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## **FROM DEMOCRACY TO AUTHORITARIANISM. THE EVOLUTION OF THE FORMS OF GOVERNMENT IN THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC**

### **Summary**

The article reflects on the measures applied by Sanacja regime after the May Coup between 1926-1935 in order to evolutionary transform the parliamentarian-democratic system into authoritarian form of government.

**Key words:** forms of government, political system, democracy, authoritarianism, constitution, repression.

## **OD DEMOKRACJI DO AUTORYTARYZMU. EWOLUCJA SYSTEMU RZĄDZENIA W II RZECZYPOSPOLITEJ**

### **Streszczenie**

Przedmiotem artykułu jest refleksja politologiczna nad aktualnością sposobów i środków stosowanych w latach 1926-1935 przez rządzącą w Polsce sanację po zamachu majowym, w celu ewolucyjnego przekształcenia systemu parlamentarno-demokratycznego w system rządów autorytarnych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** system rządów, demokracja, autorytaryzm, konstytucja, represje.

### **Introduction**

Mythologization of certain periods of the latest political history of Poland is contemporarily a major problem not only for the historical and political sciences but, first and foremost, it constitutes a problem in the context of the politics of memory as a governmental instrument applied with greater or lesser emphasis by the post-Solidarity movement governments since the beginning of the Polish political transformation. From the political point of view it may be explained and, to a certain extent, understood as the need for legitimization of the new groups holding authority following the year 1989 and the changes in the character and structure of the political system these groups were effecting. However, since the first half of the XXI century the politics of memory have taken the form of distorting the history. This process pertains primarily to the history of the Polish People's Republic the achievements of which are subject to discrediting and selective approach to the historical narration of this period of history. Contemporarily attempts are being made against this backdrop at presenting the history of the II Republic of Poland in more favourable light which are evidenced not only by the sympathy of the ruling bodies and the associated circles towards the symbols of that period but, currently, in mimicking certain political, cultural and economical patterns which, in truth, do not fit in well with the modern realities but play a significant role in the policy of the state authorities. For one possessing accurate historical knowledge it is difficult not to notice that the existing mode of governance is disturbingly similar to the methods used by the Sanacja regime in the period between the May Coup and adopting the April Constitution of Poland. These similarities may be discovered in the manner in which laws are adopted, in the policies effected, foreign policy in particular, and in the references to

the statist economical conceptions. What is thought-provoking is the fact that in the last field the figure of E. Kwiatkowski, a politician accepting and successfully, to a certain degree, realizing the actions fitting in with the canons of the state statism conception of that period, is rarely invoked. The crux of the deliberations will consist of the political science reflection on the manner in which political transformation influences modernization and stabilization of a restored state and the consequences of this process.

### **The democratic and parliamentary governance of 1919-1926**

During the restoration of the independent Polish state authorities begun to establish their own governing institutions with regional reach as early as towards the end of 1918, initially by adapting the law-making practices of the partitioners. The act of establishing the Polish authorities and the central state institutions was based on the so called Little Constitution adopted by the Legislative Sejm (Polish Parliament) on the 20th of February 1919 which temporarily set forth the organization of the chief state bodies by adopting the following provisions (Burda, 1983, pp. 14-15):

- the supreme legislative authority was held by the Legislative Sejm, its acts were proclaimed by Marshal of the Sejm and countersigned by the president of the Council of Ministers and an appropriate minister; this fact indicated transferring the entirety of the legislative power to the Sejm;
- the Chief of State represented the state in foreign policy affairs and was the supreme executor of the adopted Sejm acts in regards to civil and military affairs. Apart from the representative function this office also held the executive power;
- the government appointed the Chief of State in agreement with Sejm which, in practice, translated into the need for reaching an agreement with the Council of Elders consisting of the chairmen of clubs operating within the Sejm;
- the acts of public authority issued by the Chief of State were always issued with the countersignature of an appropriate minister;
- The Chief of State and the president of the Council of Ministers, along with the government ministers, jointly bore the political responsibility in front of the Sejm.

