eurozine

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Reason's cunning

Poland, populism, and involuntary modernization

Poland is unique. It is the only country where the government consists solely of populist parties. It is impossible to analyze it using traditional academic models because, for historical reasons, the classical fault lines of the party–building process do not exist in Poland. The populists' success feeds on demographic pressure, the transformation of values, and a deep–seated uncertainty brought on by the reforms at the end of the 1990s. But a comparison with Europe shows that populism in Poland is not unique. It has the same paradoxical consequences: populists attack democracy, but they make it more stable by expanding its ability to integrate; they make use of anti–modern rhetoric, but by polarizing, they consolidate their opponents and drive modernization forward; and because populists are as a rule incapable of solving the problems that they have identified, they lose voters' support.

From the 1962 film *The two who stole the moon*, starring Jaroslaw (left) and Lech (right) Kaczynski. The future Polish leaders were 13 at the time.

Ever since 1989, western European commentators, political scientists, and journalists have had a problem with the political landscape in Poland –– a difficulty they share with those Poles who try to transfer western European categories to their country. These categories do not seem to be appropriate. Those calling themselves leftwing are, on closer inspection, only in certain respects on the left, whereas those who would like to appear as rightwing and conservative are often radical, or indeed revolutionary; liberals turn out to be economic liberals with a elitist understanding of democracy who borrow from nationalist and authoritarian thought. The Democratic Left Alliance (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*), Poland's post–communist social democrats, was decidedly liberal in comparison to the Social Democratic Party of Germany or the French and Spanish Socialist parties. Poland's right wing called itself conservative, but has espoused at times almost social–revolutionary concepts, including a change of elites and radical proposals of reform.

A look at the political parties in the European Parliament completes this confusion: The "liberal" Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*) joined the parliamentary group of the European People's Party; the "left–liberal" representatives of the Freedom Union (*Unia Wolnosci*; since 2005 the Democratic Party) sit with the European liberals; the radical Self–Defence (*Samoobrona*) and the Catholic–nationalist League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*) belong to no parliamentary group. Only in the case of the social democrats are things in their proper place: They are part of the socialist parliamentary group. The largest party in the current government, Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc*, or PiS), sits with the representatives of the Union for Europe of the Nations, which are dominated by opponents of the

EU.

Even the Euro–sceptic British Conservatives are still a part of the European People's Party. In contrast, the leaders of PiS, President Lech Kaczynski and his brother Jaroslaw, have repeatedly stressed that they do not want the party to be understood as a Euro–sceptic party. This is despite the fact that the party, and therefore also the present government, has refused to set a date for joining the third phase of the Economic and Monetary Union, pronounced the EU constitution dead in the water, and voted for the draft of a new EU basic treaty only after an extremely hard struggle. They see themselves as rigorously anti–communist, have ordered the opening of the archives of the Polish secret services, and are pursuing a radical overhaul of the ruling elite. However, they won the 2005 elections by luring voters away from the social democrats, who had been weakened by corruption affairs and inner–party divisions, with the slogan "a social, and not a liberal, Poland". Following the elections, commentators, politicians, and academics in Germany were perplexed: What kind of party is this? It describes itself as conservative, but espouses an almost social–revolutionary programmeme; it is, on the one hand, clerical and national, even nationalist, but on the other hand, appeals to a social conscience.

"National–conservative, nationalist, anti–liberal, social–national, and national–populist", murmured the European press after the elections. No one really knew how to pigeonhole Law and Justice. One also had problems with the other parties in the coalition government: Self–Defence can just as well be categorized as right or leftwing populists, nationalists, statists, or socialists. The League of Polish Families is somewhat easier to deal with: conservative Catholicism, authoritarianism, and nationalism go hand in hand here –– all attributes of a slightly archaic right like that which existed in western Europe before the Second World War or in the 1950s.[1]

The problems that arise when one tries to apply classical political categories such as "leftwing", "rightwing", "liberal", or "conservative" in Poland are often put down to transformation with the argument that communism meant a completely different political experience and thus a different kind of social change.[2] However, this education was not so different. Despite the necessity of applying for a visa and limitations on travel, the censor and the planned economy, there were trends that found their way to eastern Europe. For pop culture, jeans, the musical tastes of young people, but also for fashions in architecture and certain ideals and values, the Iron Curtain was extremely porous. The origins of the problem are not to be found in the period of state socialism, but rather in the developments that took place even earlier.

Historical differences

The categories used in western Europe to describe party systems are heavily influenced by the theories of the political scientist Stein Rokkan, who argued that the social and economic conflicts of the past were so to speak entrenched in the western European party systems until the 1960s.[3] These systems, says Rokkann, were formed by fundamental tendencies emerging from the social and political upheavals of the centuries before. Rokkan mentions the French Revolution, which saw a conflict between the centralizing secular state and the claims of the transnational church hierarchy of the Vatican; the Reformation, which witnessed a conflict between transnational Catholicism and national Protestantism; the Industrial Revolution, which brought about the division of capital and labour; and finally the antagonism of town and country, or centre and periphery, which has existed since the Middle Ages. These divisions can

be used for most western European countries, but it becomes problematic when one tries to apply them to central eastern and eastern Europe –– and by no means simply due to the relatively short period of communist rule.

