

# Skalny Center

2009

For Polish and Central European Studies



*Professor Randall Stone, keynote speaker at the Conference on Causes of Stability and Instability in Contemporary International Relations, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, May 29, 2008.*

## Soaking in Poland and Poking at Parties in the Skalny Center



By Daniel Epstein

When I came to the Skalny Center in the fall of 2008, I had studied neighboring Slavic languages, Czech and Russian, and in parts of the post-Communist world further east (Russia) or south (Bulgaria). My doctoral work focused on political parties in the wake of democratic transitions in post-Communist Russia and post-authoritarian Brazil. But this year my goal was to add Poland as a field of specialization and expand my research to include it as a critical case for the phenomenon I study: the consolidation of party systems.

My dissertation examined political party systems in two large and diverse transition countries which had quite unstable and incho-

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## Distinguished Donors

In the past academic year, the Skalny Center experienced a painful loss with the passing of two of our great friends and supporters, Joseph S. Skalny and Anna R. Skalny. Joseph Skalny passed away on December 3, 2008 at the age of 94. His sister, Anna Skalny, passed away on April 23 at the age of 92. They were trustees of the Louis Skalny Foundation, which made the generous gift that established Polish studies at the University of Rochester in 1994 and renewed the commitment by creating an endowment in 1999. They received the Cavalier Cross of Merit of Poland for their support of Polish culture in America. They are very much missed.



*At the celebration dedicating the Skalny Center in 2000, the Skalny family gathered to mark the occasion. From left, Joseph S. Skalny, Dr. Frederic Skalny, Anna R. Skalny, and Stasia Skalny. Stasia Skalny passed away in 2004.*

## Message from the Director



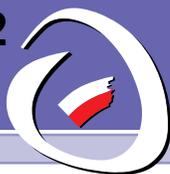
By Randall Stone

The past year has seen startling changes sweep across Central Europe and the world. In August, Georgian troops moved into the de facto independent province of South Ossetia, and were repulsed by a well-planned Russian combined ground, air and sea assault that occupied South Ossetia and Abkhazia and advanced to within 30 kilometers of the Georgian capital. Tensions rose throughout the region, pulling Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic states into a deeper diplomatic confrontation with Russia. These events were quickly eclipsed, however, by the financial crisis that spread from American subprime mortgages to European banks, Russian securities, Asian stocks, and back to American financial institutions. Russian industrial production fell 25 percent in January. China announced a \$500 billion fiscal stimulus plan. As the waves of financial distress spread, Hungary, Iceland, Ukraine, and Lithuania turned to the International Monetary Fund for emergency loans, and in April the G-20 agreed to triple the IMF's available resources. Rarely have the perils of global economic interdependence been so immediate, or the necessity of understanding international relations so clear.

The Skalny Center has been full of activity this year, as the following pages illustrate. Ognian Hishov, a Bulgarian economist, visited us from the *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* in Berlin and taught a course on the political economy of post-Communist countries. His research is on economic integration in the European Union. Annamaria Orla-Bukowska visited from Jagiellonian University in Krakow, and taught a course on the Cold War. Her research interest is in Jewish-Christian dialogue in contemporary Poland. Ewa Hauser, the founding director of the Skalny Center, returned from Ukraine this year and taught courses on Polish society and politics and political film. We will soon be saying good-bye to her, since she has accepted a position at the University of Warsaw. Daniel Epstein (Ph.D. 2008, Harvard) was our post-doctoral fellow this year, and taught courses on democratization and Russian politics. He will join the faculty at Colgate University next fall. I have spent the year teaching about international relations and writing a book about informal governance of international organizations.

Our luncheon talks and evening lectures covered a broad range of topics, including Ukrainian national identity, social policy in the European Union, contemporary Polish Catholicism, and current developments in Polish poli-

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## Soaking in Poland and Poking at Parties in the Skalny Center



By Daniel Epstein

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ate political party systems in the early years of their post-authoritarian political development. However, after the first few elections, Brazil's party system settled into one of stable multi-party competition that has helped its democracy to become consolidated, while Russia's pointedly did not. Instead, all of Russia's parties have remained weak and ephemeral, with the exception of United Russia, which is arguably merely a Potemkin village providing a façade for authoritarian backsliding.

