
The Decade of Solidarność

On 13 December, 2011, the Master MIREES and the Faculty of Political Science "Roberto Ruffilli" in Forlì hosted an open lecture dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the introduction of martial law in Poland in 1981. Speeches were delivered by **Grzegorz Kaczyński**, professor of sociology at the University of Catania, and **Guido Franzinetti**, a historian at the University of Eastern Piedmont. The event was followed by opening of the photo exhibition dedicated to the decade of Solidarność at and by a debate on Solidarność in the San Domenico Museum. All these events were promoted by the General Consulate of Poland on the occasion of Poland's chairmanship semester at the European Council.

In his presentation "**Solidarność and the revitalization of civil society in Poland**", Grzegorz Kaczyński analyzed in detail the transformation of the workers' movement Solidarność into a mass movement as a manifestation of Polish civil society. This sense of togetherness, present in the Polish society up to the 6 February – 5 April 1989 Roundtable talks, was regarded by the speaker as a pivotal step in the communist bloc countries' way toward regaining full independence.

Recalling the assessment of Zbigniew Brzeziński, US national security advisor to Jimmy Carter, who believed that post-communist states would need 40 years to establish democracy, Kaczyński likened this transformation from the communist system to **democracy** to the way of the Jewish nation led by Moses to the promised land. Likewise, Ralf Dahrendorf believed 60 years were needed to transform a post-communist society to a **civil society**. Referring to the changes that nevertheless occurred in Poland within one generation, the speaker defined the contemporary Polish society as democratic and free-market, but far from being a civil society, the reason thereof being its elites moving away from principles and values of the *ethos of intelligentsia*.

National, political and ideological components of civil society in Poland were presented by the speaker through the history of **Polish intelligentsia**. Reviewing the history of civil society as a social economic and political order of the modern society based on the middle class (bourgeoisie), Kaczyński explained the peculiarity of Poland, where the process of civil society formation started relatively late and happened namely because of the growth of cities. In Poland, the bourgeoisie was suppressed by the gentry, the dominant social class characterized by a conservative, physiocratic and self-referential ideology. In the end of the 18th century, when the role of bourgeoisie started to grow, Poland lost its independence. In the subsequent period, the issues of national independence and identity became a principal social value. It was still in this ideological atmosphere that the Polish intelligentsia was born. Integrating creative and independent people and diversified from social, ethnic and religious point of view, this group gradually won a leading position in Polish national consciousness. Transformed into a social class, it was distinguished by the qualities unique in the context of contemporary structure of Polish social society. Its system of values was not a form of social ideology, but rather a **social ethos**. With patriotism as its core value, was understood as a struggle for national liberation, associated with an array of universal ideas, characteristic of those times, such as ideological coherence in actions, the concept of citizenship as a social mission, sacrificing individual interest for the sake of the community, social and political anti-conformism, and moral imperative of solidarity with all those who suffered injustice, whatever their religious beliefs, national or ethnic origin were. In those times, all that meant support for all kinds of independence movements. The slogan "**For your freedom and ours**" was the best demonstration thereof.

Indeed, when Poland regained its independence in 1918, it was first and foremost the fruit of its intelligentsia; and so was the reconstruction of the country and the society in the inter-war era. Polish intelligentsia was credited for the fact that during the German occupation of PL in 1939-1945 the underground state that operated with an underground army. This class suffered the most from repression: about 40% of intelligentsia members were killed.

Likewise, the communist regime undertook regular efforts to decompose and destabilize intelligentsia as a leading bourgeois class, considered an enemy of the working class. To avoid a structural social void, the authorities coined the term "**working intelligentsia**", a new class that had to breed a politically correct understanding of intelligentsia. The term covered a wide workers employed in various state-managed sectors, such as industry, administration, health service, education, and arts. According to Kaczyński, the position of intelligentsia in the society was weakened, but its *ethos* was not. Its members managed to build specific niches with their families, friends and neighbours, where they passed on the younger generation the *ethos* with its core value, patriotism understood once again as a struggle for independence, with numerous forms of active or passive opposition of various social groups against the communist power.

