



CONFRONTATION AND COOPERATION

1000 YEARS OF POLISH–GERMAN–RUSSIAN RELATIONS

THE JOURNAL OF KOLEGIUM JAGIELLOŃSKIE TORUŃSKA SZKOŁA WYŻSZA
VOL. 1: 5–11

DOI: 10.2478/conc-2014-0001

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Political foundations of the *Communist* Poland 1944–1945

Key words: Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa (PRL), Krajowa Rada Narodowa (KRN), Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego (PKWN)

1. Introduction

In 1959 one of the most eminent Polish constitutional experts in exile, professor J. A. Gawenda, while describing the constitutional basis for the functioning of the Polish authorities in London, based on the Constitution of Poland from 1935, formed the terms of legal continuity and the continuity of law. These terms are of great significance for the further discussion.

Professor Gawenda demonstrated that the legal continuity means the restoration of the rightful system of law of a state. It is the state in which the legal continuity is established due to the act of restoration. Thus, it is more significant than the continuity of law, which is merely the continuation of certain rules and institutions originating from this system of law¹.

Year 1989 and following years, up to the enactment of the Constitution in 1997, brought for Poland a number of essential changes, including the system ones. However, it was neither then nor until today that clear and distinct determination of what kind of state the so called *3rd Republic of Poland* established

after 1989 is, or what its legal characteristic is when it comes to the relation with the *2nd Republic of Poland*², especially in the context of the doubtless legal and system continuation of communist *Polish People's Republic* (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa – PRL*) by the *3rd Republic*. Indeed, by the derogation of the communistic Constitution of 1952 and no reference to the Constitution of 1935, the Constitution of 1997 had confirmed the system and legal bonds between the *3rd Republic* and *PRL*. This bears significant legal consequences for modern times. Taking the above under consideration, the discussion over the creation of the political foundations of *PRL* in 1944 and later on, results in accepting their consequences for the *3rd Republic*. While analyzing the events that took place

¹ J. A. Gawenda, *Legalizm Polski w świetle prawa publicznego*, Londyn 1959, *passim*.

² This is a symbolic description of the history of Polish State. The *1st Republic* was created after 1569 Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth existed till the partition it by Russia, Prussia and Austria in the end of 18th Century. *2nd Republic* is a name of Polish State existing between World War I and World War II and after 1945 in Exile. *PRL* is called a communistic state under the Soviet protectorate since 1944 till 1989/1992. *3rd Republic* is called Polish State after regaining the independence after collapse of communistic regime and Soviet Union.

between 1943 and 1947 one should be aware of their direct effects on the political reality of the 3rd Republic.

The problem of creation constitutional foundations of PRL has been generally discussed in my text, published in 2004 in „Palestra”³. Yet the issue is worth mentioning, since it presents new stands and elements.

While analyzing the issues in question, two essential political institutions of the newly created by communists Polish state deserve, in my view, closer attention. They are so called *Krajowa Rada Narodowa* (State National Council – KRN) and *Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego* (Polish Committee of National Liberation – PKWN). Those institutions established a particular legal and political state in 1944, which actually has been respected up to now. What were the most important elements of this new „political order”.

The most essential question, which should be mentioned at the beginning, is the fact that this „new order” was being established in a complete chaos, the lack of any coherent political vision, by sheer coincidence. During the times of PRL historians and constitutional experts explained this chaos and disorder proving that those are the characteristic features of a revolutionary breakthrough. In one of the most important studies describing the constitutional system of PRL and its origins, the meaning of the revolutionary breakthrough was emphasized in the context of the relation of the new authorities towards the Constitution of 1921 by saying that:

„the people’s power came into existence as a result of **revolutionary** changes and as such was in no way associated with legal rules of the overthrown system”⁴.

The above statement, a dogma for the constitutional experts of PRL on the revolutionary breakthrough⁵, conveyed the comprehension of the period in question,

³ G. Górski, *Podstawy ustrojowe PRL (1944–1947)*, „Palestra”, Warszawa 2004 No. 9–10, p. 126–134. This article was also published in: G. Górski, *Wokół genezy PRL. Rozważania historyczno-prawne*, Lublin 2004.

