voters were allowed to eliminate candidates from the lists of the Patriotic Front of National Recovery (PRON)²³, which was the joint election platform of the PUWP and her minor allies. Already during the elections to the Sejm before 1989,²⁴ when no competition to the PRON lists was possible, voters still had a choice between voting for or against it, or they could stay at home. As opinion polls show, only

²¹ Borodziej, *Geschichte Polens*, 360–82.

²² Klaus Bachmann, *Repression, Protest, Toleranz. Wertewandel und Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Polen nach 1956* (Dresden: Neisse Verlag, 2010). For a contemporary account of the polling during the reign of General Jaruzelski, see Stanisław Kwiatkowski, "Aneks: PZPR w sondażach w latach 80," in Mieczysław Rakowski, ed., *Polska pod rządami PZPR* (Warsaw: Profi, 2000), 518–42.

²³ The Patriotic Front of National Recovery (*Patriotyczny Ruch Odrodzenia Narodowego*, PRON) was the overarching organization that united the PUWP and its allies and provided one list of candidates for the elections. Due to this, until the second half of the 1980s alliance voters could only vote for candidates from this list.

²⁴ Until the constitutional reform that was hammered out at the round table talks, the Sejm was the only chamber of the Polish parliament. The Senate, the Polish Upper House, which had existed during the Second Republic, had been abolished after a referendum in 1946.

a marginal percentage of respondents felt coerced to participate in the elections.²⁵ But the opinion surveys also show that many people regarded these steps of slow and reluctant democratization as insufficient. The consequence was paradoxical—the more options voters were given, the less they actually used them. Voter turnout decreased during the 1980s and finally plummeted, when voting no longer had any aspect of coercion or control. In 1989, when voters had the broadest choice they had ever had in the People’s Republic of Poland, there was no pressure to vote, and the poll was free and secret, only slightly more than 40 percent of the eligible voters decided to cast their vote.

Table 2: Participation in elections and the referendum during the 1980s²⁶

| | 1987 Referendum | 1988 National councils (municipal elections) | 1989 Parliament | 1990 Presiden- tial elec- tion 1st round | 1990 Presiden- tial elec- tions 2nd round | 1991 parlia- mentary elections |
|--|--------------------|--|--------------------|--|---|---|
| Participa- tion rate (percent- age of par- ticipants compared to all eligi- ble voters) | 67.32 | 55 | 62.32 | 60.6 | 53.4 | 43.2 |

None of the historians dealing with the events of 1989 denies these facts. But in Poland’s post-1989 mainstream historiography, they show up not as elements of a gradual evolution between 1980 and 1989, but as half-hearted and unsuccessful attempts of “the authorities,” “the party” or “the communists” to secure their power through tactical and symbolic concessions to “the nation,” “society” or “the people.”²⁷ According to this interpretation of Poland’s recent past, the period between 1980 and 1989 was just the final phase of a process that had started with the de-Stalinization of the late 1950s, after which “the nation” incrementally extorted more and more concessions from “the communists” until the latter’s collapse.²⁸ Among historians sympathizing with the democratic opposition in the late 1970s and the 1980s, 1989 was the last link in a kind of chain reaction that connected August 1944 (the Warsaw uprising), June 1956 (the workers’ riots in Poznań), March 1968

²⁵ Krzysztof Jasiński, and Adam Przeworski, “1996. The Structure of Partisan Conflict in Poland.” In: Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania, and Jacek Raciborski, ed., *Naród, władza, społeczeństwo. Księga dedykowana Jerzemu J. Wiatrowi* (Warsaw: Scholar, 1996), 185-206.

²⁶ Retrieved from www.sejm.gov.pl and www.pkw.org.pl.

²⁷ See, e.g., Andrzej Garlicki, *1815–2004: Historia Polska i Świat* (Warsaw: Scholar, 2005), 650–60.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 649, Garlicki writes that protests were not organized by the opposition or clandestine organizations of the Solidarity trade union, but by “society.”

(the protests of intellectuals and students), December 1970 (when the army crushed the strike movement in the coastal towns and shipyards), June 1976 (worker protests in Radom and Ursus) and 1980–81 (the emergence of the Solidarity movement).

According to this popular narrative, various social groups had stood up against communism during all of these dramatic events, but prior to 1981 they had never joined their efforts. In 1956 and 1970 workers had protested but the intellectuals remained silent. In 1968 intellectuals and students had raised their voices and then were silenced, while workers had either remained passive or even helped crush the protest. This changed only in 1976, when intellectuals from Warsaw organized legal and financial support for oppressed workers²⁹ whose demonstrations against increases in food prices had met a fierce reaction from anti-riot squads and the secret police. From then on, according to this narrative, workers and intellectuals stayed together and thus enabled the creation of the Solidarity movement a few years later.³⁰ In 1989 the communist establishment, deprived of any legitimacy, faced a united front of workers and intellectuals and thus finally surrendered. This chronology comprises all the elements of a great narrative whose aim is to create national self-affirmation and attribute meaning to a difficult and intricate past. It reduces complexity and channels contradictory, ambiguous events as well as scattered and often incomprehensible facts into a coherent story with a clear divide between good and bad, a narrative that leads from a bad past to a good present. Unsurprisingly, among historians, politicians and political commentators of the patriotic and conservative right, this narrative long remained very popular, even after 1989. The notion of an alleged conflict between a small and alienated group of communist oppressors and the overwhelming majority of the population, often described as “the nation” or “the society,” who despised these oppressors, stems from a famous monograph by Jerzy Holzer about the Solidarity trade union.³¹ Paradoxically, Holzer cannot be considered as belonging to the conservative patriotic strand of Polish historiography.

For historians who adhere to the patriotic strand of the discipline, it is no problem to regard the gradual liberalization of the late 1980s as another chapter

²⁹ These intellectuals created the Committee for the Defense of the Workers (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*, KOR), which later split up into a conservative and a liberal leftist part. The conservative anticommunist members mostly organized the Movement for the Defense of Human and Citizen Rights (*Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela*, ROPCiO), whereas the liberal left wing members renamed themselves KOR, the Committee for Social Self Defense (*Komitet Samoobrony Społecznej* KOR). For more details, see: Jan Józef Lipski, *Komitet Samoobrony Społecznej* (London: Aneks, 1983). The complicated relationship between the KSS, KOR and ROPCiO is explained in Andrzej Friszke, *Opozycja polityczna w PRL 1945–1980* (London: Aneks, 1994), 338–489.