The issues related to determining the borders of the new state, including the attempts at realizing the Promethean ideals in the east of the country by the Chief of State and the resulting Polish-Russian war, postponed the possibility for adopting a new constitution. Ultimately, by way of mutual appeasement, a compromise regarding the constitution was reached in the Legislative Sejm as late as in the beginning of 1921 and on the 17th of March the Constitution of the Republic of Poland was adopted.

The democratic-liberal principles of the state political system contained in this constitution are commonly known and do not spark major disputes in the subject literature. Thus there is no need to recall them in detail. This constitution was, according to legal and systemic sources, based on the constitution of the III French Republic<sup>1</sup>. It was not, as certain historians researching political systems claim, based on the customs preserved in the political awareness of the society and therefore this constitution had difficulties with gaining acceptance of the wider social circles<sup>2</sup>. In terms of the composition of the supreme authorities the constitution favoured the legislative

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<sup>1</sup> Compare: „System rządów parlamentarnych”, J. Szymanek, 2007, in: *System rządów. Dylematy konstytucyjnej regulacji i praktycznej funkcjonalności*, T. Mołdawa, J. Szymanek (red.), Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> Writing about the models for the March Constitution S. Krukowski claimed: „Adopting the French model of parliamentary republic resulted in our constitution connecting with our domestic traditions to a lesser degree than expected” (*Geneza konstytucji z 17 marca 1921 r.*, S. Krukowski, 1977, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PWN, p. 314).

power, primarily the Sejm. It was the result of introduction into the constitution the principle of separation of powers, based not on the premise of parity of legislative and executive power but on the formal and functional subordination of the president and the government to the legislative power – primarily the Sejm. The political distribution of the Chamber of Deputies, which was primarily the result of adoption of the five-point electoral law with proportional electoral ordinance for the Sejm elections, made establishing a ruling majority more difficult and destabilized the operations of the executive power. The president elected by the National Assembly did not hold meaningful executive power nor did he commanded the instruments which could contain the legislative activity of the parliament. Adopting the March Constitution of Poland, as it is frequently emphasized in the subject literature, was the result of a temporary compromise reached under the pressure of external factors (Polish-Russian war and the threat to the capital in the August of 1920) and was not supported by any major social and political powers which were willing to identify with it. This constitution did not gather supporters or defenders willing to defend its gravitas and protect it from the May Coup in any of the major political powers of that period: not among the right-wing supporters who considered the constitution to be too democratic, nor among the left-wing supporters who considered the constitution to not be democratic enough<sup>3</sup>. In the latter case we may only once again invoke the observation that even if the March Constitution would reach even further with its democratic solutions it still would not be able to form a firm foundation for the actual implementation of the democratic solutions adopted in its articles (Burda, 1983, p. 54)<sup>4</sup>. Only after the initial experience of the rule of the Sanacja regime, when it turned out that the systemic revolution is heading towards the veiled authoritarian rule, the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition was formed to defend the March Constitution.

Numerous contemporary lawyers and economists, such as: W. Komarnicki, S. Starzyński, A. Peretiatkowicz, W.L. Jaworski i S. Głąbiński, perceived the adopted political system based on the March Constitution as inadequate for the existing social and economical systems. The legal and institutional system contained within the constitution was not adequately founded on the social and economical structure and the political culture of the society<sup>5</sup>. This problem was accurately diagnosed by one of the experts on the Polish state law who wrote that: "the proper implementation of the particular constitution – and this is the most general aspect of the relation between the stipulations of the constitution and the practice of state life – is dependent on the adequacy of the legal regulations to the ruling social and economical relationships and to the needs and aspirations of the society itself" (Burda, 1983, p. 55). In other words, under the conditions of mounting economical difficulties and the aggravating social conflicts the system of parliamentary authority based on the dominance of the Sejm ("the Sejmocracy") was not effective enough for realization of the basic functions of the state. The political Right perceived all the constitutional shortcomings as the results of the exuberance of the representative democracy, adoption of the common citizenship, the expansive social legislation, the proportional electoral ordinance and the excessive statism. The political Left presented opposing views and claimed that the Senate was unnecessary (Polish Socialist Party proposed establishing a Labour Chamber instead), direct democracy was lacking, social and cultural rights of the working people were not adequately guaranteed, the Catholic Church was much too privileged and that the economical role of the state was insufficient. Honestly, overthrowing the constitution by way of a coup was not difficult (apart from the supporters of Piłsudski such sentiments were also displayed

<sup>3</sup> See: *Konstytucja marcowa 1921. Dokumenty naszej tradycji*, A. Burda, 1983, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> Compare: *Pięćdziesiąt lat 1918-1968*, K. Grzybowski, 1977, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, p. 88.

