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Poland's Wrong Choice: The Polish Political Scene and its Influence on the Creation of the Country's Foreign and Security Policy

Summary: For the whole period of post- communist Poland, the conduct of foreign and security policy remained in the hands of the same political camp. With the exception of the short period of the Jan Olszewski's government (XII 1991 – VI 1992) the execution of those policies remained in the hands of liberals from Solidarity camps and liberals from post-communist opportunists. The situation changed with the arrival of the new government after 2005 elections. According to the author, it is quite natural that opposition criticizes the government because of its own different political ideas and interests. It is also easy to understand that very often opposition is against one or another aspect of foreign policy conducted by the government or party in power. What is unusual, however, is total criticism and a never ending war declared on all political decisions and actions of the ruling government, especially in the domain of foreign and security policy. Therefore, one of the primary goals of the article is to answer the question of reasons for such a hostile attitude of the Polish opposition towards the government.

After the collapse of the communist regime in Poland the country's foreign and security policy was easy to understand and classify. All major political groups and parties were in favor of rejecting the old communist patterns and the full dependence on the Soviets, and also all they were interested in – briefly speaking – a reorientation of Polish politics from the East towards the West. The main differences were related to the speed of this process and the partners to work with. The first Polish non – communist

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government chaired by Tadeusz Mazowiecki was the most careful negotiating very slowly the withdrawal of Soviets troops from Poland and the question of our presence in the *Warsaw Pact* and *Comecom*. Yet, the next governments, those of Jan Krzysztof Bielecki and Hanna Suchocka, took more dynamic steps by signing, among others, the European Treaty with European Union and opening official talks with NATO related to the possibility of closer cooperation with NATO and later on, our future membership. Even the former communists, who unexpectedly won parliamentary elections in 1993 did not change this pro – western and pro-NATO policy, gradually rejecting protection of their old masters from the Kremlin.

Needless to say that this policy was widely supported by the population reaching some 75 – 80 percent for membership in NATO and ca. 75% in the case of the EU (EU accession referendum). This phenomenon of united support for foreign and security policy of the country did not change even in the case of protests coming from the right wing party – Liga Polskich Rodzin (LPR)) or doubts – (left wing Samoobrona) concerning the terms of our accession to the EU. The same situation happened when the post – communist government of Leszek Miller decided to join the anti – Saddam Hussein coalition headed by the US and sent our troops to this area. In all those cases almost all major political parties were, generally speaking, in favor of the governmental policies giving their strong or moderate support in the parliament, media and elsewhere.

Who Won the Election?

All of it has changed with the parliamentary and presidential election of 2005. Long before the voting dates it was clear that left wing politicians had no chance to win those races. Popular post – communist president Aleksander Kwasniewski was ending his 10 – year term in office and by election law was excluded from his eventual third term. His former party *Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej* (SLD) colleagues headed by Premier Leszek Miller have had no chance, after a whole series of scandals (corruption, abuse of power, nepotism, etc.) to be widely re-elected to the parliament. SLD could have even failed to pass 5 percent parliamentary threshold. Thus, it was a good chance that parties of *Solidarity* origins: liberal *Platforma Obywatelska* (PO) and conservative *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS) could build a large, secure and safe parliamentary coalition.

Facing such a development both parties have reached an agreement according to which the leader of the winning party would become the prime minister, foreign and security and industrial posts would go to PO, internal

security, work, health – to PiS, etc. As all opinion pools results had indicated the steady lead of PO it was widely understood that the future government would be headed by one of the most popular PO leaders – Jan Maria Rokita, already labeled by the media as Prime Minister of Krakow.

On the presidential election front there were three major contenders – Chairman of PO Donald Tusk, President of Warsaw, former Minister of Justice in the government of Jerzy Buzek – Lech Kaczyński, and acting Minister of Foreign Affairs from the post-communist government – Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz. Two of them were to be present in the second tour of the presidential race, most likely one from the right, and one from the left spectrum of political forces. Yet, it did not happen because, in an unexpended way, Cimoszewicz, known for his former election slogan of ‘clean hands’, was accused by his former secretary for misbehavior and tricks related to his stock exchange shares and unpaid taxes. As a result of media turmoil he gave the race up, and thus the presidential dual was played not among right and left wing politicians, but between families of former *Solidarity* activists. Here again PO Leader, Donald Tusk, enjoyed a substantial and steady lead over Lech Kaczyński in the opinion pools.

