

# **POLITICAL CULTURE AND THE DEMOCRATISATION OF A POLITICAL REGIME. THE CASE OF POLAND AFTER 1989**

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## **Abstract**

Regardless of the difficulties connected with the description or characteristics of democracy, it must be noted that – like in the case of other political systems – it has the capacity of both auto-regulation and auto-destruction. Thus, what is so important for the maintenance and quality of democracy is the degree of its consolidation, i.e. how strongly both citizens and political elites are attached to democracy itself as well as to its values, regulations and constraints it entails. It should be pointed out that the level of consolidation largely depends on the institutional, international, socio-political and cultural determinants. Institutional factors show that a high level of democratic consolidation is significantly determined by the existing model of a political system: societies in the countries with the parliamentary system display a higher degree of consolidation, while the degree is lower in the presidential system. The reason for this is the fact that the cooperation between different political actors is “forced”, which ensures that the balance between contrasting political views (institutionalized in the form of political parties) will be maintained. This results in politically extreme groups being blocked, and, finally, reflects socio-economic divisions, thus being conducive to the realization of civil rights.

**Key words:** *political culture, Poland, political transformation, democratization*

Regardless of the difficulties connected with the description or characteristics of democracy, it must be noted that – like in the case of other political systems – it has the capacity of both auto-regulation and auto-destruction. Thus, what is so important for the maintenance and quality of democracy is the degree of its consolidation, i.e. how strongly both citizens and political elites are attached to democracy itself as well as to its values, regulations and constraints it entails. It should be pointed out that the level of consolidation largely depends on the institutional, international, socio-political and cultural determinants [Sekuła 2009: 21-77]. Institutional factors show that a high level of democratic consolidation is significantly determined by the existing model of a political system: societies in the countries with the parliamentary system display a higher degree of consolidation, while the degree is lower in the presidential system. The reason for this is the fact that the cooperation between different political actors is “forced”, which ensures that the balance between contrasting political views (institutionalised in the form of political parties) will be maintained. This results in politically extreme groups being blocked, and, finally, reflects socio-economic divisions, thus being conducive to the realisation of civil rights.

Institutional determinants are as important as the international environment, which decides whether a democracy is stable or not. It is observed that democratic regimes coexisting beyond the described political system to a large extent determine a high level of democratic consolidation. At the same time, it is a factor which co-exists with socio-political determinants within the system, such as the economic development, wellbeing, a degree of industrialisation, citizens’ level of education, and the reduction of disparities in their living standard.

One of the factors affecting a degree of the consolidation of democracy, which also determines its quality, is the political culture of its citizens.

In colloquial speech, political culture is equivalent to the ethics and morality of politicians and public officials. It is also sometimes associated with diplomatic culture. In political science, a more precise definition by G. Almond and G. Powell is adopted. According to them, political culture is „the pattern of individual attitudes and political orientations of the members of a political system. It is a subjective sphere, which underlies political actions, giving them meaning. These individual orientations have a few components, i.e.: a) cognitive orientation – real or false knowledge of political objects and ideas, b) affective orientation – a feeling of bond, involvement, objection to political objects, c) judging orientation – judgments and opinions about political objects” [Garlicki 2004: 42]. Thus, political cultures should be defined as a set of relations existing among specific political objects, i.e. politicians and political institutions [Kościelniak, Wiśniewski 2005: 34-35]. Jerzy Wiatr presents a similar – in terms of description and axiological neutrality – definition of political culture. He points out that it should be defined as a “set of attitudes, values and patterns of behaviour concerning the relations between the authorities and citizens of a country” [Wiatr 1980: 328; Janowski 2010]. He also indicates that the immanent components of political culture include: “knowledge of politics, knowledge of facts and being interested in them; the assessment of political phenomena, judgments concerning the way power should be exercised; the emotional side of political attitudes, e.g. love to one’s country or hatred towards its enemies,

as well as political behaviour patterns determining how one can and should act in the political life” [Sus 2015].

James Coleman points out that political culture is defined as a kind of political social potential of a group, which determines its “ability to act and defines its sphere of activities available for the main actors of the system. The power factors – as Coleman asserts – are the more important for a group, the weaker the citizens’ community and the poorer resource of cooperation patterns it has” [Coleman 2003: 41].

As it was indicated before, political culture is an interdisciplinary phenomenon and may be defined in a variety of ways, for example, through the functions it fulfils [Sus]. Wiktor Szewczak presents it in the form of a pattern of political behaviours created on the basis of social, political or cultural transformations. He assumes that every political behaviour/change of a political system is initiated by a certain stimulus, an impulse which stimulates the society/particular individuals to act. These stimuli may include actions considered to be political behaviours, which in turn determine political culture [Szewczak 2005: 69-84]. Such development manner of political culture may be observed especially during dramatic changes of a system, resulting from reforms or from important social events, and followed by a more gradual evolution in the period of stability.

