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## Politicians in times of transformation: "Transformational correctness" or genuine differences in perception?

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P 98 - 001

**POLITICIANS IN TIMES OF TRANSFORMATION:  
"TRANSFORMATIONAL CORRECTNESS" OR GENUINE  
DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTION?**

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## **Abstract**

The paper presents selected results of the 1996 study of top Polish politicians-members of the 1993-97 Parliament and leaders of those important political parties which failed to get into this Parliament. Presented results pertain to five aspects of politicians' attitudes: (1) opinions on qualities of persons who should be vs. actually are involved in politics, (2) normatively accepted definitions of politics, (3) visions of the "good state", (4) visions of democracy, and (5) opinions on what defines political views as being either on the "left" or on the "right." As a result, consistently found across all five domains, there is a strong attitudinal similarity among politicians of differing political parties and of divergent political orientations. This finding is interpreted as reflection of a fundamental "track similarity" in the way in which Polish politicians perceive the most important tasks confronting the whole political class in times of systemic transformation. "Transformational correctness" - believing that in such times politicians should have (or at least should display) certain views - might be a strong force behind this similarity.

This paper\* presents selected results from a study conducted in Spring 1996 among Polish parliamentarians and two groups of candidates to parliament who failed to enter it. The study aimed at capturing politicians' perceptions of politics, democracy and functions of the parliament.

Some peculiar features of the Polish political arena gave an initial inspiration to the present study.

The political scene in Poland is poorly structured because there are very many small parties and alliances between them are constantly shifting. Many of them are using rather slogans than programmes in their attempts to reach electorate. This is particularly true of the right-wing parties which lost the 1993 parliamentary elections. But even the larger parties which are represented in the Polish Sejm are internally heterogeneous, especially with respect to their ideological and programmatic orientations. Moreover, there are a number of non-parliamentary parties and large political blocks *in statu nascendi* which are conspicuous for their radical rhetoric (Wesolowski, 1997). Political scene lacks also well established set of generally acceptable rules of political fair-play. Only quite recently, during the constitutional debate in February-March 1997, were we able to observe some evolution toward stable implementation of the democratic principles of political conflict resolution (Nordlinger, 1970).

It is one of the distinctive features of politics in East European transition that politics cannot be defined abstractly, according to some textbook-formula or after some outstanding theorist. *Politics is what the majority of politicians or the dominant politicians do.* Therefore, designing our research project we put special emphasis on the meaning imputed to the concept of politics by the Polish politicians. When there is no prevailing definition of politics and no clear-cut pattern to follow, then dissonance and inconsistency in the understanding and practicing of politics are likely to emerge. This may be another important feature of the deficiency and weakness of the political scene.

In the long run the weakness of the party system may hamper the overall process of systemic change, including the transformation of the economic system and the stabilization of the new democratic institutions. However, for the time being, the economic change is moving ahead, gross national product is growing faster than in other countries of the region, and the fledgling political democracy is functioning quite satisfactorily.

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\* This text was written before Polish election to the parliament in September 1997.

We explain the paradox of the lack of consolidation on the level of party system on the one hand and the relatively "normal" performance of the new democratic institutions by the hypothesis of the "transformational correctness" or "transformational compulsion" on the part of those who design and control the transformation process. Our hypothesis says that **the Polish political stratum believes that it has an obligation to pursue market and democratic reforms.** The implicit reference to "political correctness" in spelling out our hypothesis may do injustice to some sophisticated and deeply motivated politicians, nonetheless it reflects semi-conscious assumptions of many other politicians (perhaps majority of them) who are involved in the day-to-day politics of law-making and law-implementing. Evidently, the path to market economy and democracy is seen as a "wide forest track" on which several concrete "trails" may be carved in recurring practical activity. Political correctness consists of accepting the selected track as the proper general direction of change.

The political groups (political parties or formal political alliances) which we shall analyse may be compared on a number of different dimensions. We have selected five of these dimensions:

1. real and desirable characteristics of politicians; this aspect is reflected in opinions stating who *should be* vs. who *actually is* involved in politics;
2. accepted definitions of politics: we shall distinguish between the definition which is thought to prevail among politicians and the „personal” understanding of what politics is;
3. visions of the "good state": which characteristics of the state make it "good"?
4. visions of democracy: aspects which are the most important in democratic system and the degree to which these aspects are present in Polish political reality;
5. characteristics of the "right" and the "left" orientations and the role of factors that facilitate and counteract political agreements.

The study was exploratory in nature and particularly sought to answer the following question: how do Polish candidates for professional politicians perceive the new emergent reality and their own role in that reality? We did not ask our respondents to locate themselves on such dimensions as left-wing - right-wing or modern - traditional. Instead, we wanted to find out how politicians themselves understood such terms as "right-wing" and "left-wing".

Our analyses were based on the two general assumptions. First, we assumed that the political attitudes of the Polish „political stratum” (cf. Weber, 1958) are not yet fully crystallized. Second, we assumed that under such conditions political attitudes are revealed indirectly in the process of **perception**, and directly, in the process of evaluation **of the reality**. The politicians' **postulates** addressed to the political scene and political life in general should also be a help.

## **The Respondents**

Our study involves 215 parliamentary deputies representing four parties and 61 political leaders who aspired to be deputies but were not elected to the Sejm (in the 1993 elections). Why did we decide to focus on the Parliament? The answer is simple. The scarcity of political leaders and the weakness of the majority of political parties in Poland renders Parliament the body in which (1) the most important party leaders are present, (2) the most important political debates take place, and (3) the laws changing the country are created and promulgated. Parliament is the very institution where the process of reforming the country takes place. Most of the members of cabinet are deputies also.