In such a situation it was clear that PO would be the winner of both elections, and the king maker of future Polish politics ruling, with modest support of PiS, would be the looser of both races. The trouble for Polish politics was and still is that, contrary to all opinion pools, it happened exactly the other way around, and PO painfully lost both elections. The shocked PO leaders and their supporters simply refused to accept the democratic election verdict of the society (‘Poland made a wrong choice’) and rejected its own former obligation declaring their participation in power – in the newly elected parliament and the government. In a dramatic request, PO televised the negotiations concerning the formation of the government – PO leaders stepped up their own requests for more ministerial posts to such an extent that PiS chairman Jarosław Kaczynski, proposed to ask – once again – the State Election Commission who really won this race. Consequently, the idea of the strong pro-reformists PO-PiS government have collapsed. Needless to say, that millions of Poles, who voted for both parties counting on this coalition and the start of large, profound and far reaching reform programs of the country were deeply disappointed and frustrated.

In such a situation PiS has been forced to form a minority government, headed by the little known politician from its own, ranks Kazimierz

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Marcinkiewicz, being supported in the parliament by two populist parties – LPR and Samoobronę. The post of Foreign Minister went to a career diplomat, Ambassador to Russia (or Ambassador in Moscow), Stefan Meller. Such a government had found itself immediately under heavy fire coming from all directions – most violently the from post-communist SLD and PO circles and their supporters. The huge role in this campaign was played by mass media being run or/and controlled by liberals or left of center sympathizers.

The image of Poland under this new government presented by the media was not surprisingly more than a black country, the arguments of critics went, was at the edge of economic catastrophe, Polish currency in decline, democracy in question, human rights violently raped, censorship about to be imposed on the free media, briefly speaking – the democratic world was stunned by the degree of fanaticism and, non tolerance and all kinds of abuse of power by the new regime which ruled Poland. Thus the only hope for the country was the fast ‘correction’ of this election mistake, meaning a collapse of this government and a new vote. However when the moment of such a decision came, PO did not agree with the PiS proposal to dissolve the parliament. Their lead in the opinion polls was not that big, therefore they decided to wait for a much better chance counting to grasp, as a single party, the whole power in the future. As a result, the only program which opposition parties had was steadily growing criticism of government for absolutely all its decisions.

The heaviest criticism was met by the foreign and security policy. This was especially true in the case when, after the rejection of an idea about the new election by PO, the parliamentary coalition was turned into a governmental coalition, Jarosław Kaczyński became the prime minister, and leaders of LPR – Roman Giertych and Somoobrony – Andrzej Lepper got deputy prime ministerial posts. In protest for A. Lepper nomination S. Meller has resigned from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Consequently, critics went on, Polish foreign and security policy, which managed to be implemented firmly Poland in the NATO alliance and the European Union, was ruined.

New and Old Foreign Policy

With the arrival of the new foreign minister, Anna Fotyga, not only this criticism has intensified, but also the rhetoric of the government has changed. It was argued that the time of ‘corporation of Bronisław Geremek’ came to its ends. In a clear reference to the widely spread influence of the former foreign minister and the present Euro-deputy and his strongly pro – Brussels and liberal views the government has adopted much less

conciliatory attitude towards different demands coming from Brussels. There are no reasons, explained the prime minister, for which Poland should be treated differently than other members of the Union. Also, being a member of the Union, Poland should be not regarded by others as an isolated country, which means that both sides, Brussels and Warsaw, have their own mutual obligations. For example in the case of such an important issue as energy supplies, Brussels did not react properly when Russia’s and Germany’s companies signed the agreement allowing the construction of the Baltic gas pipeline, of which are afraid, for numbers of reasons, Baltic countries, members as Germany of the same European Union. In the case of the Russian ban on the export of Polish energy, Brussels got involved in this dispute only after Poland vetoed the start of the negotiations of the new treaty between EU and Russia, etc.

Consequently – J. Kaczyński argued – Poland should not be excluded from the discussion conducted under the German EU presidency concerning the revival of so-called European constitution. Why is it that,, asked the prime minister, Great Britain, Holland and the Czech Republic could open some chapters of this already questioned document for further discussion, but Poland is deprived of such right? Do we have a union of partners enjoying the same privileges or a union with first and second class membership, the last one being reserved for Poland. Poland wanted to open a discussion concerning the vote of a double majority in the EU Council (55% of the states representing at least 65% of the Union’s population) arguing that the system of so-called ‘equal influence’ is more adequate and just to the new Union of 27 and its inhabitants. Poland also asks Brussels to treat the Union not as a simple enlargement of its previous 15 members, but as a new political undertaking facing important challenges, such as agricultural, energy, and foreign and security policies, more important for the Union for the time being than creation of the post, say, the EU President.