⁴ Z. Jarosz, S. Zawadzki, *Prawo konstytucyjne*, Warszawa 1980, p. 34.

⁵ F. Siemieński, *Prawo konstytucyjne*, Warszawa–Poznań 1980. This prominent communistic scientist wrote at page 43: „PKWN manifesto and other documents passed by KRN and PKWN declared revolutionary origins of the new authorities. That authority didn’t based on the [constitutional] law but on the will of people and in that will found its justification(...). For that reason we can say that in the years 1944–1947 we have process of the revolution done by new group of the people without respect for the obliged constitutional law”.

by 1989. Therefore, in 1944 and 1945 (and probably later on, although the chronological braces of the revolutionary period have never been stated) **the revolution took place in Poland, as a result of which the old system had been invalidated, and the new, people’s state, had come into existence.**

The revolutionary period was to account for not only the problems resulting from the lack of constitution, which could be the basis for the activities of the new authorities, but also a kind of compromise with the old order, shown by the referring to the Constitution of 1921 by the new authorities. This reference arose from the international conditions of that period. It was implied that the Warsaw authorities were made to refer to the Constitution of 1921 regarding the external opinions. However, as the above quoted authors pointed out, „the whole legislative practice at that time and the practice of the state organs in general indicates that the people’s power had been shaping the political institutions, as well as social and economic ones, in a new way since the beginning, basing mainly on new legal acts, in no way corresponding to the liberal regulations included in the Constitution of 1921”⁶.

It seems though, that this chaos and disarray of the first months and years of PRL originated from somewhere else. In my previously expressed opinion⁷ I formulated a view that coming to Poland in the summer of 1944 the communists were convinced that „taking over” of the country would be made according to the model that had been used in the Eastern territories of Poland gained by J. Stalin in September and October 1939. They had no knowledge on the Stalin’s intentions concerning the future status of Poland, of whether it was supposed to be an „independent” state according to the Mongolian pattern, or just the 17th republic of the USSR. They were convinced, however, both the circles of *Centralne Biuro Komunistów Polskich* (Central Office of Polish Communists – CBKP) and *Związek Patriotów Polskich* (Union of Polish Patriots – ZPP) both in Moscow, and the centre in Poland namely *Polska Partia Robotnicza* (Polish Workers Party – PPR⁸) and KRN, that in any case on Polish territories Soviet legal order would be transferred by them, as the executors of Stalin’s orders.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 33.

⁷ G. Górski, *Wokół genezy PRL...*, p. 90, footnote 5.

⁸ Party of polish communists established by Komintern (International Communist Parties organization) in 1942 in occupied Poland. It replaced former Polish Communistic Party destroyed by Stalin in 1938.

There were no reasons for that preparations, or creation of Polish institutions still in Moscow, since everything was to be „installed” according to the Soviet pattern. Yet, when the international situation forced shamming of the Polish state under their rule, it resulted in making use of the Constitution of 1921 or the adapting of the pre-war legal system in numerous fields of social and economic life, and especially chaotic establishing of new institutions and experiments on new legal order.

After the introductory remarks let's proceed to the analysis of the legal aspects of establishing, functioning, and creation of political regulations by the above mentioned *KRN* and *PKWN*.

2. Krajowa Rada Narodowa (*KRN*)

Firstly, I would like to express a couple of remarks referring to the circumstances of the establishment of *KRN*, which was a key institution of the revolutionary legitimacy.

Nobody doubts it that the initiative to establish *KRN* came from Władysław Gomułka, at that time a member of the Central Committee of *PPR*⁹. Another thing that seems to be doubtless, is the fact that the last member of the first managing „threesome”, the real leader of *PPR* Paweł Finder, was rather sceptical towards the idea of *KRN*. It is also of significance that during the serious discussion over *KRN* P. Finder and his main associate, M. Fornalska (both were activists came to occupied Poland from Russia with strong Stalin's blessing) were arrested by the Germans who occupied Poland. The circumstances of this event, especially in the context of entirely incredible in this question memories of W. Gomułka, have stayed unclear up to now.

