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Republic of Poland

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REPUBLIC OF POLAND

(Rzeczpospolita Polska)

By Jeffrey K. Hass, Ph.D.



Located in east-central Europe, Poland comprises an area of nearly 313,000 square kilometers (about the size of New Mexico). Borders with Germany on the west and Belarus and Russia on the east give Poland notable geopolitical significance. In addition, its flat topography, with no defensible geographical features, has made Poland a prime area for conflict, as the country not only lies between historically powerful nations but also has served as an unwilling conduit for forces between Russia and Germany.

Poland does not suffer from the ethnic problems that have plagued Russia, Bulgaria, or Romania. Poland is 96.7 percent ethnic Polish. Polish is the dominant language, and Poland does not suffer disputes over a second legal language in the country. The Roman Catholic Church can claim 90 percent of the Polish population, with perhaps as much as 75 percent of Poles actively practicing their faith. Ethnic and religious homogeneity have played a large role in the post-1989 Polish political world. This dual homogeneity helped act as a social glue during the Communist period and has kept social tension at a minimum during the painful transition to a market economy and to democracy.

Poland's political system is grounded in structures carried over from the pre-1939 period, from Communism, and from contingencies since 1992. Until the new constitution was adopted on April 2, 1997, Poland's Socialist constitution of 1952 provided the basic political ground rules. The new constitution sets up the system of government and provides rights

for citizens. Freedom of organization is provided for, except when such organizations or political parties have "totalitarian" methods; Nazi, fascist, or Communist activities; or programs of racial or national hatred, inspired by Poland's memories of Nazi and Soviet occupation. Private property and a market economy are sanctified and protected by the constitution, also inspired by the desire to avoid a return to Communism. Other articles in the constitution were of some dispute, reflecting the desires of right-wing parties (in the legislative minority) and the left-wing majority. For example, the constitution allows for freedom of religion, but the state is to remain religiously neutral. This proposition angered right-wing parties and supporters, who wanted religion more forcefully supported (and religious convictions imposed) by the state. Social security, a minimum wage, and labor holidays are provided for; this probably stems from left-wing parties' Socialist leanings and convictions. Free public education and health care for children, invalids, and pregnant women are to be provided. Finally, duties are specified, although vaguely: Citizens are to pay taxes, defend the motherland (although exactly how they are to do so is left for other legislation), and care for the environment.

Relations and divisions of power between the two main branches of government, the executive and the legislature, are only now crystallizing. Before Aleksander Kwasniewski's election as president in 1995, the presidency and the legislature had come into conflict not only over policies but also over the degree of

powers delegated to each branch. This stemmed in part from the political and ideological distance between President Lech Walesa and the Socialist legislature after 1993. However, Walesa's personality also played no small role in the struggle for power. Walesa viewed himself as a savior and founder of the Polish state and accordingly took a more dictatorial attitude toward his office over time. His heavy-handed politics did not sit well with his allies in Solidarity, the party he helped found in 1980 that became a beacon of anti-Communist support in Poland. In an attempt to assemble a party apparatus Walesa created the Non-Party Bloc in Support of Reforms, but the party fared badly in 1993 and later disappeared. With the election of a Socialist legislature in 1993, Walesa's pushing of presidential powers to the limit of the law isolated him from the electorate, and he lost to the more pragmatic and moderate Kwasniewski.

After taking office, Kwasniewski tried to remodel the Socialist image from that of staunch Communism to pragmatic, social-democratic leftism. He took a moderate stance toward the Catholic Church, favored relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU), and in general presented himself less as a party ideologue and more as a moderate politician.

Despite pro-Western sentiments, especially after the experience of Communism and Soviet domination, Poles were not entirely convinced on the need to enter the European Union as they were entering NATO. The latter gives Poland a greater sense of security than the country probably has had in many centuries. The European Union, on the other hand, brings not only potential economic and political gains but also hardship, especially for agriculture. In 2002 new far-right parties made considerable gains in local elections because of the issue of EU membership. In 2003 a national referendum was held, and while a majority of those who voted approved European Union membership, there were some claims of vote-fixing or other forms of interference. Further, the referendum and pro-EU result led to a split in the coalition. The Polish Peasants Party (PSL) had entered the governing coalition with the social-democratic SLD (Democratic Left) so that a majority government could be formed, and their price for cooperation was either rejection of EU membership or tough negotiations for privileges and subsidies for Polish farmers. PSL received neither in negotiations between Poland and the European Union, and following the referendum the PSL cried betrayal and left the ruling coalition. This weakened Prime Minister Leszek Miller's position, and following stories of scandal and

a near-fatal helicopter accident, Miller resigned as prime minister, although not without the accomplishment of gaining Poland entry into the EU.

