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## **PATH DEPENDENCE AND THE INCEPTION OF THE POLISH “NEGOTIATED REVOLUTION” OF 1989**

**DRAGOȘ PETRESCU**

***Abstract:*** This study puts forward a frame of analysis of the Polish “negotiated revolution” of 1989, which initiated the revolutionary regime changes that took place in East-Central Europe (ECE) that year. The 1989 events in ECE had three particular features: they were non-utopian; they were not carried out in the name of a particular class; and they were non-violent (with the conspicuous exception of Romania). Considering these specific aspects, this author contends that the 1989 events can be termed “postmodern revolutions.” In order to explain the Polish “negotiated revolution” of 1989, the present study employs an explanatory model previously applied to the bloody revolution of December 1989 in Romania, which takes into consideration both the domestic developments and the entangled histories of the Soviet bloc countries over the period 1945–89, as well as the issue of recent path dependence. The main assumption is that the collapse of communist rule in Poland and in the other five communist countries which experienced a regime change in 1989 was provoked by a complex interplay of structural, conjunctural and nation-specific factors.

***Keywords:*** negotiated revolution; reactive sequence; Poland; communism; 1989.

Throughout the “miraculous year” 1989, six countries in East-Central Europe (ECE) experienced a revolutionary situation: Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania. It is this author’s opinion that, from the present day perspective, the key questions to be asked with regard to the 1989 phenomenon are: (1) Why did those revolutionary events occur precisely in 1989? (2) Why did the communist regimes in ECE collapse in that particular order? and (3) Why were the 1989 events in ECE not violent, with the exception of Romania? As one can easily observe, these fundamental questions relate to the timing, sequence and nature (violent or non-violent, negotiated or non-negotiated) of the 1989 events in ECE. The present study proposes a frame for the analysis of the Polish “negotiated revolution” which initiated the revolutionary regime changes that took place in 1989 in ECE. As argued elsewhere, these events had three particular features: they were non-utopian; they were not carried out in the name of a particular class; and they were non-violent (except for the Romanian revolution). Considering these specific aspects, this author contends that the 1989 events in ECE can be termed

“postmodern revolutions.” In order to explain the Polish “negotiated revolution” of 1989, this study employs an explanatory model previously applied to the bloody revolution of December 1989 in Romania, which takes into consideration both the domestic developments and the entangled histories of the Soviet bloc countries over the period 1945–89, as well as the issue of recent path dependence. The main assumption is that the collapse of communist rule in Poland, as well as in the other five communist countries which experienced a regime change in 1989, was provoked by an intricate interplay of structural, conjunctural and nation-specific factors (Petrescu 2010).

### **Conceptual Framework and Methodological Approach**

The 1989 phenomenon consisted in the breakdown of the communist regimes in six countries with different cultural-historical and socio-economic backgrounds and characterized by distinct political cultures. Moreover, these communist regimes fell in a particular order, which the present analysis terms as the 1989 sequence of collapse of the communist dictatorships in ECE, namely: Poland–Hungary–East Germany–Czechoslovakia–Bulgaria–Romania. It is quite obvious that such a complex phenomenon does not allow for a single-factor explanation. A variety of factors influenced the political decisions by incumbents and opposition groups in ECE throughout the revolutionary year 1989. As pointed out, this author contends that a complicated aggregation of structural, conjunctural and nation-specific factors determined the regime changes of 1989. These factors operated and interacted in various ways in each of the countries analyzed, but they were nevertheless present in each case. Furthermore, the particular way in which the above-mentioned factors aggregated determined eventually the nature of the revolution in each case, as well as the order in which the six communist dictatorships were overthrown. This approach has been inspired by the work of Ole Nørgaard and Steven L. Sampson, who, in their 1984 study “Poland’s Crisis and East European Socialism,” explained the birth of Polish Solidarity as an outcome of social and cultural factors (Nørgaard and Sampson 1984).

In order to permit a better understanding of the way structural, conjunctural and nation-specific factors aggregated in the case of communist Poland, the explanatory model first employed by the author in order to explain the Romanian revolution of 1989 is sketched below (Petrescu 2010, 27–72). Structural factors were common to all societies where state socialism came into being by the imposition of the Soviet model from “above and abroad,” and whose exit from communism occurred during the same year 1989. In the terms of the present analysis, two structural factors are of prime importance: economic failure and ideological decay. In the countries of “actually existing socialism,”

economic performance was an essential source of legitimation for the power elites. Thus, economic failure refers primarily to the perceived failure of state socialism to offer a living standard similar to that of the more advanced Western societies, and not necessarily to the absolute failure of those regimes to achieve a certain level of economic development. Ideological decay manifested differently in the six countries which experienced a regime change in 1989. For instance, in Hungary ideology ceased to be a driving force in the regime's relationship with Hungarian society in the aftermath of the 1956 revolution, while in Poland a similar phenomenon could be observed especially after the military coup conducted by General Wojciech Jaruzelski in December 1981.

