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The Middle East in Transition: Clues from Poland

Patrycja Sasnal

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1. A short version of this paper appeared as a PISM Policy Paper and a separate analysis on the role of religion in politics in Poland and Egypt was released by EUobserver in English and Affaires-strategiques.info in French.

Introduction

For the first time in two decades since the last wave of democratic revolutions in 1989, the year 2011 has reheated the debate about the existence or nonexistence of systemic transformation models. Yet, it is not at all clear if and how a country's experience in systemic transition – from authoritarian to democratic rule – can serve as a lesson in another country's transition. Research on the topic has been insufficient even though each new wave of democratization brings about the discussion on the limits to sharing experiences between countries. Some would claim that the 20th century provides a plethora of examples on how to conduct a transition. In fact, all undemocratic countries which sooner or later turned democratic could serve as an example to an extent: West Germany, Japan, Italy (after World War II), Portugal, Spain, Greece (in the 70s), Latin America or some Asian countries, such as South Korea (in the 80s). Skeptics would point at different initial conditions in all these examples and their inapplicability in each new case, such as a differing character and economic conditions, lack of adequate political structures or different cultural and historical background. In 2011, however, Tunisia and Egypt were at this extremely ambivalent point where they would understandably want to make decisions on their own. Yet both countries were at the same time looking carefully at the experience and competence of others who had gone through democratic transition.

Various comparisons of systemic change have been examined after the wave of democratization in Central and Eastern Europe that took place in the early 1990s. Back then, certain researchers already tried to liken these changes to the developments in those countries that had not so obviously embarked on a democratization path, such as China.² It was believed that despite obvious differences in such remote comparisons as the Czech Republic and China, those countries had “some dilemmas in common, if we define them at a sufficient level of abstraction. To discuss exceptions and solutions, however, one would almost certainly have to use concepts of a finer grain, and look at each individual country.”³ The following study will show that there are certain specifics that make the Polish experience with transition in 1989 particularly relevant to the changes unfolding in Egypt and Tunisia – similar initial conditions, a relatively short time span between both waves of change, religious background, economic hardship, etc. It will not only underline good practices that were successfully implemented in the transition period in Poland but, equally importantly, it will point at deficiencies of the Polish choices that eventually led to both positively and negatively viewed outcomes. However, it has not been structured so as to give a comprehensive comparison between the Polish transition and the events that have unfolded in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011. Clearly, there are more differences than similarities but the parallels that do exist make it worthwhile examining the applicability of the Polish experience in the Middle East.

In the late 1990s, a specific sub-discipline in political sciences about processes of transitioning to new democracies had already made its name as “transitology” or “consolidology” (Pridham,

2. Jon Elster, “The Necessity and Impossibility of Simultaneous Economic and Political Reform”, in Douglas Greenberg et al. (eds.), *Constitutionalism and Democracy: Transitions in the Contemporary World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993.

3. Jon Elster, op. cit., p. 267.

2000). Within that sub-discipline, at least four schools of thought could be differentiated: the structuralist, strategic choice, institutionalist and political economy approach (Guo, 1999). The structural transitologists focus on differences between democratization models: different areas have experienced different developments. Even though the “seeds” of liberal institutions may be common, the outcome will be very different in each and every case (Roberts, 2011: 21). The transformation of institutions is long-term and gradual, rather than revolutionary and rapid. Transition may also result from the strategic choices of political actors and their goals, which form the core of the strategic choice concept. The objective here is to forge broad coalitions to be able to achieve the goals.⁴ In other words, transformation is a result of complex negotiations between different actors: the ruling class, the opposition and other civil society institutions (Carothers, 1999: 94). According to the institutionalist approach, institutions themselves create the political and normative systems of a society and so they are the subjects of transition when they are coerced by outside pressure (Drahokoupil, 2009: 14-15). The economy approach claims that it is the economic development and growth that cause transition at the key moment. Economic factors are also indispensable for the sustainment of democratic changes (Elgström and Hydén, 2003: 106). This study is closest to the strategic choice approach, which allows for efficient comparisons among different experiences with transition but it echoes some of the assumptions of other approaches as well.

4. David Collier and Deborah L. Norden, *Promoting Political Change in Latin America: The Strategic Choice Models of Hirschman, Przeworski and O'Donnell*, Berkeley, University of California, 1986, p. 7.

Similar Initial Conditions

The decline of the system starts the moment it degenerates and begins to disseminate unaccountable brutality. That was symbolically demonstrated by police violence in all three cases in question: Poland, Egypt and Tunisia. In Poland, a 19-year-old poet, Grzegorz Przemyski, was brutally beaten to death by the police in 1983. In June 2010, Khalid Said, a 28-year-old man, was taken out of an internet cafe in Alexandria and also savagely beaten to death. It took Poland six years to react to a landmark incident in its pre-transition history. Egypt needed only six months while Tunisia needed only two. On 17th December 2010 a jobless young man, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire after his vegetable cart had been seized by police. In all three cases brutality accentuated not only the oppression of an undemocratic system but primarily the indignity of life. Constant lack of means, economic hardship, disparity between authorities and the people, the generation gap and censorship all hit Poland in the late 1980s and the Arab world in the 21st century.

Those similarities, however, deserve one particular objection: the international system in 1989 differed in many ways from the one in 2011. Gradual decomposition of the Soviet system facilitated changes in Poland and gave the Polish revolution a clear goal of joining the Western bloc. Although initially there were no real prospects of membership of NATO or the EU, the urge to westernize was clear. Neither Egypt nor Tunisia enjoys such a united vision of the future. Despite this important difference, specific similarities remain.

In all three cases the anti-government enthusiasm ran throughout the social strata. In Egypt and Tunisia, young social activism combined with the new power of modern media (the popularity of Al Jazeera, the effect of Wikileaks cables and online social media) helped bring about the revolution. In Poland, workers' unions enforced by intellectuals started the changes. The intelligentsia voiced discontent on behalf of the underprivileged. Likewise, in Tunisia and Egypt it was the youth and the poor that spoke in unison. Similarly, one of the biggest social media-inspired movements in Egypt (the April 6th Movement) sprung out of the Al-Mahalla Al-Kubra strike in 2008 while the Tunisian General Labour Union to an extent instigated the revolution in Tunisia. Thanks to its organized structure, the local branches of the Union helped to mobilize the people.