The conflict between the Vatican's claims to power and the nationalizing centralist state that sought to set up a national clerical hierarchy never played a significant role because Poland as a state did not experience the period of absolutism. A similar pretension to the nationalization of the transnational ecclesiastical structure only existed with regards to the Orthodox Church (and was implemented through the Union of Brest in 1596). This was, however, not important for the development of a Polish nation–state. Following the partitions of Poland, the fact that the Papal States as the centre of the dominant religion were outside the national territory proved not to be a barrier to nation building, as it was in western Europe, but rather a contributing factor. This was because this centre remained beyond the reach of the partitioning powers. Poland's Catholic Church remained in a certain sense Polish because its centre of power lay outside the territories subjected to Germanification, Russification, and Austrian influence. A line of conflict, as in France or England, between the claims of the nation state and the church hierarchy did not develop. Moreover, the conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism did not affect nation–building because it barely affected the nation–building elites. In Poland, which was predominantly agricultural and had little industry, even the antagonisms between capital and labour were very mild in comparison to those in the highly industrialised countries of western Europe. When industrialization was forced through under Stalinism, the terror and one–party rule that went with it prevented development of this conflict. The potential claims of the working class were not directed against a class of capitalists, but rather against the state. Therefore, during the post–Stalinist period, antagonisms similar to those in western Europe broke out into open conflicts, but they took place between the working class, on the one hand, and the state and party, on the other.

The only dividing line from Rokkan's model that was present in Poland to at least the same extent as in western Europe was that between the centre and the periphery. During the partitions, this line of conflict ran between the centres of the partitioning powers and the Polish periphery. This was the basis of the dynamism of the Polish national movement. Following independence, this conflict took place between the town and the country. Under communism, this antagonism had been frozen in place inasmuch as the centre was able to balance competing interests, while industrialization and post–war migration allowed a large part of the rural population to enjoy the benefits of urbanization. In the 1980s, the state tried to prevent these potential tensions from boiling over. Subsidies kept the price paid for agricultural products in the countryside high, while pushing down consumer prices in towns. This strategy of avoiding conflict slowly brought ruin to the state budget and contributed to the pressure on the government in favour of the reforms that ultimately led to the peaceful transfer of power to the opposition at the 1989 Round Table.

The transfer of power in 1989 took place, above all, among the urban elites. Both before and after 1989, power was in the hands of relatively well–educated, urban leaders. The peaceful transfer of power and the ensuing reforms allayed the conflict between supporters and opponents of the communist ideology, but exacerbated the conflict between town and country because the economic reforms of the 1990s ended the balancing measures. The introduction of real lending interest rates (above the level of inflation) affected above all the peasants whose production was dependent on advance financing,

which led to a form of expropriation of peasant holdings carried out by the banks. These are the origins of Self–Defence, which was founded in the early 1990s by peasants who were heavily in debt and wanted to establish a counterweight against the banks and promote state intervention. The transfer of power of 1989 and the ensuing economic reforms benefited the town most of all. They made commodities such as education, knowledge of foreign languages, access to mobility and modern communication, and contacts with abroad, which were at most available in the towns, scarce in the countryside, while foodstuffs, which during the communist period had been in short supply for the urban population, became abundant.

Shortcomings of representation

Right from the beginning, an astonishingly high per centage of the Polish population did not feel itself to be represented by the new system after 1989. Despite the enormous mobilization through the government and opposition, in 1989 forty per cent of those entitled to vote did not go to the ballot box. Voter apathy increased in the years thereafter, such that in many elections only a minority of those eligible to vote did so. The highest level of mobilization was reached during the highly personalized presidential elections, which were characterized by the parties as "final battles between good and evil".

Significantly fewer inhabitants of rural areas took part in the elections than did those living in towns. The one exception was the local elections –– traditionally a greater part of the rural population took part than did those in the towns.[4]

Challenges of the change in values

In the 1960s, western Europe experienced a violent change in values, which was characterized by generational conflict, clashes with the police, and demands for radical reform of the universities. The cause for this explosion was, in western as in eastern Europe, a revolt by the post–war generation against the values of those who had lived through the Second World War, and the tremendous demographic pressure on the job market and state institutions created by the post–war baby boom. Behind this was a yearning for more social mobility as a result of which the protestors perceived and portrayed the ruling political system as narrow–minded, insular, cut off, elitist, and out of touch. This change in values was followed by an individualization of behaviour.[5]

