

Eliza KANIA

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

“Democracy of the male species”¹: the power, transformation and feminism in political experience of prof. Danuta Waniek

The path walked by Poland and Poles since the mid-20th century is a rise from destruction caused by the Second World War, then – externally imposed form of socialism, and even later on – and attempt for a free economy to be installed on those fragile foundations. All this has had its impact, with plenty of hope and joy, but also disenchantment and distress being imprinted on the lives of Poles. Against this background was she – constantly active, constantly able to speak her own mind – prof. Danuta Waniek. In a country where the term “post-communist” can be viewed as the worst imaginable insult, Ms. Waniek openly speaks of how much does she owe to the socialist country. And – indeed – it can be considered that she was one of those who accepted this system, although not without criticism. In a country where calling a woman a “feminist” is at the very least puzzling for many, prof. Waniek speaks openly: “I am a feminist, and my whole feminism is the Article 33. of Polish Constitution that says that men and women have identical rights.”² Called by some an idealist, an “Iron Lady” compared to Margaret Thatcher. Others call her a scandalist and a person who besmears the name of Poland and its heroes.³ A person born shortly after World War II, prof. Danuta Waniek – often valued ambivalently – has to be appraised for boldly claiming her views, fighting for her beliefs and her good name. Fighting that – as she herself admits – comes at a high price.

Shock therapy

For prof. Waniek the time of political transformation in Poland was a remarkable caesura. A stage in which – we could say – all has been finished and started anew at the same time. In 1988 Ms. Waniek was finishing her tenure at the Faculty of Law at the Warsaw University. For 20 years she has been a member of the Polish United Workers’ Party.⁴ In

¹ Quote comes from the article Women and the trade union. “Solidarity” by M. Tarasiewicz, and has been referred to in D. Waniek’s book *Kobiety lewicy w polskim doświadczeniu politycznym. Tradycje, wartości, tożsamość (Women of the Left in Polish political experience. Traditions, values, identity)* Toruń 2012.

² Author’s interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

³ M. Bruszewski, *Apel do profesor Danuty Waniek (Plea to professor Danuta Waniek)*, “Goniec Wolności” (“Freedom Messenger”), <http://www.goniecwolnosci.pl/archiwum/92012/apel>.

⁴ Polish communist party established in December 1948, governing the People’s Republic of Poland between the years 1948–1989.

a system that has had its downfall hanging in the air, she has seen plenty of flaws and incoherences, but she felt a certain affection to the system at the same time. For it was that very system that allowed her to be the first member of her family to obtain a university diploma. It was socialism that allowed her – a widow with two sons being brought up single-handedly – to live in a relatively comfortable and economically safe manner. Nonetheless, every individual with even a slightest interest in Polish politics at the end of the 1980s could see that the changes were about to come. More so: the spirit of changes was omnipresent. Most of the Polish society went into the state of euphoria. The members of the Polish United Workers' Party were planning to hand over the power to the opposition. The greatest challenge, however, was the economy. Years after years of experiments and central planning had nothing whatsoever in common with the then strangely-sounding notion of "free market". "Truth is, the people in charge at the PUWP have had not much of an idea what to do with the free economy. They had, therefore, hoped that once the friends of capitalism – in the ideological sense of it – are to take over, they will find a way to invigorate the economy. Within the socialist system there was not much we could do" – that is how the whole situation is described by prof. Waniek.⁵ "It was known that Poland has to change. It has to change politically and it has to change economically. But, where the borders shall lie, so that the people lose as little as possible. This has never been told" – she adds.⁶ It has neither been told in the 1980s – when the "Solidarity" movement has only been sprouting, nor in 1989, when Poles have been heralded the forthcoming capitalism. Prof. Danuta Waniek emphasises in her publications that the principles that stood behind the general idea were equality, justice and social solidarity.

The architect of Poland's economic transformation, Leszek Balcerowicz, said, many years after it had happened in one of the interviews: "Where would Poland be, if it were to remain in the gutter of socialism? [...] Anyone knowing at least the basics of the history of Poland, cannot cast a shade of doubt over that it was worth to sever ties with the socialist dictatorship. The post-1989 period is, considering the opportunities available, the best in the past 300 years of our history. The problem lies not in the fact that we have begun to introduce reforms, but in that those reforms have, in several key points, not been completed."⁷ Many researchers stress, however, that the source of problems exceeded the fact that the reforms had not been completed. Most of all, a question needs to be asked: are the expectations regarding political transformation, that a large portion of the Polish society has had, were convergent with what the changes brought along with themselves? The year 1989 was a date somewhat symbolic, a "Rubicon" of political system transformation. The Round Table Agreement⁸ and June 1989 elections were

⁵ Author's interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ L. Balcerowicz, *Balcerowicz on transformation*, "Interia.pl", 5th November 2004, <http://fakty.interia.pl/news-balcerowicz-o-transformacji,nld,801201>.

⁸ Negotiations that resulted in reaching a political compromise in Poland of 1989, between the delegates of "Solidarity" movement and the representatives of then-governing Polish United Workers' Party, and their subordinate alliances. The Round Table sessions, that took place between 6th February and 5th April 1989 involved 452 people, amongst them T. Mazowiecki, L. Wałęsa, L. Kaczyński and A. Kwaśniewski. After: *The New PWN Great Universal Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 4, Warszawa 1997, p. 918.

a caesura, a benchmark for the actual transformation of the political system. The groundworks for changes were formed much earlier, however, since the early 1980s. Most of all, they were related to the emergence of the “Solidarity”⁹ movement, and the demands of the members of this union. Should we take a closer look at the 21 demands of MKS (MKS being the Interfactory State Committee),¹⁰ we could see that their resonance lies far away from a struggle for implementing neoliberal policies. Amongst the suggestions of the union members we can find demands such as having an opportunity to run Free Trade Unions, independent from party- and employers’ influence; a guarantee of a right to strike and of the strikers’ safety. Furthermore, the demands included “obeying the freedom of speech, print and publications as guaranteed by the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Poland,”¹¹ as well as “reinstating shipyard workers, who have been relieved off duty during a strike action, or students who have been imprisoned.”¹² Demands have also included a rise in average wages, lowering the pension age, introduction of all Saturdays as days off work; improving the working conditions at the national healthcare facilities; guaranteeing a sufficient number of places in nurseries and kindergartens to women in employment; introduction of a paid maternity leave for the period of three years, to allow for bringing up a child. The demands have not changed remarkably throughout the 1980s. “Please do look at the manifesto of Citizens’ Parliamentary Club from the 1989.”¹³ The 21 demands, nowadays considered to be the European treasure, are simmering with socialism,¹⁴ notes prof. Waniek. The people believed in that this experiment might prove successful, and that the “new authorities” will guarantee them respect for the values they struggled for. However, “past 1989, nobody asked them whether they do want the capitalism to arrive.”¹⁵ Nobody explained what the capitalism would be about and what would it lead to. Soon it transpired that the “revolution undertaken in the name of old values”¹⁶ has ignored many of them.

⁹ ISTU (Independent Self-governing Trade Union) “Solidarity” – an all-Poland trade union established in 1980 to defend the workers’ rights, up until 1989 it also served as one of the core resistance movements against the regime of People’s Republic of Poland. ISTU “Solidarity” was registered on 10th November 1980 in a Warsaw Provincial Court. Solidarity reached 9.5 million members before its September 1981 Congress (up to 10 million that constituted 1/3 of the total working age population of Poland. The “Solidarity” movement organised a structure of active resistance against the socialist regime, orchestrated numerous strike actions (e.g. in the Gdańsk and Szczecin Shipyards), during the martial law members of the movement were heavily repressed and often arrested. The activity of ISTU “Solidarity” resulted in reaching a compromise with “the communist regime” and political transformations in Poland. Amongst the most well-known activists of the “Solidarity” movement are L. Wałęsa, A. Walentynowicz and T. Mazowiecki. After: *The New PWN Great Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 5, Warszawa, 1997, p. 935.

¹⁰ A list of demands announced on 17th August 1980 by the Inter-Enterprise Strike Committee.

¹¹ 21 demands of MKS, Vladimir Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk, 17th August 1980, http://zbiory.ecs.gda.pl/images/elfinder/pdf/wis_21MKS.pdf.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ Parliamentary club associating Sejm Deputies and senators from the Citizens’ Committee by the Chairman of ISTU “Solidarity” in Contract Sejm, between the years 1989–1991.

¹⁴ Author’s interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

¹⁵ W. Osiatyński, after: D. Waniek, *Women of the Left*, Toruń 2010, p. 95.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

Prof. Waniek questions whether Poles have been appropriately prepared for the far-reaching changes. “At first, it has been said that Poland will get all that is best from capitalism and socialism, but this was not feasible. As time went by, this notion has been smoothly and consequently abandoned” – she claims.¹⁷ One day Leszek Balcerowicz – a former disciple of prof. Soldaczuk and a member of Polish United Workers’ Party, after all – has hastily convened a press conference in the Column Hall,¹⁸ and announced that from now on we shall start building a capitalism in Poland. What did that mean, nobody had the faintest idea. Nobody knew what that ‘capitalism’ meant in practice”, adds prof. Waniek. People asked how capitalism can be implemented when there’s no economic capital to speak of; people also inquired about the “middle class”, a notion up to that point unknown to most in Poland.¹⁹ The Balcerowicz Reforms²⁰ have been described as a “shock therapy”. They were a radical experiment, conducted on a wide scale, and – at the same time – one of the globally first Structural Adjustment Programmes, and “the Poles collectively started building the capitalist system, even though the suggestion itself came from a minority.”²¹

As a result of the reforms having been introduced, the following has been noticed, amongst others: inflation acceleration – driven by a six-fold increase of energy prices; almost universal abolishment of customs control what resulted in the bankruptcy of many national businesses. Taxes for state-owned companies were twice as high as taxes for private businesses, “a large amount of social infrastructure has also been liquidated, the expenses towards reducing the poverty and social exclusion of individuals have been cut, and mass unemployment came to be considered as a necessary element of free-market changes.”²²

In the opinion of many individuals, the introduction of the so-called “capitalism” to Poland was a shock, “did fit neither into the bundle of Solidarity, nor into the bundle of Round Table Agreements.”²³ “It is a thing unfathomable to me: the system transformations were being done with the assistance of mottos that were important to me as well. I believed the elites of »Solidarity« that their struggle and beliefs were honest. Then, I started gradually discovering that the can say one thing today, and say and do another one tomorrow. That there is a progressively more violent fight of political and economical interests happening around the most fundamental of issues, while the interests of

¹⁷ Author’s interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

¹⁸ One of the chambers in Polish Sejm (lower house of parliament).

¹⁹ After: D. Waniek, op. cit., p. 94.

²⁰ “The Balcerowicz Plan” – a commonly used term to denote a package of economic and transformational reforms, drawn up over the course of 111 days that has been implemented in 1990. The name itself stems from the second name of the main author of those reforms, former deputy prime minister and finance minister, Leszek Balcerowicz. Along with a group of experts (including, amongst others, prof. Jeffery Sachs), in September 1989, Mr. Balcerowicz has drawn up a reform plan, and on the 6th October he presented his plan to the public on a press conference aired by the Polish Television.

²¹ M. Wróblewski, J. Dobroszek, *Tożsamość lewicy*, (*Identity of the Left*), conversation with prof. D. Waniek, “Detalks”, <http://detalks.pl/2013/03/tozsamosc-lewicy-rozmowa-z-prof-danuta-waniek/>.

²² P. Szumlewicz, *Tragiczne rewolucje Balcerowicza*, (*Tragic revolutions of Balcerowicz*), 22nd April 2011, “Zwiazkowiec.pl”, <http://www.zwiazkowiec.info>.

²³ W. Osiatyński, after: D. Waniek, op. cit., p. 95.

paid employees being ignored,”²⁴ claims prof. Waniek. “The new elites wanted »some change«, but – as a matter of fact – they had no idea as to what would that change result in, as far as the majority was concerned. I thought, how could you do the revolution, while having no vision of changes? To sell whatever could be sold, with no questions regarding social consequences of it?”²⁵, she concludes remarks on the changes.

A Giant Leap

A stigmatising label of a “post-communist” stems from both how prof. Waniek refers to the period of real socialism, as well as to how – in a way – she believed in and help to construct that very system. Danuta Waniek was born on 26. October 1946 in Włocławek. As the first one in her family she managed to obtain a university diploma, at the prestigious Faculty of Law of Warsaw University. She got her Ph. D. in Law in 1977, and a higher doctorate 11 years later. Between 1974 and 1976, she has been studying political sciences in Vienna; in late 1980s she got a scholarship at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation at Bonn, Germany. She was an activist of Polish Students’ Association. In 1967 she joined the ranks of Polish United Workers’ Union. Prof. Waniek treats the period of socialism with balanced attitude, appreciating the great historical, social, educational and cultural achievements. She is one of the very few people on the political scene of Poland who have no issues with admitting that this system had given them a great opportunity, and they seized it. Considering the discourse regarding the 1945–1989 period, predominant in contemporary Poland, this approach has to be deemed somewhat unique. The majority of scholarly literature is dedicated to political repressions, restrictions on the people’s freedom, economic absurdities, bizarreness of the everyday life, or the dependence on the Soviet Union. Very few experts on the socialist period have enough courage to emphasise the positive changes that Poland has gone through in those times, commonly referred to as “communist”.

Waniek points out, however, that according to her the “real socialism” was little susceptible of modernisation, it moulded individuals who were feeling progressively worse in rigid structures of the system and ideological dogmas. “It might have worked out well immediately after the war, when social advancement happened on a mass scale, the country was rebuilt from the rubble left after World War II. Back then a central planning of large socio-economical processes was needed. But in the ‘60s, in the country of school-leavers a need for change could be felt,” she claims.²⁶ Prof. Waniek emphasizes that “it was also known that the command-and-quota economy would not work out in the long run. That employing it was good only up to a certain point, completing the restoration of the country required employing a different set of political-economical tools. On top of that, through the whole post-war period the issue of our western borders was a chokehold on our country. I have not managed to find, up until this point, any calculations that would indicate how much did it cost us to keep the bor-

²⁴ Author’s interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ Author’s interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

ders on the Oder and Neisse rivers. And this was a key issue for Poland – there were several groups of people in the People’s Republic of Poland working towards having those borders recognised. Besides, it is worth pointing out that I am a member of a generation of people who managed to get through their respective lives without a war in Poland. This is something that has never been previously achieved by anyone else! How can someone not appreciate that, especially considering that there were many circles that were awaiting the Third World War to begin.”²⁷

Some – unjust in her opinion – assessments of post-war reality, as well as the People’s Republic of Poland²⁸ as a whole, are summarised by prof. Waniek in the following words: “walking here [through Krakowskie Przedmieście, a prestigious street in Warsaw] we pass by giant billboards with photos of ruins of the Old Town from the Second World War. Most of those ruins have been cleared up by the 1955, the Old Town and the Royal route, including all the churches were rebuilt. There is no one attempting to say anything good about those times today, and yet this was done without the Marshall Plan, without any loans, without foreign capital. You just have to have a look at those ruins to imagine the magnitude of this effort.”²⁹

Prof. Waniek points out that the most far-reaching achievement of socialism is, according to her, “the fact that we got educated women who were able not to get threatened by the system.”³⁰ As the unarguably greatest achievement of the real socialist country she points out a step towards women’s liberation. “I am one of those people who think that this period of Polish People’s Republic or, if you wish, of real socialism, was a democratic country. This period was a great chance to rectify the negligence that nobody has even attempted to rectify in the past. It happened for the first time in the history of Poles”, says prof. Waniek.³¹ “Regardless of whether we were sovereign or partitioned, we have remained in a peculiar, social order, that accepted disparities, social impairment of women, or – as the case was with the peasants – even slavery. I am particularly interested in the situation of women, I often imagine what my life would look like if I was born in Poland 100 years earlier. Due to a century-long habits and customs, frequently originating from religious orders, I would live in a system full of constraints. Maybe I would be a suffragette, maybe a poor, uneducated woman who would take any job that comes in her way...? Certain dent in this detrimental tradition has been made by the impoverished, female representatives of the land gentry in the second half of the 19th century [...] it was then when, for the first time, it has been noticed that the social liberation of women leads through education. But this belief ‘slid through’ the history with little efficacy and it was only the socialism that – figuratively speaking – took the bull by its horns and gave the women a real opportunity,” he explains.³²

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ The People’s Republic of Poland (Polish: Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa) was the official name of Poland from 1952 to 1989. From 1944 to 1952 Rzeczpospolita Polska (The Republic of Poland) was the name of the Polish state.

²⁹ Author’s interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Ibidem.

She indicates two reasons for this process. Firstly, the ideological indications, secondly the fact that socialism “was built amongst great post-war demographic losses, particularly among men and intelligence. The energy of women was needed to compensate these losses quickly. Their career progression and work were needed for the society and for the economy. Regardless of this motivation, women joined in the works and made the most of it – and then some.”³³ After Second World War Polish women were taking employment on a scale unseen before in the Polish social and economical history.

Can we, however, with no hesitation admit that the period of the People’s Republic of Poland was a period of actual women’s liberation? Although it has been accepted that the period of “communism” was a substitute of the second wave of feminism to Poland, women had two fundamental identity paths: “the Polish mother”, and her peculiar opposite, “the [female] leader of workshop.”³⁴

Even an increase of female members of Legislative Sejm to a dozen percent, was not tantamount to handing them over increased power capabilities.³⁵ Ms. Małgorzata Fuszara³⁶ says that such state of matters came as a result that female members of parliament were “nitpicked” in a particular way, so that they were not able to have any major influence on how the Sejm operated. They were, therefore, usually less-educated than their male counterparts and worked in commissions of minor importance. Additionally, Sejm in People’s Republic of Poland was a superficial institution, as most crucial decisions were made by the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, where the amount of female members was exiguous.³⁷ Simultaneously, there were two mass organisations that counted mostly women amongst their members: the Women’s League and, its spin-off of sorts, the Country Housewives’ Club.³⁸ The Women’s League,³⁹ later Polish Women’s League, in its formative stages exhibited politicised tendencies, and later demands that were about to lead to transformation towards an organisation that would fight for women’s real rights have not yielded much of anything.

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ In 1952, out of 5.2 million people employed in the broadly-defined industrial sector, 1.5 million were women. They worked labour jobs, mostly in textile mills, factories, mines, metallurgy, construction industry and brickyards. But the equality was very superficial. As an example, the Joseph Stalin Textile Mill in Lodz had only 3 women amongst 400 foremen in total – and this ratio was quite representative for the general population. Women frequently found the new situation they found themselves in to be overwhelming, as on top of their domestic duties they were competing in surpassing their work quotas.

³⁵ The highest ratio of women in Sejm was between the years 1980–1985, when women made up for 23% of the Deputies.

³⁶ M. Fuszara, *Kobiety w polityce (Women in Politics)*, Warszawa 2006, p. 50–70

³⁷ Data from the year indicates that in 1987 women members and deputies of members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of Polish United Workers’ Party – 10.1%. In the government, the percentage of women was marginal. (after: M. Fuszara, *Kobiety...*).

³⁸ As an independent organisation it came to existence in 1966, previously having been a division of the Women’s League. It focused principally around increasing the women’s knowledge regarding agriculture, teaching new methods of maintaining the household, and nurturing the legacy of the folk culture. (after: M. Fuszara, *Kobiety...*).

³⁹ The name has changed in the early 1980s. The League of Polish Women was an organisation associating female masses, originating principally from the urban areas.

“The corset laced up once is still restricting our movement,”⁴⁰ said one of the representatives of the movement.

We could, therefore, say, that – as much as women’s liberation during People’s Republic of Poland was superficial, the real achievement of the system was the educational liberation. “I come from a generation of Polish women who were born after World War II. It is the first generation that could educate itself in an uninterrupted manner and follow the path they have chosen themselves. My parents’ generation did not have that opportunity,”⁴¹ says prof. Waniek. Between 1958–1982 the amount of women graduating with a university diploma has increased in 572%, women graduating with vocational qualifications in 753%, general preparatory high-school graduates, in turn, have increased 293%.⁴² It is worth mentioning, however, that there was a low percentage of women going into professions, or studying for the degrees, traditionally considered to be reserved for the male members of society. The gender equality has been legally confirmed in the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Poland, issued on the 22nd July 1952. Other legal norms of high importance towards equality, mentioned by prof. Waniek, are the Marriage Law Decree and the Vital Records Decree (1945), acknowledging the lay state of the institution of marriage; allowing divorce (with equal conditions for both men and women), equal rights of the individual; equal right of succession and property laws, the family and guardianship family code from 1950, or even the introduction of equality of children coming from married and unmarried families. Prof. Waniek points out that it needs to be remembered that, at the same time, there was no positive legal norm, one that would be present in the legislature, and that would interdict gender-based discrimination.⁴³ “Those far-reaching changes have not crossed the threshold of politics, as the political system that relied on controlled rationing, did not allow women to get on top of the chain,” she explains.⁴⁴

Henryk Domański described the genesis of the situation as “the paradox of a satisfied slave” – i.e. consenting to the situation where the women’s voice is of lesser importance and their position has no decisive power.⁴⁵ Prof. Waniek goes a step further: “the socialist country system did not allow women to reach the sphere of power. What we say today about the »glass ceiling« used to be the case back then as well. People were able to progress up to a certain point. Then – not anymore. Why? Because it was a system that relied on state power ministries, necessary for the functioning of the state, in which power was politically imposed, and had no source of free elections. An intrinsic feature of those ministries was a state secret, higher reasons that were closed in nature within the society. From the amount of budget spent on policing, the army and foreign services. Those people were the men – soldiers and civilians – connected by this state secret.”⁴⁶ When asked whether she has ever experienced the “glass ceiling” during the

⁴⁰ I. Ratman-Liwierska, *Edukacja poza konwencją (Education outside convention)*, Białystok 1993, p. 115.

⁴¹ Author’s interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

⁴² D. Waniek, op. cit., p. 75.

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ D. Waniek, op. cit., p. 83.

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ Author’s interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

times of socialism, she says: “personally –not, but I was barred by envious men. But this happens nowadays, too, so it has no relation to the times or the political systems in place. But in personal squabbles I would not let anyone win over me. What did I rely on? I relied on working.”⁴⁷

The Iron Lady

The political career of Prof. Waniek gained substantial momentum in the mid-1990s. Why did she enter that path at all? She liked politics, she never let herself lose sight of it. The first shock came in the period of 1994–1995, when she took the position of the Undersecretary of State for the Parliamentary Affairs in the Ministry of National Defence. The army officials that she had to work with were consternated, because Danuta Waniek was a civilian, but also – or rather primarily – because she was a female. Finally, she was a female-civilian, who has the audacity to change the existing state of affairs and interfere with their own responsibilities. “These were the army generals, who used to speak of themselves as ‘the communists in green uniforms’ ” – explains prof. Waniek.⁴⁸ “It transpired, however, that what they really care about is maintaining their positions. They were ready for everything. All of a sudden they got down on their knees, they declared their godliness, and after years of ‘civil’ marriage they all went and had church marriages. Miracles were happening” – remarks Prof. Waniek ironically.⁴⁹

One of the important army generals, former “self-confessed communist” said that the country has to be build on two pillars: the Army and the Church. And how could you engage in any discussions with those people?”, asks Waniek.⁵⁰ The conservative fraction within the army was neither open for changes, nor for the presence of a women within their ranks. You could immediately sense the rejection. The first contact with the generals of the Military Staff resulted in a question being asked by one of the army officials “So, what is this that you are going to do here? Take care of our wives?”, recalls Waniek. “They all considered delegating a woman to the department to be an insult” – she claims.⁵¹

Prof. Waniek’s task in the Ministry of Defence was statutory preparation of changes, essential to accession of Poland to NATO.⁵² The task transpired to be more challenging than initially thought. “Amongst others, a giant discovery to our army was the principle of a civil, democratic auditing. That is why I got blasted at every opportunity, because I was a civilian, something they could not fathom. They thought: a politician will step in and give us orders? To add insult to injury, a woman... My role was to make them aware that this is what the NATO standards are about,” claims prof. Waniek.⁵³ She was firm in voicing her premises, she has been thus labeled as “prone to engage in conflicts.”

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² Poland has been officially invited to join the NATO in 1997. In 1999 it has officially joined the member countries of NATO.

⁵³ Author’s interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

“There had to have been a conflict, since they all did not want to discuss anything. What was important was to get Poland to enter the NATO, as we could not allow ourselves to be outside the treaties in our geopolitical situation. I could understand it, but they could not. That was truly bizarre. But I have not graduated from a military school” – she sums up.⁵⁴ She also notices, however, that women are largely considered to be “unwelcome” within the army system of Poland.⁵⁵

Between 1995–1997 prof. Waniek was the Chief of the Presidential Chancellery in Poland. Before taking over those duties, however, she led the successful, presidential campaign of Aleksander Kwaśniewski. It was a turning point in the history of Poland for two major reasons – firstly, Aleksander Kwaśniewski’s political origins stem from the “young guard” of the Polish United Workers’ Party; secondly – his political opponent in presidential elections was the legendary Lech Wałęsa. “Once the decision has been made on Aleksander entering the presidential race, shortly prior to the commencement of supreme council meeting, he had locked himself with me in my office and offered the position. And me? Lord Almighty, I freaked out. On one hand, I saw that as a great opportunity, on the other hand, however – I was by no means an expert in leading the political campaigns,” prof. Waniek recalls the reasons for her decision.⁵⁶ She points out as well that the success came as a result of an excruciating effort of the whole staff. “No time-wasting, but motivation and discipline. This campaign was carried out without asking for any benefit, though such successful campaigns, like this one, in many Western countries can make you a multi-millionaire” – she remarks.⁵⁷ Mr. Kwaśniewski won the run-off election, achieving 51.72% of votes. In the first round he managed to 35.11%. The legend came tumbling down.

Another important moment in prof. Waniek’s career is the period between 26st March 2003–31st December 2005, when she served as the Head of the National Broadcasting Council that “shall safeguard the freedom of speech, the right to information, and the public interest in radio and television broadcasting.”⁵⁸ Her term of office ended up embroiled in scandals and a media frenzy that, eventually, made prof. Waniek step away from the world of politics. “I think that I have made some brave decisions that I have paid for” – she remarks.⁵⁹ Media anxiety had been incited by the contents of a certain document, published in 2005, with the name of “The Electronic Media Strategy of the Republic of Poland for the Years 2005–2020.” The NBC have been accused of leaning towards reinstating censorship or excessive interference into the Internet and its contents. The Council representatives explained that the media have blown the issue out of proportion, and that the main issue was that, as much as the freedom of speech and media is guaranteed by law, it has to have certain limits. Content filters, or other

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ See: E. Kania, *Ikony ciepła i niewinności*, in: *Gender jako determinanta w przestrzeni prywatnej i publicznej*, eds. I. Andruszkiewicz, A. Balczyńska-Kosman, J. Kałużna, E. Kania, Poznań 2012.

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁸ Art. 213–215 Constitution of the Republic of Poland.

⁵⁹ Author’s interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

forms of content access restriction, can be introduced only in extreme situations, e.g. to protect the well-being of minors or – more generally – the human dignity.⁶⁰

Major controversy has surrounded, however, the media frenzy around a decision made by prof. Waniek the same year, on – allegedly not legally justified in any way – ending the term of office of one of the members of the Supervisory Board of Polish Television. “Ms. Waniek has shown a major disregard for the law. We cannot tolerate this any longer” – said, at the time, Donald Tusk.⁶¹ Waniek was accused of making attempts at politicising the NBC, but she says that her intentions were just the opposite – she wanted to depoliticise the whole body. “I strived towards a sustainable management of the public media, and I thought that this would get a universal support, as such parties as the Citizens’ Platform (PO) and Law and Justice (PiS) claimed to want to do just that. Later on, obviously, they started squabbling over the matter” – explains Prof. Waniek.⁶² “The Council started being influenced by pre-election political struggle. The coalition between the Citizens’ Platform and Law & Justice was looming, and I knew that the attitude towards my person was a function of the interests of those two parties. I knew, that my political party – the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) was getting weaker. It was commonly accepted that a lot of liberty can be taken with what can be said to or about me. In fact, that everything can be said and done,” she says. Prof. Waniek has been called to testify before the Sejm Committee of Constitutional Responsibility. Several years later, the proceedings have been abandoned. The only person that back then demanded elucidation and exoneration (and still does so), was the defendant herself: “by all means, I wanted them to adjudicate on whether I violated the Constitution or not. After all, it was a very important issue to me: 16 years of serving the country and I am entering the Responsibility Committee and trying to prove I have been law-abiding and functioning in accordance with law.”⁶³ The scandal around prof. Waniek, whose issues were sidetracked once the governing parties had their representatives in the Council, has had its impact on the woman herself: “my native party used to besmear me in the left-wing press. Those are the things you remember for a long time. It is the reason why I cannot go back to that party, as I see that general vibe and those opinions as completely unfounded and very unfair towards me” – she comments.⁶⁴ After 2005 prof. Waniek steps away from the politics and returns to academia.

Patriarchal capitalism

When leaving the NBC, she was accused of being hot-headed and making hasty decisions. “This label is a staple that many label women with” – she remarks on the situa-

⁶⁰ M. Górak, *KRRiT o internecie: cenzura to bzdura!* (*National Broadcasting Committee on the Internet: Censorship is a Nonsense!*), “Internet Standard”, 25th May 2005, <http://www.internet-standard.pl/news/79150/KRRiT.o.internecie.cenzura.to.bzdura.html>.

⁶¹ W. Ferfecki, *Danuta Waniek nie stanie przed Trybunałem* (*Danuta Waniek will not stand before the Tribunal*), “TVP Info”, 1st March 2012, <http://tvp.info/informacje/polska/danuta-waniek-nie-stanie-przed-trybunalem/6632077>.

⁶² Author’s interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

⁶³ Ibidem.

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

tion. “Why is it that it is always women who are hot-headed, emotional, never men? People would at most say that a man is adamant or decisive. I have no idea what I have been hot-headed with. I think it is the price that many women have to pay for being part of the politics” – she adds. The NBC scandal heralded the end of prof. Waniek’s political career, but we need to ask ourselves the question on what were the beginnings of this career. Three years after defending her higher doctorate, in 1991, she decides to run for a place in the Sejm. Her first term as the Sejm Deputy from the Democratic Left Alliance began in 1991. She will remain a constant Deputy up until 2001 (1st, 2nd and 3rd Term of Sejm). At the same time, at the beginning of the 1990s, she starts to lead the Independent Office of Constitutional Practice at the Institute of Political Science of Polish Academy of Sciences. Presence in the direct centre of political life will result in a high number of observations regarding how the political changes, and the change of discourse, have had the impact on women, as well as how the women find themselves on the political scene. At this time prof. Waniek decides to found the Women’s Democratic Union.⁶⁵

Depte being initially engaged in the works of the body, she found the reality to result in disenchantment. “I looked at the women and my impression were not the best. They were engaged in my Union until their husbands fell ill for the first time. A man, when someone falls ill in the household, calls for somebody’s help and gets back to minding his own business. The woman thinks that she needs to commit, and then most frequently she does not go back to her previous interests” – she explains the reasons for her disenchantment.⁶⁶ The whole period of political activity has brought her many interesting remarks with regards to the female-male relations within the areas of power; “Men are democrats for as long, as there is no woman getting in their way. Once they run out of arguments, they become coarse and vulgar, they start using language commonly viewed as offensive,” she says.⁶⁷

Answering the question on where does such situation stem from, she notices that after the political transformation of 1989, “new elites very quickly (I mean both the former, democratic opposition that has agreed for that and the Church officials) sent out a clear message: that it won’t be as easy as it might seem. That we need to expect certain limitations, which will be directed principally at women. And that is what happened,” says prof. Waniek on the transformations and their aspects regarding the situation of women.⁶⁸ Anxiety was felt by many activists. So is the post-transformational reality recalled by Dorota Kempka: “in 1989 women who held seats in Contract Sejm realised that the burden of transformations will fall on their backs. And that is what happened. It was the women who were to lose the jobs in the first place, and the social-political tur-

⁶⁵ Association established on 16th June 1990 in Warsaw, declaring activities focused on the following values: freedom, equality, equal justice under law, freedom of choice, equal status, all-round advancement of women, social security, preventive medicine and education of society with regards to the women’s rights and human rights. The association is registered as a public benefit organisation.

⁶⁶ Author’s interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

moil had impact not only on the status of a woman, but also on the established order within the family.”⁶⁹

The borders of the social “role of the woman” were, once again, built around the duties of a woman, the caretaker, the gentle guardian of order and hearth-and-home. The women who wanted to become active on the political scene were to face a lengthy road. “Decommunisation is, for many, deemancipation” – a Polish feminist, prof. Magdalena Środa, summed up the whole situation.⁷⁰

The reasons for both low representation of women in Polish politics, as well as the low rate of implementing their demands, lie within the scope of prof. Waniek’s particular interest even today. She sees the case of the female “Solidarity” activists as a symbol of effacement of both women’s presence and their activity from the collective consciousness. Why any trace of their substantial input, into the direction that the transformations have taken, has been almost universally wiped out?⁷¹ What caused that such legendary figures of the opposition movement, as Anna Bikont, Teresa Bogucka, Barbara Labuda, Helena Łuczywo, Agnieszka Maciejowska, Joanna Szczęsna or Anna Walentynowicz, who managed to make remarkable contributions in the 1980s, stepped away from the spotlight after the transformation, making way for the men instead?⁷² Why were not they allowed their place amongst the legendary figures even though they used not believe in being given such an opportunity themselves? (“Everyone in Poland knows that, in December 1981, it was also women who worked at the grassroots level of the underground, opposition movement, but nobody speaks about that loudly,”⁷³ “I think that whatever I was to do, even if I was to puke my own guts, the history would not have acknowledged me”⁷⁴). Presently some of the activists admit openly that behind the image of our idols of the working class – such as Mr. Frasyński and Mr. Bujak – were women who thought and organised the work.”⁷⁵ As years gone by, the men themselves starting admitting that they were “mooching on their hard work when Solidarity became a power, but they forgot about the women’s contributions.”⁷⁶ This symbolic fact has resulted, however, in that – as recognised by some female researchers – “the democracy in Poland turned out to be a democracy of a male species.”⁷⁷

⁶⁹ D. Kempka, after: D. Waniek, op. cit., Toruń, 2010, p. 93.

