

2.3.2. Poland

The year 1989 marked the beginning of qualitative changes in political parties in Poland and the construction of a democratic party system. The process of transformation from a system of one hegemonic Communist Party under the People's Republic towards a multiparty system in the 3rd Republic (Wojtaszczyk 1998: 146) started then. The formation of a democratic party system is still underway and is a symptom of the pending systemic transformation, conditioned by social and economic changes, and by newly adopted legal regulations.

A Polish multiparty democratic system should function in a pluralist mode, with freedom of competition, as well as observance of democratic constitutional rules, and in particular those pertaining to participation in elections and following parliamentary mechanisms.

I. General conditions

Political system

Political system

In a democratic state parties are an expression of a developed civil society. After the breakthrough of 1989 there was no civil society, broadly seen as public social life. Hence, the political system that has been created since then did not have a basis in society. There was a lack of institutions representing the interests of different social groups. The citizens themselves manifested no greater interest in political parties because these were negatively associated with the period of state-socialism and the hegemony of the Polish United Workers Party – Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (PZPR). The democratisation of political life was inextricably related to changes in social, economic and political systems. The only party organisations which remained unchanged from the times of the People's Republic was the Confederation of Independent Poland (Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej – KPN) which, illegal under communism in Poland, remained in opposition after 1989. Apart from the KPN there were only insignificant and weakly organised environmental organisations. The legal parties from the times of communism – the PZPR (the United Peasants Party or Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe – ZSL) and the Democratic Alliance (Stronnictwo Demokratyczne – SD)

began to look for new forms of activity in a pluralist society. Numerous political groups began to proliferate from the common stem of Obywatelski Komitet Parlamentarny ‘Solidarność’ (‘Solidarity’ Civic Parliamentary Committee), each with different attitudes towards the issues related to systemic transformation. The social, political, economic and personal conflicts caused by the transformation led to new political initiatives, causing divisions in existing formations.

In the early phase of the economic transformation, the initial changes split society into those who had lost and those who had won. A political programme separate from popular expectations did not help political parties gain support (Wojtaszczyk 1998: 147). The Balcerowicz reforms invigorated the opposition and created the new left. Initially, the political struggle was limited to two main camps: one around the old PZPR, representing current authorities, and one close to Solidarity, the forces of the former opposition. However, not all opposition politicians participated in the round table talks, and the attitude towards the round table divided the Solidarity camp. In 1990 the different ideas for breaking away from communism presented by the circles around Lech Wałęsa and Tadeusz Mazowiecki led to the creation of new parties: the Democratic Union (Unia Demokratyczna – UD), the Liberal Democratic Congress (Kongres Liberalno-Demokratyczny – KLD), as well as Centre Agreement (Porozumienie Centrum – PC).

Electoral system

At national level, deputies are elected by proportional representation and d’Hondt’s method in mandate allocation. The element of “consociational democracy” is expressed in the abolition of the blocking clause in case of a list of an electoral committee of national minorities on the condition, however, that the national minority organization allows for the electoral committee to run under the name of this organization. The regulations on the electoral system are practically taken advantage of by only minority – the German minority, which systematically has a two person representation in the Sejm.

Electoral system

Group privileges

In line with the electoral system regulations in place pertaining to elections to Sejm, the mandates in constituencies are divided solely according to those lists of candidates the committees of whom have received at least 5% of valid votes in the country. In case of a coalition of

Electoral thresholds

committees, the threshold is 8% of valid votes in the country.

Democratic standards Parliamentary elections are fully compliant with the standards of democratic elections. Elections are run according to the principles of political pluralism and on the basis detailed legal regulations. They satisfy all of the so called electoral adjectives, i.e. elections to the Sejm are: direct, common, equal, secret ballot and proportional in the system of mandate allocation.

Legal regulation of political parties

Legal basis The parties are legally institutionalised in Poland. The framework is stipulated in the constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997, the act on political parties of 27 June 1997, the system of elections to parliament (the Sejm, the Senate, as well as the European Parliament), for the office of president and elected regional and local authorities, as well as the internal rules of the political groups. Regulations of state law are respected in practice.

