"TRANSFORMATION AS A POLITICAL MYTH IS DOING VERY WELL"

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOVIET BLOC: MODELS, PROCESS, RESULTS (Editorial Debate)

Warsaw, September 27, 2024

DOI 10.48261/INRR240601

Krzysztof Brzechczyn, ORCID 0000-0001-8789-5641
Antoni Dudek, ORCID 0000-0002-9086-8625
Michał Przeperski, ORCID 0000-0003-2712-5711
Franciszek Dąbrowski, ORCID 0000-0002-4255-6985
Filip Gańczak, ORCID 0000-0003-3497-3903
Bogusław Wójcik, ORCID 0000-0001-8886-9787

Franciszek Dąbrowski (FD): I would like to welcome Professor Krzysztof Brzechczyn, philosopher and historian from Poznań, lecturer at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, and also a researcher at the Poznań branch of the Institute of National Remembrance. We are joined by Michał Przeperski, PhD, researcher at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, who is also an employee of the Museum of Polish History in Warsaw, and here I must add with sentiment that he used to be also a research worker at the Institute of National Remembrance. We will be joined by Professor Antoni Dudek, lecturer at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, historian and political scientist, who also once used to be a prominent researcher at the Institute of National Remembrance. And on behalf of the editorial staff of the magazine, there is myself and Filip Gańczak, PhD, as well as Bogusław Wójcik, PhD,

from the Rzeszów branch of the Institute of National Remembrance.

What were the factors of transformation, not only in the Soviet Union, but also in the Soviet bloc in general? What did the models that developed during this transformation look like, because they were diverse (even within the Soviet Union they were not uniform)? And the third issue I wanted to ask you about, or ask you to reflect on, is the question of what the plans were, that is what the actors of this transformation anticipated, what they wanted to achieve, what means they wanted to use, and what came of it, in the sense of: what did they succeed in, what did they have to adapt to, and what did they fail to adapt to? Professor Krzysztof Brzechczyn – please.

Krzysztof Brzechczyn (KB): Thank you for this question. It is extremely complex because what is referred to as transformation is actually the result of processes that took place on several levels. The first is the global level, that is relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the entire camp of socialist countries. The second level is the level of resistance or development of opposition in individual socialist countries or in individual Soviet republics. Here, one could distinguish a third level, namely the level of local leaders' reaction to what was happening in the 1980s, because here too, the strategies varied. If we wanted to present this in a didactic way – I have been thinking about it, because it is difficult to describe such processes in a vivid manner – then when we talk about the global level, three main figures certainly come to mind: Ronald Reagan, Mikhail Gorbachev and John Paul II. The direct political impact of John Paul II may be questioned, but it must be acknowledged that he gave spiritual meaning to what was happening in Central and Eastern Europe. Then, when we talk about the second level, the level of societies, the figures who symbolise the changes that took place during this period are undoubtedly Lech Wałęsa, Vaclav Havel and Vytautas Landsbergis. Moving on to the third level, that of local leaders, we should mention Wojciech Jaruzelski, Nicolae Ceauşescu and Boris Yeltsin. When we talk globally about the process of transformation, we need to clearly distinguish between what happened in Central and Eastern Europe, that is in the countries of the former Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, and what happened in the Soviet Union. Here we can say that in 1985, as we know, Gorbachev came to power, and a year later he announced *perestroika*. Now we can say that *perestroika* – at this point we can wonder what Gorbachev actually had in mind: as historians, we do not currently have access to Soviet archives – but what is referred to as perestroika basically meant three things: *perestroika*, that

transformation is actually the result of processes that took place on several levels. The first is the global level, that is relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the entire camp of socialist countries. The second level is the level of resistance or development of opposition in individual socialist countries or in individual Soviet republics. Here, one could distinguish a third level, namely the level of local leaders' reaction to what was happening in the 1980s

Prof. Krzysztof Brzechczyn

is restructuring; *glasnost*, openness; and *uskorenie*, acceleration. Gorbachev's goal was to compete more effectively with the United States; at least, that was what one might assume his goals were. He wanted to achieve these goals by modernising and reducing the bureaucracy of this ossified system of real socialism. In the first stage, this social change initiative was top-down: Gorbachev was the reformer. But this was met with a certain reaction from individual Soviet republics, as well as from individual societies in Central Europe. Depending on how strong the opposition was, how deep the economic crisis was in individual Central and Eastern European countries, and depending on the democratic changes, the paths of transformation proceeded in different ways. As a result, there are differences between Central and Eastern European countries and Poland, where Solidarity was formed half a decade earlier and the communists failed to suppress it in the 1980s, and Poland was therefore a pioneer of change. In Poland, contractual elections took place earlier than anywhere else, in June 1989, and it was not until late summer/early autumn that changes took place in the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. First, it was Hungary, where the Hungarian Round Table Talks began in mid-June, then on 9 November, the Berlin Wall was torn down, protests broke out and democratisation began in the German Democratic Republic, followed by the overthrow of Zhivkov in Bulgaria on 10 November, the start of the Velvet Revolution in the Czech Republic on 17 November, and in December, the revolution in Romania and the execution of Ceaușescu. This entire process of direct transformation ends when Havel is elected president by the Czechoslovak parliament. This "Autumn of Nations" in Central and Eastern Europe influenced what was happening in individual Soviet republics, because in 1990, and this was also an important date: 17 March 1990 – Lithuania declared independence, which marked the beginning of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The final chord was struck with the Belovezha Accords in 1991, but the paths of development of individual Soviet republics, already post-Soviet, depended on how strong civil society was in individual republics, which is why independence and secession from the Soviet Union came earliest in those republics. A stable democracy is being built in these countries, as evidenced by their membership of NATO and the European Union. In the republics of Central Asia, civil society was weak, there was a break away from the Soviet Union, independence was proclaimed, but these countries may have essentially changed their ideology but remain undemocratic. We can distinguish intermediate republics where there was some opposition and civil society, but it was too weak to take control of political life in the long term. I am referring to republics such as Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova. What is interesting is that the imperial centre, Moscow, as a result of the power struggle between Yeltsin and Gorbachev, watched the collapse of the empire quite passively, but an attempt to counteract this was to support self-proclaimed states, here I am referring to Transnistria in Moldova, Abkhazia, and

> what is referred to as *perestroika* basically meant three things: *perestroika*, that is restructuring; *glasnost*, openness; and *uskorenie*, acceleration.
>
> Prof. Krzysztof Brzechczyn

South Ossetia, which was an attempt to retain what remained of the control. That is all there is to say on the subject of political change, because alongside this, the transformation also brought about a change in the economic system, but that is a different topic, and I would like to give the floor to my colleagues and fellow debaters.

FD: Thank you. Professor Dudek, please.

