

Book review:

**Sabina P. Ramet, Kristen Ringdal, Katarzyna Dośpiat-Borysiak (2019),
Civic and Uncivic Values in Poland,
Central European University Press, 385 pages**

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Monograph *Civic and Uncivic Values in Poland* was published in 2019 by Central European University Press. It consists of an introduction, 13 chapters completed in three parts and a summary. It tackles the issue of changes in the perception of Polish society over the years 1989–2015 of a number of key values, on which the axiological foundations of modern democratic states are based, also by Poland.

The publication opens with an introduction by Sabina P. Ramet, in which the author divides the analysed values into civic and uncivic ones. The civic values include the following: the rule of law, respect for fundamental rights and human and citizen freedoms, tolerance and neutrality of the state in matters of ideology. In turn, to the uncivic values, the author counts: dictatorial rule, discrimination against all minorities, contempt for human and civil rights and freedoms, the involvement of state institutions in promoting only one vision of the world.

The author also mentions key conditions justifying the choice of Poland as the subject of the study. First of all, she pointed to Poland's difference from the other European countries, manifested in a huge role played by the Catholic Church, which, especially during the communist rule, played its almost historical role. Authors of other parts have also shown that even today the Catholic Church plays a significant role in modern Poland. As an example, they point to the recurring ideological disputes about the legal right to abortion or opposition to *gender* ideology. Another argument justifying the choice of Poland is broadly understood against the background of the other European countries, civic activity of the society, which manifests itself as active participation in the work of numerous non-governmental organisations whose aim is to promote and protect certain values (e.g. Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights).

The first part of the publication entitled *System* describes the principles of the Polish political system functioning, at the same time pointing to changes in shaping Poles' electoral preferences during political changes, as well as to the socio-cultural influence of national and ethnic minorities in contemporary Polish society.

The first chapter written by Aleksander Zdravkovski presents the most important information about the process of gradual transformation of Poland's political and economic system from the communist system and the centrally controlled economy to a democratic system with a free market economy. In the next chapter, Michał Stowikowski and Michał Pierzgalski presented an analysis of changes in electoral trends, at the same time describing the most important political parties operating on the Polish political scene. The third chapter by Katarzyna Dośpiał-Borysiak, Michał Klonowski and Agata Włodarska-Frykowska presents the changing values identified by Polish society as European one against the changing role and position of national and ethnic minorities in Poland since 1918.

In the second part of the monograph, entitled *Values in Poland*, the authors indicate the most important values for the Poles declared in numerous opinion polls and try to answer the key question: why are these values so important for the Poles?

The first chapter of this part, by Kristen Ringdal, is based on research carried out by the *European Values Study*, which demonstrates the variability of values declared as civil values by Polish society against the background of other European societies. In the next chapter, Maciej Potz focuses on the evolution of the role of the Catholic Church in Polish public life, highlighting the influence of Radio Maryja in current political life. In turn, the chapter written by Ewa Gołębiowska presents how LGBT people are perceived and their aspirations for equality in society against the background of the level of tolerance and religiosity of the Poles. The last chapter, by Ireneusz Krzemiński, presents the results of a survey, which aims to find a correlation between people who declare Catholic faith and their attitude to the Jewish minority.

The third part of the publication entitled *Methods of socialisation* oscillates around very broadly understood aspects of socialisation, mainly including the role of education and culture in the lives of the young Poles.

The chapter written by Renata Siemińska analyses the role of the family and school in the process of socialisation, especially presenting the most important differences in the way of presenting social roles played by women and men in school textbooks. The next chapter by Sylwia Bobryk and Thomas Strobel demonstrates how the narrative in the history textbooks has changed over the years, since the fall of the USSR. Then Sabina P. Ramet points to the interpenetration of certain contents present in contemporary rock music of the rebellion trend, which criticises the most important institutions of social and political life.

The next chapter written by Elżbieta Durys focuses on analysis of other manifestations of culture - in this case, historical movies presenting the most important events in the history of Poland of the 20th century, which at the same time affect historical policy often present in the current political discourse. The third part of the publication ends with the chapter written by Jane Leftwich Curry, which presents the role of public and private media in contemporary democratic Poland. The chapter ends with a statement pointing to a significant limitation of media freedom during the rule of *Law and Justice* party.

In the conclusion, Sabina P. Ramet stipulates about the reasons of *Law and Justice* victory in the elections in 2015. At the same time, she points out significant problems

indicating violation of the value of liberal democracy, which is the dispute over the Constitutional Tribunal and the conflict between the Polish government and the European Commission. All these events lead the author to the following question: can Polish democracy be saved?

All chapters included in the monograph, despite a fairly wide range of subjects, make one unique complete narrative. They discuss important topics, ranging from the issue of the political and electoral system functioning, the role of minorities and religion in the lives of the Poles, and ending with art and television. The basis of the book is common ground concerning the way in which Polish society perceives key values that, on the one hand, identify society and, on the other, cause its polarisation.

Certainly, this publication is addressed to all who would like to understand what the Polish phenomenon of socio-economic transformation after the communist period is all about. The reviewed book is an attempt to answer questions about the specifics and legitimacy of the existence of key values declared by Polish society, often referred to as liberal. This question, according to the authors, is particularly relevant after the victory in the parliamentary elections in 2015 of *Law and Justice*, whose manner of governance raises numerous concerns related to violation of the rule of law.

To sum up, it should be acknowledged that this monograph, by presenting a comprehensive case study, addresses an important research problem, which is the analysis of the perception change of the values of the period of political and economic transformation important for Polish society. At the same time, referring to the Polish case, the authors try to highlight the emergence of an increasingly frequent mechanism of moving societies of some European countries away from liberal democracy in favor of authoritarian tendencies (Hungary is another frequently cited example).

One of the weaknesses of the book is the lack of symmetry of content - a lot of space was devoted to LGBT rights and the influence of the Catholic Church on public life in Poland. At the same time, due to the diversified research interests of the Authors, other key information regarding e.g. the economic system has been omitted. There is also no indication of the most important challenges (e.g. of demographic or ecological nature) that Polish society will face in the 21st century. Nevertheless, an important advantage of this valuable publication is the presentation in a vivid and cross-sectional way of changing the awareness and identity of the Poles against the background of their key values.

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