The dramatic state of the economy in Poland in the 80s drove the change. The ancien regime's gradual, incremental reforms could not cope with the scale of the problems. At the beginning of 1988, rising bread prices caused protests under the "we want bread" slogan. In Egypt and Tunisia, demonstrators also took to the streets in a quest for dignity. Hatred for Ben Ali and Mubarak, who had become faces of the regime, paralleled the Polish abhorrence of *komuna* – the communist rule. Interestingly, religiosity empowered the anti-regime sentiment in Poland, Egypt and Tunisia alike. The Catholic Church played an eminent role in bringing down communism and giving the revolution a moral character. In Tunisia and Egypt religiously inspired parties had long been in

opposition or delegalized. Apart from the opposition, the people themselves have been growing more and more religious.

The combination of all these factors led to a peaceful regime change in all three cases, albeit with differing outcomes. In Poland, the process of transformation has been long and tenuous but eventually quite successful. After 20 years of democratization, Poland is ranked 45th in the Economist 2011 Democracy Index as a “flawed democracy” scoring 7.12 on a 10 point scale.⁵ It is safe then to assume that it will take decades for Egypt (now scoring 3.95) and Tunisia (5.53) to transition to a democratic system.

Basic data comparison: Poland 1989, Egypt 2011, Tunisia 2011

Data	Poland (1989)	Egypt (2011)	Tunisia (2011)
Population	38,169,841	82,079,636	10,629,186
Birth rate	16 births/1,000 population	24.63 births/1,000 population	17.4 births/1,000 population
Life expectancy at birth	66 years male, 74 years female	70.07 years male, 75.38 years female	73 years male, 77.17 years female
Ethnic groups	Polish 98.7%, Ukrainian 0.6%, Byelorussian 0.5%, Jewish less than 0.05%	Egyptian 99.6%, other 0.4%	Arab 98%, European 1%, Jewish and other 1%
Religion	Roman Catholic (about 75% practicing) 95%, Uniate, Russian Orthodox, Protestant, and other 5%	Muslim (mostly Sunni) 90%, Coptic 9%, other Christian 1%	Muslim 98%, Christian 1%, Jewish and other 1%
Labor force	18.630 million	27.74 million	3.904 million
Labor force by occupation	Agriculture 30% Industry 44% Services 11%	Agriculture 32% Industry 17% Services 51%	Agriculture 18.3% Industry 31.9% Services 49.8%
Literacy	98.00%	71.4%	74.3%
GDP per capita	\$7,280	\$6,500	\$9,500
Inflation rate	74.00%	13.3%	3.7%

Source: *CIA World Factbook 1989, 2011.*

5. *Democracy Index 2011: Democracy under Stress*, Economist Intelligence Unit Report, 2011, <http://www.sida.se> [last accessed: 24th January 2012].

Political Forces

The major force behind dismantling communism in Poland was the Solidarity movement, a labor union, which had its roots both in the dissatisfaction of the proletariat and disillusionment of the intelligentsia. The two groups would stage massive protests on several occasions but for different reasons. The intellectuals were mostly active in Warsaw and preoccupied with socio-political issues while the working class would take to the streets when prices went up: such were the cases of clashes in Poznan in June 1956, or the northern coast of Poland in December 1970 and June 1976. It was not until these last events that the dissidents from Warsaw decided to seek a mutual goal with the proletariat, and formed the Workers' Defense Committee, an NGO supporting the families of the imprisoned workers. In August 1980, this cooperation inspired the creation of Solidarity.

Yet internal divisions smoldered under the surface. The opposition was formed by people of different backgrounds: the proletariat, intelligentsia, Catholics, atheists, descendants of the pre-war right-wing activists, and dissident former communists. After the fall of the regime, these divisions rapidly gained momentum, ultimately breaking the illusory unity in less than two years. The first free parliamentary elections in 1991 saw a gigantic number of 111 parties competing for seats. In the end, 29 of those made it mainly due to lack of a threshold law. With its implementation, these numbers became significantly smaller: 1993 saw only 35 parties in the race (and only six of those made it to the Parliament),⁶ and with every other election there would be fewer and fewer of them.

It is worth noting that the transformation and the post-communist political system became virtually violence-free. In previous years, every single major protest took its toll. In June 1956, a total of 53 people were killed,⁷ December 1970 saw 45 victims⁸ and although a number of people were also murdered under the martial law of 1981-1983 (the exact number is not known, but historians agree that it was more than 100⁹), the violence eased in the 1980s and Poland's transformation followed a peaceful path.

New political forces, however, come to power unprepared to rule the country. They tend to see the world in binary categories as a zero-sum game, thinking that the conflict they had to withstand was merely strife with the tyrant, whereas conflict is a natural social process and part of political and social life. The revolution then is only a starting point of a new time where immanent conflicts need to be mitigated in a non-authoritative, democratic manner. When this predisposition is ignored it complicates the whole transition period. In Poland, Lech Wałęsa, the face of the Polish revolution, became the first democratic president. It then came as a surprise that not all Poles would instantly accept him in post-revolutionary times even though he instigated the changes. He encountered opponents from *within* his own camp or even in the society that initially supported him. The previously united opposition soon formed a plethora of tiny parties, the Solidarity camp split and

6. Marek Chodakiewicz et al., *Poland's Transformation: A Work in Progress*, New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, 2006, p. 134.

7. Charles S. Maier, *The Cold War in Europe: Era of a Divided Continent*, Princeton, Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996, p. 368.

8. Michael G. Roskin, *The Rebirth of East Europe*, Prentice Hall, 2001, p. 115.

9. Agata Fijałkowski, *From Old Times to New Europe: the Polish Struggle for Democracy and Constitutionalism*, Farnham, Ashgate Publishing, 2010, p. 111.

regular pluralist politics began. Even if one cannot assess to what extent this experience is transferable it needs to be pondered as the most important precondition.