Conjunctural factors are of two kinds: internal and external. In the Polish case, two external conjunctural factors were particularly influential, namely, the "Gorbachev" and "Vatican" factors. The coming to power of Mikhail S. Gorbachev, who became secretary general of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985, and the launch of his program of reforms had an immense impact on the communist regimes in Sovietized Europe. Moscow's renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine was an event of paramount importance, which paved the way for the political transformations in ECE. Furthermore, the 1978 election of a Polish Pope had a direct influence on the development of dissident stances in Poland in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. This factor is especially important for the present analysis, because it contributed significantly to the initiation of the 1989 revolution in Poland, which triggered then a chain reaction in ECE and ultimately led to the collapse of five other communist regimes. This chain reaction has been termed, following Samuel P. Huntington, as the "snowballing effect" (Huntington 1991, 33). Obviously, this effect did not operate in the Polish case.

The nation-specific factors have been defined in such a way as to permit a thorough examination of patterns of compliance or conflict with authority under communist rule. Thus, the analysis of the interaction between regime and society brings us to the study of cultural values, attitudinal patterns and behavioral propensities in the Sovietized countries in ECE. Culture provides a framework through which incumbents, political leaders or power elites tend to understand the claims and actions of their opponents and react to them, and vice versa. The present study employs the concept of political culture in order to analyze the specific relationships between political structures and cultures, as well as the particular patterns of interaction between regime and society (Almond 1990; Verba 1974; Brown 1977). Applied to all the six countries, such an approach allows one explain the nature of the regime changes, as well as the particular order in which the six communist dictatorships in ECE collapsed. The present study focuses on the Polish "negotiated revolution," and therefore addresses two major political cultures, namely: regime political culture – termed as the *political culture of the Polish communist regime* and community political

culture – termed as the *political cultures of resistance in communist Poland*, which are understood in accordance with Kenneth Jowitt’s frame of analysis (Jowitt 1992, 51–52 and 54–56).

### **Explaining the Polish Revolution: Structural, Conjunctural and Nation-Specific Factors**

This section discusses the way in which a particular aggregation of structural, conjunctural and nation-specific factors determined the inception of the “negotiated revolution” of 1989 in Poland. The analysis starts by examining the structural factors, namely, economic decline and ideological decay. One can argue that Poland illustrates best the close relationship between politics, economy and social protest under communist rule. As Bartłomiej Kamiński aptly observes, in the case of communist Poland one should examine carefully the “pulsations in economy and politics.” The same author argues that the period 1949–88 can be divided in accordance with the criterion of the net investment rate into four investment cycles: 1949–57; 1958–71; 1972–82; and 1983–88 (Kamiński 1991, 26). If one examines these cycles, one finds that all of them ended with a political crisis. After the first two cycles, that is, in 1956 and 1970, social unrest and violent confrontations between the population and the authorities occurred, and thus a change in leadership followed shortly. The first cycle finished with a social and political crisis that provoked the first major working-class rebellion in Poland (Poznań, June 1956) and led to the return of Władysław Gomułka to power (the Polish October of 1956). The second cycle finished with another wave of working-class unrest. This time, the protests turned violent in the shipbuilding centers on the Baltic Coast, in Gdańsk, Gdynia and Szczecin. This major crisis provoked the fall of Gomułka and the coming to power of Edward Gierek (December 1970).

The outbursts of popular discontent of 1956 and 1970 clearly indicated that providing for the population remained the only powerful legitimation tool in the hands of the ruling Polish United Workers Party (PUWP). Upon his coming to power after Gomułka’s ousting, Gierek adopted a strategy of economic development that bore some fruit up to the mid-1970s, but which was far from being viable in the long term. In June 1976, a long-delayed decision to raise the prices of consumer goods provoked a new wave of protests by the working class. As noted, the protests were also suppressed rapidly, but their importance lies in the creation of the Committee for the Defense of Workers (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*–KOR), the organization which laid the foundations of the cross-class alliance and thus paved the way for the birth of Solidarity. The crises that characterized the final stages of the next two investment cycles, namely 1972–82 and 1983–88 were managed non-violently

