

FROM REGULATED REVOLUTION TO THE HISTORICAL WARS. RECONSIDERING POST-SOCIALIST POLAND

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The “Revolution from above” (sometimes called “revolution under the empire of the law”) that ended communism wasn’t a euphoric revolution. It was a des-oriented and confused one, avoiding to look each other in the eyes.¹

Jadwiga Staniszkis

In 1980 the world watched amazed in TV how thousands of Polish workers praised the Lord in the middle of a strike and went to protest marches with images of the Pope and of the Black Madonna of Cz stochowa in their hands. Lech Wał sa’s moustaches became a graphic icon of the Polish revolt, the Polish worker’s union *Solidarno* was celebrated as a revolution of freedom. A year after this, people all around the globe watched soldiers and tanks in the streets of Warsaw, gloomy urban landscapes under grey snow, the figure of a general with black glasses, sinister images of a *self-coup de etat*. The underground fight of the Polish workers brought them a wave of deep solidarity from very different sides. This picture of a renitent and heroic Poland, of a Catholic and anti-communist country, fighting against the foreign imposition of a totalitarian

regime has persisted until today. However, there is another stereotype of Poland as a sort of eternally unsatisfied child, a country always claiming being a victim. Especially after the 11S, Poland became for many Europeans a Trojan horse of American politics in Europe. This perception is, of course, wrong. There are many historical and political reasons for Poland’s alliance with the USA, and indeed the country has been often victim of most powerful neighbors since the XVIII century.

But the mythos of *Solidarno* as a point of no return in the destruction of state socialism in Europe is still very much alive abroad. The “Regulated Revolution” still fascinates people in the world.² This contrasts with the destruction of *Solidarno*’s legacy in its own country. Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin wall, Poland is questioning its own fight for freedom; even Lech Wał sa has been accused of being a Communist agent.³ However, the “historical wars” between 2000 and 2007, the use of archives and politics of memory for fighting the adversary are, now, a part of current politics. They might be considered a heritage of state-socialism, but Poland is now very far away from communism. The transition has taken

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¹ Staniszkis, J., *Postkomunizm. Próba opisu*. Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2001, 5.

² Dudek, A., *Reglamentowana rewolucja. Rozkład dyktatury komunistycznej w Polsce 1988-1990*, Cracow, Arcana, 2004.

³ See Cenckiewicz, S., Gontarczyk, P. *SB a Lech Wał sa*. Przyczynek do biografii, Instytut Pamięi Narodowej, 2007.

place, Poland isn't anymore a post-socialist country, but a *normal* European state.

OPPOSITION AND CHANGE

Polish historiography usually emphasizes the fact that there had been opposition movements in Poland since October 1956 and that the country, therefore, was a constant flashpoint within the Eastern Bloc.⁴ The time between 1956 and 1989 can be divided into two periods: There were numerous spontaneous protests between 1956 and 1976, which, however, never led to a long-range mobilization of the masses. The protest movements that arose between 1976 and 1989, in contrast, essentially contributed through their mass mobilization effects to the collapse of the Eastern Bloc.⁵

After the unrest in March 1968 and December 1970 the announcement of radical price increases for meat, sugar and other foods in June 1976 led to countrywide strikes. The workers of the *Ursus* tractor production company in Warsaw blocked a railroad line and threatened to paralyze transit between Moscow and Berlin. The militia arrested hundreds of the strike's leaders. They were given lengthy prison sentences in quick trials. However, after only a few weeks Gierek's government capitulated, revoked the price increases and granted some of the imprisoned amnesty. It was from this protest movement that the first openly operating opposition organization emerged, which stood up for persecuted workers and their families using legal means. "Workers' Defense Committee" (KOR) represented many different groups in Polish society –leftists and conservatives, priests and Socialists. It unified well-known authorities such as Jerzy Andrzejewski, Jan Józef Lipski, Jan Zieja, Jacek Kuro and others. The organization would become an important component of cultural and political life in Poland; it provided not only concrete help but also published

books and newspapers, the *Biuletyn informacyjny* or the cultural newspaper *Zapis*. Its *Nowa* Publishing company published the works of well-known authors like Tadeusz Konwicki, Kazimierz Brandys, Stanisław Barańczak, Adam Zagajewski and Jerzy Andrzejewski, but the works of other authors also appeared, for example Gunter Grass's *Tin Drum*. In this way the KOR created an oppositional public sphere, a corrective to the official culture scene.⁶ The cultural monopoly of the state was broken. Now, with support from Krakow Bishop Karol Wojtyła, Catholic magazines included the thoughts of both reformers within the church and those outside of it.

New opposition movements arose everywhere which no longer could be suppressed, even though the state again and again arrested opposition members for forty-eight hours and thereby sustained a credible threat of force. The security service also did not hesitate to murder members of the opposition and make those acts of violence look like accidents. The spark that would eventually ignite uncoordinated, isolated fires into an inferno was the election of Wojtyła to pope in the fall of 1978. An overwhelming majority of the Polish state identified with this choice and saw him as a symbol and characterization of "another Poland" to which they also belonged. John Paul II gave the signal for departure as well as determined the mood of societal conflict with his first pilgrimage to Poland: revolts were carried out in a peaceful, controlled and restrained manner. Violent strikes virtually mutated into masses.