After 1989, each new Parliament absorbed many new members. New members, along with deputies elected a second or even a third time, described their parliamentary function as a "crash course in politics". No doubt, by working in Parliament they gradually become **professional politicians**. They name themselves this way. Parliament provides them with new experience which adds to their former professional experience. This is why, if we want to study politics and politicians, we should study members of Parliament.

Our study also includes a group of would-be deputies who failed to pass the 1993 elections. However, this was a very special kind of failure. These people received the largest share of votes in their electoral districts. They were the real "winners" and often they were also prominent politicians on a national scale. The Polish electoral law deprived them of their victory because, on the national level, their parties failed to pass the electoral threshold (5% of the total votes for a single party and 8% for party coalitions).

It was not easy to include representatives of the two most important right-wing (Christian National Union) and centre-right (Centre Alliance) would-be parliamentarians in our study because of financial and organizational difficulties.

However, we finally managed to reach them and interview them<sup>1</sup>.

We felt it was important to include right-wing politicians in our research design because the composition of the Polish Sejm 1993-97 was "skewed". It was heavily dominated by the Democratic Left Alliance (which is the composition of the post-communist party The Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland - SdRP - and their allies, including the OPZZ trade union, women's organisations, youth organisations etc.). Second in number of deputies was the Polish Peasant Party, previously a "satellite party" under the communist regime. These two parties had a two-thirds majority. The remaining parties in Parliament are liberal-democratic (Freedom Union), social-democratic (Labour Union), nationalist (Confederation for Independent Poland) and BBWR (Non-Party Bloc for Reforms), the last one claiming to be the right wing grouping, because of their free-market orientation combined with modest nationalism.

By including would-be parliamentarians, we have enlarged the political spectrum of our investigation. ZChN (Christian National Union) is a party of laic Catholics embracing mostly traditionally oriented leaders. PC (Centre Alliance) is a centre-right party strongly anti-communist and propagating modernisation of Poland and economic integration with the West.

### **Who *should be* and who *actually is* involved in politics?**

In Table 1 we present the views of members of different parliamentary clubs and political parties not represented in Parliament with respect to who - first and foremost - **should be** involved with politics. The responses to this question allow us to conclude that Polish political groups are very convergent with respect to their views of who are and who are not "correct" or desirable actors on the political stage. Respondents from all parliamentary clubs, as well as the two parties not represented in the Parliament, i.e., Centre Alliance (PC) and the Christian National Union (ZChN), generally share the belief that the people most predisposed to the job of politician are "leaders who are able to gain social support for their programmes" and (slightly less frequently) "respected civic leaders". Least popular in all political clubs is the view that politicians should be experts. Another unpopular opinion in all clubs

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<sup>1</sup> We sampled 50 deputies from each larger political grouping present in parliament and included all deputies of smaller groupings present there: 33 Labour Union, 16 BBWR and 16 KPN. From parties out of parliament we sampled 30 would-be deputies of ZChN and 30 of PC. The sampling procedures are described in the book: W. Wesolowski i B. Post (eds.) *Polityka i Sejm*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 1998.



except the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) is the opinion that politics should be left to "party leaders".

Table 1. The profile of politicians: who *should be* involved in politics\*

Political parties (and political groupings)	Experts	leaders of parties	respected civic leaders	all people interested in politics	leaders able to gain social support and followers	difficult to answer	N= 100 %
<b>UP - Labour Union</b>	6,3	9,4	25,0	28,1	31,3	0,0	33
<b>SLD - Dem. Left Alliance</b>	6,0	26,0	22,0	4,0	42,0	0,0	50
<b>PSL - Polish Peasant Party</b>	6,0	10,0	34,0	8,0	42,0	0,0	50
<b>UW - Freedom Union</b>	6,0	8,0	10,0	20,0	56,0	0,0	50
<b>BBWR + KPN - (Right Groups)</b>	3,1	6,3	25,0	12,5	50,0	3,1	32
<b>PC - Centre Alliance</b>	3,3	6,7	13,3	16,7	60,0	0,0	30
<b>ZChN - Christian National U.</b>	3,3	10,0	6,7	13,3	66,7	0,0	30

\*percentage distribution of responses according to political groupings

Five above named parties (UP, SLD, PSL, UW, BBWR+KPN) are parliamentary parties, two named below (PC and ZChN) are non-parliamentary parties. This note refers to all tables. Full Polish names of parties are given in the Annex.

Pre-coded question

This basic convergence of opinion with respect to the most and least accepted political profiles does not of course imply that there are no differences between political clubs. However, these differences are all located within the "transformational track". There are no separate "tracks" for the separate political blocks. Politics are defined as an arena for pro-social and reliable guides through the unfamiliar field of transformation (a popular slogan). This particular political profile is especially popular among right-wing politicians and even more so among those right-wing politicians who are not represented in Parliament (two-thirds of the members of the Christian National Union and 60% of the members of Centre Alliance support this political profile or personality). On the other hand, only one-third of the members of Labour Union (UP) view politics in terms of leaders able to gain social support. The most popular view in this party is that politics means activity of all citizens. Twenty-eight percent of Labour Union politicians express this view and this is what distinguishes this most left-wing of parties from other left-oriented parties, i.e.,

Democratic Left Alliance and the Polish Peasant Party. In turn, one of the typical features of the Democratic Left Alliance is the tendency to view a proper politician in terms of activity of party leaders (26% of the members of this party believe that politics should be left to the party leaders whereas in other parties the percentage of members embracing this view does not exceed 10%).

Undoubtedly the different political groups have slightly different views of who a desired politician is but these differences are relatively insignificant. Basically, political parties do not differ with respect to their visions of the ideal politician: they all strongly or very strongly accept the view that the politician should be a reliable leader who acts on behalf of the common good - either the state or society. Likewise, all parties (perhaps with the exception of the Democratic Left Alliance) give little support to the view that politics is a job for experts or for party leaders.