<sup>5</sup> See: *O zmianie konstytucji polskiej*, W. Komarnicki, 1927, Wilno: Nakładem i Drukiem Józefa Zawadzkiego, p. 12.

by radical nationalist right-wing movements). It was further facilitated by the external factors in the form of the crisis of the European parliamentarism.

The political system the legal framework of which was outlined by the constitution of March 17th, 1921, remained in effect in its original form for merely 5 years. In conducting the successful May Coup Józef Piłsudski, who at that time did not hold any state office, not only did not dissolve the parliament but also decided to strengthen the executive power<sup>6</sup>.

The first success of Piłsudski directly following the coup related to the resignation of president S. Wojciechowski was the presidential elections. The National Assembly summoned on the 31st of May 1926 elected Józef Piłsudski to the office of the president<sup>7</sup>. This act was at least surprising and, by the same token, it was a political precedent of sorts because the same Sejm of the Republic of Poland appointed the government of W. Witos in the first place and, two weeks later, accepted the very government it appointed being overthrown and elected the leader of the coup as the new president. Piłsudski did not accept the nomination but he received a very strong political message which confirmed his claim that by selecting him to the office of the president the parliament approved of the purposefulness of the coup and, de facto, legalized the coup. On the following day the elections were held once again. A professor of the Lviv Polytechnic, I. Mościcki, was elected as the new president and was sworn into office on the 4th of June 1926. The newly elected president accepted resignation of the Prime Minister K. Bartel and ordered him to form a new government in which the office of the military affairs minister was claimed by J. Piłsudski. However, in the existing constitutional system the changes in the presidential office and in the government effected after the May Coup did not guaranteed the long-term control over the state authorities for Piłsudski. To this effect the changes in the Basic Law were required.

Under the pressure and with political support of the Right, in particular the National Populist Union disinclined towards Piłsudski<sup>8</sup>, the parliament adopted the August Novelization on the 2nd of August 1926<sup>9</sup>. The National Populist Union, which constituted a major political force in the parliament, supported the novelization believing at that time that the Sejm of Republic of Poland will not lose the control over the government in the aftermath of the proposed change. The August Novelization reinforced the legal standing of the government and the president in regards to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland by introducing the following changes:

- the president was given the power to dissolve the Sejm and the senate under the notion put forth by the government (art. 11);
- the right of the Sejm to enact its own dissolution before the end of its term was taken away (art. 26);
- the president was given the right to issue legislative decrees: a) in the period between the terms of the Sejm; b) on the grounds of a special authorization act (also adopted on the 2nd of August 1926, which gave the president the power to issue legislative decrees by the lapse of 31st of December 1927) also during the term of the Sejm;
- the changes allowed for adopting the government budget draft as an act in the event of the chamber not considering the budget within the deadline;

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<sup>6</sup> On the 12th of May Piłsudski led his forces in attack on Warsaw. Three-day long fights erupted in the capital, 379 people were killed, hundreds were injured. On the night of 14th to 15th May the government of prime minister W. Witos resigned. See: *Historia Polski XX wieku*, A. Czubiński, 2000, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, p. 159.

<sup>7</sup> Piłsudski was elected as the presidents with a 292 to 193 majority, 69 votes were discarded as invalid.

<sup>8</sup> See: *Najnowsze dzieje Polski, 1914-1983*, A. Czubiński, 1987, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, p. 154.

<sup>9</sup> The Act of the 2nd of August amending and supplementing the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of the 17th of March 1921 (JoA of RP, No. 44, item 267).