SOLIDARNO AND THE PROMULGATION TO A STATE OF WAR

In October 1979 Edward Gierek, first secretary of the PVAP, was forced to concede his helplessness before the Plenum of the Central Committee in light of the radical deterioration of the economic situation.⁷ The early 1980 replacement of

⁴ See, as examples, Eisler, J. *Polskie miesiące czyli kryzysy w PRL, IPN - komisja ścigania zbrodni przeciwko narodowi polskiemu*, Warsaw, 2008; Andrzej Friszke, *Przystosowanie i opór. Studia z dziejów PRL*. Biblioteka, Varsovia, Wiezi, 2007; Andrzej Paczkowski, *Strajki Bunt Manifestacje jako "polska droga" przez socjalizm*, Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, Poznań 2003.

⁵ Cf. Sonntag, S., "Poland", in: Detlef Pollack/Jan Wielgoch (eds.), *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe. Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition*. Aldershot 2004, 3-29, here 3f.

⁶ Lipski, J. J., *KOR: a history of the Workers' Defense Committee in Poland, 1976-1981*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1985.

⁷ Rolicki, J., Gierek, E., *Przerwana dekada*. Wydawnictwo, Varsovia, Fakt, 1990; Rolicki, J. *Edward Gierek*. Replika, Warszawa, Polska Oficyna Wydawnicza BGW, 1990.

Premier Piotr Jaroszewicz, who was responsible for the desolate economy, and the announcement of reforms came too late. When waves of strikes were unleashed in summer of 1980, they caught the administration unaware, even though they had been announced by various omens for a long time.⁸ Makeshift independent unions had long since developed among workers on the coast; the hectographed *Robotnik* newspaper reached a circulation of 20,000 copies. In August 1979, a “Charter of Workers’ Rights” was already in circulation that included many of the demands that formed the basis of the negotiations that occurred at the Gdansk shipyard one year later. All of this was only possible through the close cooperation of intellectuals and workers. The strikes at the shipyards were flanked by attacks on the “façade culture” of those in power. Authors, journalists, and filmmakers depicted the complete unhappiness of Polish society; emotion and reflection converged. They brought an entire people onto the streets.

As was so often the case in the People’s Republic of Poland, price increases served as the cause for the revolt. Gierek’s government had to spend around forty percent of the state budget to subsidize food staples; their foreign debt had grown to twenty billion dollars. If the economy was to be rehabilitated, subsidies had to be abolished. But the people wanted more than that. They presented the government with the bill for twenty-five years of dictatorship. When Anna Walentynowics, a member of the “Independent Union Founding Committee”, was fired from the Gdansk Lenin shipyard, the workers were on strike not only for her reinstatement, but also for the reinstatement of all those fired since 1976. They were also on strike for the establishment of a memorial to those shot in 1970. The work stoppage snowballed as various large firms along the coast and in Upper Silesia joined the strike. The regime was put in a difficult position. When Lech Wałsa had jumped over the wall onto the floor of the shipyard on August 24th and became the leader of the strike committee, the commander-in-chief of the Marines categorically

rejected any military action against the workers. The representatives of the Wojewodschaft party committee were ready to negotiate with the leaders of the strike. Under the advisement of critical intellectuals like Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Bronisław Geremek, the strike demands went even further a few days later: they demanded the founding of free unions, the abolition of censorship and the release of all political prisoners. The shipyard became a virtual Polish metropolis. Within a few weeks, an entire subculture arose in the area—a combination of political demonstrations, religious masses, parties, and fortification. The regime—ambitious technocrats, not ideological spitfires—conceded to the pressure from the streets. Communist functionaries also did not want to return to the early 1950s. On August 28th, the central committee broke away from its hardliners and three days later, Lech Wałsa signed the Gdansk Agreement. This laid the groundwork for independent and self-administered unions.⁹

According to the consensus that exists among most Polish historians, August 1980 did not end for ten years, when the leader of the workers at Gdansk, Lech Wałsa replaced General Jaruzelski in the first free, direct presidential elections. It proved to be a difficult path because the Polish mass revolt was a self-restrictive movement. It was realistic enough to demand neither free elections, nor full independence from the Soviet superpower. Their primary concerns included introducing pluralism to public life, rational economic reform, and scientific as well as cultural freedom. Admittedly, this entailed a proper maceration of the old structures. The Polish United Workers’ Party lost a quarter of a million members and splintered into adversarial groups after August 1980. These groups included Stalinists, National-Bolsheviks, Social Democrats, and radical reformers.

In December 1980 Poland was seriously threatened with an intervention by its “brother countries”, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. The G.D.R. favored marching into Poland. After this the G.D.R. sealed itself off from the “Polish

⁸ Cf. Besier, G. Stokłosa, K., “Solidarno—nur ein polnischer Traum von der Freiheit?": *Totalitarismus und Demokratie*, 4 (2007), pp. 267-284.