In Table 2 we present responses to the question **who in fact** is involved in politics in Poland, according to the politicians we interviewed. **Once again we found significant similarities between the different political groups.** All the groups we interviewed strongly believed that party leaders are the ones who are really involved in politics.

Table 2. The profiles of politicians: who *is* involved in politics

Political parties (and political groupings)	Experts	leaders of parties	respected civic leaders	all people interested in politics	leaders able to gain social support and followers	difficult to answer	N= 100 %
UP - Labour Union	0,0	45,5	3,0	39,4	12,1	0,0	33
SLD - Dem. Left Alliance	0,0	40,0	14,0	26,0	20,0	0,0	50
PSL - Polish Peasant Party	2,0	56,0	0,0	28,0	14,0	0,0	50
UW - Freedom Union	0,0	42,0	2,0	48,0	4,0	4,0	50
BBWR + KPN - (Right Groups)	6,3	43,8	0,0	37,5,	9,4	3,1	32
PC - Centre Alliance	0,0	63,3	0,0	26,7	10,0	0,0	30
ZChN - Christian National U.	0,0	66,7	3,3	26,7	3,3	0,0	30

If we compare Table 1 and Table 2, we shall see that with the exception of the vision of politics as the "rule of experts", what is perceived as most desirable is also perceived as non-existent and vice versa. As we can see in Table 1, all politicians,

irrespective of their party affiliation, would prefer politics to be a job for active socially rooted leaders. However, no matter what club and what party we analyze, we see that the percentage of politicians who perceive this to be actually the case is significantly smaller. The discrepancy between postulated and actual reality is especially great in right-wing parties.

## **Politics Defined**

In our attempt to reconstruct the political approaches of the different political groups we asked politicians not only to indicate who *is* and who should be involved in politics. We also asked them more directly to say how they themselves understood politics. We presented them with ten typical definitions of politics used in political science and asked them to select three and then rank-order them with respect to how closely they resembled their own personal views. In Table 3 we present, separately for each political group, the mean popularity rating for each definition of politics for the members of that group.

One of the most striking features of the results shown in Table 3 is the basic similarity between all political groups as far as the proportions of opinions are concerned. The most popular definition of politics in all the groups studied was that politics is a form of "activity aimed at strengthening the state"; the second most popular definition was "activity for the benefit of society". Differences between the various political clubs and parties only begin to emerge when we move to the third most popular definition. Depending on the group, we find either "the struggle for power", nor "the struggle for social influence" or "representation of group interests" as receiving less common support. This is surprising, especially with respect to the definition of politics as "providing people with leadership" because all groups agree, as we mentioned earlier, that politics is mainly a job for social leaders and that these (as all political groups unanimously complained) are currently in poor supply.

In other words, all political groups gave very similar rank-orders of the definitions of political activity. The fact that all political groups are basically similar with respect to the structure of their definitional choices does not mean that they do not differ with respect to the frequencies of specific choices. And so, although the most popular definition of politics in all parties is "activity aimed at strengthening the state", this definition is significantly more popular in the Christian National Union than it is in the Labour Union or in the Democratic Left Alliance. Analogously, although no

political group preferred "struggle for social influence" as one of its two most popular definitions, this definition is significantly more popular among Democratic Left Alliance politicians than it is among right-wing parliamentarians. So, the various political groups differ with respect to the popularity of certain specific definitions but basically these differences do not undermine the fundamental similarity of preferences among the different political groups. All political groups prefer social-collective definitions of politics, i.e., definitions which refer to activity on behalf of the entire state or entire society. We may say that politics is the domain of activity on behalf of "the common good" (or, to put it another way, collectively oriented activity). Definitions which refer to politics as the struggle for power and influence or representation of particular interests are less popular, no matter which political group we analyze.

Table 4 shows our attempt to test these conclusions with respect to the first and most important of the three definitions indicated by the politicians. As was the case in Table 3, here too all political groups most frequently refer to the definition of politics as "activity aimed at strengthening the state". Their second choice is usually "activity for the benefit of society". Table 4 also shows quite clearly the differences which are less pronounced in Table 3. If we were to group all the socially and collectively oriented definitions of politics (activity aimed at strengthening the state, activity for the benefit of society, providing leadership, and mediation of interests) and separately group the remaining definitions, referring to particularistic aspects of politics (struggle for power, struggle for influence, activity for the benefit of one's own party or selected group interests), then the claim that collectively-oriented definitions are more frequent irrespective of the political group is still valid. However, differences between the Democratic Left Alliance on the one hand and Freedom Party and right-wing parties on the other hand now emerge. In the two latter groups, about 80% of the politicians select „collectivist” or „communal” or „communitarian” definitions and 20% select "particularistic" definitions. In the Democratic Left Alliance, collectivist definitions no longer dominate in any significant way: 52% select collectivist definitions whereas 48% select "particularistic" definitions.