Political parties are mentioned in the first chapter of the constitution. The creators of the constitution determined that political parties would play the role of the primary institution of political life. In line with the principles of political pluralism, the Republic of Poland guarantees the freedom to establish political parties and their functioning. This freedom is one of the political freedoms of citizens. Article 11 of the constitution stipulates that political parties shall be founded on the principle of voluntary participation and upon the equality of Polish citizens, and their purpose shall be to influence the formulation of state policy by democratic means. The freedom to create political parties is not, however, unlimited. Political parties which evoke in their political platforms totalitarian methods and practices of Nazism, fascism, and communism, or allow for racial or national hatred, are prohibited. Furthermore political parties are forbidden if their platforms or activities allow the use of violence with the aim of gaining power or to exert influence on state policy, or which provide for their structures and membership to be kept covert. The novelty in comparison to previous regulations is that the constitutional provisions include a rule on the transparent financing of political parties.

The constitution provides rules for the organising, functioning and objectives of political parties, which have been determined as a function of governing. The constitution does not give governmental power to one particular political party but provides for a pluralistic system.

De iure, in line with the constitutional line on political pluralism, article 4 of the act on political parties obliges public authorities to treat political parties equally. This is important in particular in combination with articles stipulating the right of everybody to found and join associations. In fact, parties are treated equally both at the stage of their incorporation and once functioning, that is all are subject to the same defined procedures. However, in terms of the functioning of parties, there is a certain relativity as to their equality, which stems from the actual differentiation in the participation of parties in public life (Granat, Gorgol, Sobczak 2000: 29). For example, parties, which have received at least 3 per cent of votes nationally have the right to receive subsidies from the state budget. Parties which have members in parliament have the right to a one-time subvention as a reimbursement of costs incurred during the electoral campaign. The party which has registered its lists of parliamentary candidates in at least a half of constituencies has the right to free-of-charge commercial programmes on Channel 1 of Polish public radio and Channel 1 of Polish television. Therefore, the principle followed is that of 'proportional equality of changes' (Granat/Gorgol/Sobczak 2000: 29).

The act of 27 June 1997, which is a continuation of the former act on political parties of 28 July 1990, adds precision to constitutional regulations. It provides a complex regulation for creating, organising, functioning and closing down political parties. A political party can be established by a group of at least 1,000 Polish citizens who are 18 or older, and have a full legal capacity, that is party members can only be natural persons, and membership can only be individual (which means that collective entities cannot be members). A political party cannot have organisational units in companies. Moreover, there is a list of people who cannot become party members as they need to be politically neutral, as in the case of judges, prosecutors, the president of the National Bank of Poland, the ombudsman, police officers, soldiers, and state services officers. In addition, people holding a state position, for example as a member of the National Radio and Television Council (Krajowa Rada

Radiofonii i Telewizji), or soldiers in active military service, are also required to suspend their party membership. The prohibition on membership of political parties is provided for in separate acts of law.

Party formation

Under the current law, all potentially entitled social groups can find representation in the existing political groups. A prerequisite for incorporating a political party is its registration in an appropriate register maintained by the Provincial Court in Warsaw (Sąd Wojewódzki w Warszawie). Such registration can be done by three people who are entitled (as stipulated in the law) to represent the party externally, as well as to take on financial liabilities.

In order to register a party, it is necessary to submit the party's rules as well as personal data and original signatures of the party's founders. Such notification has to include, inter alia, the name of the party, its acronym and graphic symbol. The party is obliged to inform the court about changes in its rules; failure to do so can lead to the rejection of the application or registration. In other words, before the party is registered, the court verifies whether all the necessary requirements have been met. If the application is in line with legal requirements, the court immediately registers the party.

Candidacy regulation

State authorities do not interfere with the process of party incorporation or election, nor in their activities, as far as they do not infringe any regulations related to political parties. Thus internal party decisions and their candidates' participation in elections are made by the party's internal organs, taking into consideration the principles of the voting system in force.