⁹ See the classic: Ash, T. C. *The Polish revolution: Solidarity, 1980-82*. London, J. Cape, 1983; new approaches in Gruszka, B. (ed.), *Solidarność: wydarzenie, konsekwencje, pamięć*. Warsaw, IFiS PAN, 2006. A. Borowski, *Droga do niepodległości: Solidarność 1980-2005*. Warsaw, Oficyna Wydawnicza “Volumen”, 2005. A chronology of the events: Skorzyński, J., *Kalendarium Solidarności 1980-89: gdy niemożliwe stało się*. Warsaw, Świat Książki, 2005.

bug”; S.E.D. propaganda recycled anti-Polish clichés from the Nazi era. When Helmut Kohl spoke in Dresden on December 19th, 1989 in front of the ruins of Our Lady’s Church, the masses cheered. However, there were also jeers when he thanked *Solidarno* for their many years of opposition. People in Poland have not forgotten that. On the other hand, new studies report that the contact between civil rights activists and intellectuals in Poland and those in the G.D.R. was never completely severed. The declaration on the thirtieth anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, which was issued by 118 Polish, Czech and Hungarian human rights activists on October 23rd, 1986 by the “Initiative for Peace and Human Rights”, is a manifestation of this common protest.¹⁰

Stanisław Kania, Gierek’s successor to the post of first secretary, claimed to have impressed upon Brezhnev an intervention’s disastrous effects for all of Europe and to have talked him out of his plans. In February 1981 General Jaruzelski became Prime Minister and made Mieczysław F. Rakowski, who was ill-reputed as a Social Democrat and chief editor of *Polityka*, his deputy. The general requested ninety strike-free days, but when the Bydgoszcz militia gave the farmers’ *Solidarno* representatives a beating, the movement answered with a four-hour warning strike. Three days later a questionable compromise was reached between Rakowski and Wałsa that acted as the foundation of a shaky “partnership” between the government and the union. Some sort of double rule of the Communist party hegemon and the party-independent union seemed to be on the country’s horizon. Within the workers’ party, people indeed followed a limited reform path, but continued to maintain their “leading role”. There was also conflict within the *Solidarno* movement between the “realists” and the “radical reformers.” The latter were in favor of sending out a “call to the workers of Eastern Europe” to follow the Poles’ lead. When the party and the government announced a kind of “emergency law” for the following Winter, *Solidarno* planned to respond with street demonstrations, a

general strike, and a referendum over the government’s methods of rule.

However, it did not come to that because Jaruzelski declared a state of war. During the night of December 13th, 1981, thousands of *Solidarno* activists were arrested and interned. The military controlled the streets.¹¹ *Solidarno* members were fired from state enterprises in large numbers, the state-controlled media polemicized against the movement. The country found itself in a civil war-like situation. Wałsa spoke of a “War for Poland” and labelled the government a “junta”. In the fall of 1982 *Solidarno* was stripped of its legal status and many of its members left for the newly formed unions (O.P.Z.Z.), which were loyal to the regime. However, a determined core of believers remained. The conflict was the final straw for the already stricken economy. The only thing that deterred a full-blown supply crisis of the people was foreign aid –from West Germany in particular. Opposition members were also murdered. Some of the murders remain unsolved even to this day. Mass demonstrations following the shocking assassination of Priest Jerzy Popiełuszko in 1984 forced the government to convict the murderer they had hired themselves in the course of a public trial in Thorn.

The Gorbachev era allowed Jaruzelski to carry out discreet reforms.¹² Poland was given the institutions of a state of law –including a constitutional court, an ombudsman for civil rights, and referendums. Incidentally, the Soviets still criticized Polish deviation. However, by 1984 the official Polish press already refused to tolerate Soviet indoctrination. In contrast to westerners, the Poles did not sing Gorbachev’s praises. The Great Russian and convinced Communist did not find outspoken words on Katy or the “Brezhnev Doctrine” during his visit to Poland in 1988.

THE ROUND TABLE, FREE ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIZATION

In early summer 1988, a powerful wave of strikes shook the country. In a further compromise

¹⁰ Printed in Kroh, F. (ed.), “Freiheit ist immer die Freiheit...”. *Die Andersdenkenden in der DDR*. Berlin (West), 1988, pp. 226-228.

¹¹ The best analysis of the state of war and its prolegomena: Andrzej Paczkowski, *Wojna polsko-jaruzelska*. Prószyński i Ska, 2008. See too: Dudek, A. (ed.), *Stan wojenny w Polsce*. Warsaw, IPN, 2003.