in 1980 and 1989 respectively. The crisis that marked the end of the third cycle deserves further examination. Towards the late 1970s, the demand for consumer goods remained high and could not be met, and thus the regime was compelled to introduce price increases for basic foodstuffs in July 1980. When the regime announced such news, the coastal workers conducted another wave of open protest. However, the strike which broke out at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk proved to be different from the previous strikes, which had ended in violence and bloodshed. Instead of marching into the town, the workers engaged in a non-violent occupation strike and asked for the right to establish an independent trade union. Reluctantly, the regime opened negotiations with the rebellious workers and signed the Gdańsk Agreement on 31 August 1980. By signing this agreement, the regime accepted the existence of Solidarity as an independent trade union. However, the compromise reached in August 1980 represented only a temporary victory of Solidarity's "self-limiting revolution," and did not result in a change of system (Staniszki 1984). Consequently, the negotiated solution of August 1980 could not solve the economic and political problems posed by the logic of the party-state. On the contrary, it led to the military coup of December 1981 and the imposition of Martial Law.

The fourth cycle also ended non-violently. This time, however, the Jaruzelski regime and the opposition epitomized by Solidarity reached a negotiated solution that went beyond the confines of a "self-limiting revolution." Through the legalization of Solidarity and its acceptance as a political competitor, it evolved into a non-violent regime change. In this respect, it may be argued that the Polish "negotiated revolution" of 1989 represented the final stage of the "self-limiting revolution" conducted by Solidarity after its establishment in August 1980. In the case of Poland, throughout the communist period, recurrent outbursts of social discontent warned the PUWP against its mistaken economic policies. Therefore, one might conclude that the poor economic performance of the system played a significant role in the final demise of Polish communism. However, a comprehensive explanation of the inception of the 1989 sequence of collapse in Poland cannot rely entirely on the influence of economic factors. Ideological decay, which is another structural factor that deserves closer examination, is addressed below.

During the period August 1980–December 1981, ideological decay became evident against the backdrop of the political changes that signaled the coming to power of the "party-soldiers." In February 1981, General Jaruzelski was appointed prime minister and a few months later, in October 1981, he took over the post of first secretary of the PUWP as well. Such a political change was unprecedented: for the first time in the history of the PUWP, a "communist in military uniform" became the supreme leader of the party. Finally, on 13 December 1981, Jaruzelski carried out the military coup that put an end to the political changes inaugurated through the Gdańsk Agreement. The imposition

of Martial Law represents perhaps the most striking proof of the final demise of ideology in communist Poland. The Jaruzelski regime relied increasingly on bureaucratic coercion instead of selective terror. According to Jadwiga Staniszkis, during this period the exercise of power was reminiscent of “bureaucratic Stalinism, non-ideological and based on the state not the party.” Leszek Kołakowski also observes that Polish communism under Jaruzelski represented a curiosity, namely, “a communism without ideology,” a condition that contributed to its demise in 1989 (*apud* Swidlicki 1988, 7).

As shown above, contingency played a significant role in the final demise of the communist dictatorships in ECE. Of the two kinds of conjunctural factors, external and internal, the external conjunctural factors were the most influential in the case of Poland. Given the nature of the power relations between the Soviet Union and its European satellites, it is obvious that one external factor – which might be called the “Kremlin factor” – always influenced the decisions made by the power elites in Sovietized Europe throughout the period 1945–89. Until the mid-1980s, the “Kremlin factor” was synonymous with the involvement of Moscow in the domestic affairs of the “fraternal” countries in ECE, as was the case in Hungary in 1956 or in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Once Gorbachev came to power and engaged in a bold program of reforms, the “Kremlin factor” evolved into the “Gorbachev factor” and became synonymous with restructuring and openness. In Poland, the country which initiated the sequence of collapse, the changes in the Soviet Union represented the most influential external conjunctural factor. Its impact should be understood in terms of the supplementary burden put on the power elite in Warsaw during the terminal phase of communist rule in 1988–89. In his book-length dialogue with Zdeněk Mlynář, Gorbachev confesses that after his coming to power he warned the leaders of the communist regimes in ECE that Moscow would renounce the doctrine of limited sovereignty: “Immediately after the funeral of my predecessor, [Konstantin U.] Chernenko, I called a conference of political leaders of the Warsaw Pact countries and told them clearly that now we were actually going to do what we had for a long time been declaring: we would adhere strictly to the principle of equality and independence.” As Gorbachev further points out, that was a clear indication that Moscow would not interfere anymore in the internal affairs of a “fraternal” country, but his warning was not taken seriously: “This meant that we would not commit acts of intervention or interference in their internal affairs. My counterparts at that conference, as I came to understand later, did not take what I said seriously. But I did adhere to this principle and never departed from it” (Gorbachev and Mlynář 2002, 84–85). After two Soviet military interventions, in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), and a Soviet-backed military coup in Poland (1981), the ruling communist parties in ECE were suddenly left to their own devices. In this context, the power elite in Poland sought an exit

from the structural economic and moral crisis of state socialism by initiating a “preemptive action” aimed at conducting a “pacted transition” to a new political order by opening talks with the opposition.