Antoni Dudek (AD): If you were hoping for some kind of dispute between us, I'm afraid I don't see one at the moment, because I actually agree with everything Professor Brzechczyn has just said, so I will try to repeat it a little more briefly in a slightly different configuration, perhaps emphasising other points, and this may reveal some differences, because Professor Brzechczyn may disagree with something. So I will start by allowing myself to take a risk, although I will not specify the percentages, but I will list the factors in the order in which I see them, which determined the crisis of the Soviet empire, and thus the initiation of the transformation process. However, I definitely put the economy and economic inefficiency, which began to manifest itself – and here I refer to the research of some economic historians – as early as the late 1960s, at the forefront. At the end of the 1960s, the Soviet economy, and in fact most of the economies of the satellite countries, exhausted the possibilities of development based on the so-called extensive model, those huge state investments, [such as] Magnitogorsk and others, which culminated, let's say, in the success of the Soviet economy in space, because this was, indirectly, a success achieved through enormous effort, the fact that Gagarin was sent into space as the first man. However, this was done at the enormous cost of the standard of living. During the Brezhnev era, which coincided with this slowdown, attempts were made to maintain development up to a certain point through the era of détente, through a certain opening to the West, a certain warming of relations with the West, and also through increasing economic exchange. Countries such as Poland, which under the rule of [Edward] Gierek clearly [opened up to the West] – I believe, although we have no [evidence] of this, I will refer to what Professor Brzechczyn said here, that we are still groping in the dark due to the lack of open access to Soviet archives, we only have certain clues, certain fragments, certain partial documents – nevertheless, the entire Gierek's opening to the West was clearly, and we have confirmation of this in documents, legitimised and accepted by Moscow as a way of gaining technological momentum that would enable Poland to catch up with or compete on an equal footing with the West in economic terms. This is how the 1970s and early 1980s passed for the Soviet Union, and these activities brought limited results. These attempts at modernisation, whether based on loans or Western technology, ended in very limited success because certain technical solutions transferred from the West to real socialism did not necessarily work. It is not enough to have a specific technology for manufacturing a particular product if the entire economic

These attempts at modernisation, whether based on loans or Western technology, ended in very limited success because certain technical solutions transferred from the West to real socialism did not necessarily work.

Prof. Antoni Dudek

environment is different from that in the West, because then it suddenly turns out that the production of this or that item encounters enormous problems. At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, the Soviet Union found itself in a very difficult position for another reason, namely – I am not a military historian, but I have read analyses which suggest that by the end of the 1970s, the Soviet Army had reached the peak of its development in terms of various types of weapons, with a clear advantage over NATO or the Americans in some areas. However, this came at the cost of enormous expenditure. And then Ronald Reagan came along with his concept of a sharp increase in American military spending. Let me remind you that during the first two years of Reagan's administration, the Americans almost doubled their defence budget. It was a move on such an unimaginable scale that it paralysed the Russian side, because they realised that they no longer had those reserves. And this, in my opinion, accelerated the Soviet elite's conviction that "if we are to survive, we must change something." And the person who was supposed to embody this change was Gorbachev, who made a heroic attempt to modernise the Soviet empire, which, however, proved impossible to carry out. And this is, in my opinion, the deepest cause in the longest time frame. However, perestroika itself unleashed, one might say, various problems that had been building up for a long time, as Professor Brzechczyn mentioned. I would see these problems primarily in two areas: national and religious. The liberalisation of the system associated with perestroika meant that various forms of nationalism, which had previously been suppressed or hidden, both within the Soviet Union itself and in its satellite states, were given oxygen and the opportunity to become active, and the same was true of religious movements. This is not just about Christianity, it is also about Islam. If we look at the Asian republics of the Soviet Union, we can see it all – the war in Afghanistan, the Soviet defeat, which also plays a certain role here, especially in Central Asia. We are less interested in this because we are more interested in what Professor Brzechczyn rightly said about John Paul II. I agree with him that John Paul II's pontificate delegitimised communism in our part of Europe from a religious point of view. This is not just about Poland, but also about representatives of Catholics from other countries who came [to Poland] during papal pilgrimages, starting with the one in 1979. Of course, this did not have such a direct, simple and large-scale impact in Hungary, the Czech Republic or other countries of the [Soviet] bloc as it did in Poland, but these impulses were also present there. On top of that, there was the parallel experience of Solidarity – in my opinion, this was not such an important factor, because communist ideology had actually begun to die during the Khrushchev era, and it died definitively during Brezhnev's time, and one could say that Solidarity, the great workers' movement in the second country of the empire, a genuine mass workers' movement that was completely opposed to the communist movement, which was supposedly a workers' one at its inception and supposedly representing the interests of workers, slammed the lid on the coffin, so to

communist ideology had actually begun to die during the Khrushchev era, and it died definitively during Brezhnev's time
Prof. Antoni Dudek

speak. And this was, one might say, a collapse of a process that began somewhere around the time of the Soviet intervention in Hungary in 1956, [a process] of de-ideologisation of the system, but this was also evident in the reactions of communists in the West, especially the Prague Spring [1968] and its suppression – all this meant that communism as an ideology in its Soviet form was simply becoming increasingly decrepit and unbelievable. In my opinion, this also played an important role. I would also like to point out that when we talk about nationality issues, we look at them through the lens of the movements of nations subjugated by the Soviet empire, and rightly so – but one of those subjugated nations, which we rarely mention, was the German nation, two thirds of which was not subjugated, but built the most powerful economy in Europe, namely the Federal Republic of Germany, and when perestroika began in the Soviet Union, Helmut Kohl, colloquially speaking, smelled blood, smelled Soviet blood, of which he intended to buy as much as possible, that is to buy the unification of Germany. There are still many things we do not know about, such as special services' operations, etc., softening up the Soviet empire with various promises, all of which later materialised in the early 1990s in the form of huge financial transfers from the Federal Republic of Germany, official and unofficial ones (all of this was stolen anyway, both official and unofficial), which came from the FRG in order to convince not only Gorbachev himself and his entourage that it was worth going a step further, that it was no longer enough to allow some democratisation in these countries, but perhaps some elements of cooperation between the GDR and the FRG, and perhaps even reunification, and later, for the reunified Germany to also be in NATO. These subsequent stages are very important. Finally, and this is the last point I would like to make regarding models of transformation: there were as many models as there were countries that underwent this transformation, because in each of them the transformation looked a little different, but if we were to group them, I can clearly see two models of transformation. I will define them geographically – the Eastern model and the Western model. The Eastern model of transition is the one chosen by virtually all post-Soviet republics, with the exception of the Baltic states. Of course, the situation today is different in Ukraine, different in Azerbaijan, and still different in Kazakhstan. However, let us be clear: when we look at it through the lens of the past thirty years, we see that the common denominator is that no normal Western-style free market economy was built there, no Western-style liberal democracy was built there, or even attempted, and attempts were made, but unsuccessfully, to link up with Western military and political structures. In the Western model of transformation, with varying degrees of success, a Western-style market economy was built, a liberal democracy was established, functioning better or worse, and most of these countries managed to integrate into Western military, political and economic structures, by which I mean membership in the European Union and NATO. This obviously required the transformation to be carried out according to certain rules. Some countries were hesitant. Let me remind you of the case of Slovakia under Mečiar, which at one stage was not accepted into NATO along with the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary because there were some objections, but later Slovakia leaned