All of it was violently attacked by a coalition of post- communist and liberal forces headed by Al. Kwasniewski and B. Geremek. In many public interventions they accused the government for pushing breaks on European integration and disturbing the German presidency. PO has adopted here a much more moderate approach criticizing the government for the language of the dispute with Germany, but supporting it in its core issue. *Polskie Stronnictwo*

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Ludowe (PSL) joined the camp of critics offering, as a good example, its own case, means the process of negotiations of agricultural packet during the time of EU accession talks, etc.

This critical approach did not change after the not easy and difficult to digest compromise reached recently at the EU Brussels summit. The only difference is that this time PO leaders are attacking now the government for being 'too soft' with the Germans in the whole process of marathon negotiations, post-communists are praising it for a pro-EU constitution stand (meaning – a clear betrayal of its previous 'equal influence' proposal) etc. And the media are delighted to quote foreign press and western politicians and experts who are pointing at the lack of professionalism and useless stubbornness of the Polish negotiating team in Brussels headed by president Lech Kaczyński. Thus, this what is considered by the ruling coalition as a substantial success for Poland on the European political scene (Nice Treaty regulation lasting until 2017) the opposition regards as a triumph for European ideas over small Polish unfounded pretensions and aspirations. In other words in the eyes of the opposition any governmental criticism and/or failure coming from abroad is regarded as their own success in Poland – as good as it gets. This stays in sharp contrast with the process of i.e. admittance to NATO when critical voices questioning our place in this organization were counterbalanced by adequate Polish responses coming from all directions of the political spectrum.

Back to Home!

The post- communist government of Leszek Miller sent our soldiers to the Middle East in order to stabilize the post war situation in Iraq and to help rebuild the country. As long as this government was in power it considered its own decision as wise and serving the vital Polish interests. Being in the opposition, the same politicians started to question our presence there arguing that this mission is already accomplished, is too risky, lasts too long, shortly – it is simply useless. They do not accept today's government arguments that our military presence there was already substantially reduced and it deals only with training of local military forces, neither that the date of the final pull out is really close. A mistake is a mistake.

On the same token our soldiers should not be sent to Afghanistan to join NATO forces. This decision, they keep saying, was taken against public opinion which did not support this involvement, were too zealous, and Poland is sending too many troops to the front line while bigger countries are declaring much smaller military units located in much safer zones. The others are arguing that we should send our forces to the closer troubled

hot spots, say to Lebanon, when we could get bigger advantages. Also the question of adequate preparation and cost of this military expedition is brought up while the national economy requires substantial financial means, to say nothing about the urgent needs of the army itself. And last but not least critics are reminding the government that in Afghanistan all foreign military interventions turned into disasters, and we, as all previous occupants of this country – England and the Soviets, are simply facing a humiliating defeat there.

In this particular case the government has to deal even with a bigger challenge because not only did a united opposition, but also junior coalitions partners are share to a great extent share some of the abovementioned arguments.

Much of the same could be said about the latest development in this field – the American proposal to locate in Poland part of its ballistic missile defense system. Here the opposition is coming with a whole series of arguments against this initiative ranging from Russian opposition to it, through German reservations and ending with American unwillingness to contribute to a much bigger extent to the strengthening of Polish defense capabilities.

End of Mission

It is quite natural that opposition criticizes the government because of its own different political ideas and interests. This happens everywhere, not only in Poland. It is also easy to understand that very often opposition is against one or another aspect of foreign policy conducted by the government or party in power. The international political scene is full of such examples. What is unusual here is total criticism and a never ending war declared on all political decisions and actions of the ruling government, especially in the domain of foreign and security policy. Therefore the question of reasons for such a hostile attitude of the Polish opposition towards the government is worth answering. There are a number of possibilities, but at least two should be mentioned.

For the whole period of post- communist Poland, the conduct of foreign and security policy remained in the hands of the same political camp. With the exception of the short period of the Jan Olszewski's government (XII 1991 – VI 1992) the execution of those policies remained in the hands of liberals from *Solidarity* camps and liberals from post-communist opportunists. Notwithstanding their original ideologies they were united in pro-European and/or pro-American declarations and followed or/and echoed main ideas produced and distributed in those political centers. Those patterns were safe

and easy to follow, unless the dominant trends of American and European politics and interests clashed, as happened in the case of the famous 'letter of 8' when Poland was forced to make a choice between the two.