In his mentioned post-war memories W. Gomułka presented the conviction, that at the assembly of the Central Committee on 7th of November 1943, P. Finder based his agreement to set up *KRN* on some kind of approval for this initiative from Moscow center¹⁰.

As a result of the arresting of Finder and Fornalska the leadership of *PPR* was taken over by Gomułka's

group, forcing the establishment of *KRN*. However, this group didn't deserve Stalin's trust, or the support of *CBKP*. The fact that Moscow broke off all the bonds with this centre and didn't approve of *KRN*, was the expression of aversion. The level of the aversion was so high that the combat group of L. Kasman was sent to Poland with the orders to isolate and/or (?) eliminate the leaders of *PPR* and *KRN*¹¹.

Nevertheless, it was symptomatic that even the creator of *KRN* concept, the body which was supposed to be „political representation of the Polish nation”, wasn't able to imagine even the initial stages of its formation without the approval of the external factor – Soviet authorities. This element itself, presenting the dependence of the *KRN* creators on the external – Soviet factors, put into question the right of this institution to become „the leadership, representing the will, aspirations and interests of the broadest masses of the Polish society”¹².

When it comes to the actual character of the institution, which was established at night of 31st December 1943 to 1st January 1944, even Gomułka himself had no doubts. He wrote, that apart from *PPR*, *Gwardia Ludowa* (*People's Guard – GL*), and *Związek Walki Młodych* (*Union of Youth Struggle – ZWM*), „the other organizations (...) were entirely fictional, since they were represented by the members of *PPR*, who in the pre-war period participated in their activities or were their members”¹³.

These remarks correspond to the regulations included in the documents that were signed that night. It was neither in the quoted „Deklaracja Programowa *KRN*” (The Declarations of Program) nor in „Statut Rad Narodowych” (The Statute of National Councils) that the sovereign establishing *KRN* was defined.

¹¹ Such aim of Kasman's and his group mission clearly presenting former communist leader W. Gomułka in his memoirs. It is hard to interpreting his opinion in the different way. W. Gomułka, op. cit., p. 403.

¹² See it in the declaration of the *KRN* passed at its first meeting January 1st, 1944 r., [in:] *Protokół pierwszego plenarnego posiedzenia KRN*, p. 37.

¹³ W. Gomułka, op. cit., p. 342. Gomułka also mentioned in the other circumstances, that that during this first meeting (without his presence) big part of participants didn't know what was the aim of the organizers. One of them tried, when he found this aim, wanted to leave the meeting, but the rest stopped him „by force” because of „conspiracy principles”.

⁹ W. Gomułka, *Pamiętniki*, Warszawa 1994, Vol II, p. 336.

¹⁰ W. Gomułka, op. cit., p. 363–364. The similar opinion expressed in the fundamental study about history of the communist party (published after 1989) P. Gontarczyk, *Polska Partia Robotnicza. Droga do władzy 1941–1944*. Warszawa 2003, p. 306–308.

In article 1 of the Statute¹⁴ it was written that:

„the will of masses expressed by the self-sacrificing struggle of Polish people against the occupant is the moral and legal basis on which national councils are created”.

It is obvious, that even taking the existing conditions and the revolutionary language into consideration, the terms included in the quoted article in no way could be perceived as the statement of will of the Polish nation, however anybody would wish to comprehend this term. Anyway, the use of the formula „broad masses” and indication that „Polish people” only by self-sacrificing struggle „express” the will of these, undefined in this context masses, proves that „Polish people” or „the working people of cities and the country” were not the sovereign of the country. The latter term is the classic one for the soviet concept of constitutional sovereign. Thus, KRN was set up as the expression of the will of „broad masses” as the „management” unifying „the whole nation for the struggle against the occupant and hastening the victory”.