Traditional middle–class values, such as the nation, family, membership of hermetic social groups, diligence, and the willingness to subordinate oneself to a higher authority, which had been preserved during and immediately after the war, were driven away by new orientations that were more suitable for economic development: creativity, critical thought, and the cult of self–realization. As a result, groups became less important. The demands of the group no longer determined the interests of an individual; instead, his or her desires, dreams, and goals were important. Women's liberation and the protection of children replaced the cohesion of the family; human rights and the right to be different in a multicultural society superseded membership in a nation, a family, or an ethnic minority. In western Europe, this led to a politicization of society, and a blossoming of civil society and participative democracy, but it also had negative consequences. The loss of social ties (to churches, trade unions, and family bonds), the higher mobility, and the removal of the division between professional and private life alienated people

from one another, subjected them to greater stress, and left them with a feeling of insecurity.

In Poland, this individualization was restricted to the private sphere. The post–war factions that rebelled against the establishment in 1968 were formed from two groups: on the one hand, the younger communists who had spent the war in the underground and felt their prospects of promotion after the war had been blocked by the return of the Stalin loyalists from exile in Moscow; on the other hand, the student avant–garde of the baby–boom years, who rose against the stifling atmosphere of the late Gomulka period with the slogans of a democratic, culturally pluralistic socialism. The faction of apparatchiks was more successful in that it was able to secure the support of the majority of the working class by appealing to nationalist sentiment, by also stemming from the inter–war period, and by using anti–Zionist slogans. They pacified the student revolt with the help of the workers and the tools of the police state. As a result, many Jewish members of the party left the administration and army for emigration and were replaced by careerists from the lower echelons of the party.

In contrast to western Europe, the mixture of nationalist propaganda, emigration, and the methods of the police state led to a mass de–politicization of young people. Because the change in elites had taken place under nationalist (that is, collectivist) slogans, and was not accompanied by economic reforms, there was nothing driving political individualization in Poland. In the conditions of a planned economy, in which heavy industry formed a large part, and the rediscovery of the national by both the opposition and the regime, the process of individualization remained confined to a moderate change in values. Young people in Poland also wore jeans, listened to the Beatles, and grew their hair; they became more tolerant and introspective, and placed more value on self–realization than a high income. However, they did not, of course, found Green parties or become involved in social movements.[6]

In western Europe, the rapid change in values brought about a counter–reaction that quickly took on a political form and established its own institutions. The Green parties that sprung up in the 1980s in western Europe became the avant–garde of the change in values. Against this, populist parties like the *Front National* and the *Vlaams Blok* provided a rallying point for all those who felt that the changes had gone too fast and too far. While the first camp upheld anti–authoritarian, individualist, civil and pacifist values, the populists offered collective identities, often made use of an almost military rhetoric and acted in an authoritarian manner. Whereas the former propagated multiculturalism and openness, the latter espoused national unity and xenophobia. While the new social movements, action groups, and Green parties placed the emancipation of the individual at the centre of their activity, the populists called for the subordination of the individual to the demands of the collective. Whereas the first camp pursued women's liberation and equal rights for cultural, ethnic, and sexual minorities, which they justified with the right of every individual to be different, the populists contrasted this individualistic egotism with the group egotism of nationally and ethnically defined groups. While the former argued for a concept of citizenship based on the principles of integration and inclusiveness that could be adopted freely, the latter believed that the foundations of a community were exclusive, and could only be acquired through biological ties of kinship.

The avant–garde of the change in values and their opponents shared the tendency to contrast the common people with a hermetic political

establishment, cut off from the rest of society. Within this construct, both groups presented themselves as the challengers to a ruling elite that was corrupt and removed from the (supposed) needs of the normal citizens. What the one side called grass–roots democracy, the other termed "healthy public mood". Behind both lay a fundamental distrust of representative democracy, which each in turn hoped to overcome through different means. The Greens hoped that plebiscitary elements would enable the autonomous public to exert influence. The populists wanted to help "the voice of the people" be heard. As the avant–garde of the change in values increasingly integrated itself into the political system, its claim to challenge the establishment became weaker. While the populist parties remained isolated, they made a virtue out of necessity and projected themselves as the victims of persecution, as incorruptible outsiders, and construed an unbridgeable fissure between themselves and the "parties of the system" (as in the case of Jörg Haider and the other Austrian parties). In this way, democratic competition was re–interpreted as a dichotomous struggle between the small people and their representatives (the populists) on the one hand, and the illegitimate system on the other. This construction, at the very least, shows anti–democratic tendencies.

