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Dogma and Experience. Notes on the Profile of Polish Democracy

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Dogma relates to faith, while experience speaks with its own, separate voice. This is, of course, a general and ambiguous statement; a symbolic abstract symbolising an important difference between the two. In the writing that follows ‘dogmas’ and ‘experiences’ will be juxtaposed as symbolic formulations. No mention will be made of specific forms of faith, nor will precisely understood empirical findings be discussed. Instead, we will make our way across a sphere of overgeneralisations, asking questions about Poland’s hope pinned on democracy and the nature of the shifts that come to mind when we speak of a ‘democratic transformation’. At this point the two terms, dogma and experience, which represent contrast and conflict, difference and dissonance, will become useful.

Let us then take a closer look at certain ideas, ‘revealed truths’ of sorts, notions which raise the most far-reaching hopes and have become the foundation of the reform program. At the same time, we will turn our attention to the realities, taking into account effects and experience, wondering what the ‘earthly’ life of great ideas was like. This confrontation will of course become quite schematic, but will hopefully allow us to grasp typical key tendencies, contribute to contemplation and facilitate an accurate assessment of the twenty years of change.

The catalogue of 'revealed truths' was not lengthy. Two ideas were of major importance: the idea of civil society and the concept of a free market. They made up the core of the triumphant message of victorious liberalism, which pushed communism to the margins. In 1989 everything appeared simple enough. As the enthusiasts of democratic reforms assumed, civil society would create the barriers to prevent the abuse of power – it is a remedy for curing all political ills. The free market, on the other hand, is a panacea, a true blessing, which safeguards universal welfare and auspiciousness, and secures prosperity and balance. Or so it was believed.

The lodestars clearly pointed in a specific direction, leaving little room for doubt. Both ideas were unrivalled. The restitution of civil society (as it was then portrayed) and the construction of the bedrock of a free market were supposed to shape the steadfast foundations of democracy. Political violence and the absurdities of a planned economy were to be replaced by the benefits of freedom and well-being.

Everything seemed so very simple; self-regulation entered Polish politics. It was concerned with the economy and politics: the free market and a self-governing republic. These catchwords sounded promising and convincing. Market self-regulation and the breath of freedom which would release the energy of civil activity were to become the vehicles of historic change. However, as it soon transpired, everything was much more complicated. Revolutionary zeal could not overcome the all-powerful scheming spinners of fate. History would have a say and it would not by any means be the echo of revealed truths.

Rash and far-reaching oversimplification was the original sin of Polish democracy. Let us start with the problem of *civil society*. At the heart of all discourse concerning historical regeneration facilitated by the fall of communism was the idea of civil society. So what was the simplification? Oddly enough, this idea (I mean its wider social and political resonance) has never been placed in its rightful, natural context. The frequently repeated view that the issue of civil society was for the first time 'thematized' by Hegel still lingers. Actually, this is not true; the term itself is a signpost of sorts. The notion of civil society was used by John Locke, and would take pride of place in the vocabulary of English Whigs in the discourse of the Scottish Enlightenment, before travelling over the Atlantic to play a key role in shaping the ethos of freedom in America¹. It is tied to a specific view of history, society, customs and politics,

¹ On this subject see the seminal work: B. Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Harvard University Press 1967.

which the idea of *civility* imposes. Civility, hence becoming *civilised* (the shortest dictionary definition of 'civility' is to have 'polished manners', courtesy or refinement), becomes more than a code of aesthetics and social convention; it also becomes an important political code. In other words, it becomes a template for freedom based on the rules of mutual recognition, kindness and sympathy. This is where the crux of the matter lies: this is the meaning of the idea of freedom and historical change related to the formula of civil society. Just slightly changing the terminology, without misusing it, we can say that the notion of 'civility' is equivalent to the notion of 'cultural capital' or 'social capital', both so fashionable nowadays². The Hegelian abstraction, a dialectics allowing for the understanding of civil society as a 'middle term', a mediatisation formula, that is, a combination of that which is unitary with that which is general, dictates a totally different view. The intent of this short argument is not vindication, or a suggestion to 'reduce the value' of Hegel, so to speak. It is all about the unique understanding which we will not find in Hegel; the specifics, the flavour, a certain historical universe hardly ever perceived, based on the assumption (made possible by Hegel) that historical dialectics alone would guarantee inevitable change and mount civil society on a pedestal. Following in Hegel's footsteps we remain among ideas, which allow us to see the spontaneity of historical shifts with their intrinsic reason, in agreement with the unrelenting march of Reason and Freedom (this is, after all, the content of Hegel's dialectics of history). The Anglo-American model of civility, on the other hand, has focused on firmly understood historical practices, changing mores and conventions, the mutual intertwining of aesthetics, ethics and politics, thus creating a new and strong knot of social relationships. While still in Hegel's company we have learned to believe in the causative power of history, the logics of the historical process, accepting that on the strength of historical dialectics, the mere 'overthrow' of communism causes the values represented by the idea of civil society to take root. That was the alleged meaning of negation, the rejection of the *ancien regime*. Everything seemed so simple: the ousting of communism was to bring into existence the structures of civil society. However, it did not turn out like this. Civil society proved to be a phantasm leading to the deficit of 'social capital', so