Comparing two opposition currents (leftist and the traditional intelligentsia) existing in Poland in the 1980s, Kaczyński disagreed with the argument of Adam Michnik that the Polish opposition against the communist government had been initiated by secular leftists originating from former young members of the Communist Party. According to Kaczyński, the two currents were divided by the issue of **national independence**, whereas the non-leftist opposition represented the ordinary Poles' sentiments. This fact was later confirmed by the phenomenon of *Solidarność*, which associated the idea of independence with democracy in its manifesto "There is no freedom without Solidarity" ("Nie ma wolności bez *Solidarności*"), an extremely popular slogan in 1980-1989.

Another principal issue that divided the two opposition groups was the attitude toward **catholicism** in the Polish society in the times when the church was playing the role of cultural and social opposition. Appealing to the 'church of dialogue' rather than to the 'church of silence', the opposition originating from the *ethos of intelligentsia* adopted the position of respect, contrary to the secular opposition, which 1970s demonstrated ideological hostility and intellectual aggressiveness in this matter, in line with the regime's politics of that time.

The principal values of the *ethos of traditional intelligentsia* found their expression in the Gdańsk workers protest and in the *Solidarność* as its consequence in 1980, where the sense of common interest for the first time united various opposition groups, thanks to the fact that among the leaders, advisors and experts of the movement there were many representatives of intelligentsia. Counting 10.000 members in 1981, the *Solidarność* emerged as the **legitimization** of the traditional intelligentsia ethos by the Polish society, as a return to its role of the social and political elite and the evidence of the survival of the social tradition in the Poles' memory. This tradition, Kaczyński argued, was enriched by the new experience during the 1980s, i.e. by the *Solidarność* underground activities following the imposition of the Martial Law on December 13, 1981, that eventually led to the Roundtable talks.

According to Kaczyński, the results of the **Roundtable talks** surprised both negotiating parties and surpassed their expectations, as neither the Government started the talks to hand over the power, nor the *Solidarność* expected to get it. Although the traditional intelligentsia seemed to be underrepresented in the talks, its *ethos* affected all the *Solidarność* opposition sections, the evidence of which can be found both in the way the negotiations were conducted and in the achieved results. The *ethos* became the primary moral reference that united the opposition in the face of the common enemy. It was a community, which, as the successive years showed, lasted only till the first democratic presidential elections in 1990 that saw the very same opposition already divided. Often representing conflicting ideological and political views, the Polish political elite affected by a moral chaos started gradually drifting away from ordinary people, Kaczyński argued.

The disintegration of the Polish *Solidarność*-based opposition after the movement taking over the power, according to Kaczyński happened because they drifted apart, or even challenged the intelligentsia ethos, especially its value which treats **social participation** as a national mission. Kaczyński then distinguished three factors (contextual, structural and cultural) that led to a

gradual disuniting of intelligentsia's role in the modern Polish society.

The contextual factor means that social, cultural and ideological, or even ethical heterogeneity of the *Solidarność* was subordinated to the joint necessity to oppose the communist regime. This **negative social bond** determining the group identity had a strong reference to the *intelligentsia ethos*. Weakened during the period of illegal activity in 1981-1989, the movement did not form a positive bond necessary to consolidate the group and to generate its separate and sustainable identity. As the common threat represented by the communist regime disappeared, so did the motivation to sustain the integrity of the movement. All the social powers making up the *Solidarność* gradually retreated to their initial positions, considered by them to be more adequate to their social and political interests, and started new alliances, even with former opponents, just to remain on the political scene. In 1997, the *Solidarność* abandoned its social movement character and resumed its initial role as a trade union. The new situation engendered a new conflict, but, all in all, everybody drifted away from the values of intelligentsia. Moreover, **modern intelligentsia** as a natural successor of this *ethos* appeared to be too weak to constitute a social and political formation that could count with the new political establishment, turning out weak even in demographic terms, as a result of legal emigration that was characteristic of the period of 1983-1989, and which significantly, if not predominantly affected the intelligentsia class. An enormous social capital was wasted, as the new government did not manage to return emigrants back for participation in the system transformation.

