



LONG REPORT

Ralf Dahrendorf Roundtable

POLEXIST: Ensuring Poland's Position in the EU under the Current Political Climate May 30, 2018, Lodz (Poland)

On May 30, 2018, Liberte! Foundation (Poland) in cooperation with Republikon Institute (Hungary) organized as a part of the European Liberal Forum's Ralf Dahrendorf Roundtable series a debate titled “**POLEXIST: Ensuring Poland's Position in the EU under the Current Political Climate**”. Recent triggering of Article 7 of the EU Treaty against Poland and ongoing political developments in the country that have weakened Poland's position in the European Union served as a direct pretext for the discussion. The event, held at the Faculty of International and Political Studies of the University of Lodz (Lodz, Poland), generated a lot of interest among local audience, gathering over 70 people.

Since the 2015 parliamentary election in Poland, the new government introduced a number of "good changes" in the areas that contribute to the integrity of a democratic state (judiciary, women's rights, public media, nature protection, among others). As a result, Poland has moved away from the direction set by the European Union and agreed on by the member states. The recent crisis of image of Poland on an international stage is ever more the reason for a sensible and action-oriented discussion on how to put a halt to further negative reinforcements in Poland and instead, to navigate the state back on track of the further EU integration. Including in the debate voices from four various perspectives shall therefore result in creating a positive and inclusive dialogue that has at its heart the ideas of liberal democracy, rule of law, and an open society.

Four speakers, representing various areas of public life, took part in the discussion. Mrs **Joanna Burnos**, International Cooperation Representative for the Nowoczesna party, was joined by Mrs **Katarzyna**



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Knapik, spokesperson for the Obywatele RP, Mr **Csaba Toth**, ELF Board Member and Director of Republikon Institute, partner of the event, as well as Mr **Tomasz Kamiński**, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of International and Political Studies of the University of Lodz, the host of the event.

An hour-and-a-half-long discussion resulted in a number of crucial observations. Moderated by Mrs Olga Łabendowicz, representative of Liberte! Foundation, main organizer of the roundtable session, the debate had **three main objectives**: to diagnose the status quo, provide recommendations for remedying the current situation, as well as to identify the desired results at the same time taking into account anticipated challenges. The speakers appear to have managed to address all these issues – first, in their opening statements prepared from the perspective of an opposition party, a civil society organization, a Hungarian NGO, and academia – and then in the joint moderated discussion with voices from the audience.

In the open part of the debate, Mrs **Joanna Burnos** stressed that it is Polish government that is to blame for the decline of the position of Poland in the European Union. She also stated that it appears that instead of trying to remedy the relations with the EU, the current decision-makers invest more in other initiatives – as, for instance, in the Visegrad group. According to the representative of the Nowoczesna party, entering the Eurozone is a crucial step that might strengthen the state's standing on the European stage.

Furthermore, Mrs **Katarzyna Knapik** emphasized the fact that Poland is not unique in its recent tendencies and sentiments that have manifested themselves in politics and the society. She pointed out the examples of the Czech Republic and Romania – with the latter also experiencing the so-called “judicial overhaul”. According to the speaker, at the end of the day it is us, the people, who can change the status quo by being active members of our societies – voting not because we *like* politics, but because it affects our everyday lives (our jobs, prices, living conditions, among others).



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Mr **Csaba Toth** remarked that Poland still holds a stronger position in the European Union than Hungary, even though it is Poland that has been targeted with the Article 7. He also noted that Hungarian PM Viktor Orban is much more cunning in introducing the changes in Hungary and he does this in a legal manner – although controversial. According to Him, for the past few years Poland has been successfully emulating Hungarian solutions. All this is both reflected and further reinforced by a crisis of European integration which might soon bear fruit in the region. He also agreed with Mrs Knapik that we need to act now more than ever – yet, this should be done also by means of building strong institutions and alliances. Mr Toth also emphasized the need to address and provide a liberal response to the bold ideas that emerge on the right.

In response to the abovementioned observations, Mr **Tomasz Kamiński** stressed that the real issue poses the fact that the current focus of the Polish politics on the European level is defending the government. Another issue constitute personal conflicts between the members of the government and high-profile individuals from the European Union. The academic also pointed out the fact that lack of credibility, weak leadership, and no real instruments of influence all boil down to Poland's loss of its strong position in the EU. According to Mr Kamiński, unless the government can make viable decisions and promises on its own (without having to consult with the gray eminence in person of Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the Law and Justice party), the state cannot regain its respectability.

The four speakers have also briefly discussed the issue of the recently drafted EU budget. Upon a question from the audience, Mrs Burnos and Mr Kamiński admitted that it is still a proposal thus the lower position of Poland might change. Nevertheless, they also remarked that it is not surprising that less funds are to be granted to Poland as this is a general tendency at this stage.

The Ralf Dahrendorf Roundtable organized by the Liberte! Foundation has **delivered on all aspects included in the event proposal** – realizing the event program fully, gathering more attendees than initially



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anticipated, and most of all bringing about a lively discussion on the issues of vital importance to the European Union, engaging the audience in a thought-provoking and highly educational debate.

Report prepared by Olga Łabendowicz

O. Łabendowicz

L I B E R T É !

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