Besides, the “Vatican factor” influenced significantly the structuring of the anti-communist opposition in communist Poland. In fact, the election of the Archbishop of Krakow, Karol Wojtyła, to the papal throne on 16 October 1978 represented an event of major significance not only for Poland, but also for the entire Soviet bloc. According to Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, Catholicism was a major transnational actor which was able to mobilize anti-regime resources: “Sociologically and politically, the existence of a strong Roman Catholic Church in a totalitarian country is *always* a latent source of pluralism, precisely because it is a formal organization with a transnational base. The papacy can be a source of spiritual and material support for groups that want to resist monist absorption or extinction [original emphasis]” (Linz and Stepan 1996, 260). In the case of communist Poland, the Roman Catholic Church under Pope John Paul II became an external conjunctural factor that contributed in many respects to the birth of Solidarity and, some ten years afterwards, to the initiation of the “negotiated revolution” in that country. As Adam Michnik aptly notes, Solidarity was able to combine the Catholic Church’s resistance to totalitarianism and its teachings on truth with a pluralistic vision of civil society (Michnik 1998, 75–76).

In addition, unexpected events of historic significance or crucial decisions made by the Western powers contributed considerably to the demise of communist dictatorships in Poland and the rest of ECE. The “Reagan factor,” i.e., the determination of the American President Ronald Reagan to establish a high-tech spatial weapon system, forced the Soviet Union to invest more in weaponry and thus weakened it economically, influencing indirectly the breakdown of the communist regimes in Sovietized Europe, Poland included. Finally, the “snowballing effect,” conspicuously absent in the Polish case, was actually unleashed by the Polish Roundtable Agreement of 5 April 1989 to last until 22 December 1989, when Romanian communism was brought down by a bloody revolution. The fact that a very powerful factor, the “snowballing effect,” which was extremely influential in all the other five countries, was not present in the Polish case poses difficult problems of interpretation concerning the way the external conjunctural factors aggregated and contributed to the demise of the Jaruzelski regime. Yet, external conjuncture alone could not explain the regime change of 1989, which was determined by a particular aggregation of all the factors presented above.

As mentioned, nation-specific factors refer to the political culture of Polish communism and the political cultures of resistance. When examining the political culture of Polish communism, this author follows the periodization proposed by Norman Davies, namely: communist takeover, 1944–48; Polish



Stalinism, 1948–56; national-communism, 1956–80; interval of Solidarity, 1980–81; military dictatorship, 1981–83; and terminal illness, 1983–89 (Davies 2001, 3–25 and 408–15). The particular way in which the communist elite reacted to the working-class protests or dissident actions, as well as the impact those actions had on single-party rule and the policies subsequently adopted by the regime, were influenced by the level of cohesion of the respective elite. A monolithic party could engage more easily in repressive actions meant to silence societal protests without making relevant concessions to the protesters. However, a party that was more likely to face a major split at the top during, or in the immediate aftermath of, a major upheaval was prone to reacting more favorably to social demands. This brings us to the issue of crisis management. When societal protests result in splits at the top and changes in leadership, the new leaders are more often than not inclined to adopt policies meant to reduce for a while the social tensions. Such periods are usually characterized by ideological relaxation and economic liberalization and during such intervals the nuclei of civil society flourish. In Poland, a major change of political vision occurred at the power elite level in early 1981. As already hinted, this consisted of: (1) the gradual concentration of power in the hands of General Jaruzelski; and (2) the coming to the fore of the nomenklatura in military uniform. Jaruzelski was the first high ranking army officer to hold the highest position in the party apparatus, and thus his appointment signaled a major break with party traditions. Therefore, two issues concerning the political culture of Polish communism, which also characterize two periods of its history during the years 1948–89, deserve further examination. One is the vision of politics of the “civilian party” in power (1948–81), while the other concerns the vision of politics of the “military party” in power (1981–89).