My dissertation used cross-country and within country (cross-regional) comparisons to puzzle out why the Brazilian party system institutionalized, while the Russian party system did not. I discovered a solution in the concept of executive-legislative balance of power. The more it favors a directly elected executive (a president or governor), the less incentive there is for politicians to form parties. By contrast, the more powerful the legislature, the more important it is to control it, and the more politicians invest in political parties in order to build a majority coalition. The latter can lead to a stable party system, and did so in certain regions of both countries, as well as in Brazilian national politics (but not in Russia).

Poland presents an excellent test case. Poland's democratic transition began a couple of years before Russia's, and a couple of years after Brazil's, but it is different in other respects, including its size and its historical connections with Europe. Furthermore, an intense cleavage in Polish society was forged in the last decade

of the Communist period between those who identified with the Solidarity movement that was the driving force behind Poland's democratic transition, and those who were associated with or even sympathetic to the old regime. Another aspect of the Polish case that makes it particularly interesting is its dual executive, with a directly elected president who is constitutionally given less power than the parliamentarily-determined prime minister, whose authority in fact adds to the legislature's weight in the balance of power.

I began to immerse myself in Polish politics from the moment I arrived at the Skalny Center in the fall semester, making use of my teaching in order to do so. Poland was one of the main countries covered in a class I taught on the processes of consolidation of democracies in the wake of transition. I also

made use of electoral data from the Polish National Electoral Commission, as well as the advice and input of the Poland experts at the Skalny Center, including especially Dr. Ewa Hauser, professor here at the University of Rochester, and Dr. Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, visiting professor from the Jagiellonian of Krakow. My most intense research, however, came in the spring semester, when the Skalny Center generously supported a short trip to conduct interviews in Poland. I spent a week in Krakow and a week in Warsaw, conducting interviews with professors, political activists, and former officials from the Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Finance.

The first important point to emerge from my research is that, at least until the past half-decade, Poland has had a very poorly

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*Dan Epstein by the Blue Mosque in Istanbul.*

## Study Abroad in Krakow



By Emily Willis

When I was a little girl, my favorite weekend activity was visiting my mother's parents. They lived in a small house in a quiet, traditionally Polish neighborhood about twenty minutes from my parents' house. This house in a suburb of Buffalo, NY holds many treasured memories, and serves as the basis for my desire to travel to Poland and study Polish history and culture.

My grandparents' story is that of circumstance, sacrifice, and finding love in an unusual place. Bronislaw Zychora was born on a farm just outside of Warsaw into a family of ten children. Jan Pelysko grew up in the Ukraine, as one of a grocer's eight children, but was of Polish descent. Teenagers during Hitler's rise to power, both of my grandparents told stories of hiding from Nazi soldiers to avoid leaving their

beloved childhood homes. Hiding was not enough, however, to avoid what so many were subjected to during World War II. The unlikely couple found love where they were shown none at all, a Nazi work camp in Northern Germany. After the end of the war in Europe, having lived in a German displaced persons camp until 1951, they came to America and settled in that house in Buffalo that I hold so close.

Thinking back, imagining that small neighborhood holding that small house, I remember my mother, aunts and grandparents speaking Polish and cooking kielbasa, pierogi, and chruscik for special get-togethers, especially during the Easter season. During Lent, my family would go to my grandparents' house and make pisanki Easter eggs, and the Monday after Easter, my brothers, cousins and I would go out into the fields near my grandparents' house and collect pussy willows for Dyngus Day. Years after my grandparents have passed away, I realize that I would not trade the days I

spent at that small house with my large Polish family for anything.

When I first saw a flyer for the summer trip to Jagiellonian University in Poland, I knew that was how I wanted to spend this summer vacation. I had always hoped to go to Poland and the Ukraine to honor my grandparents' struggle in World War II and their memory, which means so much to me, but I never thought it would be such a great opportunity for my education as well. By studying at the Jagiellonian University, I will be able to learn to speak proper Polish, a dream of mine, and more about Polish culture and history from Polish natives in Poland itself. This trip will give me the opportunity to continue the traditions that my Polish grandparents have left me, so that my kids will not someday forget our heritage, or the horrors of World War II. Learning about my Polish roots in the motherland will be an experience to cherish for a lifetime.