Turning to Europe angered not only the Polish Peasants Party but also other factions on the conservative right frightened by possible negative implications of joining the West. In 2002 two right-wing parties emerged: Samoobrona and the League of Polish Families. Both capitalized on opposition to joining the EU, especially Samoobrona.

In the 2005 presidential election, Lech Kaczynski of the conservative Law and Justice party won a runoff to claim the presidency. Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, also of Law and Justice, became the new prime minister, ending four years of center-left government.

The System of Government

Poland is a democratic republic with a bicameral legislature.

EXECUTIVE

Poland's executive branch is like that of most European nations: a two-sided executive with a president and a prime minister. The president is the leader of the nation, while the prime minister heads the state bureaucracy. Foreign policy is the president's domain, while domestic policy is the prime minister's. The Polish model (like that in Romania or Bulgaria) resembles more the German political structure, where the president acts as a chief diplomat and the cares of the country are in the hands of the prime minister. Poland's president does not enjoy the same amount of power as presidents in Russia, Belarus, France, or the United States. This stems partially from Poland's use of the German model of strong prime minister and weak president and partially from events of the post-Communist era, when tensions between the heavy-handed Lech Walesa and the legislature arose not only over ideology and policy but also over political power.

The president is elected to office for a five-year term and can serve a total of only two terms; a runoff system is used if in the first round of elections no candidate receives more than 50 percent of the votes cast. If the president cannot fulfill his duties (e.g., due to illness, death, resignation, or dismissal by the state tribunal), the marshal of the *Sejm* is the next in line, followed by the marshal of the Senate. The president

can be removed from office by the legislature. In this case, if two-thirds of all members of the national assembly (both houses) support a petition submitted by at least 140 members for removal, then the case goes to the tribunal of state. While the case is being contemplated, the president is suspended from office pending the decision.

According to the constitution, the president's main role is to be "the supreme representative of the Republic of Poland and the guarantor of the continuity of State authority." The president is to be above the daily affairs of state—leaving these for the prime minister—and is both to represent Poland abroad and to safeguard the constitution. Foreign policy, especially agreements with foreign states, is the responsibility primarily of the president; in this he is aided by a national security council. Further, the president is the commander in chief of the armed force and has the power to appoint the heads of the military.

Domestic affairs, especially the day-to-day running of the state and the nitty-gritty of drafting and implementing policies, belong more to the prime minister and the council of ministers. The president does play a role in adopting legislation and may convene the "cabinet of ministers," which is a meeting of the council of ministers but chaired by the president, and which does not have the same power as the council of ministers. The president also sets elections to the national legislature; calls to dissolve both legislative houses if so decided after consultations with the marshals of the two chambers; introduces legislation to the national assembly; proclaims nationwide referenda; refers matters to the Constitutional Tribunal; nominates and appoints the prime minister; dismisses ministers after a no-confidence vote has passed the Sejm; and appoints judges and fills positions within the high courts.