Indicating political culture as the factor determining the growth in the consolidation of democracy, it must be pointed out that not every kind of political culture has a positive influence on the quality of democracy. Out of three commonly known ideal types of political culture - parochial, subject and participant (also referred to as democratic) - the first two negatively affect the level of democratic consolidation, and only the third one has significant importance for the quality of a democratic system.<sup>1</sup> Political scientists and sociologists distinguish a variety of the constituents of the participant political culture. For example, they point at the significance of social trust, solidarity and tolerance, as well as extensive cooperation structures, willingness to work for the common good, and respect to otherness [Putnam 2008:344]. Other important indicators include: participation in unconventional political activities, the freedom of speech, or a critical attitude to hierarchical institutions, instead of which individual autonomy and free expression are promoted. It should be pointed out here that not all components of the participant political culture are conducive to the growth of the level of democratic consolidation. The increase of individual autonomy at the expense of the authority of hierarchical institutions may lead to a serious crisis of the legitimacy of power, which may manifest itself in social dissatisfaction with the whole system (not only with particular decisions made within it) and in the questioning of its underlying values. If such phenomena occur sporadically, there is no threat of the legitimacy crisis. The threat appears only if the system is permanently criticised and such a critical attitude becomes well-rooted among socially and economically handicapped groups.

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<sup>1</sup> What is important here is the fact that there are no societies in which political culture is a homogeneous formation. There is always a single dominant type of political culture in a given society. Moreover, a specific form of political culture does not have to be permanent, and it may be manifested in particular situations. Thus, there is a popular view that political culture models are variable.

However, regardless of the abovementioned factors and differences in their composition, political scientists and sociologists agree on the choice of the principal determinants of the participant (citizens') political culture. They include: the appreciation of one's own civil political competence, a sense of obligation to participate in the democratic process, and, finally, obedience to the law and loyalty towards political structures.

Thus, we may distinguish two levels of deliberations on the characteristics of the participant political culture. On the level of the features of the democratic system, the distinctive components include: support for democracy and its principles irrespective of emotions, the acceptance of pluralism, trust in democratic institutions, and a conviction that the state should contribute to the development of the space of citizens' activity. These attitudes are determined by the second level of features of the participant culture, i.e. the identification of the individual's role in the system through the knowledge of civil rights and obligations, and the willingness to put them into life. What is also relevant here is a sense of political competence, trust in citizens, or a belief that all efforts are made to pursue the common good.

Among the abovementioned features of the participant culture, as well as among the levels of deliberations on it, one view seems to be dominant, i.e. the belief that democratic culture must be based on citizens' competences. In other words, the essence of democracy should be identified and its mechanisms must be understood, which determines all decisions and actions.

The process of the construction of democratic political culture is complex and long. It means that principles of democracy have to be consistently followed and people have to be willing to participate in democratic procedures. For these capabilities and will to develop, time, practice and experience are needed [Rajca 2007: 125]. The transformation from an undemocratic system to a consolidated democracy is a multi-stage operation, initiated and determined by the processes of liberalisation, then democratisation, and finally consolidation. According to Samuel P. Huntington, liberalisation takes place within an undemocratic system and precedes the phase of the construction of democratic mechanisms [Szyja 2013: 166].

Scholars believe that in the period of system changes, some typical phenomena occur. They may be classified in four groups. First of all, all social groups show more interest in the social life and a socio-political situation. Moreover, people participate more in the political life, which at the same time reveals social divisions - the advocates of system changes are on one side, while their opponents, who are in favour of maintaining the old system, on the other. Finally, it becomes possible to establish new political parties or socio-political groups [Szyja 2013].

The 1980s marked the period of dramatic social and political changes in Poland. Those changes were the result of the increasing polarisation of the Polish society and its division into the supporters of the authorities and the followers of the Independent Self-governing Trade Union "Solidarity" (NSZZ - *Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy "Solidarność"*), who demanded, among other things, political pluralism, the sovereignty of the nation, the respect of the most important civil rights and liberties: equality, non-discrimination, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, the right to information, free elections, parliamentary democracy, reducing the influence of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR -

*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*), the right to fair trial, and equal access to public service. Both conflicting camps – the opposition and the government – stimulated millions of people [Łabędź 2006: 45].