**Table 3. The meaning of politics among Polish politicians: Personal conceptions (mean index of three selections)\***

Political parties (and political groupings)	Mean values of the index for the indicated meaning of politics									
	struggle for power	struggle for social influence	representation of group interests	activity aimed at strengthening the state	mediation of group interests	representation of local electorate demands	activity for the sake of own party	activity for the benefit of society	providing people with leadership	other responses
<b>UP - Labour Union</b>	,30	,55		1,79	,30	,15	,39	1,46		,15
<b>SLD - Dem. Left Alliance</b>	,58	1,02	,56	1,74	,24	,30	,40	1,08	,04	,00
<b>PSL - Polish Peasant Party</b>	,46	,62	,62	2,12	,30	,30	,26	1,22	,08	,00
<b>UW - Freedom Union</b>	,40	,80	,30	2,26	,32	,28	,24	1,18	,18	,00
<b>BBWR + KPN - (Right Groups)</b>	,28	,19	,50	2,16	,09	,50	,44	1,56	,13	,09
<b>PC - Centre Alliance</b>	,40	,40	,47	2,07	,20	,30	,07	1,57	,23	,30
<b>ZChN - Christian National U.</b>	,74	,35	,42	2,61	,42	,19	,19	,97	,07	,03

\* index has the value 3 if a given characteristic was chosen as the most important (rank 1); 2 if chosen as next important; 1 if chosen in third place; 0 if not chosen at all

**Table 4. The meaning of politics among Polish politicians: Personal conceptions (accorded first, highest rank)**

Political parties (and political groupings)	politics considered as:									
	struggle for power	struggle for social influence	representation of group interests	activity aimed at strengthening the state	mediation of interests	representation of local electorate demands	activity for the sake of own party	activity for the benefit of society	providing people with leadership	other responses
<b>P - Labour Union</b>	6,1	12,1	9,1	42,4	,0	,0	,0	27,3	,0	3,0
<b>SLD - Dem. Left Alliance</b>	16,0	14,0	12,0	40,0	,0	2,0	4,0	12,0	,0	,0
<b>PSL - Polish Peasant Party</b>	12,0	10,0	8,0	48,0	2,0	,0	,0	20,0	,0	,0
<b>UW - Freedom Union</b>	6,0	10,0	2,0	56,0	2,0	2,0	,0	20,0	2,0	,0
<b>BBWR + KPN - (Right Groups)</b>	3,1	3,1	9,4	50,0	,0	,0	3,1	25,8	3,1	3,1
<b>PC - Centre Alliance</b>	10,0	,0	6,7	53,3	,0	,0	,0	20,0	,0	10,0
<b>ZChN - Christian National U.</b>	12,9	3,2	3,2	71,0	3,2	,0	,0	6,5	,0	,0

The Polish Peasant Party and the Labour Union fall in between: the ratio of collectivist definitions to particularistic definitions is 7:3. In other words, **the Democratic Left Alliance is almost split in half into two distinct groups, collectivists and particularists, whereas in the remaining parties collectivists or communitarians are clearly in the majority.** In our opinion this difference is important and we shall return to it in our global description of the different political factions.

We also asked the activists of the different political parties to estimate "the percentage of Polish politicians" who actually understand politics in each of the ten ways indicated in Table 3 and Table 4. As we can see in Table 5, in all political groups the most popular view is that, in reality, politicians define politics in terms of "activity for the sake of their own party". This finding reflects a specific consistency and inconsistency in the views of the Polish political elite. As we saw in Tables 1 and 2, the majority of respondents felt that, in reality, it is mainly the political leaders who are involved in politics, although no party (except the Democratic Left Alliance) thought this was a good thing.

Comparison of Tables 4 and 5, in turn, suggests that despite the fact that only 3 in 276 politicians said that they personally thought "activity for the sake of their own party" was what politics was about, they believed that this definition was "typical" of other politicians on the entire political arena because (with the exception of the Freedom Union) at least two-thirds of the politicians interviewed said that was how "others" understood politics.

When we look at politics as "the struggle for power" and "the struggle for social influence", we find a similar pattern. These two definitions of politics (and the definition which says that politics is about "activity for the sake of one's own party") are the ones most frequently ascribed to the Polish political stratum. Only 3%-16% (depending on which party we look at) of the political activists identify themselves with them (Table 4). However, in all political parties more than a half of politicians attribute these definitions of politics to at least 60% of Polish politicians (Table 5).

**Table 5. How do Polish politicians understand politics?  
(Percentages saying that at least 60 % politicians understand politics in a given way)\***

<b>Political parties (and political groupings)</b>	as struggle for power	as struggle for social influence	as representation of group interests	as mediation of group interests	as activity aimed at strengthening the state	as representation of local electorate demands	as activity for the sake of own party	as activity for the benefit of society	as providing people with leadership
<b>UP - Labour Union</b>	54,5	66,7	27,3	3,0	12,1	39,4	66,7	12,1	6,1
<b>SLD - Dem. Left Alliance</b>	54,0	64,0	28,0	10,0	52,0	46,0	68,0	50,0	28,0
<b>PSL - Polish Peasant Party</b>	60,0	72,0	40,0	12,0	30,0	48,0	70,0	34,0	26,0
<b>UW - Freedom Union</b>	62,0	60,0	26,0	3,0	8,0	34,0	60,0	16,0	22,0
<b>BBWR + KPN - (Right Groups)</b>	68,8	53,1	12,5	3,1	6,3	34,4	75,0	15,6	15,6
<b>PC - Centre Alliance</b>	53,6	64,3	18,5	3,8	14,8	44,4	74,1	14,8	24,0
<b>ZChN - Christian National Union</b>	71,0	71,0	19,4	0,0	9,7	22,6	77,4	6,5	24,1

\* The complete scale was: up to 20 %, 20-39%, 40-59 %, 60-89 %, 90-100 %.

In other words, irrespective of their organisational affiliation, Polish politicians perceive politics in general primarily as a job for party leaders, "aimed at strengthening one's own political party" or at procuring power or influence. At the same time, however, they view this as inconsistent with their own visions of the "ideal politician" and their own definitions of politics. The overall conclusion of this is quite clear: in all political groups the definitions of politics ascribed to the majority of politicians are (1) largely consistent with the dominant opinions within the group as to who in fact is involved in politics, (2) largely inconsistent with personal definitions of politicians and (3) poor reflections of the politicians' normative visions of the "correct politician". As we already mentioned in our comparison of Table 1 and Table 2, even these normative visions of the "correct politician" are greatly at odds (no matter which political group we look at) with beliefs as to who in fact is involved in politics.