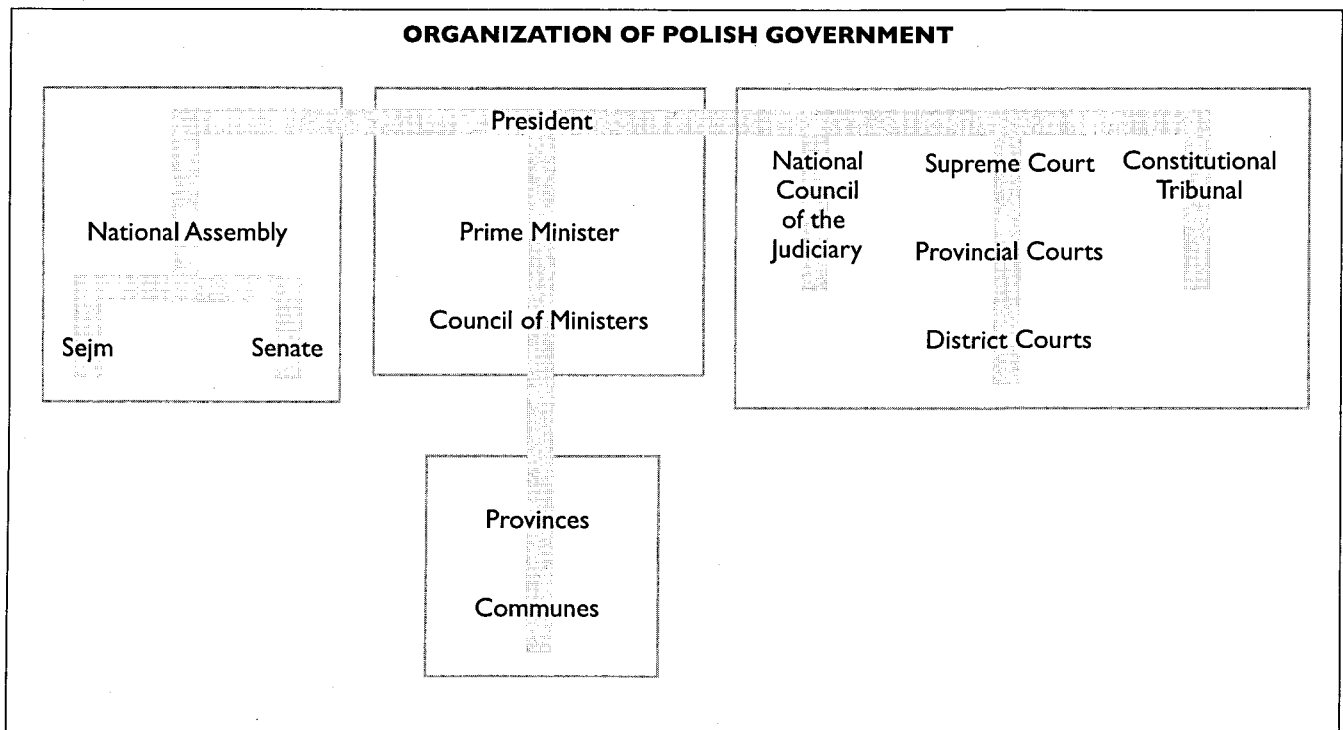
The president has only weak veto power over legislation. Upon receiving legislation passed by the national assembly, the president has 21 days to respond. He may approve the bill, at which point it enters the Journal of Laws (*Dziennik Ustaw*). If the president opposes the bill, he has two options, and he cannot use both. In the first option, he may refer the bill to the Constitutional Tribunal. If the tribunal accepts the bill as constitutional, the president is obliged to sign it. The tribunal may reject the bill as unconstitutional in its entirety or in parts. In the former case, the bill is dead; in the latter case, however, the president is to sign the bill without those parts deemed unconstitutional or to return the bill to the national assembly. The president's second option is to refer the bill back to the Sejm for reconsideration: this is a weak veto. If a quorum (more than half of the

deputies) is present and three-fifths of those present support the bill, then the president is obliged to sign it into law within seven days; the president at this point has no recourse to the Constitutional Tribunal.

One prominent role the president has played in domestic affairs is that of power broker. President Walesa, for example, in 1994 and 1995 threatened the Socialist legislature with dissolution even though he did not have the power to do so; yet his threats were taken seriously and led to Walesa's being able to make the ministerial appointments he desired. President Kwasniewski, whose style was less inflammatory, acted less as a direct power broker, although he played that role in dealing with the Catholic Church. In this way, the president puts himself "above politics" in order to help bring political consensus.

For domestic affairs the prime minister and council of ministers play a much more active role. Ministers of all state bureaucracies are appointed and sit on this body; the prime minister is the head of the group. As the heads of the state bureaucracy, the ministers have the job of managing the state bureaucracy and upholding the implementation of laws and policies. According to the constitution, the council of ministers has control over state affairs that are not expressly reserved for local self-government organs. The council of ministers also oversees the state treasury, implements the state budget, maintains internal security and civil peace, and engages in the day-to-day functions of foreign relations.

Ministers leave office on three occasions. The first is when a new Sejm is elected and comes to office; at this point the prime minister must submit the resignation of the council of ministers. (This does not mean those ministers may not be reappointed.) The second is upon the resignation of the prime minister, which the president does not need to accept. The third is in the case of a vote of no confidence by the Sejm. To depose a prime minister, at least 46 members of the Sejm must submit a motion on no confidence and submit the name of a new prime minister candidate. If a majority of the Sejm supports this motion, the prime minister must submit his resignation to the president, who is obliged to accept it. Such a motion must be voted on seven days after submission. If the no-confidence motion fails, the Sejm must wait three months before attempting the motion again (unless the motion is supported by at least 115 Sejm deputies). Votes of no confidence can also be submitted against individual ministers; such a motion requires the support of 69 deputies and follows the same time limits and procedures as for no confidence in the prime minister. The



prime minister may also call for a vote of no confidence in himself and the council of ministers in order to force issues of disagreement between the executive and legislature.