¹² Gala, D., *Reformy gospodarcze w PRL (1982-1989)*. Warsaw, Trio, 2005.

reached between the government and the opposition, a so-called “round table” was agreed upon in early 1989.¹³ *Solidarno* was intended to take over responsibility for the hopeless economic situation. However, in the semi-free elections held on June 4th, 1989, the workers’ party suffered a terrible defeat and *Solidarno* won a mandate of ninety-nine percent in the senate, which was completely freely elected, and all of the thirty-five percent of the *Sejm* mandates that were left open to free elections. When Tadeusz Mazowiecki became Prime Minister on August 24th, 1989, Poland possessed the first non-Communist head of government in the Eastern Bloc – thanks to *Solidarno*. The anticipated presidential election of November 1990 marked the true end of *Solidarno* because it was not Mazowiecki that would be Wałsa’s true opponent, but rather a millionaire from overseas, Stanisław Tymski, who was unknown up until that time. The country longed for economic success and, therefore, looked to the prosperous west. However, only in the second election, Wałsa was able to beat Tymski – with the help of Mazowiecki supporters. In December 1990 – twenty years after the bloody strikes on the coast and ten years after the founding of *Solidarno* – the electrician from Gdansk was able to move into the Belvédère in Warsaw. The People’s Republic of Poland had ceased to exist. This was expressed symbolically as the president of the London government-in-exile which still existed, handed Wałsa the insignia of pre-war Poland during his inauguration ceremony.¹⁴

After the elections of October 1991, twenty-nine parties were represented in the new parliament. Ten of those new parties had emerged directly from the *Solidarno* movement. Meanwhile, the economy was in the same sorry state. Jan Bielecki, who held the office of Prime Minister for a few months in 1991, was recognized for his economic reforms. Some of his main focuses included sound management of the state budget, negotiations with the International Monetary Fund over credit and reaching a settlement with foreign creditors. Jan Olszewski became the new Prime Minister in

December of 1991. His short reign (until June of 1992), however, made it impossible to keep up the tempo of reform. The government of Hanna Suchocka followed. Her introduction of a value added tax was an important contribution in stabilizing the state budget. At that time, private firms sprang up like wild flowers and made a positive contribution in the areas of growth and employment. In 1995 Wałsa lost the presidency to Aleksander Kwaśniewski. The results of this election amounted to the defeat of the *Solidarno* mythos.

THE END OF THE MYTHOS

The *Solidarno* mythos that symbolically defined the Polish culture for so long has dramatically become less important.¹⁵ According to the surveys, which were carried out by the Polish Opinion Research Institute, C.B.O.S. in celebration of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Emergence of the *Solidarno* on August 31st, 2005, the day when *Solidarno* was founded, is not one of the days of the year that Poles consider especially important. In the minds of those surveyed, November 11th 1918 (Independence Day), May 3rd 1791 (the day the constitution was written), September 1st (beginning of the Second World War), May 1st (Labor Day) and August 1st (Beginning of the Warsaw Uprising) were all truly important dates. The majority of young people (15-17 years old) did not know what the state of war was or when it was declared.¹⁶ Forty-six percent of Poles were of the opinion that Edward Gierek, first secretary of the P.V.A.P. in the 1970s, had rendered Poland the greatest services among the statesman after 1945. Lech Wałsa came only in second. Seventy-one percent of Polish readers of the respected Polish weekly paper *Polityka* believed that Wojciech Jaruzelski should not be condemned for declaring a state of war in Poland.

Indeed, when the Ex-Communists (Alliance of the Democratic Left, SLD) emerged as the strongest party (20.4 percent) by far from the parliamentary elections of fall 1993, a political earth-

¹³ Garlicki, A., *Rycerze Okręgu Stolu*. Warsaw, Czytelnik, 2004.

¹⁴ Dudek, A., *Historia polityczna Polski 1989-2005*. Cracow, Arcana, 2007.

¹⁵ On the construction of the myth see: Kubik, J., *Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power. The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland*. Pennsylvania State University, 1994.

¹⁶ Cf. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 13 December, 2007.

quake crossed through the whole of Central Europe. Stereotypes of Poles as fierce anticommunists didn't fit the reality. But the henceforth pragmatic Social Democrats supported the development of democracy and a free economy in Poland. In 2001 the SLD had over 100,000 members.¹⁷

Between 1994 and 1997 Poland's economic development had improved so much that some called it the "Tiger of Eastern Europe"¹⁸. The third government after 1989, the cabinet of Jerzy Buzek and Leszek Balcerowicz, introduced bills for reforms of the administrative system, pensions, the healthcare and the education system. After the parliamentary elections of 1997, one got the impression that the political situation in Poland stabilized. *Solidarno* (AWS) emerged as the winners with thirty-four percent of the vote, followed by Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD) with twenty-seven percent.

During the preparations leading up to membership in the EU, Polish policy took on some very difficult tasks. To this end, they modernized the Polish political system, which essentially meant that state had to be brought under control. After the parliamentary elections of 2001 there was nearly a complete overhaul of the political party spectrum. Those parties who had taken a backseat after 1996 were now in the drivers' seat. The coalition that included the SLD and the Work Union (UP) controlled forty-one percent of the votes, followed by the Citizens' Platform (PO) with thirteen percent.