### **"Good" State Power Structure - What Does it Mean?**

In Table 6 we present politicians' indications concerning those aspects of the political system which, in their opinion, would have to be present for Polish society to conclude that the state power structure is "good". As was the case with other opinions analysed previously, all visions of "good state power structure" fall once again within a single track and are similar for all the political groups. Different political groups do not differ with respect to their opinions as to what is most and what is least important. They only differ with respect to the specific attributes of "a good state's power structure". As far as the desirability of these attributes is concerned, they are located on the same track somewhere between the "upper limit of desirability" (shared by all groups) and the "lower limit of desirability" (also shared by all groups).

All political groups declare that if state authorities are to be perceived as "good", their officials must first of all respect the law. The attribute "prominent leader attracts support" is the least important; in between is the condition: „political leaders are effective organizers of socio-economic life”.



Table 6. Conditions under which the State power could be considered good  
(Percentage recognizing the given condition as very important)

Political parties (and political groupings)	State officials upholding the law	citizen's activity co-shaping tasks of the state	prominent leader attracting social support	political leaders are effective organisers of socio-economic life	leaders understand society
UP - Labour Union	72,7	42,4	12,1	27,3	36,4
SLD - Dem. Left Alliance	80,0	24,0	10,0	46,8	58,0
PSL - Polish Peasant Party	74,0	20,0	18,0	40,0	64,0
UW - Freedom Union	88,0	52,0	6,0	22,0	34,0
BBWR + KPN - (Right Groups)	81,3	53,1	18,8	21,9	56,3
PC - Centre Alliance	66,7	40,0	24,1	20,0	43,2
ZChN - Christian National U.	67,7	41,9	22,6	38,7	29,0

Very important = value 1 on a 5-point scale  
Items specified in the questionnaire

The parties differed in the degree to which they thought openness to civic activity (citizen's activity co-shaping tasks of state) was a crucial attribute of "good state". In right-wing parties as well as in the Labour Union and the Freedom Union, this attribute is viewed as significantly more important than it is in the Democratic Left Alliance and the Polish Peasant Party. In turn, the two latter groups give more weight to "leaders' effectiveness as organizers" and „leaders' ability to understand society". They differ significantly under this respect from the Labour Union, the Freedom Union and Centre Alliance where these two "conditions of leadership" are viewed as relatively unimportant. On the other hand, they are not too distant from the Right Groups (Non-Party Block for the Support of the Reforms <BBWR> + Confederation for Independent Poland <KPN>) and from the Christian National Union with respect to one or the other of these two conditions. Of all the parties, Freedom Union attributes least weight to various aspects of "leadership" as determinants of "good state".

To summarise, we may say that the different political groups differ in many ways despite their basic similarity which springs from the fact that they all remain within the bounds of the same "track", i.e., they all believe "respect of law" to be the most important attribute of "good state" and "attracting social support by prominent

leaders" as the least important attribute. The most clear-cut difference involves the low weight ascribed by the Democratic Left Alliance and the Polish Peasant Party to civic activity as a determinant of "good state".

### **Attributes of Democracy**

In all the political groups, "rule of law", "protection of personal freedom" and "freedom of expression" are viewed (with some insignificant exceptions) as the most important features of smoothly functioning democracy (Table 7). Such attributes as "caring for social well-being", "protection of minorities" and "citizen activity" are viewed as relatively less important by all groups. Moreover, nearly all the respondents viewed nearly all these attributes as important, a fact which diminishes the differences between groups. Some differences are probably systematic, however. Protection of minorities, in particular, is the least important attribute for all right-wing parties. This is the only point on which the different groups differ very strongly. The remaining attributes are not specific for any particular party or parliamentary grouping.

In Table 8 are presented answers given to the question on the features of democracy which have been already well established in Poland. The most often mentioned by members of all political groupings are "freedom of expression" and "free choice between parties". Rather a strong criticism of socio-political reality is voiced by infrequent indications of the item "rule of the law". It was considered very important feature of the "good state". Now deputies say that it is not yet a well established characteristic. This opinion may arise from very real and deep concern with this characteristic, both among parliamentarians and politicians outside the parliament.

**Table 7. Features serving the good functioning of the democratic system (mean of the 7-point scale)\***

Political parties (and political groupings)	rule of law	citizens' activity	control of power structures by citizens	large prerogatives for local governments	garantee of minority rights	concern of government for the well- being of citizens	freedom of expression	free choice between parties	protection of personal freedom	the rule of the best	N = 100 %
<b>UP - Labour Union</b>	6,8	5,7	6,2	5,8	5,9	5,4	6,8	6,2	6,7	5,5	33
<b>SLD - Dem. Left Alliance</b>	6,9	5,4	5,9	5,8	5,5	5,8	6,4	6,3	6,7	6,4	50
<b>PSL - Polish Peasant Party</b>	6,6	5,6	5,9	5,9	4,8	5,6	6,3	5,8	6,4	6,4	50
<b>UW - Freedom Union</b>	6,9	5,9	6,5	6,2	6,1	4,8	6,7	6,3	6,8	5,7	50
<b>BBWR + KPN - (Right Groups)</b>	6,3	5,7	6,2	5,8	4,7	5,7	6,5	6,2	6,4	6,2	32
										6,2	
<b>PC - Centre Alliance</b>	6,8	5,7	6,3	6,4	4,9	4,9	6,7	6,3	6,7		30
<b>ZChN - Christian National U.</b>	6,5	5,4	6,1	5,7	4,5	4,2	6,4	6,1	6,2		30