The above mentioned „Statute”, whose authenticity in the version known after 1945 and the content are doubtful, in article 9 defined „particular entitlements” of this body. According to this regulation KRN was to represent „the Polish nation externally until the Temporary Government is formed” (point 1) and was to appoint the Temporary Government „the moment it chooses as the necessary for the interests of Poland” (point 3). After the appointment of the government, KRN was to provide it with authorization „to perform the power”.

At the same time the article 3 of the Statute defined the rules of establishing councils, including KRN, set the rules of delegating representatives as well as the rules of co-option „of especially worthy individuals representing democratic and progressive views”.

One could presume, that this document produced in difficult conditions of conspiracy, a kind of the expression of „revolutionary will of the people”, should be the foundation of all the other actions of the new state authorities, developing in a revolutionary way. It is difficult to comprehend why this document, the controversial „Statute”, wasn't referred to in any of the decisions made or documents produced either in July and August 1944, or later. The fact that the political circumstances were favourable and the awareness of the

importance of legal foundations of the newly created institutions, in revolutionary conditions, however little, was present, makes the situation even harder to understand.

The situation looks strange, since according to Gomulka the materials from the first meeting of KRN were sent through mentioned L. Kasman to Moscow still in January 1944¹⁵. They were to get to Moscow also through two delegations of KRN. Was it possible that while in Moscow in July 1944 the most important decisions were made and settling the issue of institutions, which had the crucial meaning took place, the ones having at disposal such a document¹⁶, solid when it comes to revolutionary legitimism, passed it over entirely?

The dubious issues presented above make one ponder on the fact whether the document was familiar to Moscow, or even if it existed in 1944 in the form known later on.

The opinion seems to be confirmed by the way the process of the construction of the new state was given an account of by the constitutional experts of PRL.

The above mentioned professors Jarosz and Zawadzki had referred to this fundamental meeting of KRN in merely two sentences („The Temporary Statute only indicated that in due course it would appoint the Temporary Government. It also anticipated the appointing of the National Assembly in independent Poland in five-adjective elections”¹⁷). However, according to them the so called *manifesto* of PKWN from 22nd of July 1944 was, „the first, most general and fundamental act” of the creation period of „legal basis of the new system”¹⁸. Such a point of view is also presented by two others prominent communist constitutional experts W. Skrzydło¹⁹ and A. Gwiżdż in their fundamental studies on constitutional law of PRL²⁰.

In another crucial study on the history of KRN edited in 1976 by professor A. Burda, he as one of the

¹⁵ W. Gomulka, op. cit., p. 379.

¹⁶ A. Burda, *Odbudowa państwowości polskiej. Zasady prawne nowego ustroju*, [in:] *Krajowa Rada Narodowa*, A. Burda (ed.), Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk 1976, p. 32–33.

¹⁷ Z. Jarosz, S. Zawadzki, op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 32.

¹⁹ W. Skrzydło, *Charakter i znaczenie polityczno-prawne Manifestu Lipcowego PKWN*, „Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne”, Poznań 1959, Vol. XII.

²⁰ A. Gwiżdż, *Manifest Lipcowy i analogiczne akty proklamacyjne władzy ludowej*, „Państwo i Prawo”, Warszawa 1969, No 7.

¹⁴ *Protokół pierwszego plenarnego posiedzenia KRN*, bmdw, p. 30.

main constitutional experts of *PRL*, the meaning of the Temporary Statute was presented as of marginal significance. Although, it is discussed on three pages, it is entirely passed over in the description of actions associated with the establishing of *PKWN* (page 49 and the following). In fact, the document was inexistent from the point of view of constitution experts in *PRL*.

It seems that for them this open disregard towards the existence of *KRN* document was the only way out of problems, created by Stalin and his Polish subordinates with their chaotic actions carried out in Moscow between 19th and 22nd July 1944.