Poland's admission to the E.U. in May 2004 positively influenced the Polish population's attitudes about European integration.¹⁹ While negative opinions had been most prominent during the month before the country's entrance, after the EU's expansion in May 2004, hope, joy, and pride abounded, while fear, dolefulness, and bitterness were present to a lesser degree. Economic integration was best received; it was endorsed by seventy-one percent of Poles. Fifty-two percent of respondents also supported Poland's political unification

with the European Union. According to surveys the Poles' acceptance of E.U. membership increased by seven percent within a year. Fifty-eight percent of Poles surveyed were of the opinion that admission to the E.U. had been advantageous for the country. While fifteen percent of Poles thought that the expansion was wrought with disadvantages in a survey taken in 2004, a year later the figure sank to a mere ten percent. Every third Pole believed that the situation in the country had improved. In June 2005 seventy-four percent of Poles were integration advocates, while only fifteen percent voted against it.²⁰

"THE FOURTH REPUBLIC"

The Parliamentary and Presidential elections of fall 2005 prompted the assumption that one cannot speak of a completed consolidation process. Right-conservative and populist parties emerged from the elections strengthened, the Social Democratic Left, in contrast, emerged weaker. The political center had completely disappeared. The obvious success of a populist confrontational policy made domestic developments in Poland hard to predict. After several months of negotiations, a new Polish coalition government was formed. It was comprised of the "Law and Order" (PiS) party, the populist "Self-Defense" party (*Samobrona*), and the League of Polish Families (LPR). The liberal Citizens' Platform (PO), which came in second in the parliamentary elections with twenty-four percent, became the opposition.

Jarosław Kaczyński, brother of Polish President Lech Kaczyński and leader of the "Law and Order" party, levied a very critical comment regarding Polish policies since 1989 in his party speech in June 2006. According to his perspective, it was a matter of a "post-Communist monstrosity with an abundance of pathology". He failed to mention the benefits of Polish foreign policy after 1989 or Poland's admission to NATO or the E.U in his speech.²¹

¹⁷ Sula, P., "Post-Communist Parties in Poland after 1989", in: Uwe Backes, Patrick Moreau (ed.) *Communist and Post-Communist Parties in Europe*. Goettingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008, 311-328.

¹⁸ Cf. Buras, P., Tewes, H., *Polens Weg. Von der Wende bis zum EU-Beitritt*. Stuttgart, 2005, 133.

¹⁹ On the referenda: Szczerbiak, A., Taggart, P. (ed.) *EU Enlargement and Referendums*. London, Routledge 2005.

²⁰ Cf. Stokłosa, K., "Mehr Nutzen als Nachteil. In Polen ist nach dem Beitritt die frühere Europa-Skepsis einer pragmatischen Zuversicht gewichen". *Vorgänge* 2 (2006), 102-109.

²¹ Speech, delivered by the head of the "Law and Order Party, Jarosław Kaczyński". *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 5 June, 2006, 25.

After two years the ruling coalition collapsed. Due to infighting between the archconservatives and their populist partners, the PiS opted for new elections. As it turned out many Poles had had their fill of the Nationalist Conservative Government under the Kaczynski brothers. 53.8 percent of those eligible to vote, a high turnout by Polish standards, stormed the polls on October 21st, 2007. 41.51 percent voted for the opposition national liberal “Citizens’ Platform” (Platforma Obywatelska). In so doing, they were able to achieve the best election results since the fall of Communism. According to surveys, many voters did not even know the platform that they were voting for when they gave the “Citizens’ Platform” their votes. However, one thing was clear to them: Only the “Citizen’s Platform” led by Donald Tusk had a real chance to beat the Nationalist

Conservative “Law and Order” Party and to cause a change of government. Nevertheless, 32.11 percent of Poles voted for the “Law and Order” Party, which was, indeed, no small base. The Kaczyński’s two then coalition partners –the left populist farmers’ party “Self Defense” led by Andrzej Lepper and the rightist radical “League of Polish Families” (LPR) and its leader Roman Giertych– to the contrary received very few votes and were therefore no longer represented in the new Polish house of representatives, the Sejm. The “Leftists and Democrats” (LiD) party alliance emerged the victors of parliamentary elections –which was much less than the party had hoped to get in the elections. Clearly former Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski’s endorsement of this group had not helped them achieve a better result.

According to a survey taken in November of 2007, over seventy percent of Poles surveyed believed that Donald Tusk would make a good Prime Minister. At the same time the “Citizens’ Platform’s” potential for election exceeded the fifty percent mark. This result was evidence of a huge change of mind and of the wish for the return to a perhaps boring, but predictable policy course. Moreover, the ample mandate also provided support for the way that Tusk build his government. It was above all young Poles who hoped for change. Many emigrants who had left the country to look

for work in the west (mostly in Great Britain and Ireland) due to the Kaczyński government had returned to Poland in the meantime or made plans to do so in the immediate future. The majority of Poles wanted a new kind of government. The citizens wanted more content and less authority. After many years of aggressive policy they expected the Polish government to have a peaceful, constructive style in foreign and domestic policy and not new confrontation. The new Prime Minister Donald Tusk knew that Polish society had common goals that it must achieve. The Kaczyński brothers had split the people, declared war on the other parties and had caused fighting within families.²²