What was the consequence of this division within the Polish society was the fact that its large part were convinced that they had no real influence on the decisions made by the bodies of state authority. Politics was perceived as the sphere of the reality which (usually assessed negatively) is the effect of the activity of other subjects – the state, parties, and elites. Some people also expressed their hostility towards the state, which was a remnant of the times of the People's Republic of Poland, when disobedience to the ruling class and to the law it made was seen as an act of heroism rather than something negative. At the same time, it must be remembered that the institutional transformation in Poland was accompanied by huge mobilisation and support of the society. However, common euphoria and acceptance of the reform of the system, including the establishment of new state institutions, did not last long. The transition from the “monocentric order of real socialism to the polycentric order and capitalism” appeared to be too costly for many Poles. Great hopes and expectations, which did not correspond to the positive evaluation of the efficiency and manner of operation of new public institutions led to the ostracism of the sphere of politics, which sociologists present in the form of the specific series of events: disappointment – frustration – dissatisfaction – alienation – apathy [Lubecki, Szczegółą 2007:87].

A popular view holds that attitudes based on traditional national and libertarian values were dominant in Poland – like in the Czech Republic and Slovakia – at the first stage of the transition. A. W. Jabłoński, in turn, tries to identify the scope of possible transformations of the system and democratic changes, as well as a degree of the sovietisation of the Russian political culture. He notes that the level of political culture represented by the elites which rule the state after the first democratic elections and oversee further reforms is important for the successful pursuit for democracy [Lubecki, Szczegółą 2007].

The first partially free elections in Poland, held on 4 June 1989, marked the beginning of the gradual process of the depoliticisation of the Polish society. Experts indicate the following causes of political alienation: a low level of trust in public institutions, electors' little knowledge of candidates and programmes of political parties, disappointment with political elites, bitterness resulting from the unsatisfactory effects of the ongoing reforms, etc. At the beginning of the 1990s, most Poles highly valued the democratic system. Public opinion surveys showed that this trend lasted until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With time, however, the increasingly worse image of politicians, parties and public institutions led to an increase in the number of people dissatisfied with the way the political system functioned and convinced that citizens had no real influence on the decisions made by the state authorities [Łabędź 2006].

The Polish society is distinguished by the significant dualism of attitudes towards democracy. This dualism has been shaped as an effect of historical experience and is determined by causes of a dual nature. According to some scholars, attitudes which approve of authoritarianism originate mainly from the dissonance between expectations and the actual state. Moreover, conflicts, antagonisms and quarrels among politicians may also contribute to the development of authoritarian

tendencies. This regime does not provide space for this kind of misunderstandings and dispute. It should also be noted that the degree to which Polish people are satisfied with the functioning of democracy may be associated with problems on the political scene. In pre-election periods, as Bartosz Szyja indicates, people tend to be more content, which is attributed to the new hopes and expectations revived by political parties and to the foreseen change of the government. If promises are not kept, citizens become disillusioned and criticise democracy [Szyja]. As early as in the mid-1990s, spectacular economic reforms, which harmed the interests of large social groups, led to the intensification of feelings of frustration and disorientation. High costs of the transformation and the shock it had entailed made a large part of the society feel alienated and retreat from the sphere of public life to the safer sphere of private life. Sociologists indicate that this phenomenon assumed a form of the “deviant level of political passivity” [Lubecki, Szczegółą 2007:74-75].

The process of democratisation in Poland involved first of all legal and institutional changes. It is estimated that the development of the foundations of the state’s new political system and of the construction of democratic institutions of authority was not accompanied by a change of attitudes towards the political system [Lubecki, Szczegółą 2007]. Consequently, citizens’ political stances were marginalised.

Scholars studying citizens’ political competence are becoming convinced that an average citizen “tends to be poorly informed”, and the “classic model of a well-informed citizen, who makes reasonable judgments and rational decisions, has become the model of a gentleman from the past era that is not going to return” [Godlewski 2008: 100]. There is no doubt that the state of knowledge of political matters is also influenced by traditional media, their tabloidization and being supplanted by electronic media, which affects the level of political culture. This situation leads to a competent, politically knowledgeable citizen being replaced by a citizen who uses patterns of thought and is subject to emotions – which makes him make decisions using little effort, depending on a situation [Raciborski 2010: 103-108].

What also plays a significant role here is the religiousness of Polish people, because the institution of the Catholic Church has become a part of public life and has a considerable influence on the way Poles think of politics [Jasińska-Kania 2007: 115-116]. It is first of all determined by the Polish history, the importance of the Catholic Church for democratic changes after 1989, as well as by the distinct presence of hierarchs in the public life of the last two decades [Karnowska 2008: 219]. Thus, religion significantly affects not only the way of thinking about politics, but also the principles according to which individual and collective actors participate in it. It may even be said that morality based on Catholic values (often treated selectively) is very important for the attitude of Poles towards democracy [Jasińska-Kania 2007: 36].

