

# The way toward democracy in Poland: The question of reorganization of territorial division of the state

*Andrzej Kowalczyk ja Mirosław Grochowski*

## Summary

The purpose of this paper is to present Polish experience concerning introduction of democracy in post-communist country. The question of administrative structure of the state has served as an example of serious problems which must be solved by new government.

The first part of the paper presents very shortly history of territorial organization of Poland since 1945. Economic, political and social aspects of implemented changes are briefly discussed. Then the last transformation of territorial division under communist conditions is described. Against this background the system of local government in Poland and results of two elections: to the Parliament and to the local councils are presented.

The second part of the paper is devoted to the question of strategy of democratic institutions development. Advantages and disadvantages of both options: "from the top to the bottom" and "from the bottom to the top" are discussed. Some examples of conflicts between two options of changes are provided. At the end the authors present prospects for future and discuss necessity of reorganization of territorial division in Poland.

## Introduction

Territorial divisions play crucial roles in social and economic development of both the state and the regions. Borders of regions, provinces or communes create formal framework in which different actors of economic and sociopolitical life perform their functions. These borders may serve as an instrument of organization, management and control, which is subordinated to the ideology resulted from the political system. After collapse of com-

munistism in Poland the issue of territorial division remains the key element of the restructuring of the Polish economy and society. The future of democracy in Poland and its model which will be work out depends to large extent on how we decide to divide territory of Poland, and competences and responsibilities of the state administration and representatives of regional/local communities (Gorzelać, 1990).

## Territorial organization of Poland after World War II

New social reality of Poland after World War II consisted not only in the new political system imposed from outside, but also in new territorial organization of the state which was the result of territorial changes in Europe after Potsdam's Treaty (Kukliński, Swianiewicz, 1990).

The beginning of the 1950s was the time, when the territorial structure of the state became stabilized for a longer period. Since 1950 till 1973 Poland had been divided into 17 voivodships (provinces of regions), about 300 districts (in Polish: powiat) and 4000 communes (in Polish: gromada). Polish district has had very long history of more than four centuries. Traditionally important functions were located on this level, because a great number of subdivisions for special purposes were established according to districts' borders (Bachtler, 1990). However, the decade of the 1970s changed completely existing pattern. The laudable declarations of making authorities and decision-making centres more accessible for citizens was the official explanation. In fact creation of new 49 voivodships was the result of political game and planned to weaken extremely strong communist party committees in some old voivodships. It was good way to keep situation under control.

The first step of the reform took place in 1973. That year Poland was divided into 2500 communes. The next step was made two years later. The Government Act of 1975 laid down a two-tier model of the territorial organization of the state. First tier has consisted of forty nine voivodships responsible for the broad range of regionally provided government "services". The second tier has consisted of communes (rural communes and towns), with significantly smaller competences and responsibilities (Kacprzyński, 1990).

The reforms of the state administration in 1973—1975 introduced very deep changes in economic and socio-cultural systems on regional and local level (Gorzelać, 1989). The omnipotence of the bureaucratic central apparatus and the power of big economic organizations, limited the potential of regional and local authorities, and additionally destroyed economy and social relations on regional and local level (Jalowiecki, 1989). The subordination of the regional and local authorities to the central government and big economic organizations resulted from both formal and informal dependencies. The role of the regional and local authorities was reduced to passive reception of decisions made at the central level and within the branch system of economy. Local and regional interests did not have their advocate and executor, since the economic and institutional strength of the territorial system was too weak in comparison with the strength of representatives of national, macro-political and macro-economic interests. The reform introduced in the early 1980s modified these dependencies only to insignificant degree (Bartkowski et al., 1990).

During the whole period after 1945 the regional and local administration had been merely executors of central decisions. This tendency was enhanced especially in the early 1950s and after 1975. The best example of the central control over regional and local level was provided by the planning system. In real-socialism economy the base of any activity was a plan. The most important and obligatory for every level of authorities was the central plan. The regional and local plans were only the results of the spatial decomposition of the central plan. It was in accordance with the principle of a homogeneous state's authority. According to this principle there was a strong vertical dependence of the lower level of administration on the higher level.