This easy going foreign and security policy executed by Polish liberals of different origins remained in sharp contrast with, let's call it, reformist policy proclaimed by conservatives looking differently at the interests and the main aims of post-communist Poland. For them it was difficult to understand and to accept such a slow process of cutting off links with the communists of the past and the departure from the former Soviet empire. Right wing politicians criticized passiveness of the Polish policy in this respect and

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proposed to take more dynamic and radical steps in these directions. Thus the first Polish organization openly proclaiming Poland's full membership in NATO, *Atlantic Club of Poland*, was established by them in 1991 almost three years before the similar organization of liberals – *Euro-Atlantic Association* started to promote pro-NATO ideas and politics. Also such an important project as building a new gas pipeline from Norway in order to limit 100% of Poland's dependence on gas supplies from Russia was immediately rejected when liberal post-communists returned to power in 2001. On the other hand those proposals presented by Polish officials to our partners, such as president L. Walesa's unclear idea of 'NATO-bis' or

prime minister W. Pawlak's *Partnership for Development* proposal were totally ignored and rejected.

It is sad to conclude that all regional projects in which Poland is participating were generated not by ruling Polish liberal politicians. Thus the *Visegrad Group* was a Hungarian project, the idea of CEFTA came from Prague, and the *Weimar Triangle* from Germany, etc. The irony is that the only Polish project dealing with foreign and security issues on a larger than Polish scale, which finds its place in the history of post World War II diplomacy, came neither from the brilliant professor and author of articles published willingly in the European press, Minister of Foreign Affairs Bronisław Geremek, nor from the loins of European political salons, President Al. Kwasniewski, but

from the modest Minister of Foreign Affairs of the dark communist years, Adam Rapacki, the author of the idea of a non-atomic, Central European zone.

The problem is that leading Polish liberals, coming from the right or left of the political spectrum, simply failed to understand that successful foreign and security policy consists of something more than passive agreement for foreign proposals. And that the mandate given to them in a democratic vote will not last forever notwithstanding the result of their work (they call it 'mission') and accomplishments. In this respect their violet rejection of the present Polish policy is similar to the badly masked mockery of one of the leading Polish politicians who learning that his candidate for the presidency – T. Mazowiecki – failed to qualify even for the second tour publicly proclaimed that Poles did not understand the rules of democracy. Seen from that point of view the liberals are regarding the ruling Polish coalition as only a short break, the sad episode in their successful reign. However the trouble is that it has lasted already two years, and even worse – it is breaking their own good, passive behaviors and manners so successfully practiced in the previous, golden years.

No History

The second possible source of such a hostile and critical attitude of intellectual elites towards the Polish government, which finds its strong echo in foreign and security policy, has nothing to do with international relations, but much with domestic issues. Poland is the only country from the previous Soviet block, which did not manage to close the painful chapter of the communist past, especially the dark pages of the secret collaboration with the political police. All attempts to resolve this problem simply failed. It is amazing to see how desperately the idea of putting some light on the dirty carts of collaboration with the communist secret police is blocked by liberals through different means, such as taking down the government, as it was in the case of J. Olszewski, using endless ways of juridical tricks, or, as it happened recently, by involving deeply divided Constitutional Court. Whatever the applied means are the final result is the same – let's forget the past, let's put it into the grave, History does not exist.

The problem is that the Prime Minister J. Kaczyński and his ruling coalition are seeing it differently. In one way or on other they are going to follow the same paths as the rest of the post-communist countries, and to close the chapter of the communist years by telling the nation the truth. Therefore there are many who are afraid of the conclusion of such a process.

They are using all kinds of tools in order if not to stop, at least, to delay this process as long as possible. Toppling the government is one of these tools, discrediting the process of the whole procedure with the help of influential foreigners, is another. British journalist Timothy Gatten Ash is well known in Poland thanks to his cooperation with the Polish democratic opposition during the communist years. He also spent some time in communist East Germany, where he was closely monitored by the East German secret police. As a result he happened to have quite a big book of secret reports covering his German meetings and activities. Once the Berlin Wall collapsed and the Gawk Institute opened its archives Ash got the chance to read all those personal secret documents which were related to him., All of it was very sad, he admitted, shockingly, but the idea to disclose those papers was absolutely normal. Yet, in the Polish case such, he says, this procedure should not be accepted, or allowed, because it is absolutely abnormal.

Thus we are facing a double standard morality – what is accepted and allowed in, say, Germany or the Czech Republic, should be forbidden in Poland. In Hungary the process of opening archives of collaborators with secret police was a democratic procedure, but in Poland what we are witnessing is a witch hunt, etc.

All of it means that any foreign and/or security policy initiated and conducted by this government related to, i.e. EU reforms, the US ballistic defense system to be installed in Poland, the presence of Polish military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, etc., has no chance to be supported by the opposition consisting of post-communist and liberal forces, unless 'Poland's wrong choice' is corrected and the country is put on the right track.