When examining the political culture of Polish communism, one should consider two fundamental aspects: the cohesion of the power elite and its previous experience in crisis management. From 1944 to 1989, the following officials headed the Polish Workers Party, and subsequently, the Polish United Workers Party: Władysław Gomułka, 1944–48; Bolesław Bierut, 1948–56; Edward Ochab (March–October 1956); Władysław Gomułka (second time), 1956–70; Edward Gierek, 1970–80; Stanisław Kania, 1980–81; and Wojciech Jaruzelski, 1981–89. As noted, the Polish ruling elite faced three major crises, i.e., October 1956, December 1970 and August 1980, leaving aside other crises of lesser impact on the relationship between the communist party and society, such as those of March 1968 (the “anti-Zionist” campaign) and June 1976 (the working-class revolts of Ursus and Radom). Only in Poland did the communist party in power have such a large number of supreme leaders, which is also indicative of the numerous splits at the top of the PUWP as a consequence of social crises. Therefore, it may be argued that during the period 1944–81 factionalism was a major feature of the political culture of the Polish communist regime.

A fundamental change occurred after the declaration of Martial Law in Poland in December 1981. The military coup marked a shift in terms of regime political culture. From late 1981 to early 1989, the political culture of Polish communism was significantly altered. The coming to power of the "military party" put an end to party factionalism. After all, the existence of factions of hardliners and softliners within the PUWP, whatever this meant at different moments in time, contributed to the birth of Solidarity in August 1980. Under Jaruzelski, political decision-making was concentrated in the hands of the supreme leader of the party, who had his decisions obeyed in accordance with the established military chain of command. Therefore, it may be argued that in early 1989 Jaruzelski had the means to impose his political will upon the party and thus inaugurate a phase of political bargaining with the democratic opposition. As Ray Taras observes: "Jaruzelski's role in pursuing roundtable talks and the democratic breakthrough that they produced was ... pivotal." The same author also referred to a Solidarity activist who cited a remark by Jaruzelski: "Please remember that only General de Gaulle was capable of getting France out of Algeria," and subsequently concluded: "This was a portentous statement because it meant that only General Jaruzelski could get the PUWP out of Poland" (Taras 1999, 374). Jaruzelski's decision to engage in a second "preemptive action" in early 1989 is addressed below in the section on recent path dependence.

Nevertheless, political action by the leadership of the PUWP cannot fully explain the road to the historic elections of June 1989 in Poland. It was also the strategy of self-restraint interiorized by Solidarity from the very moment of its establishment in August 1980 and its willingness to negotiate in a hostile environment. The following section addresses the intricate issue of the political cultures of resistance in communist Poland. As already noted, the imposition of Martial Law considerably weakened the Polish opposition. Solidarity was banned and was forced to take a defensive stance and transform itself into an underground movement. The army officers in power made extensive use of force in order to tame society. Many important figures of Solidarity and the KOR were interned, while others went underground. However, the commitment to "building civil societies outside the totalitarian state," as Michnik puts it, did not fade away. After Lech Wałęsa, the leader of Solidarity, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October 1983, he and his independent trade union achieved worldwide recognition. In the meantime, the international context also changed. As already noted, the coming to power of Gorbachev, and his renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine redefined the relations between the Soviet Union and the "fraternal" countries in ECE.

These changes had an impact not only on the power elites in the Soviet bloc, but also on the dissident groups and opposition movements. Upon his release from prison in August 1986, Michnik observed that the general

repressive framework devised by the Jaruzelski regime was becoming less and less effective, but so were the underground structures put into place by Solidarity. As he further pointed out, one could observe three major tendencies among Solidarity members and sympathizers: (1) leave the organization; (2) continue the underground struggle; or (3) put pressure on the regime to re-legalize Solidarity. Michnik's central argument is that the transformation of Solidarity into an "open structure" and thus into a political force able to speak on behalf of the Polish opposition represented a fundamental political decision that opened the way for the "negotiated revolution" of 1989: "In the end, Solidarity, under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa, was able to fashion an open structure. This structure allowed Solidarity to confer a national political dimension on the workers' strikes of May and August 1988" (Michnik 1998, 141–42).