This situation had a great influence on social activity on regional and local scale. The ignorance and arrogance of central decision-makers concerning local problems resulted in psychological opposition against any decision of central government (Turska, 1990).

The system established in 1975 lasted with minor changes and revision for fifteen years. Fundamental changes of the political system and very deep reform of economic basis of functioning of the state have imposed necessity of new territorial organization. New government, which is in fact the government of the "Solidarity", is aware of this necessity. The main arguments put forward are related to the size of administrative units which should assure efficiency of functioning of economy and the state's administration as well as bodies, which represent interests of regional and local communities. Existing organization of regional authorities (the level of voivodship) is evaluated as improper, as well as division of the state into voivodships. The opinion is expressed that voivodships are too small and, as a result, competences of authorities are too dispersed. That is why it is claimed that larger regions with stronger authorities, responsible for complex development of specific areas would be more efficient. In some opinions new voivodships ought to be responsible entirely for economic cooperation with analogous regions in West European countries — German and Austrian Lands or French and Spanish regions.

Experiences from the last forty five years cause that Polish society is very suspicious about government initiatives concerning reorganization of the territorial division of the state. For many people and social groups initiatives like this one ought to be proposed by citizens and local authorities instead of the government. They consider central government initiatives to be in conflict with principles of democracy, and the symbol of arrogance and totalitarian tendencies of political centre. It sounds like an amazing paradox, because local authorities present, if not identical, at least similar political options. One may assume, that this specific approach to the role of central government is the result of the new strategy adopted by representatives of local and regional authorities. According to this strategy, after the period of battle with communist system, Poland is on the second stage of system changes. This stage is characterized by unrestricted competition between different subjects of the political and econom-

ic life. Particular interests force local and regional authorities to stand in opposition to central government initiatives and to care, first of all, about their own interests and problems. However, there is a strong need to change parallelly institutional framework of the state and its territorial organization. Because of the perception of the central government by regional and local authorities it leads directly to conflicts between these authorities and local/regional communities and central government.

### **Opposition against government initiative of territorial subdivision changes**

There are some examples of definitely negative reactions of local communities to the government initiative to change territorial organization of the state. These examples are from 1990, the period of economic and political transformations from real-socialism state towards democracy and market economy system. It is important to notice, that negative reactions against political centre happened in the period of the first "Solidarity" government of Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, and this opposition was promoted and forced by so-called Citizens' Committees — which formed during first months of the year strong political wing of the "Solidarity" and the most important political force on the local level.

The first conflict between the central government and the local authorities was connected with decision made by the central government about location of Employment Agencies. According to central government these agencies ought to be established in big cities and medium-size towns. Each office must serve an area consisted of 5—10 rural communes and small townships with approximately 50,000—70,000 inhabitants. Newly established agencies ought to help unemployed to find jobs, to create new jobs and to give unemployed financial support. The offices of Employment Agencies were established by the authorities of voivodships with acceptance of central government (by Ministry of Administration and by Ministry of Labour and Social Affaires).

Although the location of Employment Agencies was proposed by voivodships' authorities with support of local councils, these decisions and delimitation of areas served by particular agencies have been questioned by some communities. Especially these which wanted to have

agency located in their town or to be served by particular agency. The arguments raised are very different. In some cases they result from conflicts between towns rooted sometimes even in Medieval Ages. In other cases the question of possible higher unemployment and low accessibility to the agency is raised.

During discussions with the central government experts, representatives of some towns and rural communes argued that their communities had been discriminated by Communist authorities since 1945 and the Employment Agency located in their town should compensate all those difficulties from the past. Because of this reason in Radom voivodship the newly established Employment Agency would serve only one town and surrounding commune. The others accused experts of supporting so-called Communist nomenclature (the successors of the former communist government).

Another example of conflicts between the central and local authorities concerns the question of division of Poland into regions of Government Administration (G.A.).

The idea of the regions of so-called Government Administration was born in the first weeks of 1990 and was connected with the general reform of political organization of the state and changes in self-government structures on local level.