Difficult as it may be, containing anti-regime emotions at key moments is crucial for the smooth beginning of transition. The new politics cannot be purged of former regime members because they are the ones who have sufficient and adequate experience in ruling the country. The new elites, before they have the time to develop, do not have it. The transitional period is by definition transitional, meaning it combines the old and the new. In Egypt, Prime Minister Essam Sharaf was precisely a mid-way person – more of such figures are desired if the process is to go forward at good speed. What is more, it will be beneficial not to deprive the old elite of all that they may have accumulated throughout the years – be it political privileges or financial gains – so as not to antagonize them further to the changes underway in both Egypt and Tunisia. If we consider that there were about 2 million Egyptians in the National Democratic Party under Mubarak, and most likely the majority of them enjoyed a much better life than they expect now, it would not bode well for the transitional period if all those people used their contacts and means to obstruct the processes. It is inevitable that some of them will try to do just that but nevertheless the move not to strip all of these people of their constitutional rights, that is, to stand for office in national elections, should be considered smart. In pre-election polls in Egypt some of the parties formed by former National Democratic Party (NDP) officials received noticeable support.¹⁰ Finally, the *falūl*, the remains of the NDP and the regime won 16 seats in the lower house of parliament (3%).¹¹

In Poland, the ruling Communist Party was dissolved but some former officials and new left-wing activists formed the Democratic Left Alliance. The National Democratic Party in Egypt was also dissolved and the Constitutional Democratic Rally in Tunisia was suspended but, depending on the direction of transformational changes, these people can possibly reemerge at a later time. This process should not be viewed as negative, rather as a natural consequence of an inclusive democratic process. A much more complex dilemma, however, will be the “demubarakization” and “debenalization” agenda of purging public posts of officials who in one way or another had ties to former regimes. The process of “decommunization” and later “lustration” in Poland brought about a fiery debate in society, split over how to treat thousands of people working in the pre-1989 structures, especially those involved in security services. They were mostly let be initially in the first half of the 1990s as the first lustration law was adopted in 1997. The first democratic governments, especially Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s, were preoccupied with the noble and thoughtful notion of uniting society. It was in his inaugural speech in 1989 that he used the term “broad line” policy to describe his government’s separation from what happened in Poland before. It was then wrongly interpreted that he meant impunity for the former regime officials, which he did not, but the term was coined nevertheless. All in all, Poland

10. “4th Voter Survey in Egypt, Press Release”, Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies Danish-Egyptian Dialogue Institute, Cairo, 24th November 2011, <http://dedi.org.eg> [last accessed: 24th January 2012].

11. “Interactive: Egypt’s New Parliament”, Al Jazeera, 23rd January 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com> [last accessed: 23rd January 2012].

served as a unique example of all transforming countries back in the early 1990s where it was possible for former officials to at least “live quietly in the new society” (Elster, 2004: X) to the benefit of all.

The attitude towards benefiteres of the previous system can also contaminate the economy. When the economy is struggling, the business elite’s wealth must not be driven abroad, which might be the case in an event of revenge or populist economic policies. Sooner or later, quarrels about public property sharing, the property that the Egyptian army has at its discretion, for example, will erupt.

Constitutional Reforms

These reforms took a long time in Poland and were divisive but cautious and gradual. In April 1989, the Parliament amended the 1952 constitution in accordance with the transitional period's needs and the Round Table agreements. Seats in the lower chamber (*Sejm*) were divided 65% to the ruling Communist Party and its allies and 35% to be distributed in an electoral process but at the same time it was agreed that the upper chamber (*Senat*) would be set up. Elections to the *Senat* were to be free and democratic. The elections took place on 4th June 1989 with the Solidarity camp taking 35% of seats in the *Sejm* and 99 out of 100 seats in the *Senat*. It was a sweeping victory that surprised even the opposition. The ruling party was unable to form a government so, in August 1989, Tadeusz Mazowiecki from the Solidarity camp was sworn in as the first free Prime Minister. In December, another amendment to the constitution was introduced, the so-called December amendment. It scrapped the ideological preamble and allowed for political pluralism in Poland.¹² It needs to be remembered that the 1952 constitution was still valid. In January 1990, the Communist Party was dissolved. In April 1992, the *Sejm* accepted the constitutional bill that regulated the process of drafting a new constitution. It specified that the National Assembly (NA, both chambers of parliament and the president) would have to approve it before it was put to general referendum. Constitutional drafts themselves could be put forward by the president, the constitutional commission of the NA, by a group of 56 members of the NA and a group of 500,000 citizens (since 1994). But work on the new constitution was slow and the system so opaque that a "small constitution" was approved in October 1992: it regulated the relation between the legislative and executive branches and also local governments. There were three contentious issues: the scope of social rights (liberals clashed with those who advocated a more robust role of the state in solving social problems), the position of the president in the system and the role of the Catholic Church and subsequently the freedoms of conscience and belief.¹³ The last issue was catalyzed in the heated debate about the wording of the preamble: whether there should be an invocation to God in a constitution of a secular country. In all three contentious cases a consensus solution was approved with the preamble finally worded by Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Marek Borowski in the following way:

*"...We, the Polish Nation – all citizens of the Republic,
Both those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, good and beauty,
As well as those not sharing such faith but respecting those universal values as
arising from other sources,
Equal in rights and obligations towards the common good – Poland,
Beholden to our ancestors for their labors, their struggle for independence
achieved at great sacrifice, for our culture rooted in the Christian heritage of the
Nation and in universal human values..."¹⁴*

12. Marek Bankowicz, *Transformacje konstytucyjnych systemów władzy w Europie Środkowej*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków, 2010, p. 140.

13. Marek Borowski, *Wystąpienie na konferencji poświęconej 5-leciu obowiązywania Konstytucji RP z 2 kwietnia 1997 r.*, 17th October 2002, <http://www.marekborowski.pl> [last accessed: 13th February 2012].

14. The Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2nd April, 1997, *Dziennik Ustaw*, No. 78, item 483, <http://www.sejm.gov.pl> [last accessed: 13th February 2012].

It was not until April 1997 that the new constitution of Poland was approved and accepted in a national referendum and it finally replaced the 1952 constitution.

Both Egyptians and Tunisians want a new constitution. In Egypt on 19th March, eight amendments were introduced in a referendum but a fortnight later the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) scrapped the 1971 constitution altogether, replacing it with a constitutional declaration in a non-transparent and authoritative process.¹⁵ At a later stage, a constitutional assembly will be tasked with writing a new constitution. Similarly, in Tunisia a Constituent Assembly was elected in October 2011 and two months later a “mini constitution” similar to the “small constitution” in Poland was adopted. In Poland, despite a multitude of difficulties, the debate about constitutional reforms was inclusive and careful. Hence, it eventually resulted in a document that reflected the compromise between different political groups and views but it was adopted only in 1997.

It is often evoked as an argument against the quest to look for similarities in different countries' transitions that in contrast to Arab countries Poland has had historical democratic traditions. In this context, the period between World War I and World War II when Poland regained independence is thought to exemplify such traditions, although it is often contested to what extent Poland was a democratic country back then. Even though it should not be challenged that indeed Poland does have rich constitutional traditions these can prove that there are in fact certain similarities in Polish and Arab attitudes to the role of the state and the law. For instance, the Egyptian constitution of 1923 did apply Montesquieu's separation of powers, much like the Polish 1921 constitution (both within a couple of years of independence) but it is claimed by Polish constitutionalists that “the principle of separation and, particularly, of balance of powers is not part of the Polish tradition.”¹⁶ Separation and balance of powers have not grown deep roots in Egypt or Tunisia either. Furthermore, if the national Polish disposition towards the political system can be summarized it would rather prioritize a combination of democracy, strong leadership and divine salvation.¹⁷ It seems that a similar summary of the Egyptian (and other Arab) political mindset can be inferred from its history. Such predispositions would at times allow what we would describe today as undemocratic – prerogatives of the ruler, even a dictator. Democracy in Polish constitutional tradition is understood as a downward movement (from the leader to the people), rather than an upward movement (from people to the leader). Such an understanding can also be traced in Egyptian constitutional and political history.