The second, structural factor explains how weakening of the intelligentsia as a social power was also determined by the deep **structural changes** within the Polish society that were not introduced in a proper way. Economic liberalism was instituted by means of arbitrary political and administrative decisions and methods which caused undesirable or even paradoxical effects. According to Kaczyński, the liberalization of the Polish market should have been the result of the social economic structure, not the other way round. Adjusting the social economic structure to a top-down decision deprived the intelligentsia of its chance to take its due position in the economic structure for many years. In other words, the arbitrary decision to allow for the spontaneous order generated a system in disorder. One of the consequences of that process was the intelligentsia's impoverishment and weakening of its professional economic position. As a considerable part of that group traditionally or even existentially depends on those social or economic sectors, such as education, health service, cultural activity, that are less productive or even unprofitable, in today's highly profit-oriented Polish economy these sectors are not sufficiently subsidized, which results in pauperization, despair and mass emigration of educated people and thus contributes to intelligentsia's social and ideological atrophy, attenuation of social and ethical bonds, loss of appeal by intelligentsia as a social class, annihilation of prerequisites for the modern intelligentsia with its ethos to become the social and cultural core of the Polish development model.

The **cultural factor** that contributed to weakening of the intelligentsia ethos, according to Kaczyński, is expressed in three trends: the survival of some models of the communist culture, the assimilation in the Western culture, and the commercialization of culture.

In its aspiration to create a new man, the communist regime had at its disposal all the possible means of coercion, controlling the process of shaping its citizens' political and social awareness as well as their cultural identity which, as Kaczyński argued, was gradually becoming a copy of *homo sovieticus*. This is why the network of social relations was characterized by a sort of social void. Due to the **lack of horizontal social bonds** based on trust and solidarity, the civil society managed to survive only in family, friendship, neighbourhood and church relationships. This is why nowadays government institutions in the new establishment or even among individual people we can still detect the ways of thinking and acting as they used to be under the communist system, in the common civil culture where the state and public welfare were understood as external structure that were expected to be the providers of everything. This atomic concept of freedom is dominated by families and individualism. In such cultural space, intelligentsia can hardly find its due place. Consequently, it gradually disappears as an indispensable element of the Polish culture.

Losing touch on the intelligentsia ethos and being unable to transfer the genuine intelligentsia values to the world, it did not manage to prevent the *dictatorship of force* from thrning into the *democracy of force*.

A strong tendency to assimilate in the **Western culture** dating back to the prestige enjoyed by Western goods in communist times, according to Kaczyński, was strengthened by the transformation of the communist nomenclatura, an upper class that had access to those goods, into business people becoming a specific economic elite and the model of success in the new system. Simultaneously, the majority of intelligentsia were pushed beyond the mainstream after 1989 mainly because their ethos did not allowed them to take part in dirty businesses.

Finally, the **commercialization** of ethical, aesthetic, civil and religiuos values resulting from falsely understood principle of freedom and market fundamentalism made voices referring to intelligentsia ethos sound increasingly weaker. But, on the other hand, the very fact that they still can be heard, according to Kaczyński, proves that social intermediarism of the civil society tradition has not yet ceased to exist. The speaker expressed hope that this civil awareness would be taken up by the young generation of the knowledge class who will not allow the original Polish roots of the open society to die out. Kaczyński concluded his lecture by the words of Alexis de Tocqueville who believed that democracy could not function without civil society.

In his lecture titled "**Looking back without anger or hindsight: Solidarność and the *stan wojenny* 30 years later**", **Guido Franzinetti** elaborated on the Martial Law in Poland and its aftermath, drawing on his personal experience of visiting Poland since 1979.

Drawing a distinction between two legal terms, the *stan wojenny* (state of emergency) and the *stan wojny* (state of war), Franzinetti showed how the actual state of emergency was presented as a state of war in the discourse of Polish opposition and underground of the time.

Paying a particular attention to the fact overseen by most people that the **Martial Law** was announced by general Jaruzelski only at around 5 o'clock in the morning (i.e., later than it was actually introduced), the speaker analyzed the legal constitutional problem faced by gen. Jaruzelski in terms of constitution of the Polish People's Republic. Franzinetti suspected that lack of unanimity within the Council of State with regard to the approval of the proclamation of the state of emergency implied that Jaruzelski did not have the full constitutional backing for its formal proclamation, which is important, given the formalistic nature of communist systems, susceptible to their own rules.