*Emily is a sophomore at UR, majoring in biomedical engineering. She is a recipient of a Skalny scholarship for the summer study on location program in Krakow.*

# Message from the Director



By Randall Stone

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tics, Polish foreign policy, and Russian foreign relations. We enjoyed a special visit by Jerzy Stepien, Chief Justice of the Polish Constitutional Tribunal (2006-08), judge, senator (1989-1992), cabinet member, Solidarity leader, statesman and politician. During his luncheon presentation he shared his reflections on the tension between politics and judicial independence in contemporary Poland. We have also continued our series of concerts by talented Polish musicians. In December we hosted an excellent pianist, Zuzanna Szewczyk; in March we had a concert of baroque music by Polish harpsichordist, Anna Parkitna, and Australian violinist, Hanna Sless; and a concert of Polish music "From Chopin to Penderecki" (see the article by Krzysztof Polakowski.) We enjoyed collaboration on these projects with the Polish Heritage Society of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, and the Music Department.

This academic year was especially successful in promoting Polish cinema. In November we held our annual Polish Film Festival at the Little Theatre, a five-day festival that showcased some of Poland's best cinematic treasures. This year, a grant from the Polish Filmmakers Association made it possible to expand the festival and to invite a special guest, Jerzy Stuhr. Rector Stuhr is one of Poland's most acclaimed actors, screenplay writers, and directors. In April, the Skalny Center collaborated with the George Eastman House to bring to Rochester Andrzej Wajda's, "Katyn" a nominee for Best Foreign Language Film at the 80th Academy Awards.

Meanwhile, the Skalny Center continues to play a key role in undergraduate education at the University of Rochester. The Skalny Center has taken a lead role in the new major in international relations, the first major to require that all concentrators participate in study abroad. The Center offers Polish language courses at various levels and an exchange program for University of Rochester students at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, which has been supported for several years by a generous gift from the late Joseph Skalny. We are currently planning to expand the student exchange.

We look forward to seeing our friends at our upcoming events, and invite you to visit our new website for news and announcements.

[www.rochester.edu/college/PSC/CPCS](http://www.rochester.edu/college/PSC/CPCS)

*Randall Stone, director of the Skalny Center for Polish and Central European Studies, is associate professor of political science at the University of Rochester*



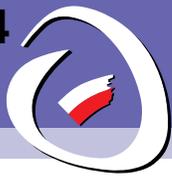
Polish Film Festival Reception: (From left) Diane Skalny Campbell, Paul Campbell, Greg Skalny, Gary Harris, Andrea Skalny Dulow, Anthony Aciolino, Gloria Skalny Sciolino, Frederic Skalny, Mary Ann Skalny.



Polish Film Festival Reception: (From left) Randall Stone, RHFIF Co-programmer Ruth Cowing, Jerzy Stuhr, RHFIF Executive Director Rosie Taravella, and Bozena Sobolewska.



Polish Film Festival Reception: (From left) Frederic Skalny, Mary Ann Skalny, Jerzy Stuhr, Andrea Skalny Dulow



## Soaking in Poland and Poking at Parties in the Skalny Center

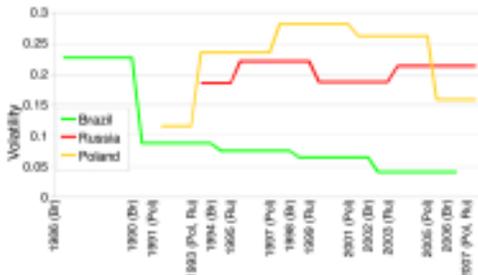


By Daniel Epstein

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institutionalized party system. Poland's party system has been more unstable, even, than Russia's in the 1990s, with parties experiencing more than just the peaks and valleys of a stable competitive party system, but a truly dizzying procession of zeniths and collapses. This can be seen through the extremely high electoral volatility of Poland's Sejm elections, an indicator of a poorly institutionalized party system.

Fig 1. Sum of Squares Index of Electoral Volatility in Russia, Brazil, and Poland 1985 to present



However, after the collapses of Freedom Union (UW), Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS), and more recently the Left Democratic Alliance (SLD), Poland appears to be developing a rather stable 2- party system, with the Civic Platform (PO) and the Law and Justice Party (PiS) as the major competitors for power, and the remnants of the post-Communist left (most recently running as the Left and Democrats coalition) and the still-important (if small) Peasant Party (PSL) in competition for a distant 3<sup>rd</sup> party status, which often enables a small party to play the role of coalitional king-maker.

My second major conclusion has to do with the importance of identity cleavages in Poland. Although stability could be seen in the 1990s' divide between collections of parties that identified with either side of the Solidarity/post-Communist cleavage, the actual set of parties on either side of this cleavage (in Figure

2, blue and green on the Solidarity side, and pink and purple on the post-communist side) experienced so much volatility that this cleavage did not foster the evolution of a stable party system.