LEGISLATURE

Poland's legislature is bicameral. The lower, "popular" house is the Sejm, consisting of 460 members; the upper house is the Senate (Senat), consisting of 100 delegates. Together these two houses make up the overall legislature, the national assembly (Zgromadzenie Narodowe). Each body is elected for a four-year term; before the end of each term the president is supposed to call for new elections. However, the Sejm may dissolve itself by a two-thirds support of a motion to do so; this leads to dissolution of the Senate as well. Also, the president may call for the dissolution of the Sejm and Senate after consultation with the marshals of the Sejm and the Senate (speakers of the two houses); at this point the president must call for new elections to both houses within 45 days. As described above, the national assembly has the power to dismiss ministers through a vote of no confidence, providing some popular control over the executive branch.

Of the two houses, the Sejm is the more powerful. Legislation may be submitted by the president, deputies of the Sejm or Senate, members of the council of

ministers, or citizens who have collected 100,000 signatures of support. A bill then proceeds to the Sejm, where it must be passed after three readings. The marshal of the Sejm can keep a bill from a vote if the bill has not passed through an appropriate legislative committee, although it is not clear whether every bill has to pass through a committee or whether this is a built-in constitutional safeguard against hasty legislation. For legislation to pass at each reading, more than one-half of all Sejm deputies must be present and a simple majority must vote in favor at each reading.

Once passed by the Sejm, the bill goes to the Senate. If the Senate takes no action after 30 days, the bill becomes law. Within that 30-day period the Senate may adopt the bill as it is, propose amendments, or reject the bill. In the latter two cases the bill returns to the Sejm; a majority can override the Senate's rejection or amendments (making the Sejm the more powerful of the two legislative chambers). Once legislation has been passed, it is referred to the president, who has the options described above. In the case of a presidential veto, the Sejm can override the veto if a three-fifths majority approves the bill once more.

JUDICIARY

Poland's judicial system, like that in every formerly Socialist bloc country, has slowly been moving from

that of Communism to that of liberal democracy, where courts have autonomy and act as a balance to other branches of government. Under Communism, the law was subordinated to Leninist ideology and the dictates of the Communist Party. Since the break with Communism, Poland's judiciary has been moving to a continental system, where courts serve more to clarify bureaucratic procedure and law and to adjudicate in disputes than to set precedent or act as a proactive third political branch.

The function of the court system in Poland is primarily to administer justice. The court system is composed of three separate groups: civil, administrative, and constitutional. At the top of the civil hierarchy is the Supreme Court. The role of the Supreme Court and lower common courts is to adjudicate in disputes and civil or criminal matters. The chief administrative court and administrative courts underneath this hierarchy control public administration, acting as bureaucratic courts. The chief administrative court and lower administrative courts also have the role of ensuring that local governments' actions conform to national law and the constitution. Finally, the constitutional court has four primary tasks: to adjudicate on questions of the constitutionality of government statutes; to ensure that national statutes follow ratified international agreements; to ensure conformity of state edicts with the constitution; and to ensure that activities of political parties conform with the constitution. The Constitutional Tribunal also plays a role in ensuring proper election procedure, as contested elections can be brought before the tribunal.

The National Council of the Judiciary is above all the courts (except the Constitutional Tribunal). It is made up of the first president of the Supreme Court, the minister of justice, the president of the chief administrative court, an independent person appointed by the president, 15 judges from the Supreme Court and lower courts (military, common, administrative), and four individuals chosen by the Sejm. The National Council is to guard the independence of the judicial system and act as a judicial watchdog to ensure the legal conformity of judges. In cases of judicial incompetence or criminality, the National Council can apply to the Constitutional Tribunal.

Judges are appointed by the president and cannot be removed from office except by a motion from a higher court, which guarantees some independence from politics. Further, upon taking the position, a judge must leave any political, trade union, or other public organization or position.

REGIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Below the national level the Polish polity is divided into 16 provinces (*województwa*), which themselves are divided into the basic local political unit, the commune (*gmina*). The constitution gives all those powers or rights not fulfilled by national government to the local government. Thus, provinces are provided a legislature and an executive, which are directly elected on a regular basis. Local governments obtain funding through local taxes and through subsidies from the central government.