³⁰ Adam Michnik, “Verteidigung der Freiheit. Reflexionen über 1989.” *Osteuropa* 59, no. 2 (2009): 9–19.

³¹ Jerzy Holzer, *Solidarność 1980–1981. Geneza i Historia* (Warsaw: Rytm, 1986). Cf. also his reflections on the divide from the perspective of 2009: idem, “Abschied von einer Illusion. Solidarność und die konfliktfreie Gesellschaft.” *Osteuropa* 59, no. 2 (2009): 151–66.

in the everlasting fight between a good nation and a bad regime. From this point of view, there was no top-down decentralization, liberalization or democratization. All of these processes were merely episodes in the nation's fight for sovereignty, during which the regime made a few half-hearted and belated concessions. These only encouraged the politically conscious part of the nation, the democratic opposition, to increase its demands. Critics of this approach toward Poland's recent history may realize how much this dichotomist or even Manichean view of the past resembles its Marxist-Leninist counterpart: History is made by oppressed yet politically conscious workers, who are led by a small, enlightened intellectual elite of revolutionaries. At the beginning of the twenty-first century this narrative then bifurcates and Poland's right-wing populist milieu starts to reinterpret it in terms of an alleged betrayal of the righteous workers by arrogant and cosmopolitan (in other words, "alienated from the nation") elites, who "took power on the shoulders of the workers."³² This is the origin of the counter-narrative to the optimistic version of Poland's transition.

The divide between followers of the "top-down" and of the "bottom-up" concepts of transition is rooted in dissenting interpretations of the intentions of both sides. Even if we leave aside the problem of how Polish society (or according to the popular narrative, "the nation") overcame its collective dilemmas concerning the events that occurred during the years between 1988 and 1992, we must nevertheless deal with the fact that the main actors in Poland at the time were the political leadership of the PUPP and the leadership of the clandestine Solidarity movement,³³ which had originally been a trade union. In most publications, both sides are described according to the labels they actually used during the conflict. There is the "Solidarity movement," the "Solidarity trade union" or "the opposition" on one side,³⁴ and "the regime," "the party" or "the commu-

³² Many elements of this legend can be found in a famous sample of interviews with critics of the Mazowiecki government, of whom many also became (or had always been) critics of the round table talks. Jacek Kurski and Piotr Semka, *Lewy Czerwcowy* (Warsaw: Editions Spotkania, 1992).

³³ The Solidarity trade union had emerged from the various worker committees created during the big protest waves of 1980. In 1981 Solidarity was formally registered as a legal trade union (making Poland the only Soviet bloc country with two competing trade unions). However, it was then de-legalized in January 1982 as a consequence of martial law. After that, many of its leaders and activists who had escaped incarceration founded clandestine trade union cells, often as members of (legal) workers committees (*radz pracownicze*), which were entitled to participate in the management of state enterprises.

³⁴ For outsiders and readers not familiar with the internal Polish discussion, the absence of a "democratic vs. non-democratic" divide may come as a surprise. Actually it seems there is not a single publication in which the supporters of democracy during the 1980s are actually described as "democrats," despite the fact that the outcome of the transition process actually brought about democracy. In some Western media and popular accounts, the political opposition in Poland has been described as "democratic opposition." In Poland, labels pertaining to sovereignty and national independence actually prevail over political notions. According to them, the opposition fought for sovereignty and independence against a regime that had been imposed from outside.

nists”³⁵ on the other. Very few authors deviate from this scheme. One who does is Jerzy J. Wiatr, a party intellectual and member of the PUWP’s Central Committee, who, during the 1980s, was a close associate of General Jaruzelski and defended the introduction of martial law and after 1989, became one of the leading figures of the postcommunist Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD). For him, the political regime of the 1980s was a military junta, not a one-party system and an ideological dictatorship.³⁶

Wiatr’s notion has not gained much popularity among Polish historians, despite increasing evidence supporting his claim that has come to the fore during recent years. It now seems as if the center of state power was indeed situated outside the official bodies of the government, namely, the state institutions and the PUWP. When, for example, in 1989 the Central Committee of the PUWP was deciding on the re-legalization of the Solidarity trade union, strategic decisions were taken by a core group of generals around Wojciech Jaruzelski, namely, Florian Siwicki (the then minister of defense) and Czesław Kiszczak (the minister of the interior, who effectively controlled the state security complex). These decisions were not made by the Central Committee’s Politburo nor by the government, the State Council (*Rada Państwa*). These decision channels had been established in December 1981, when the generals had marginalized the PUWP’s central organs, its Political Bureau, the State Council and even the newly established Military Council of National Salvation (WRON), all of which were only asked to give their assent to decisions that had been previously taken by the generals. During the second part of the decade, the generals even established a special task force whose job was to monitor and analyze the situation in Poland as well as to elaborate possible strategies to overcome the deadlock. This task force, which was never formalized, authored a number of risky and unorthodox proposals, all of which were kept confidential. They were transmitted to General Kiszczak, who forwarded them to Jaruzelski. Most of these proposals were never applied in practice. Astonishingly the members of this informal task force were people whom the generals trusted strongly but who came from outside the party and government hierarchy. One of them, Jerzy Urban, who became the government’s spokesperson, was even outside the ranks of the PUWP.³⁷

For more about the “national” character (as opposed to political, social or pluralist notions) of Poland’s transition, see Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacji, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* (Warsaw: Trio, 2005); Marcin Kula, *Narodowe i rewolucyjne* (London: Aneks, 1992); for a broader perspective, see Martin Mevius, ed., *The Communist Quest for National Legitimacy 1918–1989* (London: Routledge, 2010).

³⁵ Andrzej Garlicki, *Karuzela: Rzecz o Okrągłym Stole* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 2003).

³⁶ Jerzy J. Wiatr, “Polska droga do demokracji,” in idem, Jacek Raciborski, Jerzy Bartkowiak, Barbara Frątczak-Rudnicka, and Jarosław Kiliński, *Demokracja Polska 1989–2003* (Warsaw: Scholar, 2003), 13–56.