However, through their desire to challenge the others and break their taboos, the populists made it possible to discuss topics which up to that point had been neglected, but were considered important by large segments of the population. In Austria, the FPÖ's participation in government led to the break up of cartels, and greater transparency in and control over the decision–making mechanisms of the consensus democracy. In the Netherlands, the electoral success of the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* opened a discussion on the topic of immigration and the integration of immigrants. Until then, it had been downright criminalized.[7] Because populist parties, as challengers to the establishment, barely had any access to the media (particularly where the media is under the influence of the other parties, as with public broadcasters or those media belonging to political cartels), they had to break taboos in order to attract the attention of the media. Nevertheless, the taboos that they broke were always those arising from the system of values possessed by their opponents.

Because Poland did not experience the western European change in values and growth of individualism, there was also no counter–movement. Only in the early 1990s was the time right for a confrontation between the avant–garde of the change in values and their populist challengers. Economic reforms, rising affluence, opening up to the West, and finally integration into the EU, as well as a boom in foreign investment, created an impetus towards individualization, which deeply worried many people. Even today, important elements of the change in public and political values caused by the recent economic developments are still basically imported goods: private television, private radio, and popular media such as tabloid newspapers and women's magazines presenting hedonistic and individualized views were able to find a growing place in the market because they were financed by foreign investors. Changes in the media landscape, which in western Europe required decades, gushed into Poland over the space of only a few years. This imported change in values reached its highpoint at the end of the 1990s when many of the protectionist barriers were pulled down as part of the adaptation of Polish law to that of the EU. It coincided with another event, whose socio–psychological effects overshadowed even those of the transformation of 1989.[8]

Reforms as the populist moment

There is a good deal of talk about the four reforms of the government under Jerzy Buzek between 1997 and 2001. From its first day in office, the coalition of the Freedom Union and Solidarity Electoral Action (*Akcja Wyborcza Solidarnosc*) implemented a radical programme of reform that shook the foundations of society. The existing 49 voivodeships that had been ruled directly from Warsaw were transformed into 16 self–administrating regions. Each possesses its own parliament, which has no legislative authority and elects the executive. This was tantamount to a complete reorganization of the country. Organs of self–government also sprung up at the lowest levels of local government, which, however, possessed little power or financial means. Regional medical insurance companies assumed responsibility for health insurance from ZUS, the state agency for social insurance. New pension contributors were changed over to an equity–based system.[9] Finally, the school system was reformed through a move from a two–stage system (primary school and *liceum*) to one with three stages (primary school, secondary school, [*gimnazjum*], and then *liceum*).[10]

These changes intruded on the everyday life of the population, in particular in the rural areas, where structures and customs which had existed for decades, if not centuries, were torn up. For this reason, it is possible to detect an increasingly negative mood in opinion polls.[11] Distrust towards the authorities, other people, and all Poland's important neighbours grew, as did the feeling that the parties were no longer representative.

There are many indications that not the events of 1989, but rather the reform policies of the Buzek government were the "populist moment" that the literature identifies as the catalyst for a rise in populism and the success of populist parties.[12] Buzek's coalition collapsed under its internal contradictions and poor rating in the opinion polls. This triggered an "every–man–for–himself'" movement. Politicians from the coalition partners Solidarity Electoral Action and Freedom Union abandoned their parties in order to rescue their chances of re–election, and founded new parties that distanced themselves from the reform policies of the past. This was how the anti–party party of Andrzej Olechowski, the secret winner of 2000, was created. In founding the Civic Platform, Olechowski, who had belonged to both the establishment of the last years of the People's Republic and the post–1989 economic elite, formed a movement that channelled support from the presidential campaign and in this way sought to latch onto the potential frustrations of the post–Buzek period.

Another politician, however, made better use of the populist mood: While he was still the minister of justice under Buzek, Lech Kaczynski had begun a campaign against crime and corruption, two classic themes of western European populist parties. He presented himself as the strong outsider, attacking a system of corruption and sleaze. This was made all the easier in that before the departure of the Freedom Union, he had not played a leading role in Buzek's government. His attempts from above to force the public prosecutor's offices to adopt a firmer stance, his attacks on judges who passed lenient sentences, and his advocacy of the death penalty and firmer repressive measures were welcomed by the population. The ensuing debate on corruption made a once neglected topic into the most contentious issue in domestic politics, and led society to adopt a more uncompromising definition of what should be understood under corruption. As a result, the impression strengthened that the land really was ridden with corruption. The anti–corruption mood that emerged was grist to Kaczynski's mill and he was able to win the mayoral elections in Warsaw. This post was his springboard for

his election as president in 2005.