Party banning

By implementing the constitutional and legal principles such as equality, freedom of choice, democracy, transparency of structures and financing, as well as the social character of the work of its members, party statutes create formal guarantees for all party members to participate in political life and to make use of their active and passive electoral rights to create party structures. The legislation has determined three situations in which a party can be abolished. Parties can be struck off the register when:

- The deadline determined by the court to present clarification or missing data required for the purpose of registering a party has not been met

- The Constitutional Tribunal has decided that the objectives or principles of the party's activities are inconsistent with regulations statute
- The party does not submit a report on the sources of its financing on time.

Most often the parties decide to dissolve themselves for various reasons, for example the formula according to which a party had been functioning is not longer justified and a new party is created (SdPR – SLD; UW – Split into PO and PD) etc. The Constitutional Tribunal also has the right to ban fascist activities, but no such case has yet taken place.

Party funding

The method of financing political parties is regulated both by the act on political parties and the appropriate electoral regulations. The law determines that the sources of financing for political parties are transparent. Furthermore, it precisely lists what these sources can be, and sets out limitations in financing parties. The assets of political parties are generated from:

Legal
regulation

Main income
sources

- membership fees, subsidies, inheritances, bequests, proceeds from assets
- state donations and subventions.

Parties cannot perform business activities. They can, however, generate proceeds from assets in the form of interest on funds on bank accounts and deposits, as a result of trading state treasury bonds, the sale of assets, as well as sale of programmes, texts, statutes, emblems.

The law further determines the amount each party receives per vote when calculating the annual state subvention. It depends on the support given to the different parties, and is paid as of 1 January of the year following elections until the end of the year preceding subsequent elections. The amount of the state subvention is paid out in four even quarterly instalments. The funds from the subvention have to be held in a separate bank account.

In order to participate in elections, each party is obliged to open a separate electoral fund and all the expenses allocated to this objective can only be financed from this source until the starting date of the electoral campaign. The funds

gathered as part of the electoral fund can come from contributions by the political party or subventions, inheritances, and bequests. For each elected MP, senator or MEP the party receives a subvention according to the formula and limits provided for by the law.

Government subsidies

The subvention is given to only those parties which have received at least 3 per cent of voters' support if standing alone in the elections, or with 6 per cent support if having an electoral committee. The base amount for calculating the subvention depends on the scale of support (the lower the support the higher the base amount). Parties which have successfully had their candidates elected to parliament receive an additional bonus in the form of cost reimbursement.

Each political party is obliged to submit annual reports to the State Electoral Commission (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza – PKW) on its proceeds and expenses. Every year the parties have until 31 March to submit information on the subventions received and expenditure incurred. The finance minister presents a sample form of such a report with the data required, so as to allow for sound verification of the allocation of funds from subventions, including the electoral fund. The information is then published in the official journal.

March 31 is also the deadline for political parties to submit reports to the State Electoral Commission on the sources of the funds acquired, including bank loans and conditions of these loans, as well as information on the expenditure incurred from the electoral fund. The report must also include the opinion and report issued by a certified auditor. The report is then made public by publishing it in the official journal.

Within four months of the report's submission the State Electoral Commission can either accept it without any objections, accept it with indication of shortcomings, or reject it completely. If the information is rejected, the party can file a complaint with the Supreme Court (Sąd Najwyższy – SN) against the decision of the commission. The decision of the Supreme Court is final. A political party loses the right to subvention for a year if it fails to submit the information on time, or the information is rejected by the State Electoral Commission, or the Supreme Court rejects the complaint. If the party does not submit the report on time, the PKW files

an application to the court asking it to remove the party from the register.

II. Types of political parties and structure of the party system

The terms used to describe the political arena in Poland are the usual ones in political science and common understanding: the left, the right and the centre. This division is present on three levels: social and economic, political, and in the public language or propaganda used. Cleavages

The identification of the left and right in the systemic transformation of Poland is particularly difficult. The elections of 1989 were seen as fundamental and a breakthrough, and as such split the scene into post-communist and anti-communist parties. The main determination was a party's relation towards the *ancien régime*. It should be noted, however, that internally these blocks were divided in a more classical way, that is according to their attitudes towards the church, the economy and reconciling the past. The left is most usually associated with post-communist parties, whereas the right and a substantial part of the centre are associated with post-Solidarity circles. Such analysis, however, does not reflect the true political reality. The political platforms of most parties present a mixture of postulates and opinions from different points of the political scene.