³⁷ He joined the PUWP shortly before it dissolved in 1990. For more information about the task force, see Włodzimierz Borodziej, and Andrzej Garlicki, “Od redaktorów,” in Włodzimierz

One of the most ardent supporters of top-down reform was Mieczysław Rakowski, the former head of Poland's famous weekly *Polityka*, who served as prime minister from September 1988 until August 1989. He had never belonged to the military's core group of rulers. Recently discovered sources, as well as his own memoirs and interviews with members of his entourage, confirm that his role in advocating power sharing with Solidarity was actually much more active than it was perceived by political commentators and opposition members at the time.³⁸ They mostly remembered his support for Jaruzelski's coup d'état in 1981. His promotion of economic reform and top-down changes as well as his contemptible remarks about the round table had aroused suspicion in opposition circles, who suspected him of trying to replace a compromise with the political opposition by symbolic concessions and superficial gestures, which would allow the PUWP to maintain control over the transition process. Some of these concessions, whose details have been elucidated in recent research, comprised the creation of a Consultative Committee (promoted by General Jaruzelski). Membership in this committee was rejected by almost all members of the political opposition, as was the invitation of non-party members from moderate opposition circles (not directly connected to Solidarity structures) to the cabinet. The latter attempt had been initiated by Rakowski himself.

Due to the opening of state archives and a flood of memoirs and interviews after 1989, every step of the preparations for the round table talks can now be traced. From this perspective, even the results of the secret talks with key actors of the round table negotiations in Magdalenka are no longer surprising. As Kowal has pointed out, the idea of a power sharing deal in the Sejm as a result of partially competitive elections had been discussed in oppositional circles and within Jaruzelski's entourage long before, as had the concept of resuscitating the Senate as a body that would allow the opposition to control a part of the legislative process. This concept can even be found in a document of the PUWP's Central Committee that was prepared prior to Gorbachev's visit to Poland.³⁹

Most authors limit their analysis to these two sides of the round table talks—the opposition and what in Polish is usually called *władza*, which can be translated as power, authority, the authorities, the government (in a broader sense than only the cabinet) or the ruling elite. However, at least during the final phase of the negotiations, it is highly disputable whether there were only two sides. The official and—at that time only legal—OPZZ trade unions, which had a strong leverage over the Central Committee and about seven million members across the country, were

Borodziej, and Andrzej Garlicki, *Okragły Stół: dokumenty i materiały*, vol. 2. (Warsaw: Zapol, 2004), 6–40.

³⁸ For examples of Rakowski's active role in promoting power sharing with the opposition and advocating the legalization of the Solidarity trade union, see Garlicki, *Karuzela*, and Rakowski's own political diary: Mieczysław Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1987–1990* (Warsaw: Iskry, 2005).

³⁹ Kowal, *Koniec*, 394–95.

strongly disinclined to accept the crucial point of the talks—the introduction of “trade union pluralism,” a euphemism used for the legalization of Solidarity. The OPZZ, headed by a choleric and self-confident Alfred Miodowicz, felt threatened by the potential emergence of another strong trade union in the factories, but it also regarded (rightly, as it would later turn out) the legalization of Solidarity as a material threat against its possessions. After the imposing of martial law and the subsequent de-legalization of Solidarity, all its assets (with the exception of cash, which some activists managed to withdraw from the trade union’s bank accounts) had been handed over to the OPZZ. Under the conditions of “trade union pluralism” and a general trend toward the rule of law, the OPZZ could expect huge compensation claims from Solidarity. The role that the OPZZ played during the round table talks provided a good illustration of how “trade union pluralism” would later affect the economy. On more than one occasion, the OPZZ tried to sideline Solidarity by forwarding more radical requests than the opposition had presented.⁴⁰ Some members of the government delegation were aware of the risk that the competition between the two rival trade unions might bury radical economic reform and most likely to lead to a radicalization of the whole trade union movement. But for the two sides at the round table, the stake was much higher than that.

Authors sympathizing with the opposition tend to present the OPZZ merely as a sort of puppet that the government used to extort concessions from the opposition. Some authors even suspect Kiszczak and Jaruzelski of having manipulated the trade union in order to increase their bargaining power during the negotiations. However, until now no evidence for such a plot has been found. Nonetheless, under the pressure of a violent conflict, increasing pluralism within political camps that had until then been unified is a phenomenon well known from other transitions as well.

Tracing back the key actors’ intentions

At a large conference of historians, former political and opposition activists, and contemporary witnesses that was brought together in 1999 in a palace near

⁴⁰ When Solidarity requested an 80 percent wage compensation for inflation, the OPZZ demanded 100 percent. When the talks started, the OPZZ demanded the immediate abolition of press censorship, something that the opposition had not requested because opposition representatives were well aware of the consequences this might have for Polish–Soviet relations. During the final public closing ceremony, Alfred Miodowicz demanded to speak right after General Kiszczak and Lech Wałęsa, and threatened to leave the ceremony in protest if not granted this right. Piotr Oseka, “Okragły Stół. Taktyki negocjacyjne władzy i opozycji,” in Włodzimierz Borodziej, and Andrzej Garlicki, eds., *Okragły Stół: dokumenty i materiały*, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Zapol, 2004), 5–22. There is more inside information to be found in Paweł Kowals impressive oral history project, which is based on material collected at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor: Paweł Kowal, “Dlaczego doszło do Okrągłego Stołu? Przyczyny zmian politycznych w Polsce w latach 1989–1990 w opiniach polityków, aktywnych uczestników tego okresu,” in Tomasz Szarota, ed., *Komunizm: ideologia, system, ludzie* (Warsaw: Neriton, PAN 2001), 156–73.

Warsaw to examine these issues, no authoritative answers were found.⁴¹ The perception of both sides is still biased by their most recent interests as well as by their ex-post perspective, which drives them to conceive past events in the light of today's knowledge about them. Therefore, members of the former political establishment tend to emphasize (and sometimes exaggerate) their own willingness to "overcome the system," their preference for further democratization and for the "social-democratization" of the PUWP, whereas former opposition members describe their counterparts' actions as half-hearted and driven by the intent to "preserve the core of the system" by making "tactical concessions." Former opponents of the communist leadership tend to overestimate their own clarity of mind in a situation in which no one could actually have known exactly where history was heading, not even the most influential and powerful actors, as for example Mikhail Gorbachev. In many of their presentations, Poland's history seems to have been written by strongly determined activists who fought for a liberal, pro-Western democracy, a capitalist market economy, and the full sovereignty of the country—despite the fact that many less well-known and less highlighted documents and quotes from 1989 and the preceding years contain little proof of the leading dissidents' alleged resolve to bring the system down. While the transition was still underway, the emphasis of both sides lay on compromise rather than fight and victory. This, however, may have been due to the "civilizing power of hypocrisy"⁴² as much as to tactical considerations. Recent monographs and editions of sources have revealed strong incentives for a peaceful rather than revolutionary change. It was the absolute stalemate that not only prevented the opposition from openly confronting the regime but also stopped the regime from taking radical military options. By the second half of the 1980s, both sides were exhausted.⁴³ The breakdown of the strikes in May 1988 had shown the inability of the opposition to mount a decisive attack against the ruling establishment (protesters on the coast remained isolated and finally abandoned the strike without engaging in any negotiations); the outcome of the referendum in 1987 demonstrated the inability of the regime to obtain any legitimacy for economic reforms without political concessions. Without a politically legitimized reform agenda that