In his already quoted work, A. Burda wrote: „On 22nd July 1944 the members of *KRN* delegation in Moscow, along with the representatives of *ZG ZPP* created the branch office of *KRN* for the Liberated Territories. In the evening the decision was made to transform the Branch into *PKWN*. On 21st July 1944 *PKWN* undertook its activity. A day later the historic text of *PKWN* Manifesto was announced, which had become **the political foundation of the new state**”²¹.

Making his statements more specific, Burda wrote:

„On 21st July 1944 *KRN* passes an act establishing *PKWN*”²². However in the footnotes he clarifies, „Actually, the act establishing *PKWN* wasn't passed by *KRN*, but by its Delegatura (Branch) in Moscow, and prepared along with the members of the Executive Committee of *ZPP*. The document was then approved by *KRN* and issued in nr 1 *Dziennik Ustaw RP* published in Lublin”²³.

It is only the quoting of these contradictory statements that presents the image of a complete legal chaos, which even after 30 or 40 years of studies, hasn't been cleared up or interpreted in any rational or coherent way. It is due to the fact that by the means of various stylistic and pseudo-legal figures the attempts were made to create quasi legalistic foundation for the activities which resulted in making the basis of the *PRL* system. At the same time the attempts were being made to pass over, or present inconvenient facts in a variety of ways. Let's have a look at them, then, and judge them by the means of allegedly existing then legal regulations.

The Branch of *KRN* established on 20th July 1944 in Moscow, had no formal basis in the above mentioned „Statut Tymczasowy Rad Narodowych” („The Temporary Statute of National Councils”). „The Statute” in its known version didn't anticipate the

establishing of any „representation” or branch of *KRN* in order to make decisions concerning the appointment of the temporary government (not to mention *PKWN*), although there was a position to describe the shape of a seal which was to be used by this body.

One should remember, that only four of the delegates of *KRN* sent to Moscow were its members (Żymierski, Spychalski, Litwin and Osóbka-Morawski). The other four didn't formally belong to this body.

On the other hand, out of the eleven members of the Branch, which was established on 20th July, only three were the members of *KRN*. The „election” of *KRN* made in Moscow, obviously behind the back of *KRN* in Poland, was by the way performed by Prezydium (Executive Committee) of *ZPP*, at the assembly in which *KRN* members participated²⁴.

In no moment during the assembly creating the Branch, did the participants refer to the text of „The Statute”.

Yet, the most important in this context is the fact that on 21st July 1944 there was no assembly of *KRN* in any of the cities – Warsaw, Lublin, or Chełm, not to mention in Moscow. Hence, no „*KRN* act” could have been passed that day, as A. Burda claims²⁵. It is obvious that the document published in the first issue of *Dziennik Ustaw RP* [The Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland] from 15th August 1944, which was passed in Lublin under the title „Ustawa z dnia 21 lipca 1944 o utworzeniu Polskiego Komitetu Wyzwolenia Narodowego” (The Act on the establishing of *PKWN*), signed by Bolesław Bierut, was a mystification.

3. Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego (*PKWN*)

The situation was similar when it comes to the establishing of *PKWN*. As it was pointed out above, legally its establishment resulted from „the *KRN* act”

²⁴ More about the process of formation *KRN* i *PKWN* see: T. Żeńczykowski, *Dwa komitety 1920–1944. Polska w planach Lenina i Stalina*, Paryż 1983, p. 106 and next.

²⁵ In the *quasi* official publication *Krajowa Rada Narodowa: informator* published in Warsaw in 1983 edited by the prominent communist scientist A. Gwiżdż, all information concerning *KRN* sessions where published. Among them we can only find the general information, that the second session of *KRN* took place in still occupied by Germans Warsaw on January 2–23, 1944, and the third one „in Lublin after the Germans collapse on August 15th 1944” (p. 5).

²¹ A. Burda, p. 49.

²² Ibidem, p. 64–65.

²³ Ibidem, p. 65, footnote 4.

from 21st July 1944. As we already know *KRN* didn't pass any act that day.