- the changes restricted the right of holding the vote of no confidence in regards to the government (the motion could not be voted on the day it was submitted art. 58);
- sanctions were introduced for breaching the stipulations resulting from the art. 22 of the constitution (drawing personal gains and benefits due to holding a deputy mandate) up to being stripped of the mandate (Czubiński, 1987, p. 153).

The August Novelization strengthened the executive power but did not guarantee a future stable and reliable governance for the group of Piłsudski. According to the constitution the new elections were supposed to take place in 1927 but according to the wish of Piłsudski they were postponed by president Mościcki and moved to the March of 1928. It meant that for securing the majority in the parliament it was required to establish a party which would acquire enough mandates in the National Assembly to be able to prepare and perform the process of adopting a new constitution. Thus the originator of the coup and the contemporary symbol of fighting against the party favouritism, wishing to win the coming parliamentary elections, intended to form a political party under a contradictory name *Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rządem* (the Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government). This newly formed political party was headed by the closest associate of the marshal, W. Sławek. Establishing the Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government was to serve not only as a tool of shattering the opposing parties and groups but primarily as a tool of political dominance of the future parliament (Samsonowicz, Tazbir, Łepkowski, Nałęcz, 1992, p. 532)<sup>10</sup>.

### **On the path towards restricting the parliamentary democracy and strengthening the authoritarian rule**

Although the elections for the Sejm of the 4th of March 1928 and the elections for the senate which took place a week later enjoyed a high voter turnout (78.3%) they did not produce the results expected by the new regime. The Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government was able to secure 130 seats in the parliament but as the effect of the election results being contested in numerous electoral districts the Supreme Court invalidated the elections in 6 districts and as a result the Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government lost 20 mandates (Czubiński, 1987, p. 191). The government camp achieved greater success in the senate elections where it obtained 31.7% of votes which translated into 46 mandates. Thus, holding this amount of mandates the government camp was unable to effect changes in the constitution unaided, without the support of other parliament groups. The first portent of the lack of success in subjugating the Sejm of the Republic of Poland was the nomination of I. Daszyński, who as the opposition candidate obtained more votes of members of the parliament than K. Bartel supported by Piłsudski, to the office of the Marshal of the Sejm in 27th of March. A year later, as the result of the policy of permanent disregard and insulting of the opposition, violating the rules effective in the democratic state governed by law, and, first and foremost, the president and the ruling camp blocking the Sejm from fulfilling its constitutional functions (e.g. summoning and immediately postponing or closing sessions of the Sejm), the democratic and left-wing opposition begun to intensify its efforts aimed at protection of the parliamentary democracy. As the result of the joint statement issued on the 14th of September by Polish Socialist Party, Polish People's Party "Piast", Polish People's Party "Wyzwolenie", Peasant Party, National Workers' Party and Polish Christian Democratic Party, which contained the refusal to participate in the conference with representatives of the government regarding the issues of budget, the process of establishing the extra-parliamentary

<sup>10</sup> For more information on the nature of the Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government see: *Piłsudczycy u władzy. Dzieje Bezpartyjnego Bloku Współpracy z Rządem*, A. Chojnowski, 1986, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Ossolineum, pp. 69-78.

accord in the form of the Association for Protection of Peoples' Rights and Freedom – the alliance of leftist and rightist political parties (Centrolew – Centre-Left) – was initiated.