15. Nathan J. Brown and Kristen Stilt, “A Haphazard Constitutional Compromise”, Commentary, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 11th April 2011, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org> [last accessed: 24th January 2012].

16. Wiktor Osiatyński, “Perspectives on the Current Constitutional Situation in Poland”, in Douglas Greenberg et al. (eds.), *Constitutionalism and Democracy: Transitions in the Contemporary World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 316.

17. Wiktor Osiatyński, op. cit., p. 314.

Economy

The economic debate and reforms in Poland have only a limited and general relevance to the economic dilemmas in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world. Certainly, the most general and important conclusion that can be inferred from the Polish transition is that a democracy that cannot deliver basic goods will not last long. This assumption then makes the transitional period all the more difficult because it is supposed to simultaneously marry social justice with the necessary economic reforms at a time when a country is usually in economic crisis – a task all but possible to accomplish fully.

Economic reform was a second-track transformational process simultaneous to the political one. The transitional economic systems of Poland and respective Arab countries are different. Poland was a centrally-planned economy (with some elements of market economy such as private agricultural property) that faced the challenge of a far-reaching transition to a market economy. Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and other Arab countries are either oil producers or importers with a partial market economy. Nevertheless, all of these economies generated similar problems: unsustainability of the status quo and high unemployment. Both in Poland and Egypt, for instance, the regimes, wary of social dissatisfaction, embarked on economic reforms before the transition. These were introduced in the 1980s: the private sector grew steadily. In 1988, Mieczysław Rakowski's government removed all obstacles preventing private firms from entering the market. As in Poland, privatization plans were also initiated in Egypt.

The democratic paradox is that the more open the political process (a requirement of democratization) the more responsive it is to the demands of those who are losing economically and politically. In the first stages of economic transition, state-owned enterprises are usually privatized. That gives their owners significant profit which in turn lets them monopolize the market, much like they normally did in the pre-transition period. In the short term, they gain the most and may influence the reform process so as to keep their position. It might be inferred then that simultaneous political and economic reforms are impossible or one will obstruct the other. There are examples in the Polish experience that invalidate such a conclusion. The new entities (mainly firms) unintentionally created a constituency for reform mitigating part of the costs of the dramatic economic decline. When these companies survived and began to make profit they created a political dynamic.

The transition to a market economy in Poland began in 1990 in extremely difficult circumstances: hyperinflation, high rate of hidden unemployment, external public debt, black market foreign exchange premium, and an obsolete state enterprise sector. The first democratic government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki had to cope with a deregulated economy in a state of near hyperinflation. The Ministry of Finance led by Leszek Balcerowicz prepared and implemented the economic reform during the first two years – it was a *shock therapy*, a comprehensive program of transformation

which combined measures directed at tackling inflation with institutional reforms. These extremely liberal reforms allowed small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to flourish but at the same time did not regulate the new market enough and subsequently produced a deeper recession in the short term (inflation grew by 70% per year). It also had a grave social cost in the form of increased unemployment and poverty. In the long run, however, inflation had dropped in a decade to 1.9% in 2002 and the economy grew steadily.

Some economically helpful factors existed in 1989, such as a basic legislation from the pre-war period (Civil Code and Commercial Code) and a fairly independent judiciary. Moreover, there was already a sort of entrepreneurial spirit among the people, which is surely shared by Tunisians and Egyptians. Nevertheless, these harsh new living conditions brought about strong social dissatisfaction, which in social and political terms translated into a sharp split in the society (those supporting and opposing the reforms), a political blame game, the emergence of populist parties and a longing for the "good old times."

Unemployment and Dissatisfaction

In the first two years of transition, unemployment grew rapidly. Poland went from nominally zero unemployment (there was hidden unemployment) to 14%. Polish unemployment was structural, related to the changing needs of the state and flourishing enterprises, on the one hand, and to irrelevant skills of the population, on the other. It mostly impacted the young, a lesson of particular importance to Egypt and Tunisia. Simultaneously, throughout the 1990s the number of impoverished people had been increasing. In 2002, people living below the national poverty level reached 15% of the total population, but the number of people living below \$2/day was 8.5% in 1993 and 11.3% in 1996.¹⁸ That is quite significant as in 2005 the poverty-stricken Egyptians and Tunisians accounted for 18.5% and 7.4% respectively.

More than 4 million unemployed people in Poland needed assistance. The unemployment benefit was flat-rate (78% of monthly minimum wage, 29% of average wage) and for people with 5-20 years of employment experience. The duration of the benefit depended on the place of residence and varied from 6 to 18 months. The overall lesson in assistance to the unemployed is that the system should be directly linked to their past and future work experience so that the benefit does not encourage unemployment.

Finally, the economic reforms did converge (at a later post-1995 stage) but there was one additional incentive for their eventual effectiveness: the prospect of joining the European Union and the requirements it entangled. However, the popular discontent, which started in 1990, eventually toppled the government of the party responsible for the reforms (Democratic Union) in

18. World Bank data.

the 1993 elections, giving way to the Democratic Left Alliance (associated with the post-communists).

According to the leading liberal mastermind of economic reform in Poland, Leszek Balcerowicz, there is a short but extraordinary period of politics right after the transition when the people accept painful reforms more willingly than later on. This would then suggest that rapid rather than gradual reforms can be initiated within that period. He also advocated the tested, traditional paths to development – that is, full market economy with a system resembling that of the most liberal countries in the world. He claimed that a country in transition does not have the luxury to experiment with “third ways” and that only capitalism could keep the promise to catch up with the West alive.¹⁹ Balcerowicz implemented harsh economic reforms, which indeed caused enormous unemployment and inflation in the early 1990s but subsequently resulted in high economic growth.