According to this concept, the G.A. centres ought to support local authorities in the period of political and socio-economic transition of Poland. In future they should be transformed into districts. Thus, after several years we would have again in Poland three-tier structure of administration (as before 1975): (1) voivodship, (2) district, (3) town or commune.

In the first step (March 1990) the central government experts proposed 183 G.A. regions with average area of 1708 sq. kms and 206,000 inhabitants. Each centre of G.A. should encompass approximately four towns and twelve rural communes (Jałowiecki, Kowalczyk 1990). After discussion experts prepared the proposal of division and in May and June of 1990 government started to send prepared project (with 195 division of G.A.) to voivodships' authorities for consultation with local communities\*.

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\* Each unit of G.A. division has approximately 1603 sq. kms and 194 000 of population. The average number of towns and communes is four towns and eleven rural communes.

But on these stage of public consultation furious opposition against the government proposal appeared. There were two centers of opposition. The first one was the local authorities and local communities which did not agree with location of centres and delimitation of G.A. units. The second centre of opposition consisted of politicians who considered the idea of G.A. as the tool of the central government's control over local authorities and against the idea of self-government. After many discussions on local level, and after very fierce disputes between representatives of the local communities and members of Polish government, in August 1990 2 53 units of G.A. were established. But it did not bring the end of public discussion about this new element of administrative structure of Poland. The representatives of some communities are still fighting trying to force central government to locate G.A. centres in their towns. Others are suggesting changes in organization of G.A. division, sometimes they are against of any control of the central government over local authorities.

At the same time when G.A. units were established spontaneous process of organization of voluntary associations of local authorities took place. According to top leaders of this movement, it has been the first step towards so-called "self-governmental Poland" — the idea which was formulated in 1981 and accepted by "Solidarity" movement in 1980s. In the past this concept was understood as a tool of political struggle against Communist state, but recently some followers of this idea has perceived it as the opposition against central government as such. There are many examples of associations of this type. For instance union of towns and communes where Soviet troops are located, Pomerania Union (which groups towns and communes from five northern voivodships), so-called Union of Woodland Communes (which are against programme of annihilation of toxic waste on military area in north-eastern Poland) or National Assembly of Territorial Self-Governments which groups representations of local authorities from 45 voivodships. The example of voluntary associations may be perceived as a self-defence of local authorities, the tool which should be useful to work out relatively independent policy for particular commune or region. One may also state that this is natural further step on a way of democratization of public life in Poland.

### **New territorial organization of the state — possible options and their consequences**

It seems that there are only two possibilities of the changes of administrative division of the state. Both of them are related to the model of democracy, which would be recognized as proper to implement under Polish conditions.

The first version of changes is to maintain status-quo with some "cosmetic" changes, i.e. changes of borders delimitation. In this case division into G.A units should be abolished. This option reduces influences of the central authorities and gives relatively high independence to local authorities. This independence results, of course, from the current political situation and the fact, that new central government is on the stage of looking for new relations between central and local authorities. This still undefined situation is characteristic for the phase of transition from centralized to decentralized state.

One may state, that this version corresponds with the concept of "development from below". However, the weakness of both sides does not allow us to accept this version. From one hand communes depend strongly on the central budget. On the other hand the central government depends on them (it concerns the social base of political option and support of conducting policy) and still has to interfere and regulate economic mechanisms on almost every level to achieve goals of the national economy. The political aspects of contemporary, still relatively unstable situation are of crucial importance for all relations between the central and local/regional authorities. The central government has to play the role of "policeman" and "good father" at the same time. Paradoxically, those who talk about independence of local authorities ask political centre for intervention when things are not going well on local level. It proves that interdependencies are still very strong.

The second scenario of the possible changes of the state administration is as follows. G.A. units will develop and play the role of objective and righteous supervisor. They would be an element of not political but administrative structure. They would play the role of a "buffer" between all these elements we may define as local and central. They should not reduce or limit significantly political independence of local authorities, but they should give them support

to solve problems characteristic for specific areas. Important element of this scenario is that the decision-makers from the political centre would accept the local opposition, because on this stage of development of political structure in Poland any pressure or attempts of supervision from higher level for local leaders are unacceptable. Politicians must try to solve possible conflicts with special caution and patience.