\*1 = unimportant feature; 7 = very important feature - Items specified in the questionnaire

**Table 8. Features of democracy already established in Poland (percent selecting a given feature)**

Political parties (and political groupings)	rule of law	citizens' activity	control of power structures by citizens	large prerogatives for local governments	garantee of minority rights	concern of government for the well- being of citizens	freedom of expression	free choice between parties	protection of personal freedom	the rule of the best	N = 100 %
<b>UP - Labour Union</b>	9,1	3,0	27,3	6,1	15,1	6,1	96,8	66,0	51,5	6,1	33
<b>SLD - Dem. Left Alliance</b>	22,0	16,0	32,0	18,0	20,0	6,0	80,0	58,0	28,0	4,0	50
<b>PSL - Polish Peasant Party</b>	20,0	22,0	22,0	38,0	20,0	14,0	74,0	54,0	28,0	2,0	50
<b>UW - Freedom Union</b>	8,0	16,0	14,0	24,0	26,0	4,0	86,0	66,0	36,0	0,0	50
<b>BBWR + KPN - (Right Groups)</b>	9,4	15,6	12,5	6,3	46,9	3,1	75,0	43,8	34,3	3,1	32
<b>PC - Centre Alliance</b>	6,7	3,3	20,0	13,3	30,0	3,0	83,3	66,8	36,7	6,7	30
<b>ZChN - Christian National U.</b>	6,5	9,7	12,9	12,9	54,8	0,0	80,7	71,0	19,4	0,0	30

We also found that the attributes listed in Table 7 can be grouped into a smaller number of dimensions and thus enable us to extract some more systematic differences between political groups. In order to adjust our data more closely to the assumptions of factor analysis, we omitted those characteristics which had the most skewed distributions (i.e., those which the majority of respondents rated as "very important") and we aggregated responses rated as "not at all important" and "very unimportant", i.e. responses with very low frequencies. We then factor analysed the responses in each political group separately in order to check whether the factor structure in the different parties and clubs would be sufficiently similar. We found that the results for right-wing groups, i.e., the Non-Party Block for the Support of the Reforms (BBWR) + Confederation for Independent Poland (KPN), the Centre Alliance (PC) and the Christian-National Union (ZChN) were slightly different than the results for the remaining groups. Factor I, which we call "democracy as civic participation" includes generally: citizen activity, citizen control of power structures, free choice between parties, considerable self-government competencies for local governments, and protection of minorities. In right-wing parties, the last two characteristics constitute a separate factor. Two versions of the factor analysis are, thus, presented in the Table 9. In the first version, "participation" is defined by five characteristics (the factor solution for non-right-wing groups). In the second version it is defined by three characteristics (right-wing groups). The second factor which we labelled "democracy as the government by good leadership" (trustworthy stewardship) is found in all groups and consists of "caring for the well-being of the citizens" and "selection of the best people to govern the country". This may be viewed as a version of communitarianism (Cf. Mulhall and Swift, 1992)

The outcome of the analysis is simple (Table 9). Participational and civic aspects of democracy are significantly more important for Freedom Union and Centre Alliance than for the Polish Peasant Party, Christian National Union or Democratic Left Alliance. However, as we can see in column two, as far as the Christian National Union is concerned, its relative stance toward "participation" is fully explained by this party group's negative attitude towards minorities and strong local self-government. If we were to exclude these two items from "participation", the approach of the Christian National Union would not differ substantially from the average for all politicians. Similarly, if it were not for their approach to minorities and self-government, the approach of other right groups (BBWR + KPN) would be moderately pro-participational. If we look at democracy understood as "government by good stewards", our findings are equally clear: Democratic Left Alliance, the Polish Peasant Party and right groups believe that this is an important prerequisite of

efficient democracy whereas Freedom Union, Christian National Union and (to a lesser extent) Labour Union view this characteristic as relatively less important.

Table 9. „Participation” and „stewardship” as generalised qualities serving the good functioning of the democratic system

Political parties (and political groupings)	democracy as citizens' participation <sup>x</sup>	democracy as citizens' participation <sup>xx</sup>	democracy as the rule of trust worthy stewards <sup>xxx</sup>
UP - Labour Union	,104	-,009	-,176
SLD - Dem. Left Alliance	-,173	-,241	,422
PSL - Polish Peasant Party	-,333	-,277	,282
UW - Freedom Union	,494	,322	-,440
BBWR + KPN - (Right Groups)	-,083	,151	,248
PC - Centre Alliance	,282	,233	-,036
ZChN - Christian National U.	-,247	-,040	-,450

<sup>x</sup> includes the following characteristics of democracy: activity of citizenry, control of power structures by citizens, large prerogatives for local authorities, guarantee of minority rights, free choice between parties

<sup>xx</sup> from above characteristics (<sup>x</sup>) excluded are minority rights and large prerogatives for local governments

<sup>xxx</sup> includes characteristics: concern of government for the well-being of citizens and selection of the best people for ruling the country

The table gives mean values of factor scores in separate political parties (groupings)

The results of our analysis allow us to classify the Labour Union as moderately pro-participational and moderately pro-stewardship; the Democratic Left Alliance as strongly pro-stewardship and anti-participational; the Polish Peasant Party as strongly pro-stewardship and strongly anti-participational. Freedom Union also has a very distinct profile - it is very strongly anti-stewardship and moderately pro-participational. The Centre Alliance is moderately pro-participational with no distinct acceptance or rejection of democracy as "the rule of good stewards". Because of its approach to minorities and self-government, the Christian National Union is moderately anti-participational and very strongly anti-stewardship.