² See the important work: M. Becker, *The Emergence of Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century*, Indiana University Press, 1994 and R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York 2000.

commonly bemoaned these days. As it transpired, the models of civility do not develop when dialectics is approached abstractly.

Another issue remains. The narrative concerning civil society was seriously flawed from the very beginning. Firstly, it lacked precision and consistency. Different vocabularies intermixed. The 'construction', 'revival' and 'restitution' of civil society were used interchangeably, forgetting that each had a different meaning. Secondly, the crucial dilemma was never solved: is it evolution or diffusion? Put differently, does civil society arise owing to a process of internal changes feeding on its own energy and strength, or by embracing alien models shaped outside this process and adapting them to suit its needs? It seems that there was faith in both evolution and diffusion, mixing both planes and both schemes.

From afar, however, the awkwardness of the great improvisation was clearly evident, as stressed by John Gray who argued that trust in propagating the civil society model was groundless and the benefits rarely proven. Although the collapse of this trust failed to trigger a global earthquake it did, however, become symptomatic. In his *Enlightenment's Wake* Gray wrote:

In the post-communist world, where the disintegration of the Soviet state has inaugurated a period of upheaval and convulsion fully comparable with that which followed the fall of the Roman Empire, the collapse of the Enlightenment ideology and Marxism has not, as Western triumphalist conservatives and liberals supposed, issued in a globalisation of Western civil society, but instead in a recurrence to pre-communist traditions, with all their historic enmities, and in varieties of anarchy and tyranny³.

How this relates to Poland, a country in the EU, a disconcerted and indignant person may well ask. Well, it does to no small extent. We could debate whether the rules of civility count more in Polish politics or the opposite, the peculiar rules of incivility, the lack of recognition, courtesy, trust and willingness to cooperate. Rules related to regression, and a return to patterns of quasi-tribal enmity. Thus, assessing the peculiarities of Polish democracy, it seems fitting to say we are dealing not so much with *post-politics*, as with *proto-politics*, but the issue needs further analysis.

³ J. Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake. Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*, London and New York 1977, p. 146.

Now let us turn to another major dogma, another 'revealed truth': the free market – the essence of capitalism. Democratic capitalism, to apply another axiom, builds on the foundations of liberalism. So far, no doubt, it seemed a ready formula, not to be undermined by anything or anybody. Liberalism, treated as the most obvious ('natural') form of negating communism, suggested very simple solutions. The absurdities of the order, with state property and planning at its heart, were to be overcome by going in the opposite direction reversing the existing order of things. As the eagerly-repeated adage said: standing the world back 'on its feet again' after it had been turned on its head. The notion of turning things upside-down was treated literally and, again, superficially. It produced the triumphant rhetoric of de-communisation, the rhetoric of a return to 'normality', paving the way for the whole reform-agenda, which facilitated regeneration. Communism is 'abnormal' and democracy, with free market principles as its centrepiece, is 'normal'. Symbolic arrangements have a very strong and unambiguous resonance leading to seemingly obvious solutions. *Privatisation* – this objective raises not the slightest doubt. This is the making of the agenda, which complies with the logic of reversal. Dogmatic and narrowly interpreted liberalism is, in fact, perceived as communism *a rebours*. Privatisation would replace collectivisation, and the obvious reversal of the historical order would be complete.