However, in the early 2000s, the post-Communist left melted down in the wake of the "Rywingate" scandal of alleged attempts to bribe the media for positive coverage, and the old Solidarity/post-Communist cleavage seems to have faded away.

At the same time, it seems that a new cleavage has arisen. Building on the work of David Ost on Solidarity, I argue that a new cleavage, oriented around identity with different types of post-materialist values (as opposed to material interests), now defines the Polish party system, one that could be called liberal/anti-elite. Both sides of the cleavage emerge from the Solidarity tradition, but while the liberal side (adherents of Donald Tusk and his PO) tend to be more international, urban, and cosmopolitan, the anti-elite side (sympathizers of the Kaczynski brothers' PiS) tends to be more rural, traditionalist, and concerned with perceived threats to the Polish nation. The partisan "forbears" of the liberals are in shades of green in Figure 2, while those of the anti-elite side are in blues. If the stability of these two parties and their political styles (not exactly ideologies) lives up to predictions Polish observers have made, identity cleavages may play an important role in party system institutionalization. The June 2009 European parliamentary elections will provide the first evidence, and the 2010 presidential and 2011 Sejm and Senat elections will be the true test.

Nonetheless, while identity cleavages can provide some insight into the form of the Polish party system is taking as it institutionalizes, these two types of cleavage underscore the fact that the more important question may be *under what conditions* will such cleavages translate into a stable party system? Since the Solidarity/post-Communist cleavage failed to serve as the basis of a well-institutionalized party system while the liberal/anti-elite cleavages appears to have succeeded, there must be something more than identity that is truly the driving force. This leads to the third conclusion of my research, that indeed the balance of power between the president and parliament did play a critical role in driving politicians to invest in parties, resulting in an increasingly institutionalized party system. While the power of the president is constitutionally limited, the *de facto* and informal powers of the president have been changing quite a bit over the past decade and a half, resulting in a shift in the balance of power toward the parliament (principally in the person of the prime minister, who is responsible to it).

The presidency was endowed with a great deal more power informally under President Lech Walsa, because of his prestige as the hero of the struggle against Communism, than Poland's 1992 "Little Constitution" provided for. This can be seen not only in Walsa's ability to determine the ministers for certain critical power portfolios even after the opposition SLD won the 1993 elections, but also in the SLD's failure to actually capture the office of the prime

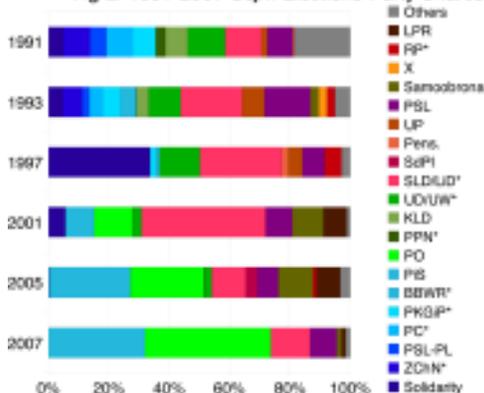
minister for its leader, Alexander Kwasniewski, and being forced instead to accept Waldemar Pawlak, head of its coalition junior partner PSL, as prime minister. A few years later, however, once the office of the president was occupied by Kwasniewski himself, the 1997 constitution stripped the president of any powers of appointment over power ministries, which tipped the balance of power away from the presidency and in favor of the prime minister (and thus ultimately the parliament). However, the legitimacy which Kwasniewski could claim (just as Walsa did) as being president "of all Poles" gave him a certain prestige, and along with his connections with important societal figures ("network power," as Dr. Krzysztof Szczerski at Jagiellonian University described it), this brought him influence over politics beyond the circumscribed role allotted to him in the new Constitution. Ironically, this was especially the case when his party was *out* of power (1997-2001). Once his party came back to power with the Leszek Miller government of 2001-04, Kwasniewski could not very reasonably battle against the influence of his own co-partisan in the prime minister's office, so his capacity for influencing developments shrank, while the importance of holding the prime minister's office was magnified.