Although the institutional and legal foundations for tackling corruption have improved steadily since 1989, not least due to the pressure to conform to EU law, corruption has become an increasingly important social problem during this period –– at least in the eyes of society. The same is true of crime. Here, too, society's perception that there is a problem has grown, despite the fact that this concern is not confirmed by crime statistics. The population's feelings of security experienced two periods of significant growth: in the period of the transformation, that is from the communist regime's referendum of 1987 on economic reform to the Balcerowicz reform of 1990, and between 1998 and 2001, during Jerzy Buzek's term of office. During these two periods, the victimization rate (insofar as the fragmentary evidence allows one to make a conclusion) did not rise, while the crime rate went up only slightly. It did rise significantly between 1996 and 2000, but over this period the number of Poles who felt that their country was unsafe actually fell! The small rise in the crime solution rates of the police between 1999 and 2001 was followed by a rise in the number of those who felt that their country was unsafe. It is unlikely that the increasing attention the population gave crime and corruption between 1998 and 2001 was a result of an actual rise in corruption and crime. It is more likely that it was a response to the uncertainty caused by the reform policy and its consequences. This can also be seen in a comparison with the period 1990–1993. During this time, the crime rate fell slightly, while the per centage of crimes solved rose from 40 per cent to 53.1 per cent. In the same period, there was a dramatic rise in the number of those who believed that Poland was an unsafe country. It was also the time in which the largest economic upheavals took place and the Poles experienced mass unemployment for the first time.[13]

In other words, the population did not feel unsafe or believe that their country was not safe because there were more crimes and corruption than before, but rather they were interested in these topics because they felt uncertain (as a result of the Buzek reforms). This is not unique to Poland and could be observed in other countries, for example, the Netherlands.

A second trend resulting from the uncertainty of the population during the reform policy at the end of the 1990s was the search for an imagined common enemy.[14] During the period of the Buzek reforms, the prestige of almost all Poland's neighbours fell among the respondents to the opinion polls. The only exceptions were the Czechs (and nations that are geographically distant, such as the Chinese and Vietnamese, who were seen slightly more positively).[15]

Polish populism in comparison

As in western Europe, Poland's populist politicians made use of these trends. Whereas Jean–Marie Le Pen, Philip Dewinter, Pim Fortuyn, and Jörg Haider pronounced immigrants to be a threat, and promised to protect society from them, Kaczynski and his party PiS declared that the Germans, Russians and those who supposedly worked for them in Poland were enemies. In August 2004, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, who was at that time still only a member of parliament, told the Polish parliament:

> In Poland, there was and [...] still is a genuine front for the defence of German interests. One must also say to oneself clearly that this front [...] consists of informants of the German secret services, including those who have been handed down

> from the Stasi. This is a very big group of people who live from German money and act as if they were independent scholars and journalists [...].[16]

Like the common enemies imagined by western European populists, this construction is rather vague; however, in contrast, it has not yet been Europeanized. While both the *Vlaams Blok* and the *Front National*, for example, direct their xenophobic agitation foremost against immigrants from outside the EU, the definition of the aliens whom Poland's populists seek to exclude embraces direct EU neighbours like the Germans and members of its own political establishment. It is true that western European populists also seek to present members of their country's establishment as being alienated from the people. However, the populists in the West have not gone so far as to condemn them as the representatives of foreign or even hostile interests.

In contrast to some western European populists, in the case of the Kaczynski brothers the imaginary threat scenarios and the reinterpretation of their own failings as virtues are more than just propaganda and demagogy. Both brothers were active in the democratic opposition against the communist system. Both are extremely ambitious, but until the elections of 2005, they were unable to find the success they had hoped for. From the beginning of the transformation they projected themselves as outsiders fighting against the conspiracy of the elites, attacking the supposed secret society of former communists and former leftwing liberal intellectuals from *Solidarnosc*, but always outmaneuvered by "the system". Both brothers believe that they are the victims of the intrigues of their opponents. Both possess a hermetic view of the world rife with conspiracy theories, and both are distrustful, seeing politics as a zero–sum game, which is only about interests and in which only the strongest can impose his will.

At the same time, they are driven by a yearning to belong to the intellectual elite of their country, which has so far showed them the cold shoulder. This explains, on the one hand, the anti–intellectual demagogy of the brothers, and, on the other, the apparent paradox that both have the title of doctor, and that President Lech Kaczynski indeed taught as a university lecturer. This also explains the attempts to turn the lack of experience in foreign politics into a trump card. They argue that they have not been corrupted by foreign contacts, but rather think exclusively in "Polish categories", unlike the intellectuals and politicians who "feed from the hands of the Germans". The unsuccessful satire in the German newspaper *taz* in the summer of 2006[17] was, therefore, particularly painful. It tried to mock two politicians who had anyway spent their lifetime fighting against the frivolous image and condescension of those around them that had accompanied them since their success as child actors. President Lech Kaczynski and Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski are men of conviction. They believe what they say, and they act in accordance with what they believe. When they speak of a threat from Russia or Germany, it is not merely demagogy or an electoral ploy.

At the same time, Poland's populists, like their western European colleagues, are very flexible and pragmatic. Populist parties polarize, provoke, and exclude social groups, but they do so on the basis of imprecise criteria and a rudimentary programme. This allows them to perform 180–degree about–faces. Foreign policy is normally subordinated to domestic goals in that it does not try to achieve long–term objectives, but rather seeks to create a distinctive image for the party at home. An excessively provocative foreign policy will be abandoned if it does not lead to the desired domestic results.