The general comparisons between Poland, Egypt and Tunisia in the economic domain end here. There is not even a similar attitude towards capitalism today. It was clear in the early 1990s that if Poland wanted to become prosperous it should have followed the path of economic development similar to that of other European countries. Whereas today when the Euro-Atlantic zone is in economic and financial crisis to a large extent caused by the greed of the markets, when the Washington Consensus development model is being contested and the notions of “liberalization” and “free market” are in Egypt and to a degree in Tunisia automatically associated with the former regime officials who had gathered enormous wealth at the expense of the underprivileged, the capitalist free market economy model does not resonate well. There is still work to be done to familiarize Egyptians with market liberalization anew and incite an entrepreneurial spirit in them so that SMEs can develop – and certainly Egyptians are known to be very keen on small entrepreneurship, at least in the grey market. Additionally, there are now other slightly different economic models to follow in countries that are showing interest in helping the democratizing North African countries from outside the Euro-Atlantic zone.

19. Interview with Leszek Balcerowicz, “Nie było trzeciej drogi”, *Polityka*, Warsaw, 28th October 2008, www.polityka.pl [last accessed: 22nd January 2012].

Social Relations

In 1991, only 22.4% of Poles described their lives as “successful” while in 2011 this number grew to 80%. But at the same time, in 2007 half of Poles were unable to answer the question about whether the post-1989 reforms had worked well in Poland or not. These two parameters offer a symbolic explanation as to how the post-1989 period has shaped the Polish people. On the one hand, it has undoubtedly brought genuine qualitative change – plenty in stores, gradual and slow but better living conditions, freedom of speech, pluralism, respect for public property – and, on the other, the social cost of Polish transformation process causes and will continue to cause mixed feelings. A more general conclusion can also be inferred here: it takes time for a transitional society to live up to democracy or its most noteworthy emanation, the rule of law. In 2009, in a national survey on the functioning of democracy in Poland only 25% of Poles felt they had any impact on the state while 72% claimed they had none.²⁰

The social aspect of transformation deserves a closer look because of certain similarities between Poland, Tunisia and Egypt (religiosity of society) and those reforms in Poland in the 1990s that may prove valid today, especially with regard to young Tunisians and Egyptians (social status of women, education or social dialogue).

Religion in Politics

The role of the Catholic Church in the Polish transition is a special case in point. It was instrumental as part of the pre-1989 opposition. For most of the communist era the Catholic Church, albeit in opposition to the regime, could function fairly autonomously until it engaged in political and social debate, mainly after 1978 when a Pole became pope. It joined the Round Table (as an observer) and supported the subsequent reforms. It also gave the revolution a moral flavor. In 1989, an expectation prevailed that the relations between citizens would be shaped by the Catholic Church, since the central government ceased to play this role.²¹ However, as much as the Church unified the Polish people before 1989, its role and position in a secular country after 1989 became a divisive issue.

Similarly, in Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood – the most vocal and powerful representative of organized religion institutions – played an important role in the Mubarak era. Like the Catholic Church in Poland the Muslim Brotherhood also epitomized the opposition. While delegalized, it was tolerated and the relationship that existed between the regime and the Brotherhood could be described as “cold peace.” After the fall of Mubarak, the popular expectation is that it will be politicized Islam (in the form of Muslim Brotherhood or others) that will dominate the public sphere. There are further similarities: 95% of Poles declare themselves religious (and Catholic)²² compared to 98% of Egyptians.²³ If we then combine it with the level of social dissatisfaction which may be exacerbated by harsh economic conditions then it may emerge that politicized

20. “Opinie o funkcjonowaniu demokracji w Polsce”, BS/20/2009, CBOS, February 2009, <http://www.cbos.pl> [last accessed: 24th January 2012].

21. Sebastian Kozłowski, “Transformation in Poland as Positive and Negative Innovation”, in Jan Bluszkowski and Stanisław Sulowski (eds.), *Dilemmas of Polish Transformation*, Warsaw, Elipsa, 2010, p. 33.

22. “Polish Public Opinion”, Public Opinion Research Center, March 2009, <http://www.cbos.pl> [last accessed: 24th January 2012].

23. Dalia Mogahed, *Islam and Democracy*, Special Report: Muslim World, Gallup Poll, 2006, <http://www.gallup.com> [last accessed: 24th January 2012].

religion can indeed thrive on the dispossessed. Some in Egypt may even support the post-Mubarak NDP as many Poles clung to the post-communists, but most will choose the Muslim Brotherhood, given the fluidity and pro-social character of their policies. In Poland, even the radical Catholic Christian National Union, a marginal offshoot of Solidarity, won 8.7% votes in 1991.

The Catholic Church then emerged as a primary player in Polish public life – very visible and potent, often imposing its doctrine on formal solutions, either directly or indirectly. As a direct example, in 1990 the Catholic religion was introduced in public schools, with two classes a week for 12 years and in 1993 abortion was made illegal. In 1993, a Concordat was signed with the Vatican, a document that usually recognizes the Catholic Church in a country, which is also the biggest benefiter of the accord in terms of legal and financial profits. These were the immediate gains for the Church as a result of its political and social influence. This matters in Egypt and Tunisia in particular because the legal and education systems will be at stake (according to 66% of Egyptians sharia must be the only source of state legislation²⁴). These are after all the most divisive secularization-related issues.

One example of the indirect imposition of Catholic discourse was the difficulties of the subsequent Polish ombudsmen after the transition. Professor Ewa Łętowska and Tadeusz Zieliński served this function precisely when religion energetically reemerged in public life. They defended the secular character of the new state and the rights of non-believers engaging in heated debates over issues such as teaching religion in public schools or displaying religious symbols in public places. The rightist parties even sought to curb the Ombudsman's prerogatives. Eventually, the differences of opinion on social issues with a religious background further divided the new elites (who were once a unified anti-communist conglomerate).

As for the political spectrum, the Catholic Church influenced the right who accentuated the role and rights of the family and the nation, not the state or the individual. That characteristic is yet another analogy with what Islam prioritizes: the umma, the Muslim family/community as opposed to individualistic liberal thought. The right was far from the post-communist left who stressed individual social rights or the central liberal discourse which advocated individual liberties and property. The interplay of these voices led "toward a permanent fluidity of alliances and conflicts."²⁵

Minorities

There seems to be another striking and surprising similarity between Poland and Egypt in transition: the attitude towards minorities. Such comparisons have not been previously