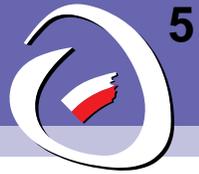
Perhaps the biggest and most dramatic shift in the balance of power came as a result of the 2005 presidential elections, when a relatively popular, well-connected president, who was often able to claim influence as the president of all Poles, left office. Kwasniewski's replacement, Lech Kaczynski, has been hampered by his lack of "network power," and has at times seemed practically besieged in office by Poland's influential elites (such as *Gazeta Wyborcza* editor Adam Michnik). Of course, this is only to be expected, since his political style has capitalized on the *anti-elite* side of the currently dominant political cleavage. Nonetheless, he has been in many ways Poland's weakest president, and as many of Poland's young, cosmopolitan urbanites have been slow to embrace him as "president of all Poles," he has been forced to abandon this strategy and fall back instead on the one sector of Poland's elites upon whom he can count: his own party's leaders. Thus, abandoning the apolitical stance adopted by Poland's previous presidents, he has appeared in television commercials for his party (which I saw during my visit), indicating that Poland for the first time has a president who really *needs* his party. Presidents in such a vulnerable position are not found in the majority of transition countries, and where presidents have been *least* in need of a party, both the party system overall and indeed democracy have suffered (Russia being the obvious example).

Although Poland and Russia are neighbors, their trajectories are quite distinct. As my work continues, I plan to return to Poland to research the informal aspects of the balance between president and parliament. In the meantime, I am grateful for the opportunities that have been afforded me by the Skalny Center, and for my interactions with its other visiting scholars.

*Daniel Epstein was the Skalny post-doctoral fellow in the 2008-2009 academic year.*

Fig 2. 1991-2007 Sejm Elections Party Shares





## Ukraine in Search of National Narrative



By Ewa Hauser

Using the results of socio-historical studies by Ukrainian and American academics as well as my own research conducted while on a Fulbright teaching grant in Mykolaiv, in South-eastern Ukraine and in a western (formerly Polish) Lviv university, I explored the themes of deep regional differences in historical memories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in this former Soviet Republic.



Prof. Ewa Hauser, speaking on "Ukrainian Search for a National Narrative," Nov. 6, 2008.

In the 1991 national referendum, the citizens of Ukraine voted overwhelmingly for independence from the Soviet Union, and a new state appeared on the map of Europe, a state with the borders and population of the former Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Independent Ukraine inherited post-Soviet problems, including a large Russian minority and a divided culture. Post-WWII Ukraine united the territories pacified by Stalin's terror in the east, south and central regions with the western ter-

ritories formerly under Polish jurisdiction.

Scholars generally agree that now there is not one but two Ukraines, so striking is the difference in historical, cultural and linguistic identity between eastern and western Ukraine.

Roger Brubaker developed a useful model for the interaction of three competing nationalisms in new states: (1) minorities demanding political and cultural collective rights, (2) the "nationalizing state" in which these minorities live, and (3) the "external national homeland," which views the minorities as its kin, if not co-nationals.

I have been studying the official national narrative of the Ukrainian "nationalizing state" as it attempts to build a national consensus. Opposition to the nationalizing state's narrative comes from the historical Russian/Soviet imperial narrative, which denies the Ukrainian claim to historical difference from Russia. The nationalizing state is attempting to bring Ukraine into Europe and NATO, while the opposing Russian historical narrative insists on Ukraine being an integral part of the Russian Slavic family. The nationalizing state supports the symbolic assertions of Ukrainian identity of the state and its people: the exclusive usage of Ukrainian, rather than Russian, in education and official business, rewriting of history from the Ukrainian point of view, and creation of Ukrainian national monuments while destroying the old Soviet symbols and monuments. This policy is happily embraced in western Ukraine and actively opposed in the east and south. Opposition to the nationalizing state's narrative comes from the Russian-speaking minority. In addition, the Russian Federation actively interferes with attempts to consolidate the Ukrainian state by

posing economic and military threats.

These regional cleavages could be overcome, but only if the ethnic and cultural aspirations of the Russian-speaking, hybrid-identity Ukrainian citizens, who constitute nearly half of all Ukrainian citizens, are not ignored. The radical nationalistic stand of the Ukrainian state actually plays into the hands of the clearly formulated "homeland" nationalism of the Russian Federation. It implicitly incites opposition to a unified Ukraine by the members of the minority whose identity it seeks to marginalize.

I concluded with a call for "sovereignty over memory," for the acceptance of painful regional



Kyiv, Bohdan Chmielnicki pointing to Moscow.

history and the resultant multiculturalism of present day Ukraine. I advocate for tolerance of substantial cultural differences, bi-lingualism and bi-culturalism through the replacement of an historical, myth-based nationalism with one based on civic participation in a representative democracy.