In terms of slogans everything seemed convincing, but syllogisms do not make history. Enthusiasts of the dogma of fast-tracked privatisation made the same mistake as that made by proponents of collectivisation. They oversimplified and believed in the magical powers of the doctrine, in the magical rule of ideological dogmas. It was expected that by introducing free-market mechanisms, privatisation would become a miraculous medicine with the power of curing all ills. It was assumed that the free market was a formula of a perfect union, which combined the economy, ethics and politics into a coherent entity, while at the same time opened the door to abundance, justice and effective governance. The symbolism of the 'invisible hand' tied to the idea of self-regulation sets the scene for the foundations of the new faith. Let's just privatise heedless of all the rest, which will take care of itself. Thus, the idea of metamorphosis turned into its own caricature. The concept of self-regulation was treated in exactly the same way as the idea of the Marxism-related 'inexorable laws of historical development' was once treated.

The anatomy of simplifications and illusions is presented insightfully by the sociologist Jerzy Szacki in his outstanding work, *Liberalism after*

Communism. 'One can say that in the countries of real socialism, liberalism appeared first as a sort of communism *a rebours*, that is, primarily a set of principles which argued against the official ideology and essentially were its reversal'⁴. This has of course provided the means to create an effective formula for legitimising the changes, but it did not assist in solving practical problems. The effective engineering of the massive project of change called for subtler instruments than dogmatically understood privatisation. Poland would be saddled with the consequences of these simplifications throughout the twenty-year period.

Actually, the very foundations of the entire concept were burdened with a major contradiction: the sin of constructivism. This free market metamorphosis, which guaranteed all the blessings of abundance, was to be the product of *actions taken up by the state* – contradicting the idea of self-regulation in the most glaring fashion. The state was to play the part of the great architect-revolutionary, laying down the basis of the new order. However, 'planned capitalism', as Jerzy Szacki rightly emphasises, 'is inevitably beginning to resemble other rationalist utopias, for which abstract *principles rather than practice* are the point of departure'⁵. It was just as well, let us add, that in the Polish reception of liberalism the starting point was essentially neo-liberalism, a dogmatic and stiff project, which enforced – together with the glorification of private ownership – a certain orthodoxy of the free market and an ideological coercion of sorts in all matters connected with privatisation. This was a case of intense radicalism. The sheer enthusiasm and zeal with which Polish recent converts to the free market constructed their plans for the Great Leap caused certain unease in the West, leading to fears that in a society which lacked a background of already existing broad structures of private ownership, privatisation, which was at once radical, sweeping and ideologically interpreted, would inevitably be very risky⁶.

The transformation effort was beginning to gain momentum at the very instant that the neo-liberal, triumphalist narrative, which saw the free market as an all-mighty happiness-spawning machine, faced its first detractors. In actual fact, long before the embarrassing Wall Street banking crisis the very idea of self-regulation was beginning to fall apart. In 1998, John Gray's seminal work, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global*

⁴ J. Szacki, *Liberalism after Communism*, Central European University Press, Budapest 1995, p. 74.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 184.

⁶ J.K. Galbraith, 'The Rise to Capitalism', *New York Review of Books*, 25 October, 1990.

Capitalism appeared. He was a one-time follower and (brief) adherent of Thatcherism and the attendant 'free market' mythology. The devastating criticism levelled at the concepts at the heart of a 'free market' mentality took into account experiences, which by the late 1990s were no longer debatable. The prophetically inspired promises made by the advocates of free-market orthodoxy have not materialised. Self-regulation as the steadfast guarantee of prosperity proved a delusion. Also, in practice, the effects contravened the neo-liberalist dogmas. 'In the United States free markets have contributed to social breakdown on a scale unknown in any other developed country [...] Free markets, the desolation of families and communities and the use of the sanctions of criminal law as a last recourse against social collapse go in tandem'⁷. Thus, the neo-liberals' Good News has not been corroborated. Privatisation, unrestrained free competition and the easing of the tax burden have not brought about the wonderful effects expected. As was said before, and emphasised by Gray, the idea of the 'free market' and the concept of self-regulation are fiction. What was defined as the 'free market' was always brought about by specific legal regulations, so a spontaneous emergence of a free market, which would entitle us to speak of a historical miracle, is highly unlikely. The *laissez-faire* ideology conceals the truth about the system, which came into being on the back of rigorist legal instruments rather than spontaneous mechanisms of historical metamorphoses. This is the way the 'free market' was constructed in early-Victorian Britain, as transpired from Gray's analysis⁸. Ultimately, then, we can only acknowledge, as the author suggests, that the idea of the global 'free market' is a 'dangerous utopia'.