Increasingly consistently opposing the endeavours of the ruling camp aimed at restricting the sovereignty of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland the Centre-Left opted for more demonstrative and radical forms of struggle. On the 29th of June the Centre-Left summoned the congress of the Association for Protection of Peoples' Rights and Freedom to Kraków. Despite "various difficulties and diversions on the part of the administration (e.g. sending false telegrams about cancelling the meeting)"<sup>11</sup> the Congress gathered numerous representatives of the opposition from across the country. The Congress adopted an important resolution condemning the dictatorship of Piłsudski, his manner of ruling and the conduct of the president. The Congress also announced the fight for abrogating the dictatorship and restoring the democratic-parliamentary governance and, on the rally taking place on the same day on Kleparski square, a resolution was adopted which announced to the ruling camp that "the society will answer with armed resistance to any attempt at a coup" (Leczyk, 1987, p. 23). As M. Leczyk writes "the reaction of authorities was fierce and brutal". The circulated statements of the Congress of Kraków were confiscated and Piłsudski himself swept to power. Under the order of Piłsudski the president dissolved the Sejm and the Senate of the Republic of Poland and the new elections were announced for the November of 1930. In the following two interviews for "Gazeta Polska" Piłsudski assaulted the Sejm of the RP and the constitution and threatened leaders of the opposition with arrests (Ibidem, s. 24). He took the leadership of the new government on the 25th of August 1930 and on the 29th of August the president dissolved the parliament and announced new November elections. Reacting to the described events the Centre-Left, after Polish Christian Democratic Party left the alliance, transformed into the electoral bloc under the name the Association for Protection of Peoples' Rights and Freedom. On the night of 9th to 10th of September the ruling camp took radical and violent actions by arresting dozens of opposition deputies (incl. former prime minister W. Witos, W. Kiernik of Polish People's Party "Piast", N. Barlicki, H. Lieberman, A. Pragier, S. Dubois, A. Ciołkosz of the Polish Socialist Party, K. Bagiński, J. Putek of the Polish People's Party "Wyzwolenie", K. Popiel of the National Workers' Party and A. Sawicki of the Christian Party) and imprisoning them in the military stronghold in Brześć near the Bug river where W. Kostek-Biernacki served as the commander. Several Ukrainian deputies were also imprisoned in Brześć as well as, a few days later, the leader of the Christian Democrats in the Silesia region – Wojciech Korfanty – and Jan Kwiatkowski of the National Party. During the electoral campaign approx. 5000 people in total were imprisoned, among them – as M. Śliwa writes – 1600 supporters of Centre-Left, including as much as 1000 socialists (Śliwa, 2000, p. 161). Owing to these actions the elections of the November 1930 entered the annals of history under the symbolic name of "the elections of Brześć". Arrests were not the only repressive measures used by the ruling camp against the opposition during the electoral campaign in order to secure the victory in elections. Numerous lists of candidates and votes submitted by the opposition were invalidated, attempts were made – similarly to the previous elections – to break apart parties and groups forming Centre-Left and the results in Precinct and District Election Commissions were doctored (Brzoza, Sowa, 2006, p. 162).

As the result of "the elections of Brześć" the Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government was strengthened (it acquired 247 mandates in the Sejm of RP and the majority consisting of 78 mandates in the Senate of RP) but it did not secure the qualified majority required for adopting a constitution. Thus efforts and advances were made to poach other parliament clubs or to corrupt their members. In the March of 1931 the Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation

<sup>11</sup> See: *Historia Polski 1918-1945*, Cz. Brzoza, A.L. Sowa, 2006, Kraków Wydawnictwo Literackie, p. 304.

with the Government once again presented in the Sejm of RP the draft of the constitution, with certain amendments, which was previously discussed and rejected by the Constitutional Committee of the prior Sejm of RP. This move sparked outrage among the opposition and thus the decision has been made to abstain from the discussion by leaving the Sejm chambers. The government camp later used this precedent to force through the new constitution. For the time being the Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government elected to deliberate on the individual parts of the constitutional draft in order to formulate the results of the deliberations in separate theses which were later recounted by Marshal S. Car.

The new idea, serving as the general systemic rule of the future constitution, was announced by the president of the Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government, W. Sławek, on the rally of the legionnaires in Warsaw in the August of 1933. According to this idea the president should hold the supreme and impartible power, and the authority bodies design for completing respective tasks should act under president's authority. W. Sławek formally rejected the classical dictatorship system and declaimed for the rule of "the elite" as the group ruling at the side of the president. The institution designed for "the elite" was to be the Senate of the RP consisting in 2/3 of the merited people and in 1/3 of the people appointed by the president. The first of "the elite" were to consist of the cavaliers of the "Virtuti Militari" order and the "Krzyż Niepodległości" order. The Senate of the RP was to hold equal rights to the Sejm of the RP.