*This essay summarizes a lecture delivered by Ewa Hauser as part of the Skalny Lecture Series last November. In fall 2009, she will join the faculty of the University of Warsaw American Studies Center.*

## Visiting the Skalny Center and Teaching Europe at the UofR



By Ognian N. Hishow

Why should a researcher of Bulgarian origin who holds German citizenship come to a center for Polish studies in America to teach a course on European integration? Well, we live in times of globalization, and that could be a good description of what globalization means in practical terms. The first surprise as I arrived was to see that at the Skalny Center, a German (Alex) and a Bulgarian (Tanya) Ph.D. student were just finishing their theses and were poised to leave to take faculty positions! Yes, the Skalny Center is a place that is very much international and open to the rest of the world—just as globalization demands.

I arrived impatient to start preparing my course on the Political Economy of European Integration. The European Union is an important part of the world, not only in terms of its large economy, which is comparable in size to the American economy. Europe should be of interest to others because of its unique character as a union of formerly hostile nations that managed to become friends, and which have lived peacefully together for decades. These perceptions have been confirmed myriad times in Europe, where I teach similar courses and give presentations on the topic before ...

Europeans. They tend to see the EU as shaping world affairs, and feel proud of being European; it doesn't come as a surprise that European themes are appealing to Europeans.

Following my experience with the interest in European affairs in Europe, I expected a similar interest in the States. After all, the EU is the closest ally of America, and the transatlantic ties remain unmatched. My students should be interested in what is going on in the EU, that important partner of the U.S. I was even a bit concerned about how I would manage the course in case too many students enrolled. However, the University of Rochester is known for its small classes, and perhaps the formulas, statistics and graphs I used in my lectures drove away a few majors in religion, biology or French philology. So the class was small, but enthusiastic.

Outside of class, however, America's lack of attention to European events was palpable. It is an interesting question why Europe is not of more interest to young Americans. Is it a partner that is too easy to handle? Troublesome players such as Russia seem to be better visible on the radar screen, and perhaps the same applies to potential future political and military competitors like China.

Maybe Europe is too preoccupied with itself and its own integration challenges to be noticed by the rest of the world as an influential agent on the international stage? After all, the EU is a union

made up of 27 partly totally different countries—historically, geographically, economically, and ethnically. Yet they have the same great feature in common—they are functioning democracies—and each of those nations feels that it is European. This is the guarantee that their ties will grow stronger over time, and Europe will become more united, cohesive, and visible in the world.

My students are convinced of this. They have traveled to European countries and participated in student exchange programs, which have brought the EU closer to them. A few applied for internships at the headquarters of the EU Commission in Brussels, and I was happy to write recommendations for them. One student is coming to visit my own institution to spend three months in Berlin working on a research project related to the catching-up process in the new member states.

Gathering European experience means the students will pass it on to other young people, and thus awareness and interest in Europe. At the same time, they are "first movers," enjoying a comparative advantage of being early entrants in the market for experts on Europe.

I hope my course has been a modest contribution to their success and career.

*Dr. Hishow was visiting professor at the Skalny Center in Fall 2008. He is Senior Research Associate at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin, Germany*



## The Chair to Share: Polish Foreign Policy Debates Continue



By Radoslaw Rybkowski

It was widely believed that the division of powers in the Polish constitution was settled in the 1990s, after the public sparring between former Polish President Lech Walesa and the Parliament, but this seems not to be the case. The Polish parliamentary election of 2007 changed the balance of power between the president and Parliament. Previously, the president and the prime minister represented the same party, shared the same visions of Polish foreign policy and national interests. In fact, the president, Lech Kaczynski, and the prime minister, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, were twin brothers. No disputes arose. The situation has become more complicated since November 2007. The liberal Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO) won 209 of the 460 seats in the lower chamber of the Polish parliament, the Sejm; while the previous winner—the more nationalist party Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc, PiS)—won only 166 seats. PO formed a coalition with the post-Communist Polish Peasants Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL, with 31 seats in the Sejm), to forge a majority in parliament.