Populist parties often deliberately refuse to draw up a homogenous ideology. They of course mostly try to present themselves as an alternative to the left and the right, as "enemies of ideology" and "anti–party parties". They take part in political discussions as the champion of a vaguely defined common good, the interests of the "little man" and an ominous, diffuse "nation", which is never properly delineated so that they can denounce any political opponent as an "enemy of the people". This all requires a proper dose of pragmatism, often more so than in the case of the established parties. Populist parties are not in a position to change the long–term interests of their country: Poland will still rely on subsidies from the EU and good relations with its neighbours no matter who is in power in Warsaw. Poland's orientation towards the West is guaranteed not only by the common market, the newly created structures of a civil society, and those citizens with contacts abroad; Vladimir Putin and his foreign policy are enough to persuade even the most convinced opponent of the EU that Poland's salvation does not lie in the East.

The developments in Poland should not be seen simply as a nationalist reaction or the anti–European revenge of people living in the past. Populist parties often act as a corrective to flaws in democracies and as a catalyst to social changes that had been obstructed. Because of this, populist parties must rely on the support of interest groups which also feel that the establishment disadvantages them. Once the populists are in power, they often introduce changes that improve these groups' access to power, state resources, the media, or opportunities to improve their social status. Society, in this way, becomes more socially mobile, old sinecures are abolished, equality of opportunity is promoted, and the party system and the bureaucracy are "aired thoroughly". In Austria, the ÖVP–FPÖ coalition brought about a weakening of the system that had removed political decisions from parliamentary and public control. In the Netherlands, the coalition of Christian Democrats and Right–Liberals with the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* gave expression to the interests of estate agents and farmers, who had felt themselves to be harmed by existing environmental and agricultural policies and had felt that they had no choice but to emigrate, and created more transparency between the government and parliament.

In Poland, small cooperative banks, retailers, and all those who want to end the guild–like rules of admission to solicitors' and notaries' bodies have received new impetus. In a situation resembling that at the end of the 1960s, politicians from PiS have sounded the call to storm a bastion that has up to now sought to hold back the onslaught of those born in the early 1980s, a period that saw an unusually high birth rate. Some mention is made about the state universities, whose autonomy under communism provided a shield against intervention by the regime. However, since 1989, it has acted as a defence against reform. At the same time, the universities' complicated internal hierarchy, in which the longest serving academics must decide upon the promotion of their younger colleagues through time–consuming and bureaucratic procedures, hampers the social mobility of university lecturers. Those who were born in the fecund early 1980s are surging onto the job market and finding barriers everywhere: 40 per cent of those completing school and university end up unemployed. At the same time, the older generation already inside the state apparatus, professional associations, and universities maintain the hurdles which ensure that the professions of university lecturer, lawyer, legal advisor, notary, judge, and public prosecutor can de facto only be entered by right of inheritance. Because of the enormous difference between the countryside and the cities, these hurdles act not only as barriers between the young and the old, but also between the urban and rural population.

In 1987, those born to the educated classes were able to retain their professional status 59.4 times more often than the sons of peasants were able to achieve this status. Twelve years later, the figure had increased to 115 times more often. Despite the reforms in education introduced after 1990, the divide between town and country has opened up even more. It is significant that such cleavages have not grown between the different social groups living in the cities.[18]

In the universities this has led to a situation whereby the children of relatively affluent town dwellers study at the state universities, which do not charge fees, while the rural youth try to compensate for their educational handicap by studying at private universities, which charge hefty fees. PiS and Self–Defence represent the spearhead of those members of the rural population born in the years with a high birth rate who are now coming onto the job market. Paradoxically, this is despite the fact that the parties enjoy more support in the towns than in the countryside, as the regional and local elections of 2006 show.

The question of social mobility sets Poland apart from the developments in western Europe and other central eastern European countries. It is true that populist parties have won elections from the Netherlands to Slovakia. However, only in Poland did the "populist moment" (the reforms of 1997–2001) coincide with enormous demographic pressure on the job market and institutions. This might explain why Poland has so far been the only European land in which a government coalition has come to power made up exclusively of populist parties. In the Netherlands, Italy, and Austria, populists formed coalitions with established parties. In France and Belgium, they were emphatically isolated by the other parties and forced onto the opposition bench. Nowhere did they achieve such electoral success as in Poland in 2005. The coincidence of the "populist moment" and demographic developments also explains why of all topics the "reappraisal of the secret service past" (*lustracja*) has become the present coalition's chosen vehicle to bring about a massive change in elites. When the protest movement of the '68ers in Germany forced through a reappraisal of the Third Reich, they undermined the legitimacy of those belonging to the war generation, whose position of power or future chances of promotion came under pressure or were lost. In the same way, *lustracja* serves to bring about a moral de–legitimization of the *Solidarnosc* generation, that is, those who are now in their forties or fifties. These people also stand in the way of those in their twenties, who do not need to fear being accused of collaboration with the communists' security services because they were children at the time. Most politicians in the coalition in Warsaw were older at that time, but so politically unimportant that the security services were not interested in them. They thus cannot be hurt by a comprehensive reappraisal of the past and the sanctions that go with it. Seen in this way, the phenomenal growth of populist attitudes in Poland is not merely a reaction to the rapid change in values brought about by EU accession and by the reforms that preceded it, but also a delayed version of the developments that took place in western Europe in the 1960s, whereby the '68ers carved out their way into the institutions and onto the job market through the de–legitimization of their parents' generation.