Gen. Czesław Kiszczak (left) and Lech Wałęsa (right) during the meeting in the Ministry of Internal Affairs villa at Zawrat street in Warsaw, 15 September 1988. Institute of National Remembrance Archives, ref. no. AIPN, 3333/66

more towards the West. And we had the opposite situation, where, for example, the case of Ukraine is spectacular, which is still at a crossroads, which for many years, in my opinion, until the Orange Revolution of 2004, followed the Eastern model of transformation, after which a group of supporters of Western-style transformation began to raise their heads there. This struggle continues to this day, although it is clear that for some time now, at least in Kiev, supporters of Western-style transformation have prevailed – and this is also what the war in the east is about. That's it, in a nutshell, of course I was speaking briefly, in slogans, I can expand on any topic, but I think it's time for Dr. Przeperski to take the floor.

FD: Thank you very much, I will definitely ask you a few more questions, but now it is time for Dr. Przeperski.

Michał Przeperski (MP): Thank you. So much has been said that I think it will be difficult to formulate any particularly insightful conclusions. I will express my opinion from a different angle. Not long ago, Fritz Bartel published an inspiring book entitled *The Triumph of Broken Promises. The End of the Cold War and the Rise of Neoliberalism* (Harvard University Press, 2022). What are the broken promises we are dealing with in 1989? According to Bartel, promises are broader development models and related social contracts that have emerged

in complex ways in the East and West, in the democratic capitalist West and in the communist undemocratic East. According to him, there are generally two orders and two types of social contracts – the Eastern one and the Western one. While from the Polish, Central European perspective, it is quite obvious that they differ primarily in that the Eastern models were imposed and could not exist without terror, violence and the bayonets of the Red Army, Bartel does not focus on this at all but tries to find similarities. And the similarity is that, until around 1973 (the year of the first oil crisis), communism and capitalism, East and West, had basically the same ideas about each other. Both fundamentally assume that there will be growth, a bright future and progress. However, Bartel goes on to say that the proportions we find on both sides are different: how much we invest and how much we consume. A similar perspective will raise serious doubts, but why is this important and worthy of our attention?

... that until around 1973 (the year of the first oil crisis), communism and capitalism, East and West, had basically the same ideas about each other. Both fundamentally assume that there will be growth, a bright future and progress

Michał Przeperski, PhD

This reasoning shows – and this is why I am starting with this book – that it is the global economy that decides (and global economic cycles, which do not follow any easily graspable rules – we do not fully understand why they work the way they do, there is an element of chaos here, it is a given). And this element brought about a fundamental collapse in global reality in the early 1970s. Moving on, we can note that the 1970s were a period during which the West adapted to new economic conditions (primarily in terms of access to energy resources), while the East failed to do so. The East began to adapt to the new global conditions only in the 1980s. It is from this perspective that I want to look at the process of *perestroika*. *Perestroika*, understood as an economic process, as an attempt at adaptation by the Soviet Union, but also by other – not all, but most – of the Soviet-dominated countries of Central Europe: in the 1980s, communist countries attempted to adapt to global realities. This delay also stems from what we have been discussing: the broader entry of communist countries into global markets [has been taking place] since around the end of the 1960s, that is roughly since the moment when they experimented with Kosygin's reforms, which were intended to marketise the Stalinist Soviet economy that had been shaken up by Khrushchev. These reforms failed in the Soviet Union, but were successful to a certain extent in Hungary, for example [as] the New Economic Mechanism. Similar solutions were experimented with in Bulgaria and East Germany, but they failed in Poland because Bolesław Jaszczuk [a member of the party's inner circle responsible for economic policy] was removed along with the entire Gomułka team after December 1970. One of the components of these reforms was to open up to the West in various ways, such as building cooperation chains and looking for customers for products from Eastern European countries. Why is all this important? Because the 1980s were a moment of crisis for the communist model of development, which had been created in the 1960s, developed in the 1970s, but found itself in deep stagnation in the 1980s. Firstly, because energy became more expensive (the second oil shock in 1979

was also significant), and secondly, budgetary policy changed fundamentally, for instance what we now call neoliberalism became dominant in the countries of the global West. In other words, new impetus was needed, not only economic – a new impetus for what [Leopold] Tyrmand described as "the civilisation of communism." And although the economy is the foundation, the main point of reference, we would not have all this if it were not for the *par excellence* political decision in 1985 that Gorbachev would become the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, and then that Gorbachev understood the reforms in this way and not otherwise. The reforms could have taken various forms, such as an another attempt to introduce the so-called *uskorenie*, which Andropov experimented with in 1983: it was a kind of disciplining of the system. Meanwhile, what Gorbachev did was primarily to open up the system; he allowed more and more unorthodox possibilities into it, weakening the centre's power and control. This is how Gorbachev attacked the Soviet party apparatus in his Krasnodar speech in September 1986. As a result of all this, the party apparatus ceased to be responsive and began to fear and doubt. Gradually, this spread further (nationalism is one example). Another series of examples that could be given is from January 1987, following the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on 20 January 1987, laws were pushed through, which were later sent to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and became Soviet law. These were laws concerning property and other uses of property in the Soviet Union, such as the introduction of agencies. All these little things can be compared to microorganisms that were introduced into the Soviet organism, which until then had been compact…

AD: And then there was Chernobyl, if I may interrupt you.

KB: Yes.

MP: Absolutely, although I don't want to elaborate on that topic at the moment, because…

AD: It is worth mentioning, when listing these factors, Chernobyl and its consequences.

MP: That's true, I'm getting to the end, because I just want to say a few things about politics and society. Gorbachev's idea was "let's allow more," while implicitly indicating the red lines. These were, in particular, a reorientation towards the West and the abandonment of the primacy of communist parties. In a nutshell, it can be said that the intention was to introduce a quasi-Chinese model, where the Communist Party retains political power and, in essence, economic power as well, but the market is allowed to operate relatively freely. It was a political game: could it have worked? It probably could have.

it can be said that the intention was to introduce a quasi-Chinese model, where the Communist Party retains political power and, in essence, economic power as well, but the market is allowed to operate relatively freely
Michał Przeperski, PhD

AD: Michał, I'll just throw in one interjection: I completely agree with you, and my response is: this game worked, except that instead of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, you have to insert a secret services' corporation, and you have Putin's regime – this is a different version of the Chinese model: a secret services' corporation took over the whole business, full stop.