The Electoral System

Poland's electoral system resembles that of other Eastern European countries, such as Russia or Romania. Suffrage is universal at age 18. The presidency is decided through direct ballot and in two rounds. To get on the ballot a potential candidate must be at least 35 years old and must collect the signatures of 100,000 citizens who hold the right to vote. All candidates compete in the first round of voting. If no candidate garners more than 50 percent of all votes in the first round, then the top two receivers of votes move to compete in a runoff round held two weeks later. The winner of this round (who will mathematically receive more than 50 percent of votes cast) wins the overall presidential race and serves for a five-year term.

Elections for the Senate (the upper house of the national assembly) are fairly straightforward. Voters cast ballots only for individuals rather than parties, and the elections are single-seat races. Two deputies are elected from each province, and three deputies each from Warsaw and Katowice. The candidate receiving the most votes wins the race. Unlike Senate races in the United States, Senate races in Poland are not staggered but are held all at the same time. The two Senate candidates with the top two numbers of votes win the two seats from each province (except in Warsaw and Katowice, where the top three vote getters gain Senate seats).

The electoral rules for choosing delegates to the Sejm are fairly complicated. In the 1991 election political parties received a number of seats equal to the proportion of total votes they received nationwide. This led to a plethora of parties and a fragmented parliament as no single party or faction dominated, and building a viable and durable political coalition proved impossible. A new election

law for the 1993 elections introduced a percentage barrier, the goal of which was twofold. First was to reduce the number of parties represented, thus allowing one or a few to have many seats, which would lead to easier creation of ruling coalitions and parliamentary governance. Second was to reduce the number of existing political parties through attrition from a large number to a handful, which would then be more powerful and more efficient at campaigning and winning votes.

In 1991, the first year of parliamentary elections, the Poles relied on both single-seat constituencies and on proportional party representation. It was confusing to most observers and led to the formation of a huge number of small parties that could not garner enough votes to have a dominant faction within the Sejm. To avoid repeating this scenario in future elections, legislators introduced a 5 percent hurdle that all parties would have to overcome to obtain places through proportional representation. This cut down on the number of parties represented in the Sejm; further, alliances (such as that founding the Alliance of the Democratic Left) have helped bring smaller parties together into larger blocs.

According to the election law, elections for the Sejm are based on proportional representation in which voters select parties through selecting individuals tied to parties. There are two party lists, one for the local constituency level, for which 391 Sejm seats are reserved, and one for the national level, for which 69 seats are reserved. At the election, the votes for party members in the constituencies and on the national list are tallied; according to the election law, a political party must exceed a percentage barrier to gain seats. For the local constituency lists, a party must garner 5 percent of the votes, or an alliance of parties must garner 8 percent; for the national list, a party or alliance must garner at least 7 percent of all votes cast.

In the actual electoral procedure, citizens vote for one individual candidate (linked to parties or alliances unless independent) on each of these two lists. If the party/alliance overcomes the five-eighths percent barrier based on a nationwide count, then the party receives a number of seats from each constituency based on a proportion of the number of votes it received in that particular constituency. (This differs from other countries, where the overall votes from all regions are tabulated into a national total, which is then broken down for assigning delegates to parties.) Once a party knows how many

delegates it may send to the Sejm, actual seats are assigned to those individuals who received the most votes. In this way the 391 seats from the first list are distributed, and the local list provides some degree of local representation.

Those parties or groups that gain at least 7 percent may also receive some of the 69 seats assigned to the national list. Here the Polish system is similar to other systems. The number of seats out of 69 that a party receives is in proportion to its total percentage of votes on the party list divided by the percentage total of all parties overcoming the percentage barrier. If only two parties overcome the barrier and they each receive 30 percent of the vote, then each receives $30 / (30 + 30) =$ one-half of the total seats. (This means that a vote cast for a party that receives less than 5 percent of all party ballots is a wasted vote.) Individuals receive a seat from this list depending on their standing on submitted lists of party candidates.