It appears that the two waves of social mobilization of April-May and August 1988 eventually convinced the authorities to initiate contacts with Solidarity. General Czesław Kiszczak, the minister of internal affairs, met with Wałęsa in late August and in September. Throughout the fall of 1988, the Polish opposition held consultations that eventually resulted in the creation of a Civic Committee, which represented what Michnik has called an "open structure," i.e., a coherent structure able to represent all opposition groups. In January 1989, the PUWP decided to open talks with Solidarity. The Polish Roundtable Talks lasted from February to April 1989 and concluded with an agreement signed on 5 April, which recognized Solidarity's legal right to exist and amended the electoral law. In the "semi-free" elections, held on 4 June (the first round) and 18 June (the second round), Solidarity won 69.9 percent of the vote and thus emerged as the indisputable winner of the historic Polish 1989 elections (Taras 1999, 375–76). Jaruzelski was elected president of the republic in July 1989 and held the position until December 1990, when Wałęsa replaced him after new elections (Taras 1999, 377). Kiszczak, initially named by Jaruzelski as prime minister, failed to form a government. Subsequently, on 19 August, Jaruzelski asked Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a non-communist politician, to form the new government. He became the first ever non-communist prime minister in Polish postwar history. Finally, the Mazowiecki Cabinet was approved by a large majority vote in the Parliament, which concluded the most important stage of the Polish "negotiated revolution."

### **A Discussion on (Recent) Path Dependence**

In scholarly literature on *path dependence*, two dominant types of sequences are considered: self-reinforcing sequences and reactive sequences (Mahoney 2000; Page 2006). According to James Mahoney, *self-reinforcing sequences* refer to "the formation and long-term reproduction of a given institutional pattern," while *reactive sequences* refer to "chains of temporally

ordered and causally connected events" (Mahoney 2000, 508 and 526). The *1989 sequence of collapse* of communist dictatorships in ECE can be seen as a *reactive sequence*, in which each event in the sequence represented a reaction to previous events and a cause of subsequent events. In this respect, an initial event, namely the Polish Roundtable Talks, set in motion a chain of closely linked reactions and counter-reactions, which ultimately provoked the breakdown of the communist regimes in six countries in ECE. Furthermore, the occurrence of the first event in the sequence, the "breakpoint," namely the initiation of negotiation with Solidarity by the Jaruzelski regime in early 1989, can be explained in terms of recent path dependence. In the Polish case, one should note that both the regime and the opposition which engaged in roundtable talks in 1989 were born of the political crisis of 1980–81. As mentioned, Jaruzelski conducted in December 1981 a successful preemptive action, which put a stop to Solidarity's "self-limiting revolution" and prevented a possible Soviet intervention. In early 1989, Jaruzelski decided to engage in a second preemptive action, meant to ensure the political survival of the ruling elite into a new political order. As shown below, not only that this second action failed, but it evolved into a "negotiated revolution" that concluded the "self-limiting revolution" which Solidarity had initiated in August 1980.

In Andrzej Swidlicki's view, the introduction of Martial Law in Poland was the result of a clash between two conflicting concepts of law: "Solidarity represented the traditional concept of law as a system of rules and restrictions that applied to both the authorities and the citizens." This, however, conflicted with the vision of the power elite. As he further points out: "The ruling apparatus ... did not feel itself bound by the existing legal provisions and reached for non-constitutional, emergency powers to restore its position as the uncontested authority in making, interpreting and applying the law." The same author further asserts: "Martial Law was devised in such a way as to leave the authorities (headed by the party's military arm) free to apply forms of repression of whatever scale and duration they considered necessary" (Swidlicki 1988, 5). According to writer Sławomir Mrożek, the imposition of Martial Law exposed what he considered the "original sin" of the communist regime in Poland, i.e., its illegality and illegitimacy (*apud* Swidlicki 1988, 5). Nevertheless, the Jaruzelski regime managed to rule the country mainly through administrative coercion. This is not to say that force was not applied selectively to suppress or contain overt political opposition. Following Swidlicki, one can discern four stages in the post-1981 "normalization" of Poland. The first stage coincided with Davies' military dictatorship period and spanned from 13 December 1981 to 21 July 1983, when Martial Law was revoked and a partial amnesty was granted. The second stage, July 1983–July 1984, lasted from the partial amnesty of 1983 to the general amnesty of 1984, when a large majority of the political prisoners were liberated. The third stage, July 1984–September 1986,

was characterized by the ability of the regime to control society; during this third stage the number of political prisoners grew again. The fourth stage can be defined as a period of stagnation. It started with another general amnesty in September 1986, continued with an outburst of social discontent in the summer of 1988 and came to an end with the decision to open talks with Solidarity, which Jaruzelski imposed on the party in January 1989 (Swidlicki 1988, 11–14).