Consequently, in the parliament and in state administration, as well as in the regional and local councils, the doors are being opened to representatives of those social groups and classes that in the past had no chance of being represented there: fewer intellectuals, free professionals, and members of the urban population; more rural inhabitants, the unemployed, and even criminals. As a result, the parliament, government, and bureaucracy are probably

becoming less effective, but in return more representative. Opinion polls show that since 2002, the percentage of those who are happy with democracy in Poland is rising once again. This increase is not dramatic, but it is noticeable and has brought the level of satisfaction back up to that which existed before 1997.

One cannot fail to notice that this trend does not sit well with the dominant voices in the Polish and German media, which criticize the government and its record on democracy. In contrast to these, an increasing number of Poles do not see the present government in Warsaw as an accident or a misunderstanding of democracy. This divergence between public and published opinion may stem from the main conflict taking place around the coalition government in Warsaw between centre and periphery, between an educated urban population that is more individualistically oriented and a less well−educated rural population that thinks more collectively. In this conflict, the editors of the (predominantly urban) media are consciously or unconsciously on one side of the barricade, and are therefore no longer neutral observers as in a normal argument between political parties.

The paradoxes of populism

In contrast to anti−democratic parties, which propagate the abolition of democracy and the creation of a dictatorship, populist parties seek to minimize the constitutionally democratic elements (representation, the balance of interests, and the search for consensus) in favour of elements of direct democracy (plebiscites, the resolution of conflicting interests through open struggle). As a result, they are caught in a net of contradictions and paradoxes. They attack the consensus of established democrats, but in doing so make democracy more stable and better able to integrate. They place themselves at the head of the protest movement, channel it, and prevent it from becoming radically opposed to the system. They are normally led by experienced politicians, who nevertheless portray themselves as outsiders and outcasts. Populist parties fight modernization and bring together those who have lost out through modernization, but encourage −− not least through their strategy of polarization −− the consolidation of their opponents and in this way the very process of modernization, which they seek to hinder. Similarly, the paradox of PiS and its coalition partners is that they combine modernization in practice with an anti−modern, reactionary rhetoric. They want to increase the number of people in work, but want to keep women inside the home. They conduct propaganda against the EU, but need its subsidies. They tear down the barriers for young lawyers, but in Poland this is of more benefit for young women than men because female graduates outnumber their male counterparts. However, the populists in power cannot expect thanks from the voters: Once all the taboos have been broken and the hurdles to promotion have been removed, the voters feel that they are better represented by the established parties. The trust in state institutions rises, and "those at the top" now suddenly seem to be able to solve the problems of the citizens. As a result, the most important reasons to vote for populists disappear.

Indeed, the western European experience shows that after only a short period in government, the Dutch LPF and the Austrian FPÖ were punished by their voters at the ballot box. In the Polish elections of 2005, PiS, Self−Defence, and the League of Polish Families achieved a resounding majority in parliament. In the meantime, PiS has fallen behind Civic Platform in the opinion polls, and the two smaller coalition partners could have large problems getting into parliament again at all. In the local elections of 2006, the coalition partners lost

about one million votes to Civic Platform and the left.

Trust in the state institution has risen, and, according to opinion polls, the number of those who feel that the parties in parliament represent them has gone up. Populist parties are Janus–faced –– they agitate against a modernization to which they themselves contribute, and attack democracies whose ability to integrate they promote. Poland is no exception here. The populist moment and its consequences for the party system in Poland are entirely comparable to the developments in western Europe. It is true that the programme with which the populists hope to score points is more materialist, collectivist, and agrarian, but this is connected with the historical development of the country. Whereas western European populists promise to defend the achievements of the welfare state, access to civil rights and certain, mainly middle–class moral concepts against "foreigners", the Polish populists declare they will protect the population from the sale of its land. The peculiar electoral programmes, which from a western European point of view appear "un–European" and exotic, above all through the dominance of agrarian–populist issues, and the fact that these subjects can also lead to electoral success in the cities, are a product of Poland's development in a direction that deviates from Stein Rokkan's model. The demographic pressure, which is behind the present drive towards a change in elites, is a result of the baby boom of the period of martial law. It goes hand in hand with the consequences of the "populist moment" of the reform years 1997 to 2001. In addition, a counter–reaction against the rapid change in values after 1990 encouraged populist attitudes in Poland significantly. The last two elements correspond to the developments in western Europe, just delayed by about 30 years due to conditions under communism.

