

Where are the Greens heading?

On 27th January 2009 a panel discussion organised by the Heinrich Böll Foundation Warsaw Office entitled "The European shades of green. Green ideas and political movements in Europe" was held at Zielna Conference Centre. About 60 people from Poland and abroad took part in the meeting.

The director of the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Warsaw **Agnieszka Rochon** opened the debate. She pointed out that the year 2009 marked the 20th anniversary of the system transformation which gave rise to the Polish Green movement. Another important date, although more so for the Greens from the West, was 1968, when the student protests broke out in Europe. Rochon also stressed that the discussion on the identity and the program of green parties was particularly important in the face of the coming elections to the European Parliament. The Greens are playing an important role now in many European countries; however, their role in the EU has yet to be determined.

Having opened the debate, Ms. Rochon gave the floor to **Jacek Żakowski** from the "Polityka" weekly who acted as a moderator of the debate. Mr. Żakowski said that the Greens' position in Poland was very weak and that they were not a recognizable political movement.

Dariusz Szwed, the chairman of the Polish Greens Zieloni 2004 and consultant for many institutions and non-governmental organisations, was the first panellist to take the floor. Szwed agreed with Żakowski that the Greens' position in Poland was very weak. In his opinion, the monopoly of neoliberal and neoconservative right was the reason behind this situation. The Democratic Left Alliance, the only party associated with the left, also proved conformistic enough to succumb to the rightist slogans. Thus, the entire Polish public debate became very homogeneous and closed.

The Greens 2004 entered the Polish political scene as a party associated with feminists, gay and lesbian people and then also environmentalists. In Poland all these groups are excluded from the public debate, which reduces their, already low, social capital. In Szwed's opinion, Poland, leaving real socialism, fell into to equally dogmatic neoliberalism. Poles are a post-political society, where social commitment is replaced by consumerism. Most people do not vote but do spend their time in shopping malls every week.

Dr. **Przemysław Sadura**, a sociologist, a member of the team of the journal Political Critique (Krytyka Polityczna), co-author and editor of the publication "Polish shade of green", took the floor after Mr. Szwed. He pointed out that the research he had carried out for the Böll Foundation studied the "green potential" in the Polish society, not the real support for the Greens 2004. The latter, he admitted, was very low in Poland, which was attributable both to lack of electorate with views close to those of the Greens and lack of budget financing for small parties. According to Sadura, a significant percentage of Poles supports green ideas, but in a selective way. There are not many people who would combine support for liberal outlook, social sensitivity and environmental program at the same time, even though most people support at least one of these ideas. For example, more and more people accept the environmental demands, but this electorate is in vast majority liberal in its views on the economy. On the other hand, rarely do supporters of social demands also back women or LGBT emancipation. Sadura believes that the Greens in Poland should promote environmental consciousness and demonstrate at the same time, that caring for the environment is no more anti- but pro-modernization.

Ladislav Vrchovský, committee member of the Czech Greens Party Strana zelených was the next panellist. Vrchovský started his speech by outlining the differences between the experience of the Greens from Central Europe and those from the West. In the Western countries the Greens based themselves on the 1968 heritage, while in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Czech Republic, they were born as one of civic movements springing up after the fall of the authoritarian system. According to Vrchovský, in the beginning of their activity the Czech Greens were sabotaged by people linked to the former communist secret services. The Greens remained small in numbers with only about 2 thousand members; however, they are playing an important role on the Czech political scene. The breakthrough came in 2006, when the Greens reached 6.3 per cent support in the elections, thus passing the electoral threshold and obtaining 6 out of 200 seats in the Parliament. What was even more important, the Greens entered a centre-right government in which they are represented by 4 ministers: of education, foreign affairs, environment and a new ministry responsible for human rights and minorities. This means that the support for the party increased significantly since 2002 when it had only gained 2 per cent of votes. In 2002 the Czech political scene became polarized, with Christian democratic ODS on one side and left-wing social democrats on the other. The centre-right parties, relatively strong in 2002, got weaker afterwards, which created a gap a bit to the right from the centre of the political scene. According to research, the Greens' potential reached about 20 per cent of citizens and it turned out that they managed to gain the support of a significant part of them. The Czech Greens have no support among farmers or workers. Their electorate mostly consists of well-educated, wealthy people from big cities; and the Greens' electoral manifesto

was written as this electorate would have liked it. It was not limited to environmental issues only, like in 2002, but covered most issues important to the society. At present the Czech Greens are preparing for the euroelections, but, according to surveys, today they would not make it to the European Parliament. In the face of the crisis they propose a program based on the development of alternative sources of energy and subsidies for the unemployed.