As I have mentioned, on 20th July 1944 in Moscow, so called Branch of *KRN* appointed on the basis of Stalin's inspiration in the morning, was in the evening transformed into *PKWN* as the result of Stalin's orders.²⁶ This was confirmed by the leading historians of *PPR*, when they wrote that on 20th July „in the evening, **following the counsel of the Soviet government**, the name Branch of *KRN* was replaced to *PKWN*, without any changes concerning the members”²⁷.

Like in the case of *KRN* it was the will of Soviet authorities, and actually Stalin himself, that was a decisive factor in establishing of this body. Also the alleged representation of broad masses, in other words *Polish working people*, the core of *KRN*, had found out about the establishment of *PKWN* from the Soviet radio.

The communist activists in Poland had learnt that, „five members of *PKWN* remain under the German occupation, where they are leading the struggle for freedom and provide the communication with *KRN*. The names of those five must not be revealed”.

What is interesting, even B. Bierut didn't know them, although in the next verse he was mentioned among the signing ones of the act, in which these false statements were placed.

Nevertheless, if *KRN* was really to make decisions and assuming they were to be in accordance with „The Statute”, allegedly approved of at the first *KRN* meeting, then on the basis of regulation of paragraph 9 point 3, the Temporary Government should have been appointed. Moreover, the second sentence of this regulation stated that *KRN* was entitled to provide „this government with the authorization to perform the power”.

However, at its third session in Lublin on 15th of August 1944, *KRN* passed *the act on the temporary procedure to pass decrees having the force of law*²⁸, yet there was no invoking to the text of „the Statute”.

It is also worth emphasising, that there was no reference to this kind of „constitution” of national councils, as the Statute issued on 1st January 1944

may be called, in either *the decree of PKWN from 21st August 1944 on the procedure of appointing general administration of the first and second instance*²⁹, or in *the act from 11th September 1944 on the organization and the scope of actions of national councils*³⁰.

4. Conclusion

The above presented analysis puts forward the facts of great significance for the way the *3rd Republic* is perceived today, also as the legal and political continuation of *PRL*, seen as the democratic system of law:

1. Both *KRN* and *PKWN* as the institutional foundations of the political system of *PRL*, were established with the direct agreement and with complete approval of the Soviet authorities. Without the approval, communists in Poland as well as in the USSR wouldn't have dared to set up the bodies as the representation of will of even the smallest group of Polish society.
2. The legal act, which had never been passed by the body indicated in it, and additionally containing blatant lie (the signature of Bierut and the five members on the occupied territories), is the formal basis for the formation of political institutions of *PRL*.
3. Chaotic actions carried out by communists in 1944 resulted in creation of a legal void, filled as chaotically and without any plan, which resulted in constitutional chaos in the creation phase of *PRL*. The results of this legal chaos have been present in many fields up to now.

It is another question how the insistence to stay loyal to this political and legal heritage presented by the political elites of the *3rd Republic* should be judged, as well as how to assess the legal „achievements” and the problems left over from the previous times, in the context of acknowledging the rule of „democratic state of law” as the fundamental one in the *3rd Republic*. In my view this problem will yet bear unexpected fruit.

²⁶ A. Burda, op. cit., p. 49.

²⁷ N. Kołomejczyk, M. Malinowski, *Polska Partia Robotnicza 1942–1948*, Warszawa 1986, p. 213.

²⁸ Ustawa Krajowej Rady Narodowej z dnia 15 sierpnia 1944 r. o tymczasowym trybie wydawania dekretów z mocą ustawy, Dz. U. z 1944 r. Nr 1, poz. 3 [J.L. of 1944 No. 1, item 3].

²⁹ Dekret Polskiego Komitetu Wyzwolenia Narodowego z dnia 21 sierpnia 1944 r. o trybie powołania władz administracji ogólnej I-ej i II-ej instancji, Dz. U. z 1944 r. Nr 2, poz. 8 [J.L. of 1944 No. 2, item 8].

³⁰ Ustawa z dnia 11 września 1944 r. o organizacji i zakresie działania rad narodowych, Dz. U. z 1944 r. Nr 5, poz. 22 [J.L. of 1944 No 5., item 22].

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