⁴¹ Paweł Machcewicz, Andrzej Paczkowski, Antoni Dudek, and Andrzej Friszke, *Polska 1986–1989. Koniec systemu. Materiały międzynarodowej konferencji. Miedzeszyn, 21–23 października 1999* (Warsaw: Trio, 2002).

⁴² The "civilizing power of hypocrisy" describes the mechanism of moderating one's opinion, whereby a person is compelled (or feels it is fitting) to publicly declare opinions that he or she does not share in order to reduce cognitive dissonance, and subsequently adopts opinions that are closer to the publicly uttered ones, displacing the ones initially held privately. On this concept see: Jon Elster, "Strategic Uses of Argument," in Kenneth Joseph Arrow et al., eds., *Barriers to Conflict Resolution* (New York: Norton, 1995), 237–57; Jon Elster, "Deliberation and Constitution making," in idem, ed., *Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 97–122.

⁴³ Borodziej and Garlicki, "Od redaktorów."

could be carried out without the threat of boycotts and strikes, the regime was unable to deliver an improvement in living standards, although this is something that might have strengthened its support among the population.

This vicious cycle probably would have embroiled the country in a spiral of protests, hyperinflation and economic decay had the internal balance of power not been altered by external influences. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev took power as the general secretary of the CPSU and launched perestroika, which encouraged both Poland's opposition and the reform-minded sections of the ruling establishment to embrace reforms. From this point in time onward, contrary to the conditions under Brezhnev and Andropov, the conservative opposition within the PUWP and the state administration could no longer mobilize support in Moscow to prevent changes in Poland. Both sides of the future transition negotiations, the opposition and the ruling leadership, could now count on Gorbachev's support and were able to marginalize the antagonists within their own ranks. At the same time, uncertainty about a possible Soviet reaction to radical measures, riots or civil war tamed the radicals in both camps and contributed to moderation and a sense of unity between the ruling elite and the opposition. Mutual trust as well as uncertainty about the consequences of radical measures drove both sides toward each other, incrementally isolating them from their radical edges. When in January 1990 the PUWP dissolved and its former leadership, new and now much younger, founded a new party, the climate of the congress was dominated by radical social democrats, reform-minded socialists and supporters of pluralism, market economy, democracy and human rights, rather than representatives of a conservative and revengeful party bureaucracy. On the other hand, the round table talks and the election campaign had also considerably weakened the radical ranks of the opposition who had sought revenge on Poland's *ancien regime* rather than compromise.

Internal constraints and external influence

Seen against the background of the violent transitions in parts of the Soviet Union and in former Yugoslavia, Poland's power-sharing deal and democratization are often described as a kind of political miracle, facilitated by wise leaders on both sides and the moderation of a strong and temperate Catholic Church supported by the Polish pope (John Paul II) and Vatican diplomacy. Indeed—and in contrast to the Soviet transitions—no television towers were stormed by paratroopers (as 1990 in Lithuania) and no ethnic minorities were incited to fight each other (as between 1992 and 1994 in Nagorny Karabakh). The Soviet leadership (and later Russian) as well as the United States and West European governments supported a peaceful transition, as did the Vatican. The pope and Vatican diplomacy were eager to stress their opposition to bloodshed and revo-

lution, even making this explicit during the round table talks.⁴⁴ Dubiński rightly states that the Catholic Church was far from being only a victim of the communist system. It acted as a moderator mainly (but not only) by means of its hierarchy. However, a factor that is often overlooked is that the Catholic hierarchy was also a party in the conflict. Until the trial of the Popieluszko assassins in 1985, the Catholic Church had been regarded as a moderator and a kind of neutral referee between the clandestine Solidarity movement and the state authorities.⁴⁵ The trial, which was used by the authorities to accuse the Church of political engagement, destabilization and hate propaganda, changed this perception, pushing the Church into the camp of the political opposition and weakening its ability to moderate. It was only during the first huge waves of protests in 1988 that the Church was pulled back into the limelight. In contrast to an ardently anti-communist pope, who had time and again publically denounced the alleged oppression of Catholics and Catholicism in Poland, the Polish episcopate was much more moderate and prudent in everyday politics and more than once outraged dissidents and radical priests, who pushed for more action against the authorities.⁴⁶

The Catholic Church was not the only actor to contain revolutionary tendencies that opposed a peaceful transition. There were two external factors that strongly constrained the change of regime and prevented radical solutions and retributive measures after June 1989. The first was the Soviet Union, whose leadership was not interested in destabilization since such a course of events would have endangered perestroika and necessitated interference from Moscow. The second was the West, which feared any type of escalation along the frontlines of the Cold War as well as large scale migration in the event of a violent regime change. The governments in Washington and Bonn were also anxious to prevent any radical change that might threaten a peaceful and negotiated transition in the GDR and the planned merger of the two German states. Last but not least, after the GDR had acceded to the Federal Republic of Germany, negotiations about the withdrawal of Soviet troops from East Germany started, creating a dangerous situation for Poland, which was also host to large garrisons of the Soviet army. The new Polish government was also eager to start negotiations on a withdrawal of these troops, but more specifically wanted to avoid a situation in which the withdrawing troops from Eastern Germany would station themselves in Poland and increase the number of soldiers in the garrisons on Polish soil. The last thing

⁴⁴ Krzysztof Dubiński, *Wokół Okrągłego Stołu* (Warsaw: Krajowa Agencja Promocyjna, 1999), 32.

⁴⁵ Jerzy Popieluszko was an oppositional and quite outspoken priest with close links to the clandestine Solidarity movement. In October 1984, he was abducted and killed by a death squad of overzealous officers of the Ministry of the Interior. Public outrage about the murder induced the government to order an investigation and to prosecute the perpetrators in a public trial in 1985. All were sentenced to relatively long prison terms.