24. Ibid.

25. Jacek Kurczewski (2010), p. 362.

researched and there are no major readings concerning the attitudes of societies in transition towards minorities specifically. Rather, one can come to at least logically viable conclusions according to prevailing sociological common knowledge that transition lets people express their feelings more freely. When the omnipresent state apparatus and informers have disappeared it is no longer necessary to inhibit any true, even xenophobic, emotions. At the beginning of the 1990s there were a couple of well-known incidents in which the inhabitants of smaller towns and local communities in Poland violently protested against the establishment of care centers for drug addicts, HIV-positive and AIDS patients. These were being built or attempts were made to integrate these patients into society in a more “Western”, “European” or “tolerant” way (Owczarzak, 2007). Right after the first such attempt in 1990, the local community protested against it and threatened the initiators. One of the best-known incidents of this kind took place in July 1990 in Głusków but there were many more in the suburbs of the capital Warsaw, Kawęczyn, Józefów and Piaski, without much reaction on the part of the authorities. In at least one of those incidents the local residents chased the patients away. The most probable reason behind these clashes was a kind of psychosis that had developed in parts of Polish society vis-à-vis AIDS – an unknown illness, demonized by the Catholic Church as being the “result of sin,” an immoral behavior.²⁶ One can conclude that intolerance towards minorities and the incapability of state institutions to safeguard the rights of minorities surfaced right after the fall of the communist regime. Some scholars would further use these incidents as proof that “the notion of democracy traditionally appeals to Poles much more strongly than do freedom or the principle of limited government.”²⁷

Poland certainly is a more homogeneous society than Egypt or Tunisia but the attacks on minorities, be it out of fear or any other reason, show that a post-revolutionary society feels more at ease in expressing the views shared by at least a local, if not national, majority. It might be an overstatement to compare the Polish attacks on HIV carriers with the attacks on Coptic Christians in Egypt in 2011 or Islamist attacks on cinemas that show movies with atheist themes in Tunisia but there might be some common ground in all three of those cases. In October 2011, 25 Copts were killed in clashes on the outskirts of Cairo, which is only one exemplification of the kind of Muslim-Coptic tensions that emerged after the fall of Mubarak. In Tunisia, a group of conservative Islamists attacked a cinema in Tunis because of a secularist movie called “Neither God nor Master” being played there. Both these incidents show a local community expressing their views in a violent way with strong local (or national) support, even on the part of the law enforcers. The rights of minorities are not observed, they are not protected by the authorities, nor are they sufficiently instilled in the constitutions in force. This problem of minority rights puts even more emphasis on the need to secure these rights, together with a whole range of other individual human rights, in the new constitutions of these countries. In Poland, these rights were finally explicitly formulated in Chapter 2 of the Polish constitution which, however, did not come into force until 1997.

26. Marcin Kornak, *Brunatna Księga 1987-2009*, Warsaw, “Nigdy Więcej” Association, Collegium Civitas, 2009, p. 10.

27. Wiktor Osiatyński, op. cit., p. 317.

Women

Much as in Egypt, women in Poland have been and to some extent still are underprivileged in the public sphere. It has been a continuous problem independent of the political system. Already in 1986 the Women's Plenipotentiary Office was established in the Ministry of Labour. Right from the start of the transformative process the status of women in society and the public sphere has been the topic of public debate, which engaged political parties, the Church and other institutional actors. The process of changing female identity was on the one hand empowered by new possibilities of self-realization and constrained by certain cultural and religious contexts on the other. The role of women in transformation cannot be underestimated as they played it often from the back seat or silently, away from the splendor of the political elite, which until now has a marginal representation of women. It is also true that as the roots of civil society went deeper and deeper, a multitude of women's or feminist organizations mushroomed, raising awareness of the status of women in the changing Polish society. The disparity between the traditional role of a woman in society and the opportunities that a democratic system offers will most likely be seen both in Egypt and Tunisia, making the Polish experience particularly valid.

Education

The Education System Act was introduced in 1991 but genuine reform did not start until 1999. The Ministry of National Education oversees the education system but the administration is decentralized: municipalities administer kindergartens, primary schools and lower-secondary schools while upper-secondary and special (i.e., artistic) schools are managed on the district (*powiat*) level. The school head is appointed by the relevant public administration body. The Central Examination Commission measures the educational achievements of pupils and schools. Between 1988 and 2002, the number of people with incomplete elementary or no education decreased threefold but significant inequalities appear with regard to gender and place of residence (rural and or Roma origin). Children from rural areas have poorer access to education due to their parents' poor education, higher poverty and distance to schools. Successful programs to improve access to education included "School Layette" (in operation since 2002, supplying children with basic school equipment) or others to enable children with special education needs, including disabled children, to function in the community of healthy children. Vocational education and training also needed restructuring (this was done later on) but both in Egypt and Tunisia it can prove very beneficial for the unemployed youth.

Communication technologies in schools were implemented through programs such as *internet room in every commune/secondary school/school*. These projects entailed equipping schools with computer systems and training for teachers (1998-2005). The Polish experience in this field

teaches that all efforts to improve IT input in the education process should focus on methodological support for teachers and the creation of education e-resources available to both teachers and students.

There is an obvious and strong linkage between education and employment. A relevant education reform is vital for the creation of more and better jobs. In this regard, vocational education and training is particularly important as it allows for the adjustment of workforce qualifications to market needs.

Transformation Drives Innovation

In this volatile period innovative people strive. This is true in the positive sense in the free market and social context – enterprises of many sorts are being created and civil society gets organized – but also in the negative sense in that innovation leads to degenerated behavior such as corruption or crime. The innovative character of the transitional period, however, makes education reform in Egypt (literacy rate at 66%) and Tunisia (literacy at 78%) one of the most urgent undertakings. In Poland, education reform was not a priority since the literacy rate was close to 100%.

Social Dialogue and Tripartite Commission

Social dialogue in Poland was institutionalized in 1994 in the form of the Tripartite Commission for Social and Economic Affairs. It comprises representatives of the government, trade unions and private employers. Its competence extends to setting indicators for pay growth in enterprises and state institutions as well as giving its opinion on budget drafts. Its opinion is also relevant whenever social order is at stake as it can debate all cases of great social significance. There are also local (*voivodship* level) commissions for social dialogue. The general principle of social dialogue is inscribed in the constitution of 1997 and there is also an extensive website devoted to the dialogue: www.dialog.gov.pl.

Healthcare

The Polish healthcare system was funded by the state throughout the 1990s. In 1991, healthcare services were transferred to provinces (*voivodships*) and municipalities (*gmina*). Since then, primary and family healthcare have been strengthened – the concepts of “family physician” and “general practitioner” were introduced. The system today is a mixture of public and private healthcare financing. It needs to be said that the state of the healthcare system had been poor although basically sufficient. Until today the debate about the reform of the healthcare system is ongoing and stirs emotions. In this regard, Poland cannot serve as a valid example of successful reforms. Similarly, the retirement and pension system is being reformed up to this very point. Poland has not been very successful in this respect but it is also a sphere of lesser relevance to Tunisia or Egypt.