MP: Exactly. Let us add that the view of economic necessity as a factor in the collapse of the communist empire is exaggerated. Let's look at the economic necessity. The actions of Putin's government, which found itself in a really difficult economic situation in 2022–24, show that when you grit your teeth and are willing to make far-reaching sacrifices, you are simply able to tighten your belt. In this sense, the years 1985–1991 were a time of recalibrating ambitions. And a few words about societies. Why are some societies undergoing this transformation faster than others? And I would like to disagree with Professor Brzechczyn, if I understood his point correctly, that we are dealing with any kind of 'civil society' in this part of Europe. There is no such thing in the realm of social reality. In the Polish version, please: where is a 'civil society'? It is in Leszek Miller's speech at the 10th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party in [January] 1989, when he says: "What we want [as a party – MP] is a socialist civil society." A moment later, there is a Resolution of the 10th Plenum of the Central Committee of 18 January 1989 on changes in the party, and the position of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party on "political pluralism and trade union pluralism," and this is excellent because it shows that this was a very fashionable slogan at the time, right? On the other hand, one could argue that there was opposition. Jan Olaszek was not the only one to write about the fact that there is a lot of activity surrounding the 'second circulation' [the *samizdat*], which we identify, sometimes somewhat instinctively, with civil society. I am not convinced by this, as we are talking about a very limited group of people who were involved in this activity for a whole range of different reasons. The idealisation that this was a kind of 'civil society' is, in my opinion, unconvincing…

AD: And what about the Citizens' Committee?

MP: The Citizens' Committee would be a significant argument against my thesis. Finally, to what extent did societies shape the transformation, and from which moment? I think that in Poland, the date of 4 June 1989 is a reason to celebrate the political agency of Poles. At that time, the political decision of millions clearly shaped reality. And when did this happen in other countries? In Romania, for example, referring to Bogdan C. Iacob's research, I think we need to look for this moment deep in the 1990s, and who knows, maybe even after 2000. It is no coincidence that Ion Iliescu was president of an institution [*Institutul Revoluției Române din Decembrie 1989*, Institute of the Romanian Revolution of December 1989, IRRD] between 2004 and 2021, which, for lack of a better comparison, could be likened to the [Polish] Institute of National Remembrance. So imagine, for example, that Czesław Kiszczak becomes head of the IPN, and remains so for many years.

KB: Let me respond to that, specifically what I understand by the term 'civil society.' Of course, I do not mean what is currently understood in liberal democracy, such as the activities of NGOs, because such organisations did not exist in communist systems. I use this term in the sense that it is a certain social activity that can be institutionalised, but does not have to be, and that manifests itself and is carried out outside of regulation or control by the authorities. In this sense, in the 1980s, we had opposition activities, an independent publishing circuit, the publication of

[independent] magazines, the distribution of these magazines, and according to the Security Service, several hundred thousand people were involved in this independent or opposition activity, although this number obviously changed over time. The scale of this independent activity in Poland, compared to, for example, Romania or Bulgaria, was incomparable, and at a certain point, this independent activity led to an early agreement between the communist authorities and the opposition. In this respect, the differences between Poland and other countries were qualitative in nature, and virtually every researcher who studies opposition activity on such a comparative scale must admit this. Was this a lot or a little? That's another matter. Referring to Dr. Przeperski's statement, does the fact that these changes took place earlier in Poland mean that Poland benefited from them or not? I would say that, on the one hand, the signal sent by society on 4 June [1989] was not so clear: firstly, around 62% of those eligible to vote took part in the elections. In the opinion of the opposition at the time, this was rather low. It was a bit of a surprise – why was the turnout so low? On the other hand, the so called national list [of the Polish United Workers' Party] lost – meaning that those who took part in the elections did not accept [prominent communist activists]. The opposition press, at least the radical, pro-independence press, emphasised that the case of the national list was a sign that the process of changes had been planned over too long a time horizon. When you look back at the autumn of 1989, you can defend Lech Wałęsa or the then 'constructive opposition' for their caution, because it was not clear how the Soviet Union would react, what would happen if we went a little too far. But what did we see in the autumn of 1989? For example, in Hungary, agreement was reached on free parliamentary elections, and these free, democratic elections took place in March of the following year. There was the fall of the Berlin Wall. In Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel was elected president on 29 December [1989]. And here in Poland, in the autumn of 1989, the arrangement established at the Round Table was still in place. Regimes are falling in Central Europe, the [Communist] party is disintegrating, and here, as [Bronisław] Geremek said, *pacta sunt servanda*, this arrangement of dual power in Poland continues. It is a paradox that free parliamentary elections were held in Poland in the autumn of 1991, which was the latest date in the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. The paradox lies, among other things, in the fact that Poland was one of the first countries to embark on reforms, but these were spread over a period of two years. Professor Dudek aptly pointed out in his book that we were dealing with a "regulated revolution" – this was not a revolution like the first Solidarity movement [1980–1981]. Jadwiga Staniszkis spoke of a "self-limiting revolution" (J. Staniszkis, *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution*, Princeton University Press, 1984, 2nd ed. 2019), that is the self-restraint came from below, but we were dealing with a "regulated revolution"; the use of the adjective 'regulated' raises the question: who carried out this regulation? Who was responsible for that? This, in turn, leads to the question of the extent to which the transformation, both in Poland and across the entire bloc, was spontaneous and grassroots, and to what extent it was planned and controlled by the KGB and the secret services. We can refer to Jadwiga Staniszkis' article

"Fragment większej całości" [A fragment of a larger whole], which she published in *Tygodnik Solidarność* in the autumn of 1989 (*Tygodnik Solidarność* 21/1989, 27 October 1989).