⁴⁶ On the role of the Catholic Church in Poland's transition see: Peter Raina, *Droga do "Okrągłego Stołu"*. *Zakulisowe rozmowy przygotowawcze* (Warsaw: von Borowiecky, 1999).

the Polish government (or anyone interested in Poland's sovereignty) wished in a situation like this was destabilization and internal turmoil, because it would only delay the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

After the Soviet Union had lost its leadership role and pulled out as a constraining factor for radical regime change, the European Union and (to a lesser extent) NATO stepped in, promoting new values of stability, political compromise, human rights and the rule of law.⁴⁷ It is striking that—in contrast to the EU's policy concerning the Balkans—its human rights and rule-of-law discourse preferred forgiveness, unity and reconciliation over retribution, punishment and “dealing with the past.” Hardly any research has been done about the link between EU policies and the preferences of its member states, or how the communist past was dealt with in Central and Eastern Europe. Only a few years later, after the violent breakup of Yugoslavia the EU favored punishment for the perpetrators there over reconciliation and unity, in the name of the human rights of the victims. In contrast, in the CEE countries after 1989, it was human rights that were usually invoked to prevent the punishment (in the form of vetting, screening and large-scale de-communization measures) and to guarantee fair (and therefore, under transitional conditions, lengthy and complicated) trials for former communist perpetrators. There, the concept of human rights was rarely used by victims to confront their torturers and reveal the truth about the past.⁴⁸

All of these constraining elements also contributed strongly to the absence of any important retributive measures. Lustration as an issue of state policy was only introduced when the new order was stable and could no longer be threatened by proponents of the *ancien régime*.

The fact that Poland's transition was a peacefully negotiated compromise, moderated by the Catholic Church and closely monitored from outside, without any retributive measures against members of the old regime, had wide consequences. These consequences can be divided into those that were short term and others that were long term.

⁴⁷ In 1988 Poland had begun negotiations on a trade agreement with the European Community. It was signed in September 1989. Almost immediately, Poland requested the start of negotiations for an Association Agreement (which would contain a full membership perspective). The request granted, Poland and the EC negotiated for another two years, and then ratified the Agreement despite strong opposition in the Polish Sejm. Poland then filed a request to start negotiations for full membership in the European Union (which had emerged after the ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht). For details, see Renata Duda, *Integracja Polski z Unią Europejską: Wybrane aspekty polityki integracyjnej w latach 1991–2004* (Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawn. Arboretum, 2004), 5–16.

⁴⁸ The majority of the research dealing with this nexus comes from the disciplines of political science and law and is found in a new strand of literature called “Transitional Justice” (research that is almost non-existent in Poland): Lavinia Stan, ed., *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. Reckoning with the Communist Past* (London: Routledge, 2009); Monika Nalepa, *Skeletons in the Closet. Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Countries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Short-term consequences

During the months following the June 1989 parliamentary elections, many of the deputies of the former government proved their autonomy by demonstrating that they were far from being satellites or puppets of the PUWP leadership. The parties of the *ancien régime* began to come under huge pressure from Poland's blossoming pluralism. Party members contested their leadership, with PUWP members of parliament voting down proposals from their leaders and instead supporting motions from the Mazowiecki government. The striving for legitimacy that the elections had triggered brushed away the remnants of "democratic centralism" with which the PUWP had so long been associated.

The opposition's landslide victory on 4 June provided the transitional government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki a huge amount of public trust, which he was able to use for a radical economic reform program. This was supported by a strong majority in parliament, which included many PUWP members, who tried their best to obfuscate their political past through radical commitments to reform, democracy, a market economy and the rule of law. During the autumn of 1989 the government pushed an enormous number of highly sensitive and socially costly reform bills through the Sejm, whose members voted in endless night sessions and extraordinary procedures in order to make these bills law by 1 January 1990. Many of these laws were highly detrimental to the aging state industries, to the highly subsidized agricultural sector, and to the bureaucratic state banks. They all dominated an extremely consumer-unfriendly market that was driven by supply rather than demand.⁴⁹ Within a year, this had changed radically: Inflation fell from several hundred percent a year to a two-digit level, and the fixed currency exchange rate (sustained by a stabilization reserve, funded by Western creditors) caused a huge external trade deficit and put extreme pressure on Polish suppliers, forcing them to cut costs.

Poland's economy quickly became competitive, but the social cost was high: unemployment rates rose from 0 to 10 percent, charities started to offer free meals to homeless and unemployed people, and populist parties and politicians gained increasing support. Under the influence of the austerity measures of Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz, the parliamentary club of the Citizens' Committee disintegrated into a plethora of rival parties. After the elections in 1993 a coalition of the postcommunist Alliance of the Democratic Left and the United Peasants' Party, a former ally of the PUWP now refurbished as the Polish Peasants' Party, was able to form a cabinet.⁵⁰ Poland became a multiparty democracy with a very strong emphasis on "multiparty."

⁴⁹ Hartmut Kühn, *Das Jahrzehnt der Solidarność. Die politische Geschichte Polens 1980–1990* (Berlin: Basisdruck, 1999).

⁵⁰ For a criticism of economic policy, elite approaches to reform and the social consequences of transition, see: David Ost, "Dlaczego polskie elity nie są zainteresowane resztą społeczeństwa?"

During the early 1990s, due to party fragmentation and a low threshold for entering the parliament, more than thirty parties held seats in the Sejm, and some of the short-lived multiparty coalitions consisted of up to eight different parties. At that time, the cleavage between supporters of national reconciliation and the partisans of “reckoning with communism” was already prominent, but the basic narrative of Poland’s march from communism to the round table and then to freedom and sovereignty still remained largely uncontested. Mazowiecki’s government was criticized for its reluctance to hold leading members of the *ancien régime* accountable for atrocities, for ruining the economy, and for depriving the country of sovereignty and dignity.⁵¹ It was at the end of the 1990s when something new emerged, namely, “the black legend” of the round table talks. It had never been a secret that deadlocks at the relatively crowded and heterogeneous round table had been overcome by a smaller “core group” of representatives from both sides (as well as representatives of the Catholic episcopate, who acted as mediators). They met at a resort owned by the Ministry of the Interior in the village of Magdalenka on the outskirts of Warsaw. At these talks, leading figures of the opposition, including some trade unionists from Solidarity, met General Kiszczak and other members of the PUWP’s Politburo. Kiszczak had taken care that the negotiations were filmed, including some potentially discrediting scenes showing opposition members drinking vodka with him. When these details were published during subsequent election campaigns, they quickly reinforced the rumors of an alleged “plot of the elites” and a “Magdalenka conspiracy.” By then, the positive associations in the narrative about the round table had been gradually replaced by a negatively loaded “Magdalenka narrative,” which involved secretive bargains between “communists and their former friends” who were “selling out national interests.” According to this “black legend” about the round table talks in Magdalenka, the opposition leadership, in exchange for political power and control over the security forces, had granted the top level perpetrators of the old regime impunity as well as access to key sectors of the economy. “Magdalenka” became the codename for the cause of Poland’s numerous transition problems, from corruption to political fragmentation, government instability and even organized crime.