What conclusions could be drawn from this for Poland? Firstly, caution is required leaving little room for idolatrous adoration of the 'eternal truths' of *laissez-faire*ism. Advocates of privatisation, dogmatically understood and treated as a tool of miraculous metamorphosis, have never taken into account that which is of fundamental importance to democracy. In one's objection to the 'free market' utopia, one should not ignore market mechanisms. The market does exist, but not as imagined by the doctrinaires and advocates of automatism who equated the idea of privatisation with the notion of humanity's universal happiness. The market is a complex system that embraces diverse practices and patterns of behaviour. Without culture it does not exist. It is determined by certain habits, customs, moral principles and effectively operating legal

⁷ J. Gray, *False Dawn*, Granta Books, London 2002, p. 2.

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 7–10.

mechanisms. It is much more than the free flow of money and freedom of contacts. A debased, simplified ideology of the 'free market' is in effect a perilous political poison, which is not conducive to the creation of the basis for democracy. Unfortunately, it seems that the influence wielded by advocates of these beliefs in Poland was far too strong.

The dogmatic concept of change and the euphoria of privatisation overshadowed the problem of broader social reconstruction, which should shape the potential for development and secure the prospects for Polish democracy. Polish research (of which the most well-known are the findings of a research team led by Prof. Czapiński) has pinpointed the severe deficit of 'social capital' as the most significant impediment to growth and further change. This, incidentally, brings us back to the problem of civility. The false reading of social and historical change has taken its toll. An automatic generation of a new type of relationship based on mutual trust and will to cooperate thanks to unilaterally understood privatisation policy, just does not happen. Things are much more complex and concern a host of issues never considered by the architects of the Great Leap, for example, conventions, morality, a sense of justice, education and upbringing. This mistake must be corrected especially as such a measure would be in line with the message of the liberal tradition. Let us remember, liberalism is not limited to the Chicago school, but includes primarily a broad tradition not easily compatible with intrusive dogmatism. It is more John Stuart Mill than the 'monetarists'. Polish democracy should keep looking for the right point of reference and the right examples, rather than shutting itself away in the sphere of an obsolete doctrine; it should defy the power of inertia.

However, our quest should be more inclusive and not be limited to searching for the right examples and models. No doubt, the imposition of the idea of repeating, copying and adapting was one of the gravest dangers generated by the 'transformation'. By defining, (in line with the logic of transformation) in the broadest terms possible, the goal of all the shifts as a 'return to normality', one signifies the negation of one's own position and the need to adapt to a pattern. The thinking was: we must be like the 'others', those who are 'normal', thereby discarding the stigma of degradation and exclusion. Putting it succinctly: we must recognise our own inferiority. This is perilous reasoning at its worst, which complies with the depreciation mechanism, or 'orientalisation' a term used for this state of mind by Edward Said in his famous work⁹. It signifies the

⁹ E. Said, *Orientalism*, Polish edition, Poznań 2005.

development of formulas, which allow for the treatment of cultures different from our own, condescendingly placing them in the background and ascribing to them an inferior status. Today it is an anachronism, at least in terms of classical models of discourse where the 'Orient' was juxtaposed with the West as the embodiment of something worse. However, in its coded, paraphrased forms, we could say 'orientalism' is alive and kicking, emerging as the revived distrust and suspiciousness evident in the attitude of the 'old' European Union members (not in official policies but in social attitudes) towards the newcomers who are treated as *parvenus*. In the case of Poland, it was a way of thinking described as 'self-orientalisation' by Maria Janion. In other words, the mechanism of self-depreciation which had come to light so many times in the past and re-emerged under the transformation¹⁰. We represent the 'East', we are from the 'East', we simply seem to be saying that the 'East', in this self-deprecating narrative, has become a symbol of subservience and exclusion. This tendency to diminish ourselves came to the fore with great impetus and proved pivotal when the eyes of the reformers were looking West, in the opposite direction.

This mechanism was at the core of an attitude, which, according to critically minded observers, puts into doubt the entire output of the transformation. A case in point is the work of Zdzisław Krasnodębski who defines Polish democracy as the 'democracy of the peripheries', stressing the imitative nature of the whole concept of change¹¹. As expected the architects of the changes, the politicians, distastefully reject the severe criticism as groundless insinuations. However, it should not be left unheeded. Even if we accept what the politicians eagerly suggest that Poland has become an important 'player' in the European sphere and has left the peripheries, doubts still linger. The reasoning behind the cult of 'accession' is still rampant. We have joined, thus all the fundamental problems have been solved: we are in the EU and NATO, so it follows that we are on the *right* side. This decision to join determined everything. Or did it really? Can all the changes introduced in Poland be interpreted without hesitation as a 'leap of civilisation'? EU accession seen as a cure-all is, regrettably, a blatant example of the persistence of this deeply rooted sense of inferiority tied to the 'self-orientalisation' mechanism. Accession itself can hardly be seen as an act of metamorphosis. Let us note, that the 'Great Leap' policy raises questions when analysed from

¹⁰ M. Janion, *Niesamowita słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury*, Kraków 2007.