FD: Thank you. I admit that while listening to you and immediately taking some notes, I also wrote down my own comments, but I decided to wait with that. There would probably be too many. One thing occurred to me that seems to have been omitted here among the triggers [of transformation], perhaps because it has to do with the fact that the opposition's participation in any changes in the entire Soviet bloc, let alone the Soviet Union itself, was, to put it mildly, uneven. The trigger for the opposition, regardless of whether it was small or strong, whether it had a greater or lesser impact on public sentiment, was undoubtedly the Helsinki Accords – and this is also something that touches on the *Schlagwort* – if we treat it as a *Schlagwort* – of 'civil society," a slogan that politicians and ideologues sometimes use to say what they want to do with society or with the civic community. When we disconnect ourselves from this use of the term, we see that the Helsinki Accords introduced an element that provided breathing space, provided space for opposition (but not only opposition) to express itself and to build a completely independent [social] representation. This is important from our, Polish, point of view, because it was understood here, let's say, but not only here, in Czechoslovakia as well. The point is that the opposition in Poland had certain influence, or, how should I put it, a projection of aspirations, or a projection of social authority (if I may put it that way, I'm sure I've expressed it imprecisely, but it's something I've come up with just now) – in the sense that this opposition did not have to be large or have any measurable factors of influence, such as [numbers], how many newspapers, books, leaflets it distributed, etc., or how many people were involved in specific actions in workplaces, or how many workplaces went on strike in 1988, but it also had an emotional projection, that is, a society that was tired, destroyed by the conditions of existence, simply chose: "Who do you want to be with? Which side are you on?" The potential for protest, dissent and discontent does not always translate into civic engagement and self-organisation within society, but if we look at what Solidarity proposed as its political system within the framework of this 'self-restraint' in 1988–1989 as its political proposal, it was a Self-Governing Republic, that is a Republic built from the bottom up. This is also a question of how much this was a slogan resulting from what Professor Brzechczyn called the 'civic society' of the time, and how much it was an assumption that this was all we could achieve [in the political conditions of 1989] or build. And the second issue is the extent to which this 'civil society' had any sense of community – because while we can say that the Baltic states lost their independence much later, a whole generation later than the rest of the nations of the Soviet Union, but we also see the potential for dissent, for example in Ukraine, which was also significant until the 1950s. On the other

the Helsinki Accords introduced an element that provided breathing space, provided space for opposition (but not only opposition) to express itself and to build a completely independent [social] representation
Franciszek Dąbrowski, PhD

hand, we can see that this did not necessarily translate into democratic transformation, but rather into undemocratic transformation, or transformation towards nothingness or conflict, if we look at what happened in the 1990s in the South Caucasus. Georgia was a failed state, and Russia was building these "conflict pockets" in the form of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Adjara and Nagorno-Karabakh, in a way building up political assets for itself with the help of conflicts that had just flared up at that time. Or we talk about Islam as a factor, let's say, fragmenting the Soviet Union, while we see that in fact in Central Asia, party officials seized power, and in Ukraine something similar almost happened (I don't want to be mistaken here). On the other hand, Belarus is a rather special case, because after the introduction of a formally functioning procedural democracy, which seemed to be working quite well, within a few years it turned into a dictatorship. As to whether – which coincides [in time] with the Helsinki momentum – the governments [of the Soviet bloc countries] were able to cope with the military and economic challenges of the 1970s and 1980s – the answer is obvious: they were unable to absorb the money they received from the West, they were unable to absorb technology, their technological backwardness was already very significant at the end of the 1960s, but despite everything, these countries still had potential, which meant that this backwardness was the result of deeply incompetent governments. This calls into question whether these governments were capable of mobilising themselves for anything more than simply staying in power. Perhaps this is another element of the de-ideologisation and, consequently, delegitimisation of communist governments.

AD: … I will try to refer to what Professor Brzechczyn said a moment ago, because this is a topic we need to discuss, as it arouses the strongest public emotions: who regulated these changes in Poland – and let's focus on Poland, I don't want to talk about other countries, although this is closely related. Since Jadwiga Staniszkis' famous article about the "KGB crisis centre" that orchestrated the entire collapse of communism in Poland, a whole school of conspiracy theories has flourished, claiming that the entire transformation was in fact the work of the Soviet secret services. This occurs, of course, with varying degrees of intensity. Let me remind you of the late Dr. Jerzy Targalski, who devoted a huge number of pages to prove that it was all staged, although even he admitted at some point that the changes had got out of control, though I am not entirely sure when he thought this happened. But I do not wish to argue with Dr. Targalski here. I would like to present my point of view on this matter – because, since I am the author of the term "regulated revolution", the title itself (as Professor Brzechczyn rightly pointed out) suggests that someone did indeed regulate these changes, that someone tried to control them. My hypothesis is that there was no single control centre, either on the scale of the entire Soviet bloc or even on the scale of Poland, but there were various centres which tried to set the tone for this transformation, with the two most important ones at this critical moment in 1989–1990 centred, on the one hand, around General [Wojciech] Jaruzelski and, on the other, around Prime Minister [Tadeusz] Mazowiecki, or earlier Lech Wałęsa, but in reality Prime Minister Mazowiecki. I would argue that the restrictions were imposed because

Mazowiecki and virtually the entire leadership of the ruling camp at the time, which had its roots in Solidarity, were living in the shadow of what I call the "13 December [1981] syndrome". Namely, they remembered how they had been activists in a great social movement that seemed unbeatable because it represented around 10 million people, and then they witnessed how, practically overnight, this movement was brought to its knees and, within literally a few days, paralysed – not completely destroyed, but paralysed effectively enough that it never revived in such a massive form. Therefore, in my opinion, the most important factor influencing not only Mazowiecki's decisions, but also those of many other people who worked with him, was the belief that they were in a minefield, that one careless move and, in some other version, 13 December [1981] would repeat itself. And this impression, in my opinion, was significantly fuelled by the other side, which, although I suspect it was aware that there was no ammunition left in the gun, did not wave it around ostentatiously, but did so discreetly, not in a way that the public could see, but quietly, somewhere in the background, showing the gun to Mazowiecki and his people, saying, "Listen, be careful, because you know, things could get messy." Of course, this was done to save certain sectors of the economy. It wasn't a case of "we won't let you change the name of the country, we won't let you have a constitution" – no, no: "go ahead and do whatever you want." It was a defence of certain segments of the state, the most important of which was the army. Well, I dare say that Jaruzelski, even when he was leaving office as president, retained enormous informal influence in the army, as a kind of insurance policy, in case something very bad happened, he assumed that the generals he had created would continue to guarantee his security to some extent for many years to come. It wasn't a formal agreement, it was a kind of social dependency, and there were many such models of social dependency at various levels down the hierarchy. In other words, different people, and I'm not just talking about Security Service agents blackmailing prominent figures with stolen, hidden material, no. It concerns a much larger number of processes that are impossible to reconstruct today, but for which we find clues, for example in the famous banking sector. This sector was developing dynamically, based on people who were not from the core of the Communist Party, because they did not really know anything about banking, but rather people from around the party, around the power. These were, for example, people who went to America on a scholarship in the 1980s, completed economics studies there, and suddenly found themselves in the banks and started making decisions about credit policy. In those days, to put it bluntly, every business was dubious and difficult to verify rationally, and in my opinion, these loans were granted on a 'hit or miss' basis, and in reality they were given to specific people because they seemed more credible than others, because we knew them, because they had come across us before. And suddenly a certain structure began to be built. Why this is the case, and this is the second