Newsweek, 6 January 2010, <http://www.newsweek.pl/polska/dlaczego-polskie-elity-nie-sa-zainteresowane-reszta-spoleczenstwa,51248,5,1.html> (accessed 8 July 2013); Stephen Crowley and David Ost, *Workers After Workers’ States* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); David Ost and Hanna Jankowska, *Kłęska ‘Solidarności’. Gniew i polityka w postkomunistycznej Europie* (Warsaw: Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie Muza, 2007).

⁵¹ Jan Olszewski and Ewa Polak-Pałkiewicz, *Prosto w oczy* (Warsaw: Inicjatywa Wydawnicza “ad astra,” 1997); Jarosław Kaczyński, Michał Bichniewicz, and Piotr M. Rudnicki, *Czas na zmiany* (Warsaw: Editions Spotkania, 1992). In the summer of 2010, 31 percent of the respondents polled by the pollster firm CBOS (Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej) regarded the Magdalenka talks as “a conspiracy of the elites.” http://biznes.onet.pl/polacy_o_magdalence_okraglym_stole_i_poczuciu_zdrady,18515,3779648,1,onet-wiadomosci-detel and www.cbos.org/archiwum.

In the intervening years, all of the sources about the round table talks and the Magdalenka negotiations have been published, including the minutes taken by Kiszczak's assistant Krzysztof Dubiński, who published several books on the topic.⁵² None of these sources allows such far-reaching conclusions to be drawn, but paradoxically this has only reinforced the vigor of the "black legend." Whereas political anthropologists point to the lack of symbolic closure and catharsis in Poland's transition, a number of popular sociologists and political scientists go much further and interpret the Magdalenka talks as the trigger that led to the (alleged) emergence of secretive networks between former members of the security forces, Party members, members of the communist *nomenklatura*, organized crime and foreign secret services. These clandestine networks are suspected of having undermined Poland's transition, threatened the transparency of political decision making, and contributed to a specific kind of political system,⁵³ which Warsaw sociologist Jadwiga Staniszkis labels "postcommunism." Postcommunism—a term whose popularity goes far beyond sociological analysis—is considered a compromised form of façade democracy, where all important decisions are made behind a curtain and then formally confirmed by official institutions.⁵⁴

Long-term consequences

As evidence from other transition countries shows, "reckoning with the past" in penal terms and punishing perpetrators of past atrocities often does not help root out the political legacy their rule has left behind. In many cases, it prompts supporters of the fallen regime to create their own parties and pressure groups and to seek rehabilitation, amnesty or even revenge. Meting out justice to former communists meets popular demands, but it also raises the costs of reconstruction and economic development and creates new and often lasting political splits that complicate democratic decision making.

In Poland's case, three distinct factors can be identified that contributed to a swift and ultimately successful political and economic transition. First, the rela-

⁵² Krzysztof Dubiński, *Wokół Okrągłego Stołu* (Warsaw: Krajowa Agencja Promocyjna, 1999), 31 (on his own role during the round table talks); idem, *Magdalenka. Transakcja Epoki. Notatki z poufnych rozmów Kiszczak-Wałęsa* (Warsaw: Sylwa, 1990). In 2000 the Hoover Institution Archives acquired 23 manuscript boxes of Krzysztof Dubiński: <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt3n39r64j/> (accessed 8 July 2013).

⁵³ Andrzej Zybertowicz, *W uścisku tajnych służb: upadek komunizmu i układ postnomenklaturowy* (Komorów: Antyk, 1993); Andrzej Zybertowicz, and Radosław Sojak, eds., *Transformacja podszyta przemocą: o nieformalnych mechanizmach przemian instytucjonalnych* (Torun: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2008).

⁵⁴ Jadwiga Staniszkis, *Postkomunizm: próba* (Gdańsk: Słowo, Obraz Terytoria, 2001); idem, *Post-communism: the emerging enigma* (Warsaw: IPS PAS, 1999); idem, *Postkomunistyczne państwo: w poszukiwaniu tożsamości. Instytut Spraw Publicznych* (Warsaw: ISP 2000).

tively early prospect of becoming an associate of the EC and then full EU and NATO membership helped prevent radical policy changes.⁵⁵ Second, the actual lack of retribution for members of the former establishment prevented them from creating any kind of “revenge” pressure group or party, and their political representation, the Alliance of the Democratic Left, quickly became a social democratic party that adopted a platform that was pro-Western, democratic, pluralistic and even pro-capitalist. After regaining power (together with the smaller Peasants’ Party) in 1993, it never attempted to change the political system or reverse the transition process. Due to the introduction of radical pro-market reforms in 1990, many members of the former elite who had lost power were able to use their resources and social capital to make money and form new careers in business. This contributed to the social support of anti-communists, who demanded the imposition of retroactive punishment or wanted the government to confiscate “immorally” achieved wealth of former *nomenklatura* members, and at the same time prevented any radical left wing movement from gaining support. Anti-Western, anti-market and sometimes even anti-democratic and populist sentiments were mobilized by the radical right, whereas the left end of the political specter remained pro-capitalist, moderate and democratic.⁵⁶

The third factor contributing to the success of transition was the strategic decision of the postcommunist left to base their legitimacy on former social democratic tendencies (from prewar times, emigration and internal PUWP opposition) and from their government record between 1993 and 1997 rather than on an ideological defense of the People’s Republic and its alleged achievements. This decision was partly driven by the aforementioned lack of retribution and the new opportunities that the transition had provided for the former *nomenklatura*.