The last panellist was **Ulrike Lunacek**, a Member of the Austrian Parliament from the Austrian Green Party and spokesperson of the European Green Party. She kicked off by emphasising that one should notice the differences in green potential of particular European societies as well as in electoral systems. For example, in the UK the plurality voting system is in place which makes electoral success more difficult for the Greens. Even though about 10 per cent of the society supports them, there is no chance they can get to the parliament. The situation of the Greens is particularly difficult in the new EU member states. In neither of the new member states did they manage to enter the European Parliament during the last elections. Lunacek agreed with the preceding speakers that the sources of the Greens' movement were different in Eastern and Western Europe. In the West, the year 1968 and the criticism of the ossified state institutions were of key importance. On the other hand, only a few years later, in 1970s, many green activists came to a conclusion, that it was not enough to base themselves on civic society and it was necessary to enter the existing institutions; however, the Greens started from getting politically involved on a local level. If we compare the current program of the Greens with that initial period, it has become much wider. Not only does it cover environmental issues, it also focuses on human rights, feminism, LGBT movement and democracy. According to Lunacek, the Greens' advantage is high resistance to corruption. Moreover, the Greens are mostly a party of civic protest and they are rarely in power, which has its advantages, but also causes that the Greens are not associated with positive solutions. Furthermore, the Greens' place on the political scene is unclear. Most Green parties in Europe are drawn towards the left, which may sometimes become an obstacle in Central and Eastern European countries. On the other hand, nowhere in the EU do the Greens co-rule with social democrats and in a few countries they are in coalition with right-wing parties. According to Lunacek, the Greens are looking for a chance to implement their program and sometimes coalitions with right-wing or Christian-democratic parties provide this opportunity; all the more so, that for example a part of the Finnish right-wing is more leftist than the Austrian social democrats. However, she believes, it is worth remembering that the Greens' electorate are usually well-educated, middle class city dwellers open to modernization processes. Summing up, Lunacek stressed that the Greens' demands were sometimes quoted by mainstream parties; still, they were rarely catered for. With the electoral campaign to the European Parliament approaching, the Greens would try to promote their program combining energy saving and creating new jobs.

After Ms. Lunacek, **Mr. Szwed** took the floor again. In his opinion the Polish political scene is dominated by the hegemony of two right-wing parties, i.e. the Civic Platform and Right and Justice. Furthermore, the government maintains the illusion that Poland will not be affected by the economic crisis. Poland is supposed to keep competing with others by low cost of labour force. However, it is already quite obvious that when it comes to labour costs it will be hard for Poland to compete with Ukraine or China. According to Mr. Szwed, centralization and monopolization of the Polish economy are significant problems. In his opinion, a New Green Order that will redirect economic activity is necessary. Instead of pumping money in rescuing banks and other sectors of "traditional" economy, it would be worth using the crisis to expand ecological sectors and invest in new forms of energy. For the moment, however, this type of investment is being blocked by powerful groups defending the existing structure of the economy. Mr. Szwed also said that the Greens were not an anti-market force, but they believed that there were some sectors where the market should be subject to control because it sometimes leads to lowering both environmental and social standards.

Afterwards a session of questions and answers began, which gave guests a chance to clarify issues arousing controversy.

Answering the questions the head of the Polish Greens said it was worth working together with various movements from the left hand side of the political scene. According to **Mr. Szwed** it was also worth using consumerist approach widespread in the society for actions connected with promoting ethical consumerism. He answered the accusation of lack of realism in the Greens' economic program stating that miners should be re-skilled and given work on the ground. He did not agree with the thesis that the Greens came into existence in response to the technological change and energy crisis of the 70s. In his opinion the Greens' program had been much wider and covered many dimensions of social life from the very beginning. Finally, he criticized the oversimplification of the media broadcast nowadays concluding that the tabloidization of politics did not serve the Greens well.

Mr. Sadura was critical about the coalition of the Czech Greens with Christian democrats. In his opinion forming part of a government does not make sense if it means cooperation with the right wing. Similarly, the Greens should not form coalition of fear with organisations reluctant to technological development. He was also sceptical about the idea of copying the development path of the Western Greens. It is not clear what models should be followed; moreover, building a social movement, on the basis of which a strong political party could be formed, remains the most important thing.

According to **Lunacek**, there is no need or possibility for the Polish Greens to follow the development path of the Western Greens. She is of an opinion that there is not much chance for the development of mass Green parties. Professionalism and gradual

development of regional structures is more important. The Austrian Greens have about 3 thousand members and yet they are a strong player on the political scene. Asked about the influence of Haider's death on the Austrian political scene Lunacek answered that the fight for his electorate was still in progress, but the fighting parties were the right-wing ones. She pointed to a significant role of financing of political parties by the state, including those groups that do not enter the parliament. In her opinion an important thing is to fight against the stereotype of the Greens as anti-modernization parties. Because, in fact, the Greens support ecological modernization and promote new quality of consumption.

Vrchovský defended the coalition of the Czech Greens with Christian democrats saying that it gives them a chance to fulfil some of the party's program goals. Furthermore, in some issues Christian democrats themselves have environmental views and are open to a large number of the Greens' initiatives. He also said that the Polish Greens could contribute significantly to the politics, all the more so taking into consideration that Poland is to a large extent an agricultural country. As an example, the Polish Greens could support ecological food production. On the other hand he emphasised, that one of the important values of the Czech Greens was their full openness to a dialogue with representatives of different movements. That is also why the sessions of his party are open to the public, which has attracted many young people. The Czech Greens have also broken the division of the political scene into the left and the right, by positioning themselves partly beyond this division.

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