The dominant parties with a leftist orientation are Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Democratic Left Alliance – SLD) and Socjaldemokracja Polska (Polish Social Democracy – SdPL). These groups promote a parliamentary governmental system and a market economy with extensive state intervention. Relevant parties

The rightist parties are Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS) and the League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin – LPR). In the centre-right there is the Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska – PO), and in the centre-left are the Democratic Party (Partia Demokratyczna – PD) and Polish Peasants Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe – PSL). The political agenda of the Self-defence of the Republic of Poland party (Samoobrona – SRP) includes both leftist-populist trends (particularly in the economic and social dimension) with rightist-leftist ones at the level of public propaganda.

Table 1
Parties by ideology

	Present Situation ^a			
	GA	GS/GJ	O	NR
Religious			PSL	
Rural/ Landowner				
Liberal			PO	
Conservative				
Nationalist		PiS (GS) LPR (GJ) SRP (GJ)		
Labour			SLD	SdPL
Ethnic/ Regional			MN	
Others				PD

^a after parliamentary elections of 2005.

Key: GA = alone in government, GS = senior partner in government, i.e. party of prime minister, GJ = junior partner in government, O = opposition, NR = No representation in parliament.

The divisions which result from the choices made in 1989 have been visible throughout the entire decade in both parliamentary and presidential elections (Grabowska 2004: 172-180). They ceased to dominate for the first time in the presidential elections of 2000, and were substantially marginalised in the parliamentary elections of 2001. In 2005 it became apparent that in both parliamentary and presidential elections the division of the political scene initiated in 1989 had lost its importance. The parties which gained recognition now were the parties of protest and contestation, and were no longer created on the basis of past divisions. This led to substantial shifts in the electorate. For the first time in a presidential campaign, the dispute between the main rivals was not about 'life histories and attitude towards the past' but was merit based and focused on such issues as a vision of the economy or ways of holding presidential office.

Since summaries like that in Table 1 tend to be insufficiently precise, the following paragraphs spell out in more detail the short history of the main political formations on the Polish scene and their ideology.

Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) is a rightist party created in 2001. The initiators were conservative politicians previously active in Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność (Solidarity Electoral Action), referring to the traditions of independence and stemming from the Solidarity movement of the 1980s. The party advocates qualitative changes in Poland – the introduction of the 4th Republic, vetting and decommunisation, an increased role for the law and the combating of social pathologies, in particular corruption in public life, strengthening the executive power, and a more stringent negotiating position in the institutional structures of the European Union. Following the parliamentary elections of 2005 the party became the core of the governmental coalition formed with Samoobrona and LPR. Its leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, took over the post of prime minister in 2006. Lech Kaczyński won the presidential elections.

Platforma Obywatelska (PO) is a liberal-conservative party created after 2000 as a social movement and, as of 2001, as a political party. Its founders were politicians of the Union of Freedom (Unia Wolności) and Solidarity Electoral Action (Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność). The group formed the biggest opposition group under the leftist government in 2001–05. After the parliamentary elections of 2005, PO was again the opposition, despite the original agreements with PiS. PO calls for the introduction of huge reforms, including the reform of the fiscal system (a flat-rate tax), electoral reform (a majority voting system in parliamentary elections) and parliamentary reform (a single chamber parliament) (Sejm). The party focuses strongly on Poland's membership of the European Union. PO's supporters are found among different social groups and strata, in particularly among citizens of liberal beliefs, with higher education, and the inhabitants of big cities.

Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (SLD) has existed as a political party since 1999. The party was established on the basis of an electoral block of Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) – the heir of the former PZPR – and 30 other leftist organisations. The party is in favour of a market economy

and a parliamentary system of government. It promoted and worked for Poland's membership of the European Union and NATO. SLD advocates the separation of church and state and has a sceptical/negative approach to 'decommunisation' and 'lustration' (vetting). The party is heterogenic. Its structures include at least three political tendencies: leftist towards liberalism, the new left, and representatives of the old party apparatus who refer to leftist-populist views and who affirm the principles of real socialism. SLD has a very effective organisational structure. The party led a coalition government in 1993–97 with Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe and in the years 2001–05 with a temporary participation of Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe. The party's former leader, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, was president of the Republic of Poland in the years 1995–2005.

Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (PSL) has functioned under this name since 1990. It is a continuation of the Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe from the times of the People's Republic, but it also goes back to the tradition of the peasants' movement from the period between the two world wars. The party lacks an explicit, transparent self-image. Its members tend to represent the broadly understood peasant interests, or to view themselves as a generally left-oriented party, a national centrist party, or a Christian oriented group. PSL refers to the idea of agrarianism from the inter-war period. It advocates parliamentary democracy and state intervention in the economy. PSL had a sceptical and moderate attitude towards the conditions of Poland's membership in the EU, pointing to Western European protectionism and the threat of weakening national identity. From its beginning, the party had at its disposal the organisational structure and leadership apparatus inherited from ZSL. PSL has supporters among inhabitants of rural areas and small towns, where it encounters fierce competitions from Samoobrona RP.

Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Samoobrona RP) was created in 1992, taking advantage of social groups disappointed with the costs of social, political and economic transformation which had taken place in 1989. The party, functioning on the basis of a social and political movement, increased its importance by criticising the mode of systemic transformation. Advocating such notions as fighting corruption and opposing liberal economic policy, it simultaneously appeals for more social policy and a more active role of the state in the economy, and claims the need

to renegotiate some of the conditions of Poland's membership of the European Union. The social and economic platform of the party is dominated by leftist and populist slogans, while culturally and politically, the tone is conservative and refers to national and Christian traditions. Samoobrona is particularly popular among the poor members of society, with lower levels of education, mainly the inhabitants of rural areas and small towns.

The breakthrough moment for Samoobrona were the parliamentary elections of 2005, as a result of which the party – together with PiS and LPR – has become a member of the governing coalition.

Liga Polskich Rodzin (LPR) was set up shortly before parliamentary elections. In the sphere of culture, values and politics, the party presents rightist and conservative opinions, with extreme trends, at times with no tolerance for other outlooks and with strong nationalist tendencies. LPR advocates the need to construct the 4th Republic, where the shortcomings of the systemic transformation after 1989 would be overcome, and full decommunisation and vetting would be carried out. The party declares support for the strengthening of executive power (a presidential system), parliamentary reform, and the increased importance of traditional values in the life of the country, such as family, patriotism, religion, ownership, the fight against pornography, the necessity of renegotiating the conditions of Poland's membership in the EU or even secession from the organisation. The party finds support in extreme rightist and nationalist circles.

Socjaldemokracja Polska (SdPL) was set up in 2004 as a result of the dissolution of the parliamentary representation of SLD. 157 deputies remained in the group whereas 33 seceded and registered a new party. The main reason for the break-up was the conflict within the coalition and large-scale corruption. The party was unsuccessful in passing the electoral threshold and did not win any parliamentary seats after the elections in 2005. New electoral coalitions have been made with SLD.

III. Parties and parliamentary representation

The party system in Poland has seen significant changes since the democratic transition. The two most important changes are the fairly high variations in votes for the same

party from one election to the next, which reflects the low party affiliation of Polish voters, and a steady concentration of the number of parliamentary parties. To begin with the second phenomenon, while in the first democratically elected Sejm more than 14 parties gained seats, the number of parties with national representation has now fallen to six. Moreover, parliamentary strength has turned from a left-right confrontation as represented by the SLD and AWSP in the mid-1990s to the centre, since PO and PiS have risen to be the major parties in parliament.

The other phenomenon is the quite low lifespan of formerly strong parties. For example SLD, which gained pluralities in the elections of 1990, 1993 and 2001, fell to only 55 seats in the latest election. The same is true for other parties that were the former initiators of democratisation. This is mainly the result of the proportional method of splitting the mandate with the blocking clause and d'Hondt's method of mandate allocation. The blocking clause, which in the case of electoral committees is 5 per cent and in the case of committee coalitions is 8 per cent of valid votes, does not apply to the electoral committees of national minorities, which is a reflection of the rule of 'consociational democracy'.