The lack of catharsis and the impossibility of holding the former leadership of the PUWP and of Jaruzelski’s junta legally accountable have certainly contributed to the rise of populist tendencies in Poland at the beginning of the new century.⁵⁷ They are, however, not the only causes of these tendencies. The lack of a strong symbolic cut with the past has led to the emergence of several substitutes. An incremental inclusiveness of Poland’s collective memory about the communist times, which has begun to see both communists and anti-communists

⁵⁵ Such a perspective was lacking in parts of Europe and the post-Soviet space, where violent ethnic conflicts interrupted transition. Jerzy Wiatr, *Europa postkomunistyczna. Przemiany państw i społeczeństw po 1989 roku* (Warsaw: Scholar, 2006), 82–108.

⁵⁶ Klaus Bachmann, *Polens Uhren gehen anders. Warschau vor der Osterweiterung der EU* (Stuttgart: Hohenheim Verlag, 2001), 25–59.

⁵⁷ See David Ost, and Hanna Jankowska, *Kłęska „Solidarności”: gniew i polityka w postkomunistycznej Europie* (Warsaw: Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie Muza, 2007); Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism of Poland* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994). Ost identifies the lack of politicization of economic transition as the main source of populism, not the lack of retribution.

as “good patriots,”⁵⁸ is accompanied by an ever more exclusive historical policy, which idealizes the radical anti-communist opposition and individual extremists who favored armed fight over civil protest. At the same time, the legalist opposition of the late 1940s, such as the anti-communist part of the Peasants’ Party and the moderate Catholic opposition has been overlooked.

The attractiveness this patriotic narrative still has in Poland can be explained by the relative ease with which it can be used in political fights as well as for patriotic education. It is additionally reinforced by the historical policies of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), a huge and influential state institution that was created with clear and unambiguous political intentions. However, due to the complexities of the democratic process, the IPN is now largely insulated from direct party influence. The IPN was initially established to archive, administrate and analyze Poland’s secret police files, which survived the transition process and their mass destruction that was initiated by Poland’s last communist minister of the interior, General Czesław Kiszczak, who resigned in the summer of 1990. Due to extensive government funding, the IPN dominates large parts of Polish historiography concerning the postwar period, communism and the history of the democratic opposition. IPN publications include extensive editions of sources, monographs, edited volumes and many periodical series. These all share some common features. First, they advance the above-mentioned patriotic narrative by reducing the scope of their research to three actors: the anti-communist opposition, the regime, and the Catholic Church. Second, they rely largely on the secret service files, and either ignore other sources or deliberately refuse to compare them to the secret police archives. This results in historical accounts that are either anecdotal or strongly biased because of their focus on the relatively small minority of actors who actually took sides in the conflicts that tormented Poland under communist rule—the politically active part of the anti-communist opposition, priests and bishops, and the regime’s leaders and its security sector.⁵⁹ Despite a huge amount

⁵⁸ Actually General Jaruzelski became extremely popular after imposing martial law, and retained this popularity until the early 1990s. During the decades following 1989 a higher percentage of respondents have seen martial law as a “necessary measure” to avoid Soviet intervention than was the case when martial law was introduced—and this despite a huge amount of archival evidence that points to the contrary. This evidence shows that it was Jaruzelski in 1981 who asked his interlocutors in Moscow to increase public pressure on Poland in order to intimidate the opposition and reinforce his own position. The Soviet leadership refused to intervene militarily and made it clear, that “the Poles had to sort it out between themselves.” Andrzej Paczkowski, *Droga do “mniejszego zła”*. *Strategia i taktyka obozu władzy lipiec 1980–styczeń 1982* (Cracow: Wyd. Literackie, 2002), 206–10, 246–68.

⁵⁹ In 2010 the IPN organized a conference and invited its critics. The goal of the conference was to assess the quality and overall tendency of IPN public relations and book production. A summary can be found in Adam Leszczyński, “IPN bez taryfy ulgowej.” *Gazeta Wyborcza*. 9 Dec. 2010, http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,8790004,IPN_bez_taryfy_ulgowej.html; idem, “Czy IPN może być zbawiony?” *Gazeta Wyborcza* 10 Jan. 2011, http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,8922040,Czy_IPN_moze_byc_zbawiony_.html.

of edited sources and despite the accessibility of all government archives concerning state-church relations, the role of the Catholic Church is still one of the big enigmas in historical research on 1989. This is due to a lack of access to the Church archives, which are not subject to the regulations pertaining to the state and PUWP archives.⁶⁰ Another reason is the specific paradigm that most historians apply when delving into Church documents.⁶¹ They treat the Church as a part of the opposition, an actor who, with a certain degree of independence, followed the same agenda as the opposition. In some cases, the Church hierarchy (the level of local priests is seldom a research topic) is presented as a kind of “honest broker” between “the authorities” and the opposition. But the Church is never regarded as an autonomous actor with own potentially “selfish” interests that may have differed from the objectives of the opposition.⁶² According to this perspective, bishops intervened in order to accelerate the transition process, eliminate obstacles and ease tensions, but never in order to forward their own agenda.

The IPN’s focus on the State Security police and the political opposition neglects the attitudes and activities of the majority of the population, which at all times refrained from direct political engagement. Actually, the IPN’s narrative is much less a history of Poland or the Poles than a history of those who fought to support Poland and the Poles, and who claimed at the same time to represent either the majority or even “the whole nation.” To the same extent, leading intellectuals of the political opposition during and after martial law also pretended to fight for the interests of the Polish nation as a whole, as was the claim of the protagonists of the PUWP, whose governments after 1981 declared that they represented the interest of “the nation” more than they claimed to fight for class interests, a world revolution or against reactionaries.

⁶⁰ Except for the documents that were either burnt in 1990 by the Ministry of the Interior or were later handed over to the new secret services (because they contained information about informants who were still operational), all state archives relevant for research about 1989 are today publicly accessible. This is true for the government documents and the PUWP archives, which are stored at the Archiwum Akt Nowych, as well as for the secret police archives, held by the IPN.

⁶¹ Many documents in the state archives have been published by Peter Raina and others. Peter K. Raina, *Droga do “Okrągłego Stołu”: zakulisowe rozmowy przygotowawcze* (Warsaw: von Borowiecky, 1999); idem, *Kościół katolicki a państwo w świetle dokumentów 1945–1989*, vol. 3: 1975–1989 (Poznan: Pelplin, 1996); idem, *Rozmowy z władzami PRL. Arcybiskup Dąbrowski w służbie Kościoła i narodu* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo “Książka Polska,” 1995). In the last monograph, the archbishop Dąbrowski acts “in the service of the Church and the nation,” which suggests congruence between the interests of both.