¹¹ Z. Krasnodębski, *Demokracja peryferii*, Gdańsk 2003.

the perspective of specifics, for instance, the size of Polish investment in research and development. At a time when the whole world is revelling in the idea of knowledge-based society, Polish expenditure on research and development is embarrassingly small (in proportion to its share in GDP). The country's share of 0.4–0.5 percent of GDP places it at the bottom end of any statistics, outside the European mainstream. So perhaps we are still hiding in the peripheries, which no amount of boastful rhetoric about a 'leap of civilisation' can alter.

Politics is linked with these general questions and their historical meaning; politics seen in terms of specifics and practice, in terms of defining tasks and seeking specific solutions. This will not be a detailed analysis. Let us instead grasp the general tone and issues, which, as before, allow for the detection of a typical dissonance: the mismatch between the truth embedded in the 'founding myth' and in reality. In addition to the motifs already considered (the idea of civil society and the concept of the free market) the idea of 'solidarity' has also been at the centre of attention. As a matter of fact, this idea should be the starting point in our analysis of the style and nature of the practices involved in the everyday operation of Polish democracy.

The idea of 'solidarity' was a perfect match for the embracing of civil society, thus making it possible to interpret politics in terms of mutual recognition, trust and working together. But it didn't take long before it became apparent that these were mere illusions. At the inception of the transformation, already the imperative of Polish politics came to the fore – hostile confrontation symbolised by the slogan *wojna na górze*¹². A squabble between differing positions, the clash between different interests, is a natural feature of democracy, but should it necessarily be seen in terms of *war*? This is the question which should be decided upon when embarking upon the peculiarities of Polish democracy.

It became known very quickly that Polish democracy had little in common with a consensual model of politics. No formulas of political communication were developed, which could have furthered agreement and cooperation. In fact, hostile confrontation became the norm. If we were to speak of Polish democracy in terms of 'development' then only growing mutual dislike and mistrust comes to mind. The ominous logic

¹² Expression refers to the conflict (it uses the word *war*) between representatives of the Polish establishment.

of rejection as revealed by the sharp polarisation of the public in the wake of the Smolensk catastrophe illustrates this¹³.

However, the symbolic capital of accord and understanding ran out much earlier. The language of consolidation formed by the tradition of a common struggle, which drew strength from dreams of democracy, became irrelevant and was replaced by the language of conflict. The dreams were not matched by the reality of the transformation. The good news was substituted by the politics of exclusion. The free market represents selection. Very soon the fateful influence it had on society was felt leading to drastic divisions, which before seemed unimaginable. Transformation would 'orphan' large parts of society untouched by the 'invisible hand of the market'. The hymn of solidarity would be replaced by bitterness, mistrust and rage.

Political players were perfectly aware of this. For those of them who sought confrontation, social discontent was a true blessing. They set about their task right away, furnishing the public's blind anger and discontent with optical instruments, which sharpened the ability to see. Narratives, which exacerbated the sense of disappointment, quickly followed; treason, false patriotism, servilism, the selling out of Polish interests, and all the mysterious conspiracies in which 'the just must fall'. Thus, Polish politics has become a politics of resentment. Friedrich Nietzsche pinpointed the secret of resentment is assigning blame. Resentment breeds on the 'evil' passion for depreciation and basks in the pleasure of discrediting¹⁴. It amounts to the continuous questioning of virtue and refusal to award recognition. Thanks to resentment we can bask in the limelight; WE are the better ones, better than those who are 'worse'. We must pursue this quest for singling out those who are 'worse', we must continue to defame and condemn. This is the sense of the rules of valuation imposed by resentment. Its logic works like poison; resentment truly becomes venom, which degrades the tissue of accord and understanding. But let us not ignore it; it is not a curio, a peculiarity found on the margins of life. Resentment, in the opinion of Nietzsche's contemporary commentator, is 'a way of creating the world'¹⁵. And as a political principle it ushers in destruction: it thwarts mutual trust, slights authorities and brings about a sense of menace.