The new PO-PSL government was bitterly criticized by the president, Lech Kaczynski, even before it was sworn in. At first, he went so far as to propose that his brother, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, should continue to serve as prime minister because he seemed to be the only person capable of securing further political reforms in Poland. Later, Lech Kaczynski warned that he would not accept Radoslaw Sikorski as the new government's minister of foreign affairs, although the Polish constitution did not give him the right to block the appointment. In spite of the president's declarations, the government was eventually accepted, with the PO leader, Donald Tusk, serving as prime minister and Radoslaw Sikorski as minister of foreign affairs.

However, the president's criticism and obstruction continued. Lech Kaczynski demanded greater authority in the field of Polish foreign policy. He declared that, according to the Polish constitution, he is the ultimate "representative of the State in foreign affairs" (Article 133, 1). The prime minister and minister of foreign affairs replied that the constitution also provides that "the

Council of Ministers [the government] shall conduct the internal affairs and foreign policy of the Republic of Poland" (Article 146, 1).

The clash of visions and priorities in Polish foreign policy erupted again last summer. Aug. 7, 2008, during the Olympic Games in Beijing, Georgian military forces entered the separatist region of South Ossetia. Although South Ossetia was formally part of Georgia, it had been *de facto* independent since the early 1990s, and contained Russian military bases. The Russian military responded by repulsing the Georgian troops and entering Georgia in retaliation. The Russian army advanced to within 30 kilometers of the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, but halted on Aug. 12 and subsequently withdrew. The president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, had a close relationship with Lech Kaczynski, and had visited Poland several times discussing the possibility of a new route for an oil pipeline from Central Asia running through Georgia. Kaczynski, on many occasions, had declared his public support for Georgia's ambitions to become a member of NATO and the European Union.



Tusk and Kaczynski at the Council of the European Union in Brussels.

The Polish president repeated his firm support for Georgia during the Georgian-Russian conflict. Lech Kaczynski organized a visit to Georgia by the presidents of Lithuania, Estonia and Ukraine, and the prime minister of Latvia. The Polish president was joined by the minister of foreign affairs, Radoslaw Sikorski. Donald Tusk said that Sikorski's presence was meant to prevent any "surprising statements" by Lech Kaczynski. During a demonstration in Tbilisi, however, Lech Kaczynski exclaimed, "We are here to fight!" This was a rather surprising statement, since that at the same time Nicolas Sarkozy, the president of France (which held the presidency of the Council of the European Union at the time), was signing a cease-fire agreement with Russia. Thus, the presence of the minister of foreign affairs was in vain. The actions of the

Polish president, and the anti-Russian sentiments that he expressed, exacerbated international political tensions.

The problem of "chairs to share," referred to in the title here, emerged in October when the Council of the European Union met in Brussels. Each EU member state was allocated two chairs, and the government declared that Poland would be represented by the prime minister and the minister of foreign affairs. Lech Kaczynski demanded a place for himself in the Polish delegation, however. He made a public statement to the effect that he had to go as the constitutional representative of Poland, and he had to be present to advocate the Georgian cause. The other member states were not prepared to grant extra places for extraneous Polish politicians, however, so apparently two Polish officials would have to share the same chair! The minister of foreign affairs diplomatically ceded his chair to the president. After all of this fuss, however, Lech Kaczynski arrived late to the meeting and missed the discussion of the Georgian situation.

Back in Poland, the Polish president again attempted to present himself as the true supporter of Georgia. Invited by Mikheil Saakashvili, he decided to go to Tbilisi, although the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs advised him to postpone the visit because the unstable situation in Georgia made it impossible to guarantee his security. While in Georgia, Lech Kaczynski was taken on a visit to the Ossetian border that had not been scheduled or cleared with the Polish secret service, and an incident occurred during the excursion in which firearms were discharged on the other side of the border. It was not clear who or what was the target and no one in the party was injured. Again, this raised the question of the appropriateness of the president's actions.

These two seemingly different issues, Polish-Georgian relations and the struggle for chairs at the EU, reflect the unclear division of authority in Polish foreign policy. Efficient foreign policy requires a clear delineation of authority. The clash of visions, interests, and personalities is damaging to any conception of the Polish national interest. The Constitutional Tribunal began listening to legal arguments in May on the question of who has final authority over foreign policy. So perhaps 12 years after the Constitution came into effect, the decision of the Tribunal will put an end to the embarrassing quarrels among Polish politicians.