⁶² The title of Dudek’s and Gryz’ book is paradigmatic for this approach, where one finds “the communists” (non-capitalized) against “the Church” (capitalized). Antoni Dudek and Ryszard Gryz, *komuniści i Kościół w Polsce 1945–1989* (Cracow: Znak, 2003). Elsewhere Dudek is much more critical about the policies of the Church hierarchy: idem, *Reglamentowana rewolucja: rozkład dyktatury komunistycznej w Polsce 1988–1990* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Arcana, 2004), 79–90.

In a fine, clearly structured and compelling analysis, Zaremba has shown why and how Poland's ruling elite during the People's Republic shifted from its failed internationalist strategy during the Stalinist period to a more and more national and even nationalist and chauvinist strategy during the following decades.⁶³ His book reveals how, in the end, the leadership of the ruling establishment, on one hand, and the political opposition, on the other, competed for national (rather than social) legitimacy. General Jaruzelski's speeches refer just as often to notions of "national salvation," "national unity" and patriotism as those of Lech Wałęsa when he addressed his supporters. Poland's post-transition discourse was dominated by notions of sovereignty, independence, national pride and honor, rather than by references to democracy, pluralism or human rights.

Neither the intentions of the protagonists nor the activities of the secret police decided the outcome of this struggle. It was rather the attitudes, convictions and the readiness for engagement of the largely undecided and hesitating bystanders, all factors that remain outside the popular patriotic narrative and the view of IPN researchers and their perpetrator/victim/hero paradigm. It must be mentioned that due to the specific materials and the methods applied by sociologists, this paradigm never prevailed in the sociological analyses of the People's Republic's everyday life. Even under censorship, sociological accounts of Poland's society during and after 1989 depict a much more nuanced and complex picture than the concept of an alleged conflict of "the regime against the nation" has ever suggested.⁶⁴

It is probably not accidental that today younger authors are applying sociological viewpoints and methods as well as tools from social psychology and social history when beginning to delve more deeply into societal moods and fashions, everyday life, as well as the dreams and conflicts, convictions and attitudes of the "ordinary citizen."⁶⁵ Some examples include the economy of queuing⁶⁶ or the mechanisms governing the black market.⁶⁷ *Alltagsgeschichte*, the history of everyday life, has a long tradition in Polish historiography, as exemplified by the books of Tomasz Szarota about everyday life in occupied Warsaw⁶⁸ or even much

⁶³ Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm: nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* (Warsaw: Wydawn. Trio, ISP PAN, 2001), 383–96.

⁶⁴ Władysław Adamski, Krzysztof Jasiewicz, Lena Kolarska-Bobińska, Andrzej Rychard, and Edward Wnuk-Lipiński, eds., *Polacy 88. Dynamika konfliktu a szanse reform. Raport z badania "Sprawy Polaków '87"* (Warsaw: Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii. Polska Akademia Nauk, 1989).

⁶⁵ Barbara Klich-Kluczevska, *Przez dziurkę od klucza. Życie prywatne w Krakowie (1945–1989)* (Warsaw: Trio, 2005).

⁶⁶ Małgorzata Mazurek, *Spółczeństwo kolejki. O doświadczeniach niedoboru 1945–1989* (Warsaw: Trio, 2010).

⁶⁷ Jerzy Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzwiami. "Czarny rynek" w Polsce 1944–1989* (Warsaw: Neriton, 2010).

⁶⁸ Tomasz Szarota, *Okupowanej Warszawy dzień powszedni* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 2010); idem, *Życie codzienne w stolicach okupowanej Europy. Szkice historyczne i kronika* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1995).

earlier monographs dealing with peasants' life in interwar Poland. Not the approach itself is new, but the material on which it is based. The new wave of this strand of social history does not ignore the party archives and the secret police files, all of which are now accessible to the public, but also examines unpublished diaries, personal interviews, newspaper archives and archives of institutions that have been much less penetrated by historians than the party archives, the secret police files or the cellars of the army, the Ministry of the Interior, or Poland's Foreign Office.⁶⁹ Recent publications have been based on the archives of the Television and Radio Committee,⁷⁰ the Agency for the Control of Publications and Public Performances (which was responsible for the carrying out censorship)⁷¹ and private documents in local archives.

Historians have always had an interest in debating the means and aims of censorship, but still today, Poland lacks a comprehensive theoretical and empirical account of its censorship mechanisms. Most articles and books on the subject are purely descriptive and often normative, seeing censorship as just another tool for regimes to oppress societies. The same is true regarding the media in the People's Republic. Romek's most recent book on censorship provides detailed stories about specific cases, including extensive quotes from the sources which show that censorship can also be regarded from a different perspective—as a place where compromises about interpretations of the past were negotiated.⁷² During these negotiations, the state institution had initially more leverage than the other side—usually the author, who was often supported by his editor. Later, after the emergence of a strong and competitive second market that was beyond the scope of the censors' influence, the bargaining power of authors increased considerably. This point shows that at least in this respect, liberalization was actually imposed on the government from the bottom up, rather than granted by reform-minded rulers who had recognized the wind of change and adapted to it. This case contradicts the top-down version of gradually applied liberalization during and after martial law, but it is also not a case for the “society against the regime” paradigm, since the actors in the clandestine book market, the authors and their readers, constituted only a marginal section of the overall population.

⁶⁹ Krzysztof Dąbek, *PZPR. Retrospektywny portret własny* (Warsaw: Trio, 2006).

⁷⁰ Klaus Bachmann, *Repression, Protest, Toleranz Wertewandel und Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Polen nach 1956* (Dresden: Neisse Verlag, 2010); Patryk Pleskot, *Wielki mały ekran. Telewizja a codzienność Polaków w latach sześćdziesiątych* (Warsaw: Trio, 2007); and (for later periods) Lechosław Gawlikowski, and Yvette Meisser Moreno, “Audience to Western Broadcasts to Poland during the Cold War,” in A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta, ed., *Cold War Broadcasting. Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. A collection of studies and documents* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 121–41.

⁷¹ Zbigniew Romek, *Cenzura a nauka historyczna w Polsce 1944–1970* (Warsaw: Neriton, IH PAN, 2010).

⁷² *Ibid.*