According to J. Hryniewicz (1990), the future of Polish democracy should be connected with so-called "state's democracy". The socio-economic structure of Polish society is in the period of transition. The latest sociological studies show that in the Polish society the strongest social relations exist in small social groups (family, groups of friends etc.). It means that the identification with family is stronger than with local community, professional group, or group of people of similar age. According to Hryniewicz, the socio-economic transition from communism towards democracy may provoke the psychological desintegration of these groups, as well as their political and economic alienation. Such situation may be very dangerous for integration and functioning of the state. The economic and political transformations may be threatened by revolts of the lower classes which would not understand the ideology and directions of changes. Thus, the state and political parties should perform four fundamental functions: to integrate, to mobilize, to generate innovations and to support social activity. In situation of Poland the central authorities (government and political parties) ought to promote the socio-economic changes and should clearly present the goals and directions of these transformations.

The theory formulated by J. Hryniewicz was confirmed by results of the first in Poland, fully democratic presidential elections in late autumn 1990. The second position of Stan Tyminski, with 23.1 % of votes for, against 40.0 % for Lech Walesa and only 18.0 % for former Prime Minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, proved that hypothesis put forward by Hryniewicz was correct. Tyminski won in four voivodships, and had the second position (behind Walesa) in 38 others. He received strong support in regions with coal mining and metallurgical industry (Silesia), as well as in rural voivodships in northern and central Poland. His followers had been recruited from low-educated classes, young unskilled workers and inhabitants of medium size

and small towns. The regions where Tyminski won with Prime Minister Mazowiecki are in deep recession, with high ratio of unemployment and without any visible advantages resulting from economic programme introduced in January 1990 by Minister of Finance, Balcerowicz. Coal miners in Silesia Region, as well as young unskilled workers and females from small industrial centres, were these social groups especially severely touched by structural changes in Polish economy. According to Polish sociologist T. Zukowski, Tyminski was supported especially in communities with low social integration (exemplified by high crime rate and low religiousness, high immigration to medium size industrial centres from countryside etc.) and in the past relatively weak influence of "Solidarity" (with exception of Silesia Region).

The success of Tyminski may be explained not only by strong negative perception of Mazowiecki's government, but also by widespread opposition against central government as such. Anti-government slogans during presidential campaign, formulated especially by small right-wing present on Polish political scene, and nationalistic-oriented parties which supported Walesa, helped Tyminski to beat former Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki. Tyminski accused Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Balcerowicz of "crimes against Polish nation" and "selling out Polish economy to foreigners". He also declared that the Poland ought to have nuclear weapon, low taxes vs. state's social programmes, liberal economy vs. full employment, etc. Paradoxically, his populism was accepted not only by groups with strong anti-Mazowiecki orientation (for them transformations towards market economy was not enough radical), but also by some followers of former Communist regime (who did not accept Balcerowicz economic programme).

In our opinion, the suggestion that the success of Tyminski was only the result of support of groups connected with Communist Party, is only partly true. His political success may be explain by syndrome named "homo sovieticus". In general terms, it means the huge nostalgia for "welfare state" in Communist version — with low salaries, but also relatively low prices, full employment, social services free of charge, state control over economy and political life etc. The policy promoted by Prime Minister Mazowiecki's government was against "homo sovieticus" orientation. Thus, a lot of

Tyminski followers (as well as many of Walesa supporters) were recruited among people who did not accept the difficulties connected with rapid transition from centrally planned economy to market economy, and who perceived the government as an enemy of the ideas of "self-governmental Poland". In this sense, the success of Tyminski may be interpreted as a result of ten years' "Solidarity" campaign against Communist regime. It seems that quite big part of Polish society did not realize that political situation in Poland had changed. For many people every government would be unacceptable, because in their perception it would be an external power. Yesterday it was Rakowski regime (Communist), today it is Mazowiecki government (formed by "Solidarity"), tomorrow it would be Mr. X government, etc.

The last paragraph of this paper is rather pessimistic. However, it is important to be aware that this society had been socialized in a very special way for more than 40 years. It must be considered by politicians introducing democratic reforms.

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