The new government aligned itself, above all, with the EU without spoiling its good relations with the U.S. Tusk and his minister were interested in showing that one can successfully represent one’s own interests without kissing alliances and compromises goodbye. This political style stands in contrast to that of the Kaczyński’s, who always said no and fought against all who thought differently than they did. One of the Kaczyński government’s huge mistakes was that their foreign policy was controlled by national as opposed to international goals. Another huge deficit was their lack of principles: their policies were unpredictable and unstable. The Kaczyński government concentrated on emphasizing Poland’s uniqueness –with respect to history and identity as well as with respect to its national goals and interests. Although the Poles had long since arrived in the European Union, the Kaczyński government tried at every turn to persuade the Poles that the Polish situation and Polish interests were different from those of the E.U. They thereby suggested a polar situation in which it was “us” versus “them.” It became the norm that Polish politicians went to Brussels to defend something, to do something impossible or to weaken somebody, not to work with others or to seek out constructive solutions. This attitude caused an increasing distance to emerge between Poland and the other members of the E.U.²³

After the Kaczyński episode there was quite a bit of catching up to be done in German-Polish relations; they had to become more pragmatic and professional.²⁴ Tusk made it known that Poland

²² Cf. Paradowska, J., “Dwa lata dla brata”. *Polityka*, 12 January, 2008, 12-15.

²³ Cf. Olechowski, A., “Sfotygowana dyplomacja”. *Polityka*, 17 November, 2007, 24-26.

²⁴ Cf. Vetter, R., “Hoffnungen”. *Polen-Analyse-neue Regierung*, 18 November, 2007.

would only be able to realize its interests in the E.U. if it maintained good relations with Paris and Berlin.²⁵ The appointment of former Polish Foreign Minister Władysław Bartoszewski to the post of Secretary for Special Issues should serve to improve German-Polish relations. Bartoszewski had various connections to Germany and had received the highest German honors. Tusk spoke of him as having the “best biography” in the country.²⁶ Poland’s behavior towards Germany and the E.U. changed most in its tone. Tusk wished to consolidate strategic relations with Germany. Difficult themes wasn’t avoided, but rather discussed in a friendly, conciliatory style. Although Polish troops should indeed be withdrawn from Iraq, Tusk still wanted his country to work with him to help improve relations between Europe and the U.S.²⁷

Not only the Poles, but also the Germans and most of the other E.U. states hoped that the new Polish government would mean the end of talks of a „Fourth Republic“ and the authoritarian rule of the Kaczyński brothers. The time of blockading important E.U. projects was also over. There was quite a bit of happiness in Germany over the Parliamentary elections in Poland. They were excited to be able to work together with politicians who were open towards the world. Poland was even able to initiate better relations with Russia. Donald Tusk reinitiated a dialogue with Moscow that had not taken place for quite a while.²⁸ The election results in Poland clearly show a strengthening of democracy in this country. Nevertheless, it was still difficult for Tusk’s cabinet to accomplish its goals since President Kaczyński rejected the new government’s foreign policy and continued to attempt to pursue his own counter-foreign policy. Lech Kaczyński and his followers were sticking to this strategy by changing the foreign policy center to

the Office for National Defense. Politicians from “Law and Order” wanted to use this foreign policy position to defend the presidential palace.²⁹

HISTORICAL WARS

Dealing with the Communist past began later in Poland than in Eastern Germany. On the other hand a deeply rooted historical awareness exists among the Polish people. This historical awareness has shown itself to be above the influence of particular official policies regarding history as well as those of historical research.

The Polish perception of history still seems to be influenced by the myths of the Second Republic, which in part have a “sinister connection” to Communist projections. The romantic victim perspective, which is often related to a messianic salvation mythos, has shaped and continues to shape the Polish view of themselves and their history. A part of researchers of Polish historiography, meanwhile, have begun to study some of Poland’s taboos, such as its relationships with national minorities or the problem of postulated ethnic unity. Sociologists, anthropologists, and cultural researchers have made important contributions to the “Jedwabne Debate” of 2001, which refers to the murder of Polish Jews by Poles in 1941 in the village of Jedwabne. The debate was impelled by the publication of Jan Tomasz Gross’ book “Neighbors”, a brief but vehement text about this massacre.³⁰ This can be considered the first battle of a war that took place in the pages of newspapers and the screens of televisions, whose weapons were books and archival acts. Object of this war was a double heritage of the communist period. At one side, the legacy of repression and crimes of the communist dictatorship. At the other, the many

²⁵ Cf. “Tusk verspricht ein Wirtschaftswunder”. *FAZ*, 24 November, 2007, 7.

²⁶ Cf. Urban, T., “Ein Gerechter mit klarem Feindbild”. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 23 November, 2007, 8; Neuer Beauftragter für Deutschland. “Tusk ernennt früheren Widerstandskämpfer Bartoszewski”. *FAZ*, 23 November, 2007, 6; “A interview to Władysław Bartoszewski”. *Die Zeit*, 6 December, 2007, 10.