There is no doubt that the theses publicly proclaimed by W. Sławek corresponded with the intentions of Piłsudski. The "constitutional theses" debated in the Sejm of the RP, submitted by the general referent S. Car in violation of the existing stipulations and in the absence of the opposition deputies, despite the protest of deputy S. Stroński (People's Party), were, without deliberations, renamed to "the constitutional act" and adopted on the 26th of January 1934. The draft of the constitutional act adopted in such a manner was relayed to the senate of the RP. This action constituted violation of article 125 of the Constitution which proclaims that "a notion for amendments to the Constitution shall be signed by at least 1/4 of the statutory number of deputies and announced at least 15 days in advance" (Burda, 1987, p. 96). The manner in which the Constitution was "adopted" by the Sejm also aroused concerns of Piłsudski himself who, in order to improve the image of the ruling camp, ordered the Senate of the RP to conduct "a thorough debate". The upper chamber of the parliament realized this task and introduced numerous amendments which were adopted on the 10th of January 1935, nearly a year after the draft was adopted by the Sejm of the RP. The amendments introduced by the Senate of the RP were processed by the chamber of the deputies on the 23rd of March 1935, once again in violation of the constitution adoption procedure (Czubiński, 1987, p. 225). Ultimately, on the 23rd of April 1935, president I. Mościcki signed the new constitution and thus legitimized the new political system of the Republic of Poland and the authoritarian government. The new constitution rejected or restricted the basic systemic principles which political science literature attributes to the democratic state:

- the principle of the sovereignty defining "the Polish state as the good of all citizens" as the sovereign (art. 1);
- the principle of separation of powers by focusing the power in the person of the president as "the uniform and impartible state power" (art. 2, section 4 and art. 11) and downgrading the role of parliament to serving in control and advisory functions;
- it limited the principle of representation of the people by decreasing the participation of citizens in electing the supreme government bodies by rising the age of voting right to 24 years and the age for the right to stand in elections to 30 years;

- it annulled the political pluralism principle by adopting on the 8th of July 1935 the new electoral ordinance which introduced 104 uniform two-mandate electoral districts and deprived citizens of the right to directly submit candidates by transferring this right to the District Electoral Assembly.

The new Constitution of the 23rd of April 1935 brought the president to the forefront of the state and focused "the uniform and impartible state power" in his hands and thus, in consequence, all other forms of authority: the government, the Sejm, the senate, armed forces, courts and control instruments were subjected to the control of the president. This constitution made the person of the president answer only "to God and history" for the fate of the country and deemed the care for the wellness of the country, the readiness to defend it and the care for placing the country on a proper place among the nations of the world as the supreme obligation and responsibility (Borucki, 2002, pp. 161-170). How the president and the Sanacja regime were able to fulfill these obligations the wider Polish public was able to learn only after Hitler's assault on Poland during World War II.

The subject literature does not challenge the new constitution in regards to the issues of the elitism in regards to the access to the supreme state offices, departure from the aforementioned principle of sovereignty of the nation or the issue of ensuring the supremacy of president's and government's executive power over the legislative power, major restriction of independence of courts, breaking off with the parliamentary-cabinet rule, factual cancellation of political pluralism and ensuring that inheritors of Piłsudski will maintain power. The newly adopted regime was no longer the democratic-parliamentary system, although it retained, as certain historians emphasize, the institutional solutions characteristic for the state governed by a limited democracy<sup>12</sup>.

Certain historians researching political systems compare it to contemporary authoritarian and fascist systems and in this context they emphasize the moderate authoritarian character of the Polish system. However, they ignore the fact that in the neighbouring country – Czechoslovakia, restored after nearly 300 years of being subjected to the rule of Austro-Hungarian monarchy, only the external intervention was able to dissolve the well-functioning democracy of Czechoslovakia. Much closer to the reality are the views which proclaim that the social and political resistance, the traditions of freedom, agricultural and industrial character of the economy and the dominance of peasants in the social structure of the country were the factors which defined the borders for expansion of the Sanacja regime (Ajnenkiel, 1983, p. 342).