I dare say that Jaruzelski, even when he was leaving office as president, retained enormous informal influence in the army, as a kind of insurance policy

Prof. Antoni Dudek

type of complex – as I have mentioned the 13 December syndrome, I want to talk about the qualification complex. This becomes very clear when talking to some people from the first four Solidarity governments who were responsible for the economic sector in the finance ministry, the privatisation ministry, etc. One of them, who can be found in my book, uses the following argument in response to the question: "Why did people more closely associated with the former communist party apparatus than with the opposition become bank presidents, important people who made decisions about the entire financial sector?" The answer was: "We couldn't make the Solidarity treasurer, who counted contributions, the president of a bank. What qualifications did he have? He wouldn't be able to cope." And here we had a candidate who, for example, completed their postgraduate studies in economics at Columbia University. So, since he had a degree from Columbia, it didn't matter that he had previously worked in the Office of the Council of Ministers, etc., we gave him the job because he knew what he was doing and guaranteed that he would manage in the bank." In my opinion, there were hundreds, thousands of similar decisions, and they built something that the other side, the radical right, later considered as evidence of a conspiracy, an all-encompassing conspiracy that caused our people to be cut down, and they, the Reds, are everywhere. Meanwhile, it was the result of both factors I mentioned – the 13 December syndrome and the qualification complex. In fact, if these decisions had been different, and the balance of power had been slightly different, and only people affected by these two characteristics had made them, and then 1993 happened [the parliamentary elections won by post-communist parties]. The way of thinking I have outlined could change, I suspect that it would evolve, but since 1993, decisions in Poland have once again been made by people who come from that [communist] system, and they obviously support their own people, not those from the opposing camp. I don't believe in any conspiracies, but I do believe in a certain force of gravity, the pressure of the old system and its remnants, which could not be removed for one simple reason: there was no grassroots social pressure. All those who talk – and this is my last point – about the betrayal of the Solidarity elites fail to take into account that these elites were always, to some extent, influenced by the lower classes. If the lower classes put pressure on them in a particular matter, they did something about it. If they didn't press, they didn't do it. In this context, I always give my favourite, highly symbolic example from January 1990, when the public learned that secret service files were being burned somewhere in rubbish dumps. On this basis, organisations such as Fighting Solidarity, the Confederation of Independent Poland, and the Federation of Fighting Youth began to organise demonstrations aimed at protesting against the destruction of files by the security service. According to my findings, the largest demonstration of this kind, involving around a thousand people, took place in Poznań. These demonstrators attempted to occupy the headquarters of the Voivodeship Office of Internal Affairs in Poznań, but they were confronted by 1,800 militiamen, so they had no chance of succeeding. Meanwhile, in neighbouring East Germany, on almost the same day or on the same days in January, around 100,000 residents of East Berlin

occupied the Stasi headquarters and stopped the ongoing destruction of documents. This is also the most important explanation for the limited nature of these changes: there was simply no pressure. If in January in Poznań not 100,000 but 30 to 40,000 thousand, and in Warsaw 80 or 100,000 had gathered around relevant institutions to demand more decisive actions from Mazowiecki's government, these measures would have been implemented immediately. But these demonstrations did not take place – although attempts were made to organise such a demonstration, so it cannot be said that people did not know – they knew, it was announced that the demonstrations would take place. Simply no one wanted to go, because apparently people did not think it was that important to them, that the secret police were so terrible that they had to take action now and hold them accountable, so that at least the documents of their crimes would not be destroyed. Social passivity is a factor that we must bear in mind when discussing civil society. I think that Dr. Przeperski's thesis that it did not exist at all in Poland is too harsh. Nevertheless, the beginnings of this civil society were quite poor, in the form of underground publishing and later of citizens' committees. However, before these citizens' committees had time to do anything, they started to quarrel. The outbreak of the 'war at the top' [the conflict between Lech Wałęsa and Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki in 1990] and personal ambitions, already visible in the autumn of 1989, paralysed the opposition movement, which began to focus largely on itself, as evidenced by the 'war at the top' and the unfortunate presidential elections [1990]. That is my answer to the question concerning the regulation of these changes in Poland. I think that this story is slightly different for each country in the Soviet bloc, but the ending is actually quite similar. When changes occur, they follow the concepts of Western advisors, specifically the International Monetary Fund in the economic sphere, and in terms of political and constitutional issues, the concepts of specialists from the European Economic Community / European Community / European Union and European integration. These are the Copenhagen Criteria, but I do not want to elaborate on this now. This is what transformation looks like in Poland and other countries that eventually joined the European Union, and NATO. I don't want to say that this transformation was imposed on us, but it had been suggested by the West and we accepted it. We could have rejected it, but I want to tell everyone who thinks we should not have taken it, that in my opinion, we would now be somewhere between Belarus and Ukraine. That is my deep, unprovable conviction.

> Social passivity is a factor that we must bear in mind when discussing civil society. I think that Dr. Przeperski's thesis that it did not exist at all in Poland is too harsh. Nevertheless, the beginnings of this civil society were quite poor, in the form of underground publishing and later of citizens' committees
>
> Prof. Antoni Dudek

FD: However, it seems to me that these changes are not just a matter of motivation on the part of certain important political actors to do or postpone something, but also of a widely held belief. Those societies that wanted to join NATO and the European Union were able to do so and made such demands, even if their political elites were unable to keep up. The example of the

Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine is quite significant.

KB: It's more complicated than that. The question is rather: "What do we mean by conspiracy?" This immediately takes us into the realm of conspiracy theories. According to conspiracy theories, the participants in the conspiracy have control over all the consequences of their actions; they control everything.

FD: It seems more likely that there were actions taken by [a certain number of] actors, or even small circles. But it is difficult to talk about conspiracies that would be able to control [everything] on a large scale. [Conspirators usually] have contingency plans.

KB: Exactly, but that's not the case. But that doesn't mean there are no conspiracies in society or in history. Examples from history – The November Uprising [1830 in Poland] – this is a classic example of a conspiracy that failed. The conspirators knew that the Russians were investigating them, and to avoid arrest, they provoked an uprising.

FD: When dealing with a dictatorship, not everything can be done openly.