This remark is relevant to the extent that the understanding of democracy, or the conception of it, determines citizens’ political behaviour. It particularly refers to the degree of involvement in conventional and unconventional political behaviours. It should be noted that studies on Polish people’s attitude to democracy were carried

out by different groups of scholars after 1989.<sup>2</sup> The results of their research allow us to draw a few basic conclusions concerning both the definition of democracy and its significance, and the level of social acceptance in Poland. We may observe that democratic values were by and large fully approved of [Roguska 2008: 266]. This is reflected in the common belief that the democratic system prevails over all other forms of government. It should be stressed that it was at the beginning of the transformation period that this political system had the lowest level of support. It was attributed to the economic problems of the time. However, this trend has improved and approximately 60-70% of Polish citizens express their approval of democracy [Kolarska-Bobińska 2008: 266].

The general perception of democracy as the best form of government significantly differs from the way it is evaluated in Poland. We may observe periods of dissatisfaction with the democratic system and its quality in the country, which manifests itself both in the negation of its values – for example, rights of minorities [Sekula 2009: 133] – and in the fact that the support for democracy has not always been of an absolute character.

The reason for this is a view shared by the overwhelming majority of Poles, according to which “there are times when non-democratic rules are more desirable than democratic ones” [CBOS – *Centrum Badania Opinii Publicznej*, Centre for Public Opinion Research 2009]. This belief became reinforced in the period of 2005-2007, when the Law and Justice (PiS – *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*) party was in power (in a coalition with other parties). Despite the recognition of democracy, authoritarian views gained popularity in the country then. The majority of citizens (52%) were convinced that undemocratic rules prevail over the democratic form of government. They backed the idea that a “strong person at the helm of the government may turn out to be better than democracy” [CBOS 2005]. These trends, however, did not last and at the beginning of 2007 the level of approval of the democratic system noticeably rose.

Poles associate the democratic system first of all with economic equality. People made frequent statements about “the need for the government’s supervision over banks”; they demanded that the government undertake action to reduce unemployment and that private enterprises be controlled [Sekula 2009: 145-166]. Thinking about democracy in terms of economy not only produces a false image of the democratic system, but it also determines popular views on this subject. At the same time, it may reflect longing and hope for the realisation of social justice in the system based on equality. This conviction may be quite dangerous, however, because, as Janusz Reykowski put it, “democratic institutions may be easily rejected if their functioning does not guarantee conformity to the vision of a good state” [Reykowski 1995: 123].

The economy-based view of the democratic system remained to be dominant at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. However, apart from economic values preferred by the society, references to axiology in the political sphere appeared, such as: equal justice under law, personal liberties, or the rule of law [CBOS 2000]. Other

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<sup>2</sup> What is worth mentioning here are the teams of Janusz Reykowski, Mirosława Maroda or Lena Kolarska-Bobińska.

important values included: freedom of association, the competitiveness of political programmes, and freedom of speech [CBOS 2003].

The diagnosis of knowledge determines decisions that are made, and these in turn affect actions. After 1989, Polish people tended to act for the good of their closest surrounding, which led to the growth of populism and the dichotomous division into “us” and “them”. It was manifested in the elections of 2005, when the Self-Defence party gained a large number of parliamentary seats, and the PiS based its election campaign on the slogan of “solidarity Poland” fighting against “liberal Poland” and on contrasting the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic of Poland to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Republic. In this case, however, a low level of civil competence was the result of the lack of trust in the authorities, which had been definitely influenced by the lack of dialogue and agreement, and the society’s poor knowledge of politics.

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, sociologists have observed a gradual decrease in citizens’ involvement. In 2002, as the results of the European Social Survey show, 12.4% of the respondents participated in or were members of socio-political organisations, while the figure in 2002 was only 9% [Lubecki, Szczegółą 2007]. The Polish society usually adopts anti-civil attitudes. It is quite surprising if we bear in mind that the political transformation in Poland was initiated by the protests of change-oriented “Solidarity”. Edmund Mokrzycki writes that “Poland<Self-governing Republic> did not outlast the system it had fought against. It was the specific circumstances of that battle that formed it and gave it hallmarks of a civil society.” As he accurately points out, the time of transformation was an enormous trauma for many social groups and caused the “rapid disintegration of the whole syndrome of the Polish civil society, in each of the fundamental meanings of this term” [Lubecki, Szczegółą 2007].