²⁷ Cf. “Tusk verspricht ein Wirtschaftswunder”. *FAZ*, 24 November 2007, 7; “Tusks neue Wege”. *FAZ*, 30 November, 2007, 12.

²⁸ Cf. Wojciechowski, M., “Stosunki Polski z Rosj : nie słodko, ale normalnie”. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 7 December, 2007, 2.

²⁹ Cj. Pawlicki, J., “Zagraniczny Lech Kaczyński”. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 20 November, 2007, 3.

³⁰ Gross, J. T., *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, NJ, 2001.

problems of the past, above all of the Second World War and its aftermaths, that had been not good resolve under state-socialism.³¹

The process of dealing with the Communist past has been carried out differently in Poland than in other formerly Communist countries.³² While, in places such as Czechoslovakia, people efficiently agreed upon the institutionalization of the process, established an office for documentation and investigation of Communist crimes and only began to question the correctness of this decision after the fact, it was carried out in the absolute opposite way in Poland. First a serious debate raged in the political and economic realms over the most appropriate way to proceed. When this finally came to an end in the year 1998, the Polish *Sejm* wrote the Law for the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN). It still took some time, however, for this institute to be able to begin its work because the President at the time, Aleksander Kwaśniewski vetoed the law. He advanced the argument that the law discriminated against a certain category of citizens –namely the former special services functionaries of the People’s Republic of Poland as well as those who secretly collaborated with them– by denying them access to the files. The president’s veto provoked fierce reactions in Poland. Kwaśniewski was labeled the “President of all the Stasi people”. The political conflict kept the leader of the institute, Professor Leon Kieres from being elected until June of 2000.

The institute began to play an important paper in politics only after 2004 and above all, after the change of government in 2005. The IPN has a web of sites in all Polish regions, with educational, scientific and legal functions. As holding the archives of political police, it gives documents of “lustracja” (“cleaning”), of not having been a confident or agent for the political police. Historians in the institute did in the last years incredible work for dealing with crimes of communism and for exploring many other regions of Polish contemporary history. The IPN published many books, sponsored hundred of conferences and congresses, and made dozens of exhibitions. There is no institution in Eastern Europe that has a more active

paper in the promotion of contemporary history than the IPN. However, the political instrumentalization of the institute was, from the beginning, very clear.

It has been a bumpy ride for the institute since day one. In 2004 there was an exciting affair. Bronisław Wildstein, a right-wing journalist for the Polish daily newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* and a former oppositionist published a list of names on the internet of the people who supposedly had connections to the security apparatus of the People’s Republic of Poland. The problem with the so-called Wildstein-List was that he was not clear about which people were informants and which were the informed about. It is unclear even to this day how Wildstein was able to gain access to the names. The incident also had consequences for people trying to access these files. After the incident it became even harder for researchers to gain access to the material in the files. However, since the creation of the new right-conservative coalition government in May 2005, the list with names of former agents of the Polish intelligence service grew even longer due to the fact that exposure of the country’s Communist past was among the Kaczyński brothers’ most important political goals. According to a representative survey taken in June 2006, a majority of Poles (fifty-nine percent) were in favor of “lustration” as it is called in Poland, but only if the accused has the right to an attorney. According to a representative survey carried out by the Polish newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, however, the majority of Poles weren’t actually interested in a lustration process as such. Fifty-six percent of those surveyed were of the opinion that the process would exert “a bad influence on Polish politics”. Only thirty percent were of the contrary opinion. There was a preponderance of skepticism towards this process among the sixty-seven percent of Poles who were university graduates. These reservations increased in the year 2007.

Conflicts about police files supposed only the beginning of a real historical war. A radical reformulation of all history and memory politics took to revalorization of a heroic and patriotic image of

³¹ Stokłosa, K., “Memoria y política. Sobre el papel de la historia en el proceso de transición polaco”. *Revista de Historiografía*, Madrid, (in print).

³² Szczerbiak, A., *Dealing with the Communist Past or the Politics of the Present? Lustration in Post-Communist Poland*. *Europe-Asia Studies*, Volume 54, 4, 1 June 2002, 553-572.

Poland, which achieved its highest point with the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Rising against the Nazis and the opening of a museum of the Rising.³³ The now ritual celebrations have turned the 1st of August in one of the most important days in Poland. Popular culture - however supported by the state- brought to life for example, performances of the Rising, a minute of silence besides with the sound of sirens at the “W-Hour” –when the Rising began– and rock concerts with texts about the rebellion. The Institute of National Remembering has grown enormously, becoming a sort of monopoly on the construction of official memory.