KB: Yes. But when it comes to elements of continuity, and if we use the word revolution, there has never been a revolution in the world that has completely broken with the past. Even the Bolsheviks after 1917 had to use specialists, both in the army and engineers. But on the other hand, the fact that these specialists and experts must be present in every system does not mean that they are not aware of their role. Returning to the transitional period in question, we can recall the conversation between Wojciech Jaruzelski and Egon Krenz, which took place on 2 October 1989. The transcript of this conversation includes the phrase "we are retaining the controlling stake." This statement proves that there was a rudimentary awareness that we [i.e., the communist state] were becoming more democratic, but that certain key areas had to remain under our [i.e., the communist party's] control. If we look at the composition of Mazowiecki's government, we see that the Ministry of National Defence was headed by a member of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), the Ministry of Internal Affairs by Czesław Kiszczak, the central bank (National Bank of Poland) by Władysław Baka, also a member of the PZPR, …

AD: … The Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations – Marcin Święcicki (member of the Central Committee), and Communications [Ministry of Transport and Maritime Economy] – Franciszek Wielądek. …

KB: … Yes. Professor Dudek described in his latest book what happened with the judiciary and the National Council of the Judiciary (Antoni Dudek, *O historii. Narodziny III RP*, Warsaw: WAB, 2024). In this case, too, certain deliberate changes can be seen, aimed at making judges appointed during the communist era irremovable. I am not a proponent of the theory of a universal conspiracy, but it was a difficult situation, a period of transition, and these post-*nomenklatura* circles somehow supported each other. Whether in the media (which is also an important aspect here), the judiciary,

we can recall the conversation between Wojciech Jaruzelski and Egon Krenz, which took place on 2 October 1989. The transcript of this conversation includes the phrase "we are retaining the controlling stake"
Prof. Krzysztof Brzechczyn

or the economy. Understanding the issue of controlling transformation processes depends on the perspective related to the moment in which we are talking. When we refer to a process that is beginning, we may be aware that something has started, in which year, but we do not know exactly what the effects of this process will be. If we were talking about Russia 30 years ago, we could have said, "It's great, there's Gorbachev, he wants to democratise, there will be a free market, Russia will be a normal country." If this conversation about Russia and the transformation of the Soviet Union had taken place in 1999, we could have discussed the problems of this economic transformation. However, the hypothesis or assertion that the power structures in this country maintain control over the entire society could [at that time] be considered a manifestation of a conspiracy theory. But when we talk about Russia in 2024, when we already know, first of all, that Putin comes from the KGB, and secondly, that he came to power and exercises it thanks to the *siloviki* and power structures, it is difficult to hypothesise about a transformation in Russia…

FD: The question is, what were they [the communist security police] able to control? I believe that if we do not break out of this pattern, which forces us to look for far-reaching attempts to maintain control over the situation, such as: to what extent the *Statní Bezpečnost* tried to manipulate Czechoslovak demonstrators in November 1989, or how the Romanian military carried out the revolution, not to mention the KGB and the army in the Soviet Union itself, or if we start talking about a conspiracy of the elites, or, on the other hand, start using slogans about civil societies that liberated themselves without any negative emotions or immediately revealing some kind of community skills – we will not break out of one of the patterns, such as either constructing the so-called 'positive message' or constructing a negative message. Meanwhile, the question arises as to whether we are able to arrive at a situation in which an objective description of the collapse of the Soviet empire, as well as the break-up of Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia, is possible within this very framework. In short, are we able to describe how the empire of the Second World collapsed?

KB: No factor can be eliminated from this description. The economy played a role here, as did the influence of Islam, spiritual and ideological issues, and political factors such as the development of an independent society or opposition structures, or the actions of the ruling apparatus itself, its individual structures and segments. Some of these actions [by the apparatus] were deliberate, others were a response to the situation. The problem is how to rank these factors. Which are essential, important and should be mentioned at the beginning of the description, and which are secondary and supplementary. In my opinion, it is important to skilfully prioritise these various transformative factors, both those operating within a given society and those of a geopolitical nature.

MP: I disagree with Prof. Brzechczyn, who said that all factors must be identified. It is not possible to identify all factors. It reminds me of Marcin Zaremba's book, *Wielkie rozczarowanie* [The Great Disappointment], which is excellent in many ways, where at the beginning the author sets himself the goal of identifying what led to the creation of Solidarity (M. Zaremba, *Wielkie rozczarowanie. Geneza rewolucji Solidarności*,

Cracow: Znak, 2023). At the end of this book, we are indeed presented with a multitude of factors, but in terms of explanation, it leaves us feeling unsatisfied. However, was there one factor that seemed to dominate the others? If I say that in the case of transformation, the decisive factor would be sought in the social aspect, or perhaps Professor Dudek [would say] that it would be rather the economic aspect, then that is fine, these are differences of interpretation. I believe you will agree that we have a factual description. It's not that we have huge gaps. We do, of course, have some gaps in our knowledge: for example, the role of Western corporations. They are active players in transformation processes. Yes, in the first half of the 1990s, and in the second half of the 1980s too, actually – it's difficult to analyse. So we do not differ fundamentally in our description, we differ in our interpretation. In this case, the interpretations of Professor Jadwiga Staniszkis, which seem somewhat extravagant from today's perspective, were invoked. Of course, there are more names. Jerzy Targalski is outstanding when it comes to description – an expert, polyglot, erudite, and at the same time a man who failed to cope with interpretation. This is evidenced by his five-volume work, which is as impressive as it is alarming in terms of the level of interpretation (J. Targalski, *Służby specjalne i pieriestrojka. Rola służb specjalnych i ich agentur w pieriestrojce i demontażu komunizmu w Europie Sowieckiej*, Vol. 1–5, Warszawa-Komorów, 2017). …

FD: … Zybertowicz…

MP: … We didn't have authors like Targalski; we don't have anyone who could intellectually encompass the entire Soviet bloc, but as I said, this interpretation is not entirely accurate.

One more thing I wanted to say at the end, regarding these interpretations. Certain bold interpretations, sometimes considered conspiracy theories, for example Andrzej Zybertowicz's *W uścisku tajnych służb* [In the grip of the secret services] (A. Zybertowicz, *W uścisku tajnych służb. Upadek komunizmu i układ postnomenklaturowy*, Komorów, 1993), but also various popular perceptions of [the negotiations in] Magdalenka [between the communist government and representatives of Solidarity in 1988–1989] as a betrayal of the Round Table, not even a dark legend of the Round Table [in Poland in 1989], but something more. Professor Dudek mentioned his favourite examples, so I will give you mine: the Hungarian political myth – a political invention, but also a myth, called the *Rózsadomb Paktum* myth, or the myth of the Rózsadomb Pact. Rózsadomb is the most beautiful district of Budapest. It was there that, allegedly, on 15 March 1989, representatives of the USSR, the USA, Israel, the Hungarian political elite and religious leaders met. During this meeting, a 20-point agreement was allegedly concluded, ensuring the safe takeover of power by the communist elite in exchange for the peaceful withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. The list of alleged participants included successive prime ministers, the leader of the Hungarian Democratic Forum, József Antall, and the leader of the post-communists, Gyula Horn. When it comes to facts, this is clearly a fabrication. However, there is something more important at stake. Conspiracy thinking is possible when there is no space in the public sphere to articulate certain views. Therefore, in the early 1990s, during the Antall government (1990–1993), political correctness prevented questions about