Yet it is hard to deny that in Poland after 1989 there was a tendency to establish all kinds of civil society institutions (political parties, trade unions, social movements, non-government organisations, etc.), but at the same time the number of people interested in real participation dropped. Thus, an increase in the number of civil society institutions was not proportionate to the growth of citizens’ activity.

It may be surprising in the light of what citizens themselves declared. In the 1990s, as many as 60% of them recognised the need for strengthening interpersonal solidarity [CBOS 2002]. It was a clear signal that the public sphere must be renewed through citizens’ involvement and their readiness to act. It was also a sign that democracy was becoming rooted in Polish people’s awareness [Kochanowicz 1998:13]. Despite this fact, however, the civil society in Poland during the transformation of the system was poor and was not a match for the political authorities. That was the main cause of the weakness of the Polish democracy. “Only a civil partner can control powerful structures of political and economic power and reduce the effects of various internal tensions in the society. It is only such a partner that is able to release social reserves even in the conditions of (...) hopeless political, social, cultural, or economic crises” [Gliński 2009: 234].

The civil society manifested itself mainly in two areas of activity: the first of them referred to as local communities, gathered around local government institutions, and the other one, through a high degree of citizens’ maturity - in non-government organisations. The civil society was also active in different forms of individual activity and less formalised social groups which were set up with the aim of the

accomplishment of a specific task. The manifestations of the presence of civil society are important from the perspective of the reception of communitarian ideas. What seems to be of the biggest importance here, however, are local communities, because their activity is to a large extent based on strong social bonds. The strength of these bonds is determined by the identification with the community and with the values it represents. It is obvious that the depth of such identification remains debatable as are the consequences of the adopted community model. There is no denial that social ties based on the identity of a community determine the establishment and development of social initiatives and activity [Dzwończyk 2010: 89].

Political parties also attached big importance to local communities. However, they often limited their scope of activity to the tasks of local government. Thus, local government institutions were not precisely separated from newly arising local communities. At the same time, political elites paid no attention to the fact that the activity of the civil society at the local level was very often determined by factors other than those associated with a community. The role of the leader (for example, in the form of local intelligentsia) was frequently ignored as was the significance of a parish in a community and the grass-root character of initiatives, often against the intentions and will of a local government.

The abovementioned facts reflect the specific nature of thinking about local government in Poland. It is often seen as “self-governance without participation”, which actually excludes the activity of local communities. Such a state of affairs has been determined by strongly decentralised and party-dependent levels of local government, which leads to the dominance of technocrats rather than community workers in its structures. Thus, local self-governance may display features of oligarchy [Kurczewski 2002: 255], which are in contradiction with the republican and democratic assumptions of the civil society. Such a premise leads to yet another observation, i.e. it indicates the clientelistic and paternalistic character of relations between local authorities and a citizen, which does not have a positive influence on the development of local communities and contributes to the weakness of democracy in Poland.

Balance may be achieved both thanks to informal social movements, and owing to citizens' individual initiatives. Informal collective behaviours, however, have an incidental and marginal character. The presented data do not reflect the essence and scope of influence of individual and collective informal activities. The reason for this is first of all the fact that the actions taken are determined by very diverse initiatives: from meetings at schools to hobby initiatives. It must also be noted that because of their diversity, initiatives are much more developed and present in the society than it is shown in surveys. What is the characteristic feature of individual and collective (not formal) activities is their broad democratisation: they involve the representatives of all social layers and groups. Finally, a degree of activity depends on the region of Poland and on the kind of political culture one represents [Gliński 2002: 46-48].

Individual and collective initiatives do not need to be positive actions taken for the benefit of a community. This mainly concerns “informal groups connected with a kind of ‘non-negotiable’ ideology with strong, but rigid identities, distinguished by the lack of tolerance for people with different views or by radical programmes”

[Gliński 2002]. Moreover, they may cause waves of uncontrolled protests, street demonstrations (for example, “defenders of the cross” in front of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw), which triggers civil activity but does not necessarily serve public good and may not be in conformity with the law.

What constitutes an important category in the analysis of the condition of civil society are definitely non-government organisations, which enjoy the greatest popularity out of all the forms of participation described. Since 1989, this sector has significantly developed, especially in the spheres supporting sport, culture, education, social welfare, local growth, and healthcare [Gumkowska, Herbst 2008: 19-21]. Studies on the scope of activity of non-government organisations show that they are rarely typically civil organisations, and the majority of them are organisations which fulfil functions other than civil ones. This is because citizens are more willing to get involved in personal development through sports, educational or cultural activity, at the same time taking little interest in “civil virtues.” It seems that it is caused by the mental legacy of the view of the protective tasks of the state, which was adopted by real socialism.