The enemies and critics of the Sanacja regime accurately defined the substance of this system by claiming that with its power the president, as the holder of the supreme executive power, became sovereign himself. The powers of the president supplanted the principle of sovereignty and democracy. It should be also noted that from the procedural perspective it has been the second time in the history of Polish nation (following the Government Act of May 3, 1791) when a new constitutional system has been adopted by the parliament by means of various non-democratic practices and subterfuge, this time not in order to reform the country but to depart from the democratic system-wide solutions (Ajnenkiel, 1991, pp. 285-297). The act of the constitution sanctioning the authoritarian rule system did not end the fight between the opposition parties and the dictatorship of the Sanacja regime, particularly after the death of Piłsudski, and was met with resistance of various social groups. The latter half of the Thirties brought intensification of economic and political strikes and protests which resulted in repressions

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<sup>12</sup> Compare: *Polskie Konstytucje*, A. Ajnenkiel, 1983, Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, p. 341. The system set forth in the April Constitution is also defined in the subject literature as "Cesarean" or "authoritarian". See: *Historia ustroju i prawa polskiego*, J. Bardach, B. Leśnodorski, M. Pietrzak, 1999, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, p. 501.



and violence on the part of the police force, including firing at the protesters and fatalities. The internment camp, designated by certain historians as a concentration camp, established by the Sanacja regime as early as in the July of 1934 in Bereza Kartuska in the Polesie region became the symbol of the rule of the Sanacja regime. After the outbreak of war approx. 3000 prisoners went through this camp who were not only the activists of the organizations which were illegal or were abolished by the Sanacja Regime, such as Ukrainian Nationalist Organization (UNO), the Communist Party of Poland (CPP), the National Radical Camp, but were also the people associated with People's Party (PP) and the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). Communists constituted the largest group of prisoners (1400-1500 individuals). Other sources indicate that among prisoners there were 55% of communists, 4% of Ukrainian nationalists, 2% of Radical Camp representatives, 1% of People's Party members, 1% of Nazi sympathizers, and the rest consisted of various "economical pests" (*Miejsce Odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej*).

### Conclusion

Similarly to the other countries of the Central and Eastern Europe the enormous social and economical disparities and the emancipation movements of the compromised social masses were favourable conditions for rejecting the democratic systems established after the conclusion of World War I. The democratic and liberal solutions, requiring high political culture of citizens and stable economy, were not a strong enough civilizational foundation in the light of the aforementioned conditions for conducting the reforms aimed at modernization. This was the main reason behind the ineffectiveness of liberal democracy and adoption of authoritarian or fascist systems in numerous European countries<sup>13</sup>. In comparison to other European authoritarian states the democratic system of rule established in Poland after Poland regained its independence and its evolution towards the authoritarian regime, effectively sanctioned by the supreme legal act, was a rather peculiar case specific for Poland. Piłsudski and the Sanacja regime did not directly imitate the contemporary European authoritarian and fascist systems although they shared the mutual resentment (if not hate) towards the parliamentary democracy.

The direction in which the system evolved seemed rational; since the attempts at modernization of the society and the economy of the II Republic of Poland through democratic governance have not produced palpable progress the prospect of the authoritarian authority resolving those issues could have appeared more advantageous. In all fairness, the May Coup was launched in the period of growth of Polish economy and not its decline but the finalization of the coup, crowned with adoption of the April Constitution, took place much later, in the period of great economic crisis which in Poland lasted between 1930 and 1935. In the eyes of the society this fact could serve as an additional justification for the necessity of the systemic changes and application of repression towards the opposition contra-posing introduction of these required changes. The history displayed that focusing and centralizing power in a singular government body was also unable to produce better results. The well regarded and recognized investigators of the Polish economic history of the interwar period – Z. Landau i J. Tomaszewski – referring to the balance of the II RP economical growth, wrote that (1991, p. 79):

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<sup>13</sup> Compare: *Rządy Sejmu 1921-1926*, T. Nałęcz, 1991, Warszawa: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, p. 76.

The progress in civilization took place in the interwar period Poland. However, we must bear in mind that the level the restored Polish nation was leaving was (apart from the Prussian district) very low. Thus the process of development of our country proceeded at a rate slower than in other, more developed countries. The rate of our development was similar to the rate of development of agricultural-industrial countries of a similar level of wealth. Between the first and the second World War Poland was unable to reach the civilization level of other, more developed countries.

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