Polish elections have swung consistently between right and left. Solidarity was the biggest gainer immediately after the collapse of Communism, but its enactment of shock-therapy economic reforms created social pain and a backlash, with voters turning to the Social-Democratic Party, formerly the Communist Party but revamped to embrace post-Socialist, pro-Western symbols and rhetoric. In 1993 the Democratic Left, an electoral alliance headed by the Social Democrats, came to power but were unable to solve thorny economic issues. As well, the thought of former Communists in power did not sit well with much of the anti-Communist population. In 1997 the remnants of Solidarity had created a super-alliance of pro-reform parties, the Solidarity Action Committee (AWS). However, AWS was weakened by a series of scandals under AWS prime minister Jerzy Buzek. This, coupled with Kwasniewski's reelection and promise to take Poland into the EU, brought SLD back. With the Polish Peasants Party, SLD created a coalition government—again, a turn to the left. However, tensions emerged between SLD and PSL over European Union membership: PSL feared the impact of EU farming policies (especially the end of farming subsidies) on its constituents, while SLD had embraced the general line of pro-EU moderate or left-leaning parties in Europe, such as New Labor and the Liberal Democrats in Britain. Not surprisingly, the 2005 legislative elections witnessed a turn back to the right, with the Law and Justice party winning the most seats and forming a minority coalition government with several smaller parties.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, 2005

| Candidate | % votes Second Round |
|----------------|----------------------|
| Lech Kaczynski | 54.04% |
| Donald Tusk | 45.96% |

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, 2005

| Party | Sejm Seats | Seats: Senate |
|-------------------------------------|------------|---------------|
| Law and Justice | 155 | 49 |
| Citizens' Platform | 133 | 34 |
| Self-Defense of the Polish Republic | 56 | 3 |
| Alliance of the Democratic Left | 55 | 0 |
| League of Polish Families | 34 | 7 |
| Polish People's Party | 25 | 2 |
| Election Committee German Minority | 2 | 0 |
| Independents | 0 | 5 |
| Total | 460 | 100 |

The Party System

Poland's political spectrum was scattered in the early years of the democratic transition. The disbanding of the Polish United Workers' Party gave rise to many left-wing parties, and the fragmentation of Solidarity after 1990 led to a multiplication of right-wing parties. There were too many parties with too little power, making coalition building difficult if not impossible. After the election reform of 1993 the number of parties was reduced, and politicians began building coalitions.

Given the flux in party composition and existence and the relative newness of the party system, little direct information is available in non-Polish languages about exact party composition, procedure for obtaining and distributing funds, and organization. Most Polish parties appear to be no different from those in other post-Communist countries. They are loosely organized groups of political elites and subelites whose activities are primarily parliamentary and deliberative.

Major Political Parties

LAW AND JUSTICE

(Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc; PiS)

A center-right party, Law and Justice was founded before the 2001 elections. For party members and members of parliament, PiS drew upon remnants of the foundering Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS). PiS is pro-Europe but not fanatically so. The core component to PiS's political platform and identity is combating corruption and improving the effectiveness of Poland's overall legal and court systems. In 2005 PiS scored a huge victory in the elections, winning 155 Sejm seats and 49 Senate seats and forming a minority coalition government led by Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz. In the presidential contest, Lech Kaczynski of the PiS emerged victorious.

CITIZENS' PLATFORM

(Platforma Obywatelska)

This party was founded in 2001 by Andrzej Olechowski, Maciej Plazynski, and Donald Tusk. Olechowski and Plazynski eventually left the party, leaving Tusk as the clear leader. The party favors conservative economic policies such as increased privatization and reduced power for labor unions. In 2005 it performed very strongly, winning 133 Sejm seats (an increase of 68) and 34 Senate seats, placing it second in both results behind the PiS. In the presidential contest, Tusk was defeated in a runoff election by Lech Kaczynski.

SELF-DEFENSE OF THE POLISH REPUBLIC

(Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej; S)

Samoobrona emerged for the 2002 elections as a protest vote against EU membership and for the defense of Poland's agricultural sector, which the Polish People's Party (PSL, the traditional rural party) has not defended as vigorously as some of its constituents would like. At the center of the party is charismatic Andrzej Lepper, a former farmer himself, whose style and rhetoric remind some of fascism. Samoobrona is a more nationalistic party of rural and agricultural voters, in contrast to the PSL. It also is right-wing, in contrast to the PSL's leftist leanings. Further, Samoobrona has not participated in governance, as PSL has, giving it the typical "cleaner" image of a party that has only

been in opposition. In the 2005 elections Samoobrona won 56 Sejm seats and three Senate seats, while in the presidential election Lepper finished third in the first round of voting, his strongest showing ever.