Assessing the introduction of the Martial Law as a perfectly organized operation from a technical point of view, Franzinetti stressed that blocking telephone connections explains in part the surprise element of the takeover, but the operation was ready to start already from October 1981, with every locality in Poland already having military and political presence under the pretext of the problems of the economy of distribution.

Seeing no objective reason to proclaim the **state of emergency** in a country of the communist block which had not have a revolution in the sense of 1956 in Hungary and whose party leadership had the confidence of Moscow, Franzinetti stressed that military takeovers are alien to the communist tradition. Reviewing the 'lesser evil' speculations with regard to a possible Soviet intervention had gen. Jaruzelski failed to take over the power, Franzinetti interpreted the reason for the military takeover as an attempt to solve internal problems of the Polish Communist Party (PZPR) and the fear of the collapse of the Polish communist system. The Solidarność, according to Franzinetti was in a weak, defensive position, despite verbal radicalization of Lech Wałęsa's discourse who was proposing an unrealistic referendum for redefining relations with the Soviet Union. Stressing that no evidence of Solidarność's insurrectionist stance was ever put forward, Franzinetti argued there was no political military need to take over power in that moment.

The speaker then came to a crucial point of the **Soviet non-invasion**, owing the term to Vojtěch Mastný. Quoting the transcripts of the Politburo discussion on the 11th of December 1981 and speeches of Yuri Andropov, then head of the KGB, and Mikhail Suslov, a conservative anti-reformist within the Politburo, Franzinetti stressed the non-interventionist stances of the Soviets with regard to Polish internal affairs: even when it came to the Solidarność, the Martial Law was considered a too risky step. The document quoted by Franzinetti seems to contradict the version that Jaruzelski was being pressurized by the Soviets with the threat of military intervention.

The last two points made by the speaker concern the **reactions** to the coup and the aftermath of the coup. Agreeing with an assessment by the "Financial Times" made after the coup that everybody in Europe has had a sigh of relief, Franzinetti drew a distinction between the official declarations of condemnation of the Martial Law and actual relief of most foreign ministries around Europe that the Martial Law was introduced, and that a huge bloodshed was avoided. What, instead, was unexpected according to Franzinetti, was a very vast movement of solidarity with Solidarność that lasted right until 1989 all over Western Europe.

In relation to the **aftermath** of the coup, Franzinetti argued the resignation and despair of people getting through with their every-day life that explains the army's success in taking over a totally pacific movement. Quoting episodes of the Solidarność's sense of tact when dealing with explosive materials they had access to in the mines, the speaker stressed the movement's non-guerrilla character. The killing of priest Jerzy Popiełuszko in 1984, portending a serious and even violent crisis in Poland, saw a very restrained reaction on both the Church's and the Government's part. The fact that the killers of Popiełuszko, members of secret services, were put on trial and sentenced was not a typical development for a communist government.

But what really marked the turning point in Poland even before Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the USSR, according to Franzinetti, was a gradual **policy re-thinking** by the Polish leadership. Fascinatingly, the Polish communist regime (including the military one) used to carry out opinion polls from the 1950s onward that were actually producing real results, reflecting the situation in the society. The Polish generals having no illusions about the feelings of people in Poland was a crucial aspect of the capacity of the military regime to accept its failure. Gradually, progressively from 1984-1985 onwards and especially from 1986 they established indirect contacts with members of the opposition, which resulted in a passage to actual roundtable negotiations in 1989.

In conclusion, the speaker made two arguments. Firstly, the military action proved to be a facilitating aspect of the Polish transition, because Poland, unlike other countries, did not have to worry about the radicalization of the Communist Party, because it already had military communism. Secondly, five years after introducing the Martial Law, old issues of the Solidarność publications could be easily bought in Warsaw: such lack of fear of people talking about Solidarność on the part of the authorities was unthinkable for other communist countries that experienced repression, the fact that is telling a lot about the Polish experience.

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