accountability or, for example, about what was happening to the assets of the MSZMP, the Hungarian Communist Party. This created an excellent climate for conspiracy theories to flourish on the margins of society. In Poland, conspiracy theories were also quite prevalent in the 1990s. Anthropology clearly shows that such seemingly absurd ideas and explanatory prostheses appear when certain questions cannot be [openly] asked. We cannot ask questions in the public space we co-create, so we escape with these questions underground, where they evolve into various oddities and searches for different, to put it euphemistically, unorthodox explanations. At the end of our discussion, it is worth noting how we talk about transformational topics. In my opinion, after thirty-five years, transformation as a political myth is still going strong. At the same time, its power [impact] is waning, remaining astonishingly strong, but waning nonetheless. Therefore, I would venture to predict that in ten years' time, this myth will no longer have any significant mobilising power in current politics. This is important because it will leave this topic largely to historians. Today, for example, martial law [in Poland in 1981] evokes such strong emotions, as it affected the lives of people who are still important, active, shape the public sphere, hold important positions, speak out and create narratives about our reality today. Over time, this will change and we will also be able to break out of this vicious circle of myths. With the passage of time, we are closer to this truth, because the component of current political use is disappearing, and the transformation will increasingly become history. In the most extreme sense, an event becomes historical when its last witnesses pass away. Of course, we still have a long way to go. However, when witnesses and participants cease to play such important roles in public life, this is a very significant moment. The temperature of the dispute over transformation is changing. Let us recall the emotions aroused by *Reglamentowana rewolucja* [The Regulated Revolution] when it was published, and how much controversy it caused (A. Dudek, *Reglamentowana rewolucja. Rozkład dyktatury komunistycznej w Polsce 1988–1990*, Cracow: Arcana, 2004). Today, it is still a classic book that continues to be read, but naturally it no longer evokes such strong emotions.

> In my opinion, after thirty--five years, transformation as a political myth is still going strong
> Michał Przeperski PhD

FD: It's a reference book, quite simply.

MP: We are clear about its quality. The point is that this is a book that used to be exciting, but today it simply isn't exciting anymore.

KB: It's also a kind of strategy: instead of arguing, it's best to ignore. While we are on the subject of regulation and conspiracies – I don't like using that term, a better description would be 'the hidden side of social processes'. This hidden side…

FD: … "the second room," as one Polish politician called it in the 1990s…

KB: … it does occur. A classic example is the Rywin Affair [a corruption scandal in Poland in 2002 involving changes to media law in exchange for a significant bribe]. Let us assume that Adam Michnik does not publish the recording of his conversation with Lew Rywin and an article appears somewhere in *Gazeta Polska* stating that Rywin came to Michnik and demanded 17 million zlotys or some other amount for passing a bill.

This would be considered a manifestation of paranoia and a conspiracy theory, etc. When *Gazeta Wyborcza* published this, and what is more, a special parliamentary commission was later appointed to investigate the affair, it revealed in an authoritative way the hidden side of all political decisions made, which are not, were not recorded in the sources. Thanks to the circumstances mentioned, they were recorded. Therefore, I do not wish to disregard this hidden side of the social and political process, but this does not mean that what is happening in this sphere of hidden processes is of fundamental or essential importance. It depends on the circumstances, on specific facts and specific processes. This will inevitably be the case in these transformation processes. For the simple reason that these changes were initiated by the state authorities and the process of making these decisions and consulting on them is, by its very nature, confidential.

AD: On my part, I would like to sum up by referring to what Dr. Przeperski said – how I see the prospects for discussion about transformation in the future. I disagree with him on one point: as someone who initiated heated discussions about martial law in the 1990s and participated in them, I have the impression that over the last dozen or so years, the temperature of these discussions and interest in the subject of martial law has rapidly declined, and I have the impression that something similar is beginning to happen with the turning point of 1989 and the whole discussion about transformation. And I make no secret of the fact that this makes me very happy. What does it mean that this temperature is dropping? It means that politicians are less interested in it, less inclined to impose various narratives and distort or exaggerate them. What politicians are really interested in is that they take some historian, some of his thesis, and present it in a grotesque form, because they are usually unable to repeat sensibly what that historian had to say. So I am very happy that the whole debate on transformation will slowly move from the political arena to the academic arena, although this process will obviously not happen within the next year or even several years. But it will definitely happen within a dozen or so years. This is very good news for us, as people involved in transformation, because I make no secret of the fact that the influence of politicians has not been conducive to historical and academic debate. What do I hope will weaken this trend? The departure, hopefully within the next dozen or so years, or perhaps even sooner, of those people whom I call representatives of the '89 generation from Polish politics. By this I mean those who entered the political scene with a great bang around 1989. Just as they entered, some left it for a moment, while others remained and have survived to this day. Admittedly, there are only a few such personalities left, but they are extremely influential on all sides, and when we bid them a fond farewell (I must admit that

as someone who initiated heated discussions about martial law in the 1990s and participated in them, I have the impression that over the last dozen or so years, the temperature of these discussions and interest in the subject of martial law has rapidly declined, and I have the impression that something similar is beginning to happen with the turning point of 1989 and the whole discussion about transformation

Prof. Antoni Dudek

I am eagerly awaiting that day), there will be a chance that their successors will be less involved in this. They will, of course, wave this banner; the tradition of Solidarity is so appealing that there will always be someone who will refer to it, someone who will consider themselves its main heir. But this would be utter epigonism and in my opinion it is irrelevant in the current political struggle. These issues will no longer play a role. I won't hide the fact that I'm really hoping for this, not only to have more freedom as a researcher, but also because I believe that Poland has more important issues to deal with than politicians' discussions about 1989 or martial law. They'd better focus on energy and a few other issues that are crying out for attention here.

FD: Thank you. To conclude the discussion, I should say that we are dealing with the creation of myths that outlive the participants of the events. Historical myths are not only passed down from generation to generation, but also perpetuate certain doctrines or political beliefs. One example of this is the tradition of the Russian 1917 October Revolution, or the tradition of the French Revolution, which can be described as deep-rooted myths. But we can also talk about deep social facts, which will also persist through the continuation of property relations, social relations and certain social beliefs from generation to generation. Here, this 'hard reality' on the one hand, and myths on the other – which, as myths, create certain community beliefs – will nevertheless persist. The question is how many lessons we can draw from the fall of the Soviet empire and from how we found ourselves in the new reality as national and social communities. Thank you, gentlemen.