In the conditions of the system transformation, it first of all concerned socioeconomic issues. A tendency of two “contradictory passions” emerged: “someone had to lead people by the hand and at the same time they wanted to keep freedom” [Tocqueville 2000: 44]. Thus, citizens’ participation was replaced with the demand for supporting democracy, especially in the economic and social sphere. It was reflected in people’s disappointment expressed in the form of protests and strikes. However, it would be quite a simplification if we limited the causes of social dissatisfaction with the state’s activities to the sphere of economy. “Some demonstrations were purely political in nature, and they were organised by political parties and their followers. It was a contradiction between objectives, values, and strategies of their implementation that was a subject of the conflict triggering protests” [Mikołajczyk 2001:70]. Thus, political organisations took advantage of the weakness of the civil society, the main feature of which in the 1990s was the “claims-based rationality” [Mokrzycki 2001:184]. In that period, what was manifested to a larger degree than citizens’ participation was “learned passivity, parasitic innovativeness, spread of egalitarian and collectivist behaviours, and paternalistic attitudes to the state,” which led to the establishment of political parties distinguished by “extreme populism” [Dzwończyk 1999: 171]. The abovementioned problems did not serve the purpose of the development of civil society. On the contrary, they were conducive to the “fluctuation of civic mindness”, which was willingly used by political parties in electoral campaigns [Pałeczki 1992: 19].

What was also important for attitudes to the state and what contributed to the weakness of civil society in the 1990s was the fragmentation of political elites. It was not conducive to the development of civil behaviours. It is consensual elites, which are integrated around basic shared values that trigger the development of the civil society. Owing to this, the institutional order may be established. Such order provides stable framework within which conflicts arising from the presence of pluralism in politics may be settled. The fragmentation of political elites in Poland led, as it was mentioned before, to the deep polarisation of the society and to fundamental political divisions – into the “post-Solidarity” camp and “post-

communists” in the 1990s, and into two competing versions of a community after 2001.

While in the 1990s, the society perceived the state as first of all the initiator of economic and political reforms, the requirements concerning the institution of the state became quite specialised in the following decade. In the conditions of the system transformation, the citizens’ mentality and their dissatisfaction with the outcome of the reforms – especially in the context of high social costs – led to the intensification of the “defiance of the state.” It was not of a permanent character, and occurred periodically, but it was a clear sign that the society did not trust political elites.

As a result, the state was perceived as an institution which is unfriendly to citizens, which was largely affected by the paternalistic expectations of the society and its tendency to “circumvent” law regulations (which was in fact equivalent to deceiving the state and its society) [Sztompka 1992: 128]. Thus, the most frequent forms of civil participation were the ones which expressed disapproval for the activity of the state, but at the same time strengthened neither of the two sides: neither the state nor the civil society [Eckert 1994: 16].

Consequently, a barrier appeared in the form of the lack of social trust in political elites and state institutions. Thus, the development and activity of civil society was hampered. It was only at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries that the significance of citizens’ participation was recognised, but still the expressions “social trust” and “social capital” were frequently treated in an instrumental manner. From the beginning of the transformation, the lack of social trust manifested itself mainly in the feeling of insecurity resulting from the emergence of threats that had not been known before, such as structural unemployment or increasing competitiveness among people. It was linked both with the lack of alternative choices, or insufficient knowledge of such choices, and with the attitude to political elites. Their negative image in the eyes of the society was the result of the inefficiency of state institutions and of big disappointment arising from high aspirations and expectations of the transformation era [Sztompka 1996: 34].

The increasing distrust in the state did not only lead to the weakness of the civil state, but it was also an expression of people’s expectations from their country at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Citizens generally approved a wide scope of the state’s obligations to its society [Bartkowski 2010: 52-64]. Almost 90% of the respondents recognised the need for the state to ensure access to healthcare, as many as 65% demanded that the state should “guarantee the minimum standard of living for the unemployed,” while 50% believed that it should “provide accommodation to those who cannot afford it”. Such claims as shown in the survey confirm the society’s assessment of changes. In 2002, more than 43% of the respondents expressed a view that the reforms of the system in Poland brought “more harm than benefit.” It should be noted that this figure marked an increase on previous years: in 1997, 22,3% of Polish citizens declared their dissatisfaction with changes, while in 1999 the number rose to almost 32% [Cichomski 2002: 54-55].

The evaluation of changes was closely connected with the assessment of the activity of state institutions and of democracy. As many as 93% of the respondents stressed that the “authorities do not take proper care of people” [Cichomski 2002]. Yet 82% of Poles still consider freedom to be the positive outcome of the reforms. The Polish

society has a strongly egalitarian bias and its attitude to reforms is rather negative, especially in the economic sphere. Such a view is popular with all social groups, but it is the most common among uneducated people with low income, living in small towns and villages.