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## Rethinking Poles and Jews in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century



By Annamaria Orla-Bukowska

Several decades ago a Polish poet, Kazimierz Wierzyński, penned *Lekcja konwersacji* (*A Conversation Lesson*)—a poem warning the reader not to speak of Poles and Jews (or any other minority group) because this was a minefield likely to explode. Less than a decade ago, an NGO in Poland, the Forum for Dialogue Among Nations, in association with the



A Polish-Jewish university student plays with her younger compatriots at the Jewish Community Center in Krakow.

American Jewish Committee, published a book titled *Difficult Questions* (in both a Polish and English-language version). All this and more serves to illustrate that Polish Catholic-Polish Jewish relations have stereotypically been seen as an "uneasy" subject to broach. Furthermore, after the Holocaust and after a half-century of totalitarianism which had "monoculturalized" the population, the average person thought such relations to be a moot point. Who was there to talk to, and what was there to talk about?

Nonetheless, so much changed in Poland in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that, in fact,

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Hanna Sless

## Joy of Music at Two Skalny Center Events



By Krzysztof Polakowski

March of 2009 delivered two unique musical events co-sponsored by the Skalny Center for Polish and Central European Studies and the Polish Heritage Society of Rochester.

The first concert took place on March 8 at Kilbourn Hall, Eastman School of Music. It was a charming afternoon of baroque music played by Anna Parkitna (harpsichord) and Hannah Sless (violin). Anna Parkitna holds a Master of Arts degree from I. J. Paderewski Academy of Music in Poznan, Poland, and a Master of Music from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London, UK. She performs regularly, both solo and chamber music. Hannah Sless received a postgraduate diploma from the Australian Institute of Arts and studied baroque violin at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague, Netherlands. She plays regularly with period groups, including the Gabrielli Ensemble and the Netherlands Bach Orchestra. Anna and Hanna like to play together and came to Rochester from London for this unique performance, appreciated by about 150 Rochester music lovers.

Anna Parkitna gave a spectacular presentation of baroque works for harpsichord, many of them by Polish composers, including Jan Podbielski, Mikolaj from Krakow, and Jan from Lublin. Harpsichord, widely used in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, became much less popular by the 19<sup>th</sup> century following the invention of the piano, as it was considered “feeble” in its dynamics. It was a Polish harpsichordist, Wanda Landowska, whose performances, teaching, recordings and writings played a large role in reviving the popularity of the harpsichord as a performance instrument in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her mission to uncover the forgotten music and performance styles of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries paved the way for today’s interest in authentic performances of early music on original instruments, such as the one we enjoyed on March 8. It was thrilling to hear very little-known Polish baroque music performed very stylishly by Anna Parkitna on a beautiful harpsichord.

Hanna Sless plays on a baroque violin, which possesses a very different timbre from the contemporary instruments. Listening to her playing with Anna Parkitna works of J. S. Bach, C. P. E. Bach, and J. H. Schmelzer felt like being back in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The second concert, titled “From Chopin to Penderecki,” took place on March 29 at the Strong Auditorium, University of Rochester River Campus, and was additionally co-sponsored by the University of Rochester Music Department. It was an ambitious and successful attempt to present the scope of Polish music from Chopin and his contemporaries to the present time. Works of F. Chopin, H. Wieniawski, M. Karłowicz, I. J. Paderewski, K. Szymanowski, G. Bacewicz, W. Lutoslawski, A. Panufnik and K. Penderecki were performed by Sabina Slepceki, who plays in the first violinist section for the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra; Joseph Werner, the Principal Pianist of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra; Ignacy Grzelazka, a brilliant cellist educated at Chopin’s Academy of Music in Warszawa, Poland and at Texas Christian University; Zuzanna Szewczyk, a dynamic virtuoso pianist, who has just completed her Ph.D. in piano performance at the Eastman School of Music; and Emily Tworek Helenbrook, a real vocal prodigy—a 14-year-old girl blessed with a voice of unusual beauty and strength.

The program of this concert was carefully created and included both romantic and impressionist pieces and the works of contemporary Polish composers. It featured not only music for solo instruments, but also two trios—by Chopin and by Panufnik—played superbly by Ignacy Grzelazka, Sabina Slepceki, and Joseph Werner. Particularly interesting was the inclusion of the piano trio by Andrzej Panufnik, an outstanding Polish composer, who left his native Poland in 1954 as a protest against political control by the Communist regime. He settled in England and eventually was adopted as one of Britain’s greatest composers. His open criticism of the utilitarian vulgarity of so-called “Socialistic Realism” in music resulted in a total boycott of his achievements (imposed by the

state). In 1990, