
The Transformation of Polish Villages Before and After 1989

On 24 May 2012, **Maria Pasztor**, doctor habilitus and professor ordinarius at the University of Warsaw, Institute of International Relations, Section of European Integration, delivered an open lecture in the framework of the Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe (MIREES)

The lecture focused on the systematic transformation faced by **Polish agriculture** in 1989. In the initial part of her lecture, professor Pasztor reviewed the peculiarities of the Polish agricultural sector that make it stand out against the background of the rest of the Eastern Block. Up to 1989, Polish agriculture was predominantly in private hands. Between 1944 and 1949, as a result of **agrarian reform** consisting first of all of expropriation of land without any compensation, formerly German lands were granted to peasants, which formed new farms. In the subsequent years, the pressure for collectivization subsided. After 1956, the new communist authorities led by Gomułka stopped insisting on this kind of reform.

The speaker reviewed the private share in the total area of agriculture in various years, both prior to 1989 and in the subsequent period. She argued that the **communist policies toward farmers** were influenced by two processes: the role of the farmers in the uprisings of 1970, 1976 and 1980, and the economics of scarcity, as the farmers were producers of deficit product of basic importance. The latter circumstance helped them to achieve a strong bargaining position.

As the processes of political transformation and **transition to market economy** started after 1989, perceptions of farmers as victims of the new system were widespread. The speaker analyzed the impact of drastic measures applied under the Balcerowicz's plan, which resulted in the impoverishment of the population, the loss of demand for consumer goods, and a dramatic decrease in the farmers' incomes.

Presenting relevant statistical and survey data, the speaker concluded that farmers were less inclined to complain about new order. She argued that the vision of farmers as a source of social discontent was to a certain extent exaggerated.

Drawing on research data, professor Pasztor presented conclusions on the conditions of the **Polish farm after 1989**. First of all, farmers limited the production in their farms. Moreover, many farmers were affected by the changes in the credit regulations. Simultaneously, labour market in many rural areas shrank. The speaker presented the unemployment rates in the country, as well as problems of psychological nature, related to the necessity of changing the routine ways of earning one's living. Parallely, investment problems emerged. In 1987-1992, the size of farms with lower incomes increased. Analyzing the demographic phenomena, the guest argued that social processes did not contribute to positive improvement of the agrarian structure. In the said period, the increase in big farms was twice as small as in 1984-1988. Changes in the number of farms without prospective successors were analyzed, along with the effects on the growth of **unemployment and salary uncertainties**. Decreasing leisure infrastructure was reflected in the shrinking number of cinemas, cultural centers and kindergartens.

The speaker then elaborated on the farmers' opinions on transformation subsequent to the fall of communist authority, the degree of approval toward the policies of **Tadeusz Mazowiecki**, as well as high expectations connected with the Solidarity movement. The electoral dynamics among the farmers were analyzed, with a particular focus on the electoral performance of the Polish Peasant Party. The speaker characterized the political strategy of Polish farmers as a passive waiting for stimulus from the authorities.

According to Pasztor, the **European integration** had positive influence on the increase in agricultural production volume. The difficult negotiations resulted in a reasonable compromise December 2002 in Copenhagen. The terms of inclusion of Polish agriculture in the common area were among the most difficult issues. The speaker analyzed the trends in Polish agricultural sector after accession, paying a particular attention to structural changes compared to the pre-accession period, measured in terms of income level and the share in subsidies.

The lecture aroused a great interest of the audience and was followed by a lively discussion.

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