When analyzing the context in which this crucial decision was made, Jaruzelski's personality and leadership style deserve further examination. An interesting report on Jaruzelski's "attitude, behavior and style" was provided by Colonel Ryszard Kukliński, a senior officer on the Polish General Staff. Kukliński, who had served as aide to Jaruzelski, defected to the United States in December 1981, shortly before the declaration of Martial Law.<sup>1</sup> According to Kukliński, Jaruzelski's vision of the Soviet bloc as a sort of "socialist Commonwealth" was in line with the tenets of the Brezhnev Doctrine upon his coming to power. Consequently, Jaruzelski discouraged the independent stances of other "fraternal countries," especially the Romanian stance:

In the span of the last decade, Jaruzelski evinced ... that he is decidedly against the course of becoming independent of the USSR which Romania had chosen to follow. The Romanian signals, which I personally transmitted from Romania, and which indicated that they expected the Poles to take a more independent position at the Warsaw Pact forum, Jaruzelski considered these nearly a plot or counter-revolutionary move and discarded the ideas with contempt.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, Kukliński's analysis of Jaruzelski's personality traits may give some insight into the way in which the PUWP leader and army commander-in-chief made his decisions:

Jaruzelski has an inborn instinct for discipline and obedience combined within an instilled worship for power. ... The cult of power and the ecstasy which he experienced in exercising it resulted in the situation in which once having achieved power he never shared it with anyone else. ... He never made decisions precipitously, especially under the influence of emotions or passion. Difficult decisions took their time to ripen with him, at times for weeks ... and the most difficult (the imposition of Martial Law) took several months. Though he gladly took advantage of the advice and expertise of the specialists

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<sup>1</sup> During the period 1972–81, Kukliński provided the CIA with some 40,000 pages of secret documents related to the Warsaw Treaty Organization. For more on this case of Cold War espionage see, for instance, "A Look Back... A Cold War Hero: Colonel Ryszard Kukliński;" Internet; <https://www.cia.gov/news-information/featured-story-archive/2010-featured-story-archive/colonel-ryszard-kuklinski.html>; accessed 26 April 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Report by Col. Kukliński on *Jaruzelski's Attitude, Behavior, and Style*; Cold War International History Project (CWIHP); Internet; <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/19830101.pdf>; 47. See "New Kukliński Documents on Martial Law in Poland Released," 11 December 2008; Internet; <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/new-kuklinski-documents-martial-law-poland-released>; accessed 26 April 2014.

and listened to the proposals of his closest associates, it was a rare occasion when he was influenced by their views. His decisions were independent and resulted rather from his own contemplations, frequently in solitude.<sup>3</sup>

As shown above, the declaration of Martial Law in Poland in December 1981 marked a shift in terms of regime political culture. Since the establishment of the party in December 1948 and until December 1981, the PUWP’s inner circle of power was characterized by a low level of cohesion. The coming to power of the “military party” in December 1981 put an end to party factionalism, and thus under Jaruzelski political decision-making was concentrated more than ever in the hands of the supreme leader of the party. Moreover, the decisions of the supreme leader of the PUWP were obeyed in accordance with the military chain of command. Therefore, Jaruzeski had the means to impose his political will upon the party. This statement deserves further examination.

In the new international context determined by the Soviet renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine, Jaruzelski’s decision could be interpreted as a “preemptive action” intended to save what could still be saved in political terms at that moment. The decision of the supreme leader of the PUWP to initiate a second preemptive action in January 1989 was influenced most probably by the success of his first action of the kind, i.e., the imposition of Martial Law in December 1981 by the “military party,” thus avoiding a possible Soviet military intervention (Kramer 2009, 9–11). In terms of path dependence, however, a major difference existed between the two preemptive actions. The imposition of Martial Law in December 1981 was aimed at *path stabilization*, in the context of the Brezhnev Doctrine and in the conditions of Solidarity’s ongoing “self-limiting revolution.” In 1988–89, in the new context of Soviet–Polish relations determined by Gorbachev’s renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine, and faced with a new wave of contestation from below, Jaruzelski opted for a political scenario based on *path departure*.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the supreme leader of the PUWP decided to apply a second preemptive action and negotiate with Solidarity the transition to a new political order. This decision constituted the “breakpoint” which set in motion a *reactive sequence*, that is, the *1989 sequence of collapse* of communist dictatorships in ECE.

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<sup>3</sup> Report by Col. Kuklinski on *Jaruzelski’s Attitude, Behavior, and Style*, 9 and 16–17.