This classification calls for three comments. First, as we already mentioned, all clubs view all the above-mentioned features of democracy as very important or important (cf. the means in Table 7). Therefore, when we say that this or that party is

pro-participational or anti-participational, pro-stewardship or anti-stewardship, this of course does not imply any absolute position in a network of beliefs. It merely indicates a certain distance from the standard, i.e., strong positive evaluation of both participation and "government by good stewards". Second, the classification presented above is a good reflection of the characteristics to which we drew attention in other parts of this analysis (visions of the "good politician", ways of understanding politics and good power structure). We may therefore treat it as a useful aggregated description. Third, the differences outlined in the above classification must be viewed within the context of "track similarity" of ideas held by the different political groups. This similarity, as we underscored in the introduction to this article, may be viewed, at least partly, as the unifying effect of "transformational correctness".

### **Political Symmetries and Asymmetries**

In the nineteenth century right orientations characteristically accented the need to protect religious rights in public life and the need to protect national identity along with laissez-faire-ism and protection of private ownership. Today, nearly everywhere, such ideas have given way to more complex ideological and political orientations. These orientations seem even more complex in Poland, in the period of post-communist transformation (Jasinska-Kania, 1996). However, it would be wrong to say that previous associations, characteristic for specific political doctrines, have become obsolete. What we have today is greater individualisation of beliefs and different compositions of ideas within the same party.

We asked individual politicians to name the characteristic features of left and right political orientations. The question was open-ended. We wanted our respondents to share their "own" views with us (Table 10).

The attributes of left and right orientations mentioned most frequently come as no surprise. Positive evaluation of private property has its counterpart in positive evaluation of interventionism; appreciation of religion has its counterpart in the demand for a secular state. However, it is noteworthy that there is no counterpart for "appreciation of the nation". No-one mentioned "internationalism". This attribute, though present not so long ago, has now disappeared. It is also noteworthy that responsiveness of politicians to public opinion has no counter-characteristic in the form of some elitarian attribute ascribed to the right orientation. Elitism is not verbalised by politicians, either to the right or to the left of the political stage.

Table 10. The most often mentioned characteristics of left and right political orientations according to political group affiliations.

Characteristics of *right* political orientations

Political parties (and political groupings)	positive evaluation of private property	positive evaluation of religion and the Church	positive evaluation of the nation and tradition	critical of left orientation	critical of social welfare provisions
UP - Labour Union	58,8	64,7	47,1	0,0	29,4
SLD - Dem. Left Alliance	34,6	42,3	34,6	15,4	15,4
PSL - Polish Peasant Party	75,0	41,7	16,7	0,0	8,3
UW - Freedom Union	68,2	40,9	36,4	4,5	4,5
BBWR + KPN - (Right Groups)	58,8	29,4	70,6	0,0	0,0
PC - Centre Alliance	73,3	46,7	66,7	-	-
ZChN - Christian National U.	79,3	65,5	69,0	-	-

Characteristics of *left* political orientations

Political parties (and political groupings)	positive evaluation of interventionism	positive evaluation of social welfare provisions	egalitarianism and concern for social justice	demand form secular state	responsiveness of politicians to public opinion
UP - Labour Union	39,4	58,8	47,1	52,9	23,5
SLD - Dem. Left Alliance	3,7	40,7	11,1	33,3	48,1
PSL - Polish Peasant Party	20,0	72,0	8,0	44,0	20,0
UW - Freedom Union	60,0	65,0	5,0	30,0	5,0
BBWR + KPN - (Right Groups)	18,8	18,8	18,8	18,8	0,0
PC - Centre Alliance	56,7	43,3	3,3	40,0	-
ZChN - Christian National U.	51,7	34,5	10,3	34,5	6,9

Open-ended question - Omitted are less frequently mentioned characteristics. - Up to 3 characteristics mentioned by each respondent

Number of deputies in each grouping = 100%

As far as the "strength" of the various attributes (measured in terms of frequency of indication) is concerned, we can easily trace it in Table 10. Once again we are struck by the similarity between different political parties. Certain attributes do differ, however. One of them is "egalitarianism and concern for social justice" mentioned by 47.1% of the Labour Union deputies and only 5.0% of the Freedom Union deputies and 3.3% of the Centre Alliance deputies. "Responsiveness" to public opinion, which is indicative of left orientation, is mentioned by 48.1% of the Democratic Left Alliance deputies and only 5.0% of the Labour Union deputies! This result calls for further investigation and analysis.

### **Perceptions reflecting critique of political adversaries**

It seems that the representatives of some parties tend to report what they think to be a discrediting feature of their political adversaries. For example, Labour Union, a secular party, selects quite often "positive approach to the Catholic Church" as a distinguishing factor of right-wing parties whereas the Christian National Union and Freedom Union (pro-market parties) attribute "positive approach to state ownership" as a criterion of left-wing orientation. Such perceptions are supposed to put the "adversary" in a rather negative light.

Much more direct evidence about real political conflicts is provided by Table 11. Among factors that **counteract political agreements** the most often mentioned is **"different opinion on the communist past"** and equivalent expressions (the question was open-ended). This type of answers was given equally frequently by non-parliamentary right-wing parties (strongly anti-communist) and post-communist Democratic Left Alliance. This certifies to the real feeling of division on both sides. To another phenomena refer "characteristics of the political elite". These category includes answers which pointed to the "negative" relationships between individuals and groups within elite , like personal conflicts and antagonisms, personal ambitions, inability of some groups to co-operate, political envy. Quite frequent were also answers pointing to "different ideologies and outlooks" i.e. divisions in symbolic sphere. However, **the imperative of reforms is frequently indicated as a factor facilitating political agreements**. Here we trace the foundation for feasible co-operation.