What also seems to be important is Polish people's attitude to civil rights and obligations and their assessment of the activity of the civil society. It is often emphasised that the evaluation of the above spheres is often determined by the role one plays in the society, his or her individual and group interests, as well as the place of living, education, or age. Factors of outlook – such as political views (left or right wing) and religiousness of individuals – also play a significant part. Thus, the evaluation of both the state and the civil society, and of their rights and obligations to a community, is dependent on the same factors creating auto-identification.

When identifying the determinants of the activity of an individual in the field of civil rights and obligations, we must stress the importance of social integration. An obligation to work actively for the good of a community and to “fulfil one's civil duty” originates first of all from the fundamental sense of participation in the political system [Lipset 1998: 123]. In practice, it means that among people who get involved in this sphere are the ones who have not been pushed onto the margin of society due to the loss of work and having nothing to live on. Requiring citizens' involvement, a community should ensure that they have a basic standard of living in the name of social solidarity. Only then will an individual become a full participant of the system. Thus, a “person's rights and obligations are not only a consequence of his or her status, but they are also confirmation of it”. The lack of a sense of solidarity as regards economic issues breeds alienation, which may directly lead to attitudes that negate any political involvement. They manifest themselves in low voter turnout, a passive attitude to those in power, or clearly expressed distrust in political elites, which may trigger the development of populist or even undemocratic movements. [Dziubka 2008: 34-45].

Social integration, which to a large degree constitutes the foundation of citizens' participation, should be supported by the so-called citizen ethics [Dziubka 1998: 121]. Its basic assumptions include norms of conduct of both citizens and the elites that represent them, which belong to commonly shared and accepted ethical standards. They determine behaviour in the public sphere and are a point of reference for civil activity. They form the basis for one of the key elements of participation, i.e. social trust. Therefore it seems that norms of conduct followed by politicians in the public sphere are vital for an increase of social activity. However, as the research of 2009 shows, acts violating public ethics are still relatively little condemned. What is much more negatively perceived is the littering of the natural environment (81.3%), unduly received benefits (55.5%), or using means of public transport without a valid ticket (39.3%). Polish people also express disapproval of member of parliaments who prefer dealing with private matters to service for the society (73.1%) [Bratkowski 2010: 58].

Moreover, the evaluation of the activity of state officials and the assessment of the same behaviours among “ordinary” citizens quite differ from the adopted standards. We may observe specific dualism of views here. Finding a job through acquaintances, avoiding taxes or paying money to have an operation in a public hospital at an earlier date are not seen as reprehensible acts when done by citizens,

but are considered to be so when politicians behave in this way. Thus, the need arises for a clear distinction between social morality and public morality, which reflects the state of citizens' political competence and has an undoubted influence on the activity undertaken by the society.

All of the abovementioned determinants of the development of the civil society in Poland were not very strong in Poland after 1989. Thus, it is justifiable to claim that while civil society was one of the principal assumptions of the system transformation, it "was not accomplished in a satisfactory degree" [Gliński 2002]. That is why the civil society is often criticised for "defectiveness" or "enclave-type activities and institutions" [Gliński 2009]. Its fundamental feature is the fact that it displays qualities which constitute a community, but are contradictory to the values represented by the state [Szacki 1997: 36]. Before 1989, it was based on the dual distinction between "them" and "us", and in the 1990s it assumed a form of the ethical evaluation of the state's activity, especially in the process of economic changes.

This was mainly manifested in the "non-participative support," expressed as dissatisfaction with the efforts the state makes. [Kurczewski 2008: 237]. What distinguished such forms of activity was first of all their negative dimension – dissatisfaction devoid of any positive initiative at the grass-root level. Thus, the civil society had an enclave-like nature, because "the citizens, who wanted to solve problems which are important for them do not wait for any top-down initiatives and the distribution of resources, but take action themselves" [Szacki 1997: 38].

In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we witnessed a significant reduction in civil participation, which was the result of the increasing party dependency of local governments, as well as of the low level of citizens' political competence. Other factors included Polish people's mentality, political culture, which was not participation-oriented, and political elites' evident aversion to citizens' involvement. The weakness of the civil society in Poland was conducive to the occurrence of the waves of populism, exclusivism and elitism of those in power.