⁷⁰ M. Środa, after: D. Waniek, op. cit., p. 111.

⁷¹ For the first time, the “Solidarity” phenomenon has been “unearthed” by an American journalist Shanna Penn. She has conducted dozens of interviews with the opposition movement activists, transforming them into a multi-voice narrative. Amongst the interviewees were some legendary figures, such as Anna Bikont, Teresa Bogucka, Barbara Labuda, Helena Łuczywo, Agnieszka Maciejowska or Joanna Szczęsna. First feature article by Penn, on the women of Solidarity, *The State Secret*, has been released in the magazine “With Full Voice” (“Pełnym Głosem”) in autumn 1994 (#2). Results of S. Penn’s work have been fully published in the book *Women’s Underground*, Warsaw 2003; an American release took place 2 years later. A similar subject matter has been taken by Ewa Kondratowicz in her book *Lipstick on a Banner*. Ms. Kondratowicz has conducted deep conversations with over 20 female “Solidarity” activists.

⁷² M. Janion, after: D. Waniek, op. cit., p. 102.

⁷³ A. Klos, *Syrenki, amazonki i wojownicze żółwice Ninja*, “Laboratorium reportażu”, <http://www.terezin.europa-auschwitz.pl>, 3.08.2005, quote from B. Labuda.

⁷⁴ E. Kondratowicz, *Szminka na Sztandarze (Lipstick on a Banner)*, Warszawa 2001, p. 27.

⁷⁵ B. Labuda, D. Waniek, op. cit., p. 102.

⁷⁶ E. Kondratowicz, after: D. Waniek, op. cit., p. 105–111.

⁷⁷ M. Tarasiewicz, after: op. cit., p. 103.

Who is afraid of the Church?

The first cue for the changes following such way was, according to prof. Waniek, “agreeing with all demands of the Church, what was directed against the freedom of women in the broad sense of the term.”⁷⁸ Prof. Waniek sees, as a symbolic “case” showing what direction the edge of changes is turning towards, to be the discussion on abortion. In People’s Republic of Poland terminating the pregnancy was held in accordance with the act from 1956,⁷⁹ with a permission being given by a specially qualified doctor, under the three following circumstances: when terminating the pregnancy was recommended by a doctor considering the health of the foetus or the pregnant mother; when there was a justified suspicion of the pregnancy being the result of a criminal act, and when the pregnant mother has found herself to be living in adverse conditions. After the political transformation a discussion took place on intensifying the legislature on pregnancy termination.⁸⁰ The subject of abortion has held a lot of political weight. Large enough for “the women being removed from the discussion. The subject has been discussed with the women being effectively excluded, to the point that one might think the whole issue has nothing to do with the women themselves.”⁸¹

Prof. Waniek indicates, that the role and privileges⁸² that the Catholic Church received in Poland have a major influence on the discourse: “In my opinion, the Church has been tremendously successful. Back in the day, we were able to create a whole movement. Nowadays, those young women are brought up in such a way, with the contribution of the Church, that they will never say out loud they might have done an abortion, as that would get them labelled as ‘killers’,” she says.⁸³ She also indicates the adverse conditions that many young mothers have to struggle with in contemporary Poland. After moving towards a free economy many benefits, that the young mothers

⁷⁸ Author’s interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

⁷⁹ 27th April 1956, on conditions for admissibility of pregnancy termination (Journal of Laws, 2000, No. 12, Item 61).

⁸⁰ Currently the pregnancy can be terminated by a doctor only under the following conditions: i) when the woman’s life or health is endangered by the continuation of pregnancy (regardless of the age of the foetus), ii) when the prenatal examination – or other medical presumptions indicate a strong likelihood of severe and irreparable damages to the foetus or an incurable disease threatening the life of a foetus (to the moment when the foetus reaches a stage when it is capable of independent life outside the body of a pregnant woman, iii) when there is a reasonable suspicion of pregnancy being a result of a criminal act (up to 12 weeks from the beginning of pregnancy). Up until today there is, however, a public debate on imposing even more severe restrictions on pregnancy termination. One of the examples for that was the fact that, in 2007, there was an attempt to directly introduce legal protection of human life from the point of conception, however this has not been approved by the Sejm.

⁸¹ J. Plakwicz, after: D. Waniek, op. cit., p. 95.

⁸² According to the Constitution of the Republic of Poland from 1997, the public authorities should remain impartial about religion, world-view and philosophy, guaranteeing freedom of their expression in public life. Church officials continually make pleas, however, to the members of Polish parliament working on the legislature, asking them to maintain the traditionally Christian values with regards to, amongst others, civil unions, in-vitro fertilisations, euthanasia or abortion. The money annually turned over to the Church and its subordinates is estimated to be between 1 and 5 billion PLN (£200m to £1b). The Church is also enjoying several privileges with regards to its estates, e.g. various tax exemptions.

⁸³ Author’s interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

could make the opportunity of, have virtually vanished. It becomes harder to get a place for a child in a kindergarten, and very few Poles can afford buying their own flat. “A woman will not escape her biological role. There is nobody else who can give birth to a child. However, the capitalism has changed us very strongly, the contemporary woman will not take the risk of condemning her own child to destitution instead of happy childhood. It becomes progressively more difficult for her to abandon her professional life, seeing as capitalism is an everyday struggle for existence that nobody wants to lose. The state should consider the transformations, if it really does care about the population growth – remarks prof. Waniek.⁸⁴

Asked directly about the role of the Catholic Church, she answers: “This influence is definitely too large. Even though the Church itself has been remarkably weakened through its own sins.”⁸⁵ She advises the politicians, who somewhat fear the Church, to distance themselves from discussing its matters on the political scene: “if the politicians were to learn how to take responsibility for their own words, for their own actions; if they were to stop arguing about the Church-related matters, then maybe Poland would have looked different than it does look now. How much social energy has been wasted on futile disputes over religious dogma, incompatible with today’s challenges?”⁸⁶ Prof. Waniek indicates, however, that in these days there is a generation of Poles who have been taught the (Catholic) Religion as part of their school curriculum, and who thus have a skeptical view of the institution. Pedophile scandals, controversies regarding Church estates – all this makes young people “have their own experiences with (Catholic) religion lessons in schools definitely discourage them from participating in religious practices, their attitude clearly starts to alter.”⁸⁷

Democracy, resistence, solidarity

“I once noticed that, when I am pondering, when I do some reckoning in my head, I start swearing in my head. And I do not swear at all in real life. I noticed that I start thinking in words that make me freak out. This all has, however, surprisingly gone by. These are the costs” – that is how prof. Waniek describes the manner in which she got by with the pressure she was under when in the centre of the political events.⁸⁸ Asked about why has she even made a step in this direction, she answers: “the politics always attracted my attention, I am, after all, a political scientist” – she replies. But the reason for her direct involvement in political activities post-1989 were expectations regarding the changes in the situation of women. “I knew a little bit more about the fate of women in capitalism, and I reckoned that the negative changes will knock on our door as well. Like 2 times 2 makes 4. And, with this in mind, I had to step in and get involved in de-

⁸⁴ Ibidem.

⁸⁵ M. Wróblewski, J. Dobroszek, op. cit.

⁸⁶ Author’s interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

⁸⁷ Ibidem. A wide-spanning analysis of relations between the Catholic Church and the Polish state has been conducted by D. Waniek in *Orzeł i krucyfik. Eseje o podziałach politycznych w Polsce (The Eagle and the Crucifix. Essays on political divisions in Poland)*, Toruń 2001.

⁸⁸ Author’s interview with prof. D. Waniek, Warszawa, 23rd February 2013.

fending the women's rights. These are the origins of my presence in the world of politics", says prof. Waniek.⁸⁹

As one of the biggest challenges, in the world of politics of the contemporary Poland, she sees to be the necessity for an increase of political activity of women, as well as the ongoing fight with stereotypes. She also says that, in theory, we have much less obstacles in the way of a woman's career. "Theoretically: because the catalogue of laws and civil rights gives an equality chance. I think that we would have been in a completely different place, if it were not for the pressure of the Catholic Church," she claims⁹⁰. She remains skeptical, however, of the way that the women participate in the contemporary politics: "they sometimes feel distinguished, honoured, when a man – in order to reach his own goals – manipulates them."⁹¹ She sees the Congress of Women as a most successful attempt to resuscitate the solidarity between women in Poland. She points out, however, that this is an initiative that visibly "leans towards the [Citizens'] Platform."⁹²

Evaluating the contemporary condition of Polish politics, prof. Danuta Waniek is mostly disappointed with the poor condition of contemporary Left. Despite after her very emotional departure from the NBC she decided not to join the ranks the Democratic Left Alliance again, she still remains closely connected to the party. "I think that the vacuum on the left side of Polish politics comes from the fact that it is all too easy to be on the Right these days, as the right-wing ideology is ubiquitous. It stems from the Polish patriarchal capitalism, from the Church having entered the sphere of public education. In order to get to the Left, you need to find your own way", she says.

Prof. Waniek is also wondering about the causes for the peculiar passivity of young Poles, the ease they accept whatever government serves them with. "I think that the substitute of resistance is emigrating to the Western countries and finding employment opportunities there. And let us imagine that those two millions go back home and do not get a career. We would soon get a rebellion on an unforeseeable scale," she claims. With regard to difficult situation on the labor markets of European countries Prof. Waniek considers the rebellion to be quite an effective instrument. But she's clearly referring to the international movement, just as in the case of the Outraged Movement. "All what is happening today can only be countered by a global movement. Against this background fatigued Poles, as a matter of fact, agree for everything that comes their way. I do not know if they are so tired, or do they lack faith, but that is how it is. So, I think that it has to transcend the [national] borders" – she says. She points out, however, that the source of the protest has to lie outside the spheres of the political powers, but at the same time has to be a source that would somewhat frighten, somewhat adjust the proceedings of the European Commission. Solidarity within a given country might have an impact on local elections, but will have no influence on the decisions made on the European Union level, and it is the European Union that distributes the funds" – sums up prof. Waniek.⁹³

⁸⁹ Ibidem.

⁹⁰ Ibidem.

⁹¹ Ibidem.

⁹² Ibidem.

⁹³ Ibidem.

In recent years prof. Waniek has concentrated on her academic activities. Besides publications strictly in the field of political sciences (e.g. “Political Parties in 2005 Elections”, “2007 Elections and the Media – Post-Fourth Polish Republic Landscape: A Selection of Issues”), she also penned a few books on the state of the Polish Left in recent years (“The Left in Practice of Governing: Selection of Issues”), the presence of women in the world of politics (“Women of the Left in Polish Political Experience: Traditions, Values and Identity”), or the position of the Catholic Church in Poland (“The Eagle and the Crucifix. Essays on Political Divisions in Poland”).

Asked on what could make her reconsider going back to politics, she responds immediately: “A prolonged lack of vision of development, and capitalism was supposed to aid with this issue. I have no idea what will happen in my country in a year’s or two years’ time. There is no notion of a ‘common good’. The right-wing parties keep on struggling for a political shape of Poland, there seems to be no common ground for a compromise. This frightens me. makes me feel so dejected.”⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Ibidem.