DEMOCRATIC LEFT ALLIANCE

(Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej; SLD)

SLD began as an alliance of social-democratic parties led by the Social-Democratic Party of Poland (Sojcał-Demokracja Rzeczpospolita Polskiego; SdRP). The heir to the Communist party, SdRP and SLD threw off the old image of Soviet Communism and embraced a more Western social-democratic image, including a sleeker, younger, Western-looking presidential candidate (Kwasniewski) in 1995. While critical of radical shock therapy in the 1990s, SLD did support pro-market reforms following a more gradual approach, which Poland eventually adopted. SLD supports a regulatory state in the economy, multiparty liberal democracy, and an active state role in welfare and other social defenses, although it does not go so far as to support large subsidies as some agricultural parties do. As the heir to the Communist party, SLD has a developed network of local, grassroots cells and organizations throughout Poland. While this gives it some mobilizational advantages in comparison to other parties, ultimately its success in national elections has depended on its overall image and the images and policies of competitors on the right.

Throughout the 1990s the SLD moved to capture the center ground. This was made possible by weakness of parties to the left—most leftist parties are either very marginal, radical Socialist parties, or agricultural parties such as the PSL—and the collapse of the Solidarity alliances to the center-right. Interestingly, SLD's center-left position resembled the change in the British Labor Party under Tony Blair ("New Labor," which rejected many of its historically Socialist programs, such as nationalization of industry). SLD championed integration with Europe even at the cost of initial and temporary shocks to Polish industry and agriculture. After 2000 SLD formed an electoral alliance with the Union of Labor. But in 2005 SLD was soundly defeated in the elections, winning only 55 Sejm seats and no Senate seats.

LEAGUE OF POLISH FAMILIES

(Liga Polskich Rodzin; LPR)

The League of Polish Families emerged for the 2001 elections. LPR grounds its identity and ideology in Catholicism (with which, however, it does not have

formal links) and Polish history. LPR's program contains left-wing and right-wing policies. On the left, LPR's economic policies are relatively protectionist and critical of post-1989 economic reforms. LPR found a patch of fertile soil among Polish voters, in particular older Catholic Poles who were hurt by economic reforms but whose Catholicism (or other aspect of political belief) keeps them from voting for the former Communists (such as the Democratic Left Alliance). At the same time, LPR's social policies lean to the right. Catholicism is strong in Poland, yet most parties are centrist or left-leaning, and right-leaning parties such as Solidarity and its heirs focus their platforms and policies more on economic reform, social welfare issues, and anti-Communism. This has left "cultural" social issues, traditionally the property of the Catholic Church, up for grabs in the political realm. Finally, LPR is fiercely opposed to the European Union and has attracted euroskeptics' votes. In the 2005 elections it won 34 Sejm seats and seven Senate seats.

POLISH PEOPLE'S PARTY

(Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe; PSL)

Founded in May 1990, the PSL is the heir to the Communist-era United Peasants' Party, which was an independent Communist party but a minor player to the Polish United Workers' Party. Led by Waldemar Pawlak, the PSL was one of the first and main parties to orient its program to a specific segment of society—in this case, the more than 3.7 million Poles who work in agriculture—rather than to society at large. Like the SdRP, the PSL favors slower implementation of market reforms and an increased presence of the state in regulatory and social safety-net functions that can provide all citizens, especially peasants, with the opportunity to participate in political and social life.

The PSL claims to adhere to "agrarianism," a philosophy that supports market democracy with a state capable of addressing excesses and problems; agrarianism also exalts the peasantry and its historical role in society and proclaims the need to protect peasants from potential inequalities that occur with economic and social change. Echoing the Socialist rhetoric of its past, the PSL claims exploitation should be addressed and should not be the cornerstone of an economy; in Socialist fashion, the PSL stresses that social interests come before (exploitative) economic interests.

Interestingly, the PSL's seeming leftism does not entirely extend into the sphere of social issues. The PSL claims that its agrarianist platform holds values also espoused by the Catholic Church, which marks

a partial break of the PSL from the atheism of the Communist era and possible good relations with the right-wing AWS. PSL did not have to hope on AWS, however; its leftism was enough to gain an invitation to form a majority ruling coalition in the Sejm in 2001. PSL entered with the understanding that entry into the European Union would either be delayed or would occur after further negotiations for the defense of Polish agriculture, much of which remains in the form of small and not always efficient peasant landholdings.

PSL's moderate-left pro-agriculture stance has not been as effective as of late in shoring up its constituency. Partly because it did not confront EU membership sufficiently vigorously, a competitor for the agricultural vote emerged, Samoobrona. Competition from Samoobrona drove PSL toward a more anti-EU position. In 2005 the PSL won only 25 Sejm seats, down from 42 in the previous election; it won two Senate seats.