<sup>4</sup> This approach is based on Ebbinghaus’s analysis of the three scenarios of institutional transformation, as follows: (1) path stabilization, i.e., “marginal adaptation to environmental changes without changing core principles;” (2) path departure, i.e., “gradual adaptation through partial renewal of institutional arrangements and limited redirection of core principles;” and (3) path cessation or switching, i.e., “intervention that ends the self-reinforcement of an established institution and may give way to a new institution in its place” (Ebbinghaus 2005, 17–18).

### **Concluding Remarks**

The “negotiated revolution” in Poland inaugurated the 1989 sequence of collapse of the communist dictatorships in ECE. The case of Poland is the most complicated and difficult to explain especially because the “snowballing effect” did not operate in its instance. This study offers a well-grounded explanation of the 1989 events in Poland by focusing on a set of structural, conjunctural and nation-specific factors. The analysis concentrated first on the structural factors, i.e., economic failure and ideological decay. As previously mentioned, Poland went through four major crises, in 1956, 1970, 1980–81 and 1988–89, which resulted in major political changes at the top of the PUWP. The crises of 1956, 1970 and 1980–81 occurred in a period in which the Brezhnev Doctrine was a “viable part of Moscow’s foreign policy arsenal” (Ouimet 2003, 5). The Soviet Union considered that it had the right to restore the “socialist order” in any “fraternal” country where actions from below or from above threatened the existence of the communist rule.

The Polish crisis of 1980–81, however, was different from the previous ones: the working-class protest in Gdańsk did not turn violent. The non-violent, occupation and round-the-clock strike, which benefited from the support of prominent dissident intellectuals, forced the regime to negotiate with the strikers and eventually to permit the establishment of Solidarity. Over the period August 1980–December 1981, Solidarity employed a strategy of “self-limitation” which envisaged a reformation of the system without regime change. In such a situation, the sole effective weapon of the new independent trade union was the general strike, but this weapon proved to be less powerful than previously thought in the face of the “communists in uniform.” The “military party” under General Jaruzelski came to the fore in December 1981, and imposed Martial Law. This indicated that the military arm of the party was not only unwilling to tolerate the existence of Solidarity, but was also able to engage in large-scale domestic military operations.

In 1988–89, a peculiar aggregation of structural, conjunctural and nation-specific factors made the Polish “negotiated” revolution possible. As shown above, in the particular case of Poland one can observe a close relationship between politics, economy and social protest. Based on the criterion of the net investment rate, one can identify four investment cycles in the economy of communist Poland, i.e., 1949–57, 1958–71, 1972–82 and 1983–88. When the fourth investment cycle came to an end in 1988, there were no signs of a different outcome than in the case of the previous three, which had ended with a political crisis. Social dissatisfaction with the regime was on the rise, and a new wave of social mobilization occurred in April–August 1988. At the same time, the strategy of administrative coercion introduced under the rule of Jaruzelski

made ideology void of any mobilizing power. External conjuncture was less favorable than ever for ruling communist parties in ECE, including the PUWP. In 1985, Gorbachev became the new leader of the CPSU and soon afterwards it became clear that the Kremlin envisaged a change of policy with regard to the Sovietized Europe. Beginning in 1987, Gorbachev gradually abandoned the Brezhnev Doctrine, which significantly reduced the margin of maneuver of the "military party" in power in Warsaw. The reformist course imposed by Gorbachev left the leaders of the "fraternal" regimes in ECE to their own devices, while Catholic nationalism fueled by the "Vatican factor" was acting in support of Solidarity.

The nature of the Polish revolution, i.e., "negotiated" and thus non-violent, was due to a particular interaction of regime and community political cultures. Based most probably on the experience of his previous highly successful preemptive action of December 1981, General Jaruzelski made the decision to initiate a second preemptive action and open talks with Solidarity in January 1989. As discussed above, a major difference existed between the two preemptive actions in terms of path dependence. The imposition of Martial Law in December 1981 was aimed at path stabilization, in the context of the Brezhnev Doctrine and in the conditions of Solidarity's "self-limiting revolution." In the new context of Soviet-Polish relations determined by Gorbachev's renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine and faced with a new wave of contestation from below, Jaruzelski opted for a scenario of political transformation based on path departure. Consequently, the supreme leader of the PUWP opened negotiations with Solidarity in the hope of controlling the transition to a new political order. Such a decision was eased by the shift in the regime political culture after December 1981, which enabled the supreme leader of the PUWP to impose his decision on the party. Last, but by no means least, it was Solidarity's strategy of self-restraint and its ability to negotiate and seek a compromise in a hostile political environment that permitted the negotiations to be finalized and the elections of 4-18 June 1989 to take place.

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