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1 Klaus Bachmann, "Populistische Parteien und Bewegungen in Osteuropa", in Frank Decker (ed.), *Populismus. Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?* (Wiesbaden 2006), pp. 216–232. On the worldview of the League of Polish Families, see Ulrich Schmid, "Eine glückliche Familie. Die Giertychs und ihre Ideologie", in Manfred Sapper, et al. (eds.), *Quo vadis, Polonia? Kritik der polnischen Vernunft* [= *Osteuropa*, 11–12/2006] (Berlin 2006), 69–80.

2 Timm Beichelt, Michael Minkenberg, "Rechtsradikalismus in Transformationsgesellschaften. Entstehungsbedingungen und Erklärungsmodell", in *Osteuropa*, 3/2002, 247–248.

3 Stein Rokkan, *Staat, Nation und Demokratie in Europa. Die Theorie Stein Rokkans aus seinen gesammelten Werken*, Peter Flora (ed.) (Frankfurt am Main 2000).

4 Raciborski, Wybory, 112.

5 Ulrich Beck, Elisabeth Gernsheim (eds.), *Riskante Freiheiten. Individualisierung in modernen Gesellschaften* (Frankfurt am Main 1994). 307–315; Martin Diewald, *Soziale Beziehungen. Verlust oder Liberalisierung. Soziale Unterstützung in informellen Netzwerken* (Berlin 1991); Ulrich Beck, *Risikogesellschaft. Der Weg in eine andere Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main 1986).

6 On 1968, see Jerzy Eisler, *Polski rok 1968* (Warsaw 2006). For the anti–Zionist campaign, see Dariusz Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna w Polsce 1967–1968* (Warsaw 2000).

7 Dick Pels, *De geest van Pim. Het gedachtegoed van een politieke dandy*. (Amsterdam 2003).

8 On populism and the media see, Gianpietro Mazzoleni, Julianne Stewart, Bruce Horsfield (eds.) *The Media and Neopopulism. A Contemporary Comparative Analysis* (Westport 2003).

9 For more on this see Reinhold Vetter, "Der Globalisierung kaum gewachsen. Polens Sozialsystem auf dem Prüfstand", in Sapper et al., *Quo vadis, Polonia?*, 133–152.

10 Lena Kolarska–Bobinska, *Druga fala polskich reform* (Warsaw 1999).

11 Opinion polls showed that the reforms were overwhelmingly viewed negatively. See Centrum Badan Opinii Spolecznej: *Cztery polskie reformy. Komunikat z badan*, January 2001.

[12] The concept "populist moment" is derived from Lawrence Goodwin. See Lawrence Goodwin, *Democratic Promise. The Populist Moment in America*. (New York 1996). Cf. Frank Decker, *Der neue Rechtspopulismus*. (Opladen 2004), 21–28.

[13] The fact that the feeling of being threatened had very little to do with the actual security situation can be seen in the fact that the feeling of a foreign threat rose dramatically 1998–1999, that is at a time Poland was about to join NATO. Michal Skrzeszewski, "Polska a swiat", in Krzysztof Zagorski, Michal Strzeszewski, *Nowa rzeczywistosc. Oceny i opinie 1989–1999. CBOS, Dialog* (Warsaw 2000), 203.

[14] See Peter Oliver Loew, "Feinde, überall Feinde. Psychogramm eines Problems in Polen", in Sapper et al., *Quo vadis, Polonia?*, 33–51.

[15] Anna Grudniewicz, Michal Skrzeszewski, "Polska a swiat", in Zagorski and Skrzeszewski, *Polska, Europa, swiat*, 88–89.

[16] Minutes of the 82nd session of the 4th Sejm, 25 August 2004. www.sejm.gov.pl.

[17] "Polens neue Kartoffel", in *taz*, 26 June 2006.

[18] Henryk Domanski, *Hierarchie i bariery spoleczne w latach 90–tych* (Warsaw 2000), 24. On the divide between town and country, see the interview with the statistician and sociologist Wieslaw Lagodzinski, "Polska wies wciaz daleko od szosy", in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 15 November 2006. According to Lagodzinski half of all the village schools were closed down between 1989 and 2006. The number of students has increased five times, whereas the number of students coming from the countryside has only doubled. See also Klaus Bachmann, *Polska kaczka w europejskim stawie. Polskie szanse i wyzwania po przystapieniu do UE* (Warsawa 2006), 55–78.

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