Minor Political Parties

UNION OF LABOR

(Unia Pracy; UP)

The Union of Labor is a left-wing party that is popular among the working class. The Union of Labor has its origins in a combination of leftist political ideology and anti-Communism. However, the UP cannot be considered a remade Communist labor party. The UP supports a leftist Socialist vision and temporarily was a member of the left-wing ruling coalition of the PSL and SLD after 1993. The UP supported the SLD's positions and did not provide any left-wing opposition. In the 1997 elections the UP did not clear the 5 percent vote hurdle and lost representation in the Sejm. In the 2005 elections it formed a coalition with the Alliance of the Democratic Left.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY

(Partia Demokratyczna–demokracy.pl)

This party was founded in May 2005 as the legal successor to the Freedom Union. The latter was formed in 1994 when the Democratic Union (UD) and the Liberal Democratic Congress decided to bring their political forces together as a parliamentary opposition to the leftist majority. The Freedom Union maintained the political program of its component groups: economic reform and closer foreign relations with the

West. On social issues the Freedom Union was not entirely conservative but instead was liberal in the classical sense; it was right-wing in its economic policies (pro-market reforms). While the Freedom Union was pro-market and anti-Communist, it did not openly support the social conservatism that other right-wing parties espoused. The conversion of the Freedom Union to the Democratic Party was led by Wladyslaw Frasyniuk, Jerzy Hausner, and Tadeusz Mazowiecki. The party attracted significant media attention prior to the 2005 elections but in the end fared poorly, winning only 2.5 percent of the vote and gaining no seats in the Sejm or Senate.

Other Political Forces

As in other Communist regimes, the army was a powerful support to the civilian regime. While under civilian command, the army gained status after 1980, when it stepped in to enforce martial law against Solidarity's challenge to Communist authority. The army was the main political force in the 1980s, until liberalization and the end of Communist rule. After this the military receded into the background. Given memories of martial law and the importance to the army of the Moscow-backed leadership, it is unlikely the armed forces will step into the political limelight soon.

Civil organizations have been important forces of political change, especially since 1980. After 1989, however, Solidarity's fortunes declined. Infighting and the drawbacks of responsibility to leadership hurt their electoral support, and Solidarity was continuously threatened by internal fragmentation. By 2000 Solidarity seemed a spent force. Trade unions in Poland had greater vitality than in other Communist countries, but after 1989, in the face of market reforms, unions as well lost some power. However, they remained powerful enough to slow privatization in the middle 1990s. Thus trade unions are important political players for occasional issues, mostly concerning economic well-being of blue-collar workers and control of enterprises. In the countryside, Poland enjoyed a relatively independent peasantry, unlike most other Communist countries, and the Polish peasantry had their own party, which became the Polish People's Party. Even the rise of Samoobrona and decline of the Polish People's Party does not diminish the potential mobilization in the countryside. Thus, civil society in Poland does have some vitality, and, unlike in neighbors Belarus or Russia, political parties and elites cannot co-opt or ignore civic organizations and associations entirely.

National Prospects

In spite of obstacles and hazards on the road to a market economy and democracy, such as political fighting between individuals, parties, and branches of government, and problems of shock therapy, Poland may be considered a success story in the former Communist bloc. Despite his mostly autocratic behavior, Walesa handed power over to a former Communist, Aleksander Kwasniewski, when he lost the presidential election of 1995. Another peaceful change of power took place in 2005.

Despite scandals over media control and ownership and the European Union referendum, Poland appears poised for positive political and economic development. EU membership might create initial pain for the agricultural sector, but it will also improve trading links with the rest of Europe. Membership also sends a positive signal to foreign investors, whose capital is vital to continued post-Socialist economic recovery. Politically, while Poland's electorate shifts between preferences for the left and right, politics remains stable. The remnants of Solidarity and the post-Socialist social democrats are more centrist than after the collapse of Communism, and radical parties to the left and right for the moment are marginal players. Samoobrona and the League of Polish Families are the kinds of parties that emerge in reaction to percep-

tions of threat from transitions to new economic life, but if the European Union can provide Poland with the materials for growth, then recent history suggests Poland will be one success story in the post-Socialist world. With few ethnic tensions—a potential problem in such countries as Russia, Romania, and to a lesser extent the Baltic countries—and social solidarity from the Catholic Church, the foundation for stable politics is in place.

Further Reading

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