Free mandate MPs have a free mandate. They are representatives of the nation and are not bound by the instructions of their voters ('The deputies and senators execute their mandate for the good of the Nation'). They are independent, in that there are no legal means of imposing any activities on them and they are irrevocable. There is group membership and party discipline in the parliament and often the voting is carried out according to the instruction of the party group's chairperson – there is full subordination in this respect. However, there are no legal constraints against deputies switching their group membership. Formally, there is no instrument that prohibits a group member from leaving a group and joining another. The mandate is assigned to the deputy; so if a deputy secedes from a group, the party loses that mandate and has fewer members.

Group discipline The main binding force of a party in parliament is its participation in government or opposition, but even this does not guarantee the stable durability of the coalition. There are no other organisations of groups of parties.

MPs are bound by the decisions made within parties. The level of this dependence is related to the location of the

actual centre of power – in the parliament or outside of it – or whether the management of the party is connected with the parliamentary group. For most parties, it is. Where there are parliamentary groups, for example in PO, these are slightly separated. In Samoobrona, where there is a relatively strong centralisation of authority, parliamentarians are bound by instructions and failure to observe them can lead to removal from the group or even secession. At present, the two biggest parties in parliament have common roots, and their ideological agendas do not differ greatly from each other.

Table 2
Parliamentary elections

Party	1997		2001		2005	
	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats
SLD	27,1	164	41,0	200	11,3	55
UP	4,7			16	3,9	
PiS			9,5	44	27,0	155
PO			12,7	65	24,1	133
SRP	0,1		10,2	53	11,4	56
PSL	7,3	27	9,0	42	7,0	25
LPR	5,6	6	7,9	38	8,0	34
PD	13,4	60	3,1		2,5	
AWSP	33,8	201	5,6			
MN	0,6	2	0,4	2	0,3	2
Others	7,3		0,6		4,5	
Total		460		460		460

SLD: Democratic Left Alliance, UP: Labour Union (2005: Social Democracy of Poland, SDPL), PiS: Law and Justice; PO, Civic Platform, SRP: Self-Defense, PSL: Polish People's Party, LPR: League of Polish Families (1993-1997: Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland, ROP), PD: Democratic Party (former Freedom Union, UW/Democratic Union, UD), AWSP: Solidarity Electoral Alliance of the Right (1997-2001: Solidarity Electoral Alliance, AWS), MN: German minority.

Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.de/poland2.html>.

IV. Internal organisation and decision-making

Party membership Since the authorities only require lists of founding members when a party is being registered no lists of members are required. Formally, each party declares a certain defined size of membership but lists of members are not revealed.

Members of the party have the right to submit proposals for the party's programme. The policies are adopted at conventions that deal with the specific regional issues, and despite the regional character of these actions, they are adopted centrally. From interviews carried out with the members of the different parties it is apparent that the main complaint is about parties being too centralised with a lack of opportunity for members to discuss the party's programme.

Internal organization Most parties are homogenous in their organisation with structures that reflect territorial divisions. They are relatively monolithic at all levels across the country: parties have their branches in the provinces, as well as councils of different tiers in the municipalities and counties. The basic organisational unit is a local or regional circle. Parties try to have such circles in each municipality and – in big cities – in every borough. One should bear in mind, however, that these are relatively young parties and the construction of their territorial structures is still work in progress, particularly parties which have emerged from informal social movements such as PO or Samoobrona. Parties such as PO or SdPL are stronger and better organised in cities than in villages and, in contrast, PSL has a much better structure in the rural areas. SLD has the best territorial organisation – there are SLD organisations at each level across the entire country, while PSL also has a very good organisation, with its rural structures prevailing over the city ones. The remaining parties are still in the process of building their structures and regional organisations.