¹³ Air crash that killed 96 passengers including the president, first lady and many members of the country's political elite near the city of Smolensk (Russia).

¹⁴ See *F. Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals*, Cambridge University Press 2006.

¹⁵ P. Sloterdijk, *O ulepszeniu dobrej nowiny. Pięta 'ewangelia' Nietzschego*, Wrocław 2010, p. 31.

Frustrated politicians reject the politics of the status quo, dream of spreading shockwaves and settling scores, and therefore eagerly draw upon resentment as a resource. Pursuing this further, we can see that by despising the democratic logic of compromise they manifest revolutionary temperaments. In Poland, they have played a significant role by contributing considerably to the weakening of democracy; opposing the idea of the status quo with their project of the IV Republic. The potential of their influence was demonstrated by the intensity of emotions stirred up by the Smolensk plane crash. They pushed Polish politics onto the tracks of a psychodrama, a substitute war in the sphere of symbols and gestures. In spite of this, however, the real deficiency of Polish democracy is the lack of an authentic opposition. The current opposition, operating on the level of phantasms and symbols, distorts the rules of the political game, which secures the efficient operation of the democratic machine. So, instead of offering factual criticism, which at least requires some effort, the opposition provides moralising gestures and slogans. By discrediting and deprecating, it creates a world of mirages of contempt and stigma. Instead of a reasonable democratic play for power we are dealing with its substitute; the politics of inflated preaching.

The opposition in Poland has learned the style of resentment and anger. It is poised to undertake activities that could be associated with the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses and with ‘anger management’, in the words of Peter Sloterdijk¹⁶, at the same time ignoring tasks, which constitute the pillar of the democratic ‘agenda’. The opposition does not monitor government policies, or voice criticism beyond the moralising objections and patriotic slogans it cherishes so dearly. The important reform of the education system at all levels – an obvious priority – is ignored by the opposition. It seems, there are better vehicles for the voice of anger and resentment than the question of research and development; catastrophic tones and the aura of revolutionary protest are more suitable platforms. All these elements build up an atmosphere of anticipation for the justice of judgment day on which those who have wronged us will meet their fate.

The logic of conflict, condemnation, a war fought on the level of symbols, is related to the primacy of ‘image politics’, in which gestures and posturing replace democratic debate. Public opinion polls are used to measure the rate of success in this field. Instead of challenging discussions

¹⁶ P. Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, NY, Columbia University Press 2010.

and difficult decisions we are dealing with procedures, which resemble advertising campaigns following fashionable theories, which reduce the notion of politics to the level of 'political marketing'. The erosion of the 'founding myth' of Polish democracy has created a void filled entirely by the elements of political marketing and 'anger management' strategies. At the same time, the central source of support and stability of the time of hope, the idea of civil society, market self-regulation and solidarity, turned out to be quite fragile. Evidently, there is a dearth of symbolic capital. A strong and consistent narrative, which could set the tone of Polish politics, simply is not there. It came to a standstill somewhere between the extremes of resentment and 'accession' optimism. Not a single model of political communication emerged, which would overcome the inertia and schematism. All the formulas have become trivialised; the public is bored with all the 'revelations' and other inspired visions. The 'Green Island'¹⁷ as well as the 'IV Republic' found their way into the antique auction. All exciting 'truths' were transformed into marketing banalities. Ideas have evaporated. Besides, they belong to the style of another era. What is left is daily administering and the politics of marketing.

ABSTRACT

Three fundamental ideas: civil society, the free market and solidarity lay at the root of the concept behind the changes defined as a democratic transformation. These ideas became the underpinning of the founding myth of Polish democracy, an underpinning which proved to be highly liable. Free market mechanisms and the political struggle for power were at the root of the erosion of values linked to the ideals of civil society and solidarity. The notions of mutual recognition and cooperation gave way to fierce competition. Disillusion and frustration plunged Polish democracy into a torrent of resentment. The idea itself of market self-regulation collapsed. Polish democracy found itself in a void, between the extremes of resentment and naïve accession-optimism, activated by the integration program. A deficit of symbolic capital thwarted the creation of a political communication model conducive to opening a genuine debate. Instead, an image-based politics emerged as a substitute of effective communication, representing a swing in activity away from debate and towards gestures and platitudes.

¹⁷ Poland was dubbed the 'green island' of Europe in reference to its initial success in weathering the economic crisis.

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