As Krzysztof Łabędź pointed out, the components of political culture which are functional in the democratic system were developed in the period of no democracy. They in turn triggered the process of the development of democratic institutions. Moreover, the abovementioned scholar notes that as the result, among other things, "the actual mode of implementation of democratic principles, these elements have become weaker, the support for the democratic system is not increasing at the level of behaviour and is decreasing at the level of beliefs. This, in turn, may cause problems in the sphere of the social legitimisation of power" [Łabędź 2006: 53-54]. As Robert Dahl accurately remarked, there is no democracy without citizens' involvement and participation in the public life [Dahl 1995: 319]. Feelings of alienation, rejection, and a low level of participation – resulting from the negative evaluation of political parties for not keeping election promises and for having unreal and incoherent political programmes aimed at short-term election success – pose a real threat to the development of democratic political culture in Poland and impede the process of changes of the system. David Beetham presents a similar view, indicating that the concurrence of rules, values and objectives adopted by the ruling with the opinions and aspirations expressed by citizens constitutes the factor legitimising the activity of state authorities. The discouragement of the Polish

society, which is the consequence of the modern view of the political class as shown by the media, favours the promotion of undemocratic attitudes, thus threatening the processes of democracy stabilisation. The democratic political culture, as R. A. Dahl points out, constitutes a real barrier protecting the society against crises and guarantees that if such problems occur, they will be overcome without the destabilisation of the democratic order and with no need to reject democratic institutions and mechanisms [Szyja 2013: 175].

In his deliberations on consolidated democracy, Bartosz Szyja presents the results of Ronald Inglehard's studies. They clearly show that „the fact that material needs (such as the need for economic and physical safety) have been satisfied owing to the social and economic development caused the emergence of higher-level needs (such as human rights, political liberties) the fulfilment of which is possible only in democracy” [Szyja 2015]. The democratic legal culture is reflected in citizens' general conviction that fundamental rights and freedoms must be respected, that all people are equal before the law, and that they are willing to participate in democratic decision-making procedures [Kulesza, Winczorek 1992].

According to Lipset, the economic development in the country supports democracy. Some scholars are of the opinion that political culture safeguards democracy even in the times of economic slowdown. What is more, it is assumed that the country will remain democratic only if it enjoys citizens' political support based on democratic values. As the abovementioned scholar claims, political culture is the outcome of shared history and forms an integral part of the social identity of a given person that is resistant to changes. Thus, it may take decades for cultural values to be noticeably modified.

The Polish society of the transformation era, just like other post-communist societies of Eastern Europe, was subject to rapid, euphoric and deep changes, which were a manifestation of “negative solidarity” [Lubecki, Szczegóła 2007: 89]. Attitudes, principles and behaviours which had formed the socialist pattern developed through education were suddenly disposed of. This rapid transformation process soon appeared to be hard to accept for many people. Moreover, it was not conducive to the establishment of forms of cooperative activity and to the perception of shared values and ideas. Hence, some circles express opinions that are full of nostalgia for the “relatively peaceful” times of the People's Republic of Poland [Markowski 2007: 147]. There is a dominant view in the literature according to which passivity, mass resignation, withdrawal and apathy were all the immanent features of the Polish political culture in the period of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Republic [Markowski 2007]. Mikołaj Cześnik has coined the expression of “the culture of an election boycott” – the expression of defiance being the outcome of a “historically rooted method” of conduct in an illegitimate system. According to some scholars, a high degree of absence – as it was mentioned earlier – is of historical origin and results from “the indifference and the lack of interest and crystallized political views” of a large part of the society. Polish people's political activity manifests itself in the use of symbolic or rhetorical forms and has a character of protests and articulating needs and demands to the authorities. It does not have a potential for grass-root change initiatives [Lubecki, Szczegóła 2007].

To sum up, political culture is of the key importance for the functioning of democracy. This relation is vital here as only a part of the public reality is defined

by the law. Thus, democracy is developed not only by means of legal regulations, but also through traditional customs. The quality of democracy is obviously affected by the way a discourse on important state matters is conducted. Aggression, impetuosity, unwillingness to seek compromise, and the antagonisation of debate not only have a negative impact on citizens' trust in the political class, but they also – which has more dangerous implications – weaken the legitimacy of decisions made by those in power [Rajca 2007: 122]. There is no doubt that the attitude of approval for the transformation of the system is dominant in Poland, and the majority of the society deems democracy as the best possible system. The results of surveys conducted by public opinion research centres show that the consent for the establishment of undemocratic rules is given only in the times of particularly serious political conflicts and respondents justify it with a difficult situation in the country [Szyja 2015]. The Polish society is still strongly politicised. The fact that it has a negative opinion on the realm of politics contributes to people's passivity and makes them withdraw into the private sphere. Thus, the requirements posed by a democratic society and its cultural norms cannot be met. Change is still possible, but it requires a "process of long persistence" [Lubecki, Szczegółka: 90].

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