Table 11. Factors facilitating and counteracting political agreements

## Counteracting factors

Political parties (and political groupings)	N= 100 %	different opinion on the communist past	different ideologies and outlooks	characteristics of the political elite	difficulties in forming policies	conflict of interest between groups
UP - Labour Union	33	54,5	36,4	51,5	27,3	12,1
SLD - Dem. Left Alliance	50	58,0	12,0	48,0	14,0	6,0
PSL - Polish Peasant Party	50	48,0	28,0	38,0	42,0	10,6
UW - Freedom Union	50	50,0	16,0	48,0	26,0	8,0
BBWR + KPN - (Right Groups)	32	53,1	18,6	40,6	34,4	3,1
Non-parliamentary parties	60	52,5	21,3	57,4	21,3	3,3

## Facilitating factors

Political parties (and political groupings)	N= 100 %	imperative of the continuation of reforms	internal threat	external threat	common goals on the international arena	„raison d’etat“	interests and values of elite	social interests and actions	support for democracy
UP - Labour Union	33	27,3	12,1	9,1	45,5	24,2	27,3	3,0	6,1
SLD - Dem. Left Alliance	50	28,0	10,0	10,0	14,0	22,0	32,0	6,0	6,0
PSL - Polish Peasant Party	50	40,0	2,0	12,2	28,0	18,0	26,0	8,0	14,0
UW - Freedom Union	50	30,0	14,4	14,4	26,0	10,0	22,0	8,0	14,0
BBWR + KPN - (Right Groups)	32	9,4	6,3	9,4	6,3	9,4	37,5	6,3	9,4
Non-parliamentary parties	60	23,0	19,7	21,3	18,0	11,5	16,4	3,3	9,8

Respondent was asked to indicate three factors without ranking them. Number of persons in each party (or groupings) = 100 %.

Open-ended question

**Table 12. The most important parts of the political elite (percent selecting a given indication)**

Political parties (and political groupings)	party and parliamentary elite	state cadres	post-communist elite	post-solidarity elite	knowledge elite	business elite	media	The Catholic Church elite	civic association elite	other
<b>UP - Labour Union</b>	63,6	30,3	33,3	18,2	15,2	18,2	3,0	9,1	18,2	9,1
<b>SLD - Dem. Left Alliance</b>	70,0	12,0	26,0	22,0	2,0	8,0	12,0	8,0	14,0	6,0
<b>PSL - Polish Peasant Party</b>	76,0	18,0	44,0	12,0	18,0	22,0	2,0	16,0	8,0	4,0
<b>UW - Freedom Union</b>	56,0	14,0	58,0	24,0	16,0	16,0	4,0	4,0	24,0	26,0
<b>BBWR + KPN - (Right Groups)</b>	37,5	15,6	50,0	40,6	6,3	21,9	-	6,3	-	18,8
<b>PC - Centre Alliance</b>	29,0	12,9	77,4	58,1	19,4	12,9	-	3,2	9,7	16,1
<b>ZChN - Christian National U.</b>	6,7	13,3	46,7	50,0	16,7	13,3	10,0	-	16,7	33,3

Open-ended question

Historically formed dividing line between the "post-communist bloc" and "former opposition bloc" is reflected in still another answers, namely to the open question on "the most important part of the political elite". Looking at Table 12 we see, first, that no matter what party we look at, **parliamentary deputies and party leaders** are considered to be the most important "part". This shows how homogeneous the perception of political life is. Second information, however, provided by the same table, refers to the historical division. Freedom Union, Non-Party Block for the Support of Reforms + the Confederation of Independent Poland, Centre Alliance, and the Christian National Union all **believe that the post-communist "nomenklatura" is among the most important parts of the elite**. This proves to the enduring conflict over the legacy to rule. What is rather astonishing in the whole set of answers is very low percentages of indication to business elite, media, Catholic Church. It seems that deputies, when answering this question, have in mind primarily autonomous sphere of "making politics within the political elite".

## Conclusions

In this paper we have shown preliminary findings of our studies. The findings are rather unexpected. We found consistently that politicians from different political parties and political orientations are in many aspects very similar. This similarity is manifested in the similarity of proportions of specific opinions or descriptions of reality in the different political parties. We interpret this as meaning that among Polish politicians there is a fundamental "track similarity" of perception of the tasks confronting politicians in times of systemic transformation. "Transformational correctness" may be a strong force behind this similarity.

Despite this similarity, we have also found some patterned differences between parties. Divergent perceptions refer to the symbolic sphere and to the "real structure" of political influence (power "retained by "nomenclatura" people", Table 12) Such perceptions, combined with strong sentiments, may fuel ideological conflicts. They may lead to polarization of the political scene, because in some important aspects, for different political actors, "things look actually different" and "they should be arranged differently".

Aggravation of conflict, however, is not the only possibility, even not the most probable one. Strong "conflictual" perceptions (and, consequently, actions) may be substantially reduced by the convictions that economic market reforms, and the construction of viable political democratic system is of prime importance. Public opinion seems to move in that direction and it may exert influence on some impatient politicians.

**Names of the Polish Parties and Political Groupings  
(Nazwy polskich partii i ugrupowań politycznych)**

- UP - Unia Pracy (Labour Union)  
SLD - Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Democratic Left Alliance)  
PSL - Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish Peasant Party)  
UW - Unia Wolności (Freedom Union - formerly Democratic Union)  
BBWR - Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rzdem (Non-party Bloc for Cooperation with Government)  
KPN - Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej (Confederation of Independent Poland)  
PC - (Porozumienie Centrum (Centre Alliance)  
ZChN - (Zjednoczenie Chrześcijańsko-Narodowe (Christian-National Union)

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