Under the law, all organs of a party are elected for a term in office. The duration of a term is laid down by the statutes. The mode of electing party organs has to follow democratic standards. In most cases the election of authorities of all tiers takes place by means of a majority vote and in the case of personal votes the rules of a secret ballot are observed. The election of chairman is subject to an absolute majority vote. The structure of the organisation is similar. At each level there is a board with a chairman and a treasurer, and for the

purpose of coordination county, regional, provincial, and national authorities are created. The legislative power lies in the hands of conventions (at all levels), while national congresses (meetings, conventions) elect the leader of the party and adopt new programmes and statutory documents. Furthermore, there are peer courts and optional revision commissions. Members of conventions are delegates from the different tiers, members of councils, as well as qualified representatives, that is MPs, MEPs, senators, mayors, etc. The most important meeting which takes place in between conventions are councils.

National conventions (congresses) of parties determine the ideological stances of parties, adopt platforms and electoral strategies. Regional problems are presented at regional conventions but they are decided on centrally. Formally, the nomination process prior to elections is bottom-up, that is by board elections at the different tiers. It often happens, however, that even the voice of regional leaders is ignored and the decisions are made centrally. There are no formal quotas for gender representation in any party. Except for the SLD where general decision-making follows a bottom-up approach, all other parties are primarily controlled by the central leadership

Power structures

Parties have relationships with collective social organisations. Leftist parties particularly cooperate with trade unions. These relationships are external as is the case between SLD and the Association of Polish Teachers or the National Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ). Samoobrona, however, has structural links to a collective social organisation, as it was created on the basis of a trade union, to which it still belongs, although it also has external relations with the Association of Individual Farmers. The parties or their leaders and members of rightist parties have contacts in particular with religious and church organisations. For example, many PiS members are active in Opus Dei or cooperate with Rodzina Radia Maryja (the Family of Radio Maria). LPR has strong connections with Młodzież Wszechpolska (the All-Polish Youth), which is a youth national-nationalist organisation.

Relationship with civil society

All parties have declared that they have youth structures. It was only when SLD had transformed itself into a political party that it allied with youth and women's organisations, and trade unions. It now only has a youth organisation under its auspices. I believe that youth organisations have

relatively little influence on the party and its debates on political policies. Despite this, the young members are extremely active and engaged in the activities of the party.

V. General assessment

Major
obstacles

Specific legal, social, economic and political conditions have formed both the important characteristics of Polish political parties and the party system, and have determined its evolution. The following are illustrative of the image of Polish political parties:

- On the political scene there are many political groups. However their number is much lower than at the beginning of the system's transformation. Even in the 1990s there were approximately 300 political groups registered whereas now there are only about 100, of which only few count.
- The internal party structures are relatively underdeveloped and not very active. This is particularly true of groups outside parliament, but is also apparent with the parties that developed from the Solidarity movement. Most of these groups are based on strong party leadership (personalisation).
- The political platforms of the parties are very unspecific. They only partially respond to and try to solve the problems articulated by their members and voters. There are strong populist tendencies in the electoral platforms they announce.
- Coalitions are created mainly through agreements made by party leaders and/or for reason of common 'historical roots' rather than on the basis of the contents of political agendas.

The evolution of the Polish party system in the years 1989–2006 indicates a gradual shift from a multiparty system to a system of moderate pluralism. The important elements accelerating this process were the consecutive presidential (1990, 1995, 2000, 2005) and parliamentary elections (1991, 1993, 1997, 2001, 2005). The initial polarisation of the system was not accompanied by the creation of politically significant extreme groups. The parliamentary elections of 1993 ended the era of polarised pluralism and meant a gradual move towards moderate pluralism; this was manifested by a limited number of parliamentary groups

which were reduced to just a few. This tendency endured and has been confirmed in subsequent elections.

The evolution of the Polish party system has often been accompanied by a lack of balance on the political scene between the left and the right, with a weak centre. At the same time, both the left and the right significantly deviate from the standards of these formations in the mature Western European democracies. The post-communist Polish left has not created a strong ideology which could begin a dialogue with the concepts of modern social democracy found in the UK, Germany or Sweden. The right, on the other hand, is overly dominated by nationalist-type organisations, which are weakly rooted in liberal or conservative tendencies.

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