2011 Onwards

Poland's Action in the Wake of the Arab Awakening

The Polish government understood very early on in 2011 that the changes in Tunisia and Egypt resemble those in Poland two decades earlier. Additionally, Poland was then in the midst of preparations for the 2011 Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of the year. From the perspective of the traditional Polish foreign policy, the Arab uprisings did not fit very well on the Polish goals list. The country has been known to be the propagator of the European Eastern Neighbourhood Policy's expansion rather than an active player in the Mediterranean. Poland had to incorporate the necessity to respond to the changes there in its priorities for the Presidency. Two of those priorities did overlap with the Middle East: "Secure Europe" and "Europe Benefiting from Openness". Apart from the European Union agenda, however, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the President's Office as well as Polish think tanks and NGOs began to vigorously promote the Polish transformational experience. There were visits in the region – particularly Egypt and Tunisia – by Polish parliamentarians, "fathers of transformation" and public administration staff, etc. Even before those visits, the Egyptian envoys had been tasked with preparing reports on how the Polish experience could be relevant for Egypt, for example. It was a clear sign that despite the differences Egypt was also looking at Central Europe for clues, a sign that encouraged the Polish administration. In July 2011, Tunisian Minister of Regional Development Abderrazak Zouari visited Poland to take a closer look at the regional reform and its results and in September Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohamed Kamel Amr arrived in Warsaw. The opposition leaders in Tunisia and Egypt came to Poland for a five-day visit at the beginning of September 2011, and in October fifteen delegates from Egypt, Tunisia and Libya observed the Polish parliamentary elections to get an insight into a democratic electoral process. The Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs also organized a specialized training in transition called "SENSE" in November for a group of Tunisians. Tunisia seemed to be the priority country for Poland in terms of experience sharing. Finally, there were many conferences devoted to the topic of sharing experience in transformation with the Middle East, both in Poland (and elsewhere in Europe) as well as in North Africa. One of major events of this kind was the "EU and Southern Neighbourhood: New Prospects for Mutual Co-operation in a Changing Environment", senior officials' conference in Warsaw in December 2011. In short, the most tangible effect of the Polish Presidency and action vis-à-vis the transforming Arab states and EU Neighbourhood is the proposal to create the European Endowment for Democracy, reaffirmed in Council conclusions in December 2011.²⁸ Moreover, throughout 2011 Poland has certainly strengthened its position in North Africa and developed an extensive network of contacts with the new political forces in the region.

28. "Council Conclusions on the European Endowment for Democracy", 3130th Foreign Affairs Council meeting, Brussels, 1st December 2011, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/126505.pdf [last accessed: 24th January 2012].

Conclusion

The changes in Poland in the early 1990s definitely seemed to be taking a slower, less radical pace than transitions elsewhere in the post-communist bloc. Judging from a two-decade perspective, however, the country has certainly become one of new leaders of the European Union, an outcome envisaged by hardly anyone at the time of transition. Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and any other countries that may follow in their footsteps certainly face a more difficult task than Poland did in the early 1990s, knowing at least the direction in which it wanted to go and the aspirations of the people.

So far, the reaction of the Polish intelligentsia and people directly involved in the transition in the 1990s to the idea of sharing the Polish experience with Egypt and Tunisia has been mixed. They can be divided into optimists (who see real potential in the idea) and skeptics (who point at the differences and the inapplicability of the Polish experience in Arab countries). Of these two groups, the first one can be further divided into those who emphasize the advice Poland can give in the most crucial and general transition issues, such as dealing with officials from the former regime and those who favor Polish advice in specific sectors that have demonstrated specific solutions. The skeptical Poles often point at what seems an inseparable *mélange* of politics and religion in Arab countries – the famous “father of the Polish transition” and presumably the most moderate one, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, specifically cautions against the overly-extensive inclusion of religion in politics. He is not a skeptic but one major piece of advice he seems to be giving is not to get too preoccupied with the past – it cannot be brushed away but one should draw positive conclusions from it, not negative, otherwise these attitudes can slow down the whole transition process.²⁹ Each of the three groups mentioned has good arguments to support their points of view but none of them claims that trying to share the Polish experience in the Middle East will harm the transitional processes there or the Polish or EU stance in the region.

It remains to be seen whether the Polish experience in transition can be applied in either Tunisia or Egypt in any real terms. After all, the lessons that can be learnt range from general ones (tending to be the most crucial and difficult to apply) to very specific, aimed at particular education programs, civil society building or regional reforms. The ones that stand out run in the face of the revolution goals:

- Do not completely rid politics of former officials or deprive the old elite of all that they may have accumulated throughout the years. Use their experience in the transformation period.
- Democracy is about compromise. Even the deepest divisions between secularists and religiously inspired people can be overcome. Yet these divisions only show in full force after the revolution.
- A democracy that cannot deliver basic goods will not last.

Any Polish experience can only be transferred if Tunisia and Egypt voice interest in cooperation on these issues. Poland itself was very cautious in using the help of foreign advisors and it was later

29. “Mazowiecki o arabskiej wiosnie: konieczny rozdział religii i państwa”, Polish Press Agency, 1st December 2011, <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl> [last accessed: 24th January 2012].

criticized here and there for not following the West's advice.³⁰ Again, even the Polish experience with foreign advisors is two-fold. There were a few useful advisors, such as Jeffrey Sachs, but generally external advisory effort used to be perceived negatively. The term "Marriott brigades" was coined to describe the mainly British counselors who arrived in Warsaw to help with the specifics of Polish transformation but they hardly ever left the hotel to avoid the dull Polish reality. It is only natural, however, that people both high up in the echelons of state decision-making or responsible for reforming narrowly-defined domains would look at other countries' experiences in search of clues. Undoubtedly, that was also the case in Poland.

The price to pay for democratic changes is high. People are rarely aware of it at times of revolution. In the 1990s there were nine different governments in Poland. The fluidity of the political scene will most likely be a natural phenomenon in transitional Arab countries. It goes without saying that the revolution is thus only a starting point for a period of increased instability. The recent Arab Youth Survey 2011 showed that as much as the Arab youth want democracy they also expect stability.³¹ Their possible disappointment with transition will prove costly for subsequent governments attempting to reform the country. On the positive side, the majority of Tunisians and Egyptians are young people, below the age of 30, who look optimistically to the future. They are the most valuable resource for their respective countries – a resource that needs to be taken good care of during transition.

Finally, time is short both in terms of what transitional processes require and the public expects, and what Poland can do in the Middle East. Undoubtedly, 2012 will require Poland, the EU and international community and institutions to sustain their aid programs so that the transitional processes continue. The coming year will also be important because of the plans both in Egypt and Tunisia to write their new constitutions and the first steps of their new assemblies. It is not at all certain that the transforming and reforming Arab countries will look to the West, including Poland, for help and advice. The Indonesian or Indian models of democratization get at least as much applause in Egypt, for example, as does the Polish experience. The Arab public is understandably rather reluctant to be "taught lessons from the West." It is vital that in the coming years the EU understands that despite the fact that North Africa and the Middle East might be looking elsewhere for good practices, the region still does need European help and attention – especially in times of austerity. In this framework the Deauville Partnership launched in May 2011 needs to get underway in practice as soon as possible and expand significantly so that Arab youths have a prosperous future to look forward to.

30. Zbigniew Blok (2006), p. 133.

31. "Third Annual ASDA'A Burston-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2011", March 2011, <http://burson-marsteller.eu> [last accessed: 24th January 2012].

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Chronology of Events in Poland³²

³². Chronology compiled by the author.

1989**6th February-4th April: Round Table Talks and Agreement**

The talks gathered members of the communist government and representatives of the democratic opposition, many of whom had served prison sentences under the martial law. The immediate impetus for the negotiations were the mass strikes of 1988, but both sides have been signaling a willingness to resolve the social, economic and political stagnation that has marred the country for years. As a result, an agreement was achieved, which paved the way for democratization of Poland, and the rest of the Eastern Bloc followed suit.

1989**4th-18th June: Parliamentary elections**

The legislative elections were not entirely free: 65% of the total seats in the *Sejm* (Polish lower chamber) were reserved for the ruling Communist Party and its allies. Yet, in the race for what was left, the united opposition managed to win all seats.

1989**19th July-24th August: “Your President, Our Prime Minister”**

In July, General Wojciech Jaruzelski – a military strongman, leading Poland for the previous decade – was voted president of the country by the Parliament, but only by a majority of one vote. Soon afterwards, Adam Michnik, a top dissident since the turmoil of 1968, published an article under the title “Your President, Our Prime Minister” calling for a true share of power by both sides. As a result, members of two satellite parties of the communists switched sides and in August Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the first non-communist prime minister in Eastern Europe after World War II.

1989**29th December: “The December amendment”**

Parliament changes the Constitution. Poland no longer was a “people’s” republic, and the articles about the leading role of the Communist Party, alliance with the Soviet Union and socialist economy were scrapped. The same month, a series of laws – commonly known as “The Balcerowicz Plan”, named after their author, the Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz – were signed. They rapidly transformed the Polish centrally planned economy into a free market one.

1990**President Wałęsa**

In January, the Polish United Workers’ Party, which had led the country since the end of World War II, officially disbanded, and its democratically-inclined members formed a new political body. Over the coming months, the police force was reinstated (in place of the Civic Militia, which over the years had become associated with political repression), the once powerful Security Service

was replaced with a new intelligence agency, and censorship laws were dropped. In December, Lech Wałęsa, the legendary leader of the Solidarity movement, was elected president in the first fully democratic popular elections of this kind in Poland. However, by that time the former opposition had become heavily divided over the future visions of the country: the so-called “War on the Top” crushed its unity.

1991

First entirely free parliamentary elections

In October, a treaty signed with Moscow paved the way for the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Polish territory (the last soldier left for Russia two years later). In the same month, the first fully free elections to the Parliament took place, which – because of the lack of a threshold – saw a surprisingly high number of 29 parties win seats.

1993

Post-revolutionary political blame game

The inner conflicts in the former opposition camp got the better of it, and in May President Wałęsa dissolved the Parliament. In the September elections the post-communist parties triumphed and subsequently formed a new governing coalition. Although initially seen as a threat to the young democracy, the eventual lawful rule of the new government proved that the transition from autocracy was going the right way.

1995

President Kwaśniewski

In October, Lech Wałęsa narrowly lost presidential elections to the leader of the Democratic Left Alliance (post-communist): Aleksander Kwaśniewski. At the same time, a fierce public debate erupted over whether to prosecute the officers of the late regime, especially those who worked as secret collaborators for the Security Service.

1997

2nd April: New constitution

A new constitution was adopted by the Parliament, and approved in a nationwide referendum. The lustration law was also signed, aimed at preventing the former informants and agents of the Security Service from holding public positions.

1999

Accession to NATO

In March, Poland becomes a member of NATO, thus fulfilling one of the main goals of the new foreign policy formed after 1989.

2004

Accession to the EU

In May, Poland is welcomed into the European Union. In the eyes of many Poles, it is the ultimate proof of the successful transition from an autocratic regime to a modern democracy.



IEMed.

The European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), founded in 1989, is a consortium comprising the Government of Catalonia, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and Barcelona City Council. It incorporates civil society through its Board of Trustees and its Advisory Council formed by Mediterranean universities, companies, organisations and personalities of renowned prestige.

In accordance with the principles of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's Barcelona Process, and today with the objectives of the Union for the Mediterranean the aim of the IEMed is to foster actions and projects which contribute to mutual understanding, exchange and cooperation between the different Mediterranean countries, societies and cultures as well as to promote the progressive construction of a space of peace and stability, shared prosperity and dialogue between cultures and civilisations in the Mediterranean.

Adopting a clear role as a think tank specialised in Mediterranean relations based on a multidisciplinary and networking approach, the IEMed encourages analysis, understanding and cooperation through the organisation of seminars, research projects, debates, conferences and publications, in addition to a broad cultural programme.

EuroMeSCo

Comprising 87 institutes from 33 European and Mediterranean countries, the EuroMeSCo (Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission) network was created in 1996 for the joint and coordinated strengthening of research and debate on politics and security in the Mediterranean. These were considered essential aspects for the achievement of the objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

EuroMeSCo aims to be a leading forum for the study of Euro-Mediterranean affairs, functioning as a source of analytical expertise. The objectives of the network are to become an instrument for its members to facilitate exchanges, joint initiatives and research activities; to consolidate its influence in policy-making and Euro-Mediterranean policies; and to disseminate the research activities of its institutes amongst specialists on Euro-Mediterranean relations, governments and international organisations.

The EuroMeSCo work plan includes a research programme with three publication lines (EuroMeSCo Papers, EuroMeSCo Briefs and EuroMeSCo Reports), as well as a series of seminars and workshops on the changing political dynamics of the Mediterranean region. It also includes the organisation of an annual conference and the development of web-based resources to disseminate the work of its institutes and stimulate debate on Euro-Mediterranean affairs.