A part of this historical conflict was a wide campaign of recovering positive aspects of Polish recent history, as for example, remembering the many Poles who helped Jews during the Second World War or celebrating the different dissidents of the communist period. Also, the IPN published books about resistance against communism, promoting “heroes” of the anti-communism resistance³⁴. This took to problems with neighbor countries. An example is the case of Józef Kura, Ogie , an anticommunist partisan, leader of a large group of maquis, who has been accused of anti-Semite and nationalist crimes. So, while the Polish Institute published a hagiographic book about it,³⁵ its Slovak equivalent, the Ustav Pamati Naroda, opened an investigation about Kura’ crimes against the Slovak minority³⁶. An interesting case of use of the power of the institute for defending Poland’s image is the publication of the translation of Marek

Jan Chodakiewicz’s book on Polish-Jews conflicts³⁷. Chodakiewicz, a right-wing Polish emigrant in the USA, tries to defend Poland of accusations of anti-Semitism after the Holocaust, using historiographic techniques that one can find in revisionists authors like David Irving³⁸. Curiously enough, the Polish translation was scheduled to be published just a little time before the Polish translation of Jan Tomasz Gross’ “Fear”, a powerful –and rather unfair– analysis of Polish-Jews relations in the opposed mood to Chodakiewicz’s³⁹.

Besides of the reconstruction of a positive image of Poland, the other pillar of this strategy was a ferocious attack against Communism, and the attempt of a radical de-legitimation of everything related to the old regime. This took again to some problems with other countries. For example, the de-communization process (change of patrons of streets, withdraw of communist monuments...) provoked a conflict with Spain. The purpose of diminish pensions for Polish Communist fighters in the Spanish Civil War wasn’t accepted in Spain and there was a large exchange of invectives in the press of both countries. The Spanish low chamber voted unanimously a formal petition to the government for oppose against Kaczy ski’s plans. The incident left scares in the mutual perception of the public opinion in Poland and Spain⁴⁰.

This anti-communism of a part of Polish society contrasted with the nostalgia of everyday life under socialism, a sort of *camp* remembering of socialist past that became rooted in popular culture⁴¹. There isn’t in Poland an almost exclusive

³³ Bukalska, P., “Y Nuremberg se olvidó de Varsovia”. *Clio: Revista de historia*, 49, 2005, 20-21.

³⁴ See for example a historiographical tour de force: Wnuk, R., Poleszak, S., Jaczyńska, A., Ladecka, M. (eds.) *Atlas polskiego podziemia niepodległościowego 1944-1956*. Warsaw, Instytut Pamięi Narodowej, 2007.

³⁵ Kowalski, R. (ed.) *Wokół legendy “Ognia”. Opór przeciw zniewoleniu: Polska-Małopolska-Podhale 1945-1956*. Nowy Targ, Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne, 2008.

³⁶ Kura, B., “Paweł Smoleński, Słowacki IPN upomina się o ‘Ognia’”. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 19-12-2008.

³⁷ Original version: Chodakiewicz, M. J., *After the Holocaust: Polish-Jewish Relations in the Wake of World War II*. Columbia, Boulder, University Press, 2003; Polish version: Chodakiewicz, M. J., *Po Zagładzie. Stosunki polsko-żydowskie 1944-1947*, Warsaw, IPN, 2008.

³⁸ But Chodakiewicz is not an Holocaust negationist of course and his works are not anti-Semitic!

³⁹ Gross, J. T., *Fear. Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation*. Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2006; Gross, J. T., Strach. *Antysemityzm w Polsce tu po wojnie. Historia moralnej zapaści*, Cracow, Znak 2008.

⁴⁰ Faraldo, J. M., “Rozmówki hiszpańsko-polskie”. *Polityka*, Warsaw, 23.06.2007, 52-55.

⁴¹ Troebst, S. *Ulf Brunnbauer, Zwischen Amnesie und Nostalgie. Die Erinnerung an den Kommunismus in Südosteuropa*. Cologne, Böhlau, 2007.

positive view of Socialism like in East Germany, where *Ostalgie* is an instrument of construction of identity against Western Germany. Intellectual and artistic elites in Poland are still formed by members of anti-communist dissidence. The remembering of communism in literature and the arts is usually negative⁴².

CONCLUSIONS

From the time of the opposition against communist rule in the late 1970s and early 1980s until the historical wars of the 2000s, Poland has run a long walk. Radical changes in economy and society have produced changes in remembering of the communist past too. State-socialism is for

Poland still a matter of discussion, a weapon in current politics and a source for reexamination in historical sciences and arts. But Poland isn't a "post-socialist country", if we take Jadwiga Staniskis' definition of a country where socialist structures still are determinant.⁴⁴ Since Poland's entrance to the European Union in May of 2004, the population's support for the EU has increased permanently. In May 2008 it had the approval of 78 percent.⁴ Polish politicians want to take on an influential position within the EU and the country is now the most significant state in the Eastern flank of the Union. Even plagued by political problems and certain instability, it can be considered that the transition in Poland has been already successful.

⁴² See for example Michał Rosa's film "Rysy" (2008) and Andrzej Wajda's "Katy" (2007).

⁴³ Staniskis, J., *Postkomunizm. Próba opisu*, Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdansk 2001.

⁴⁴ Cf. <<http://www.ukie.gov.pl/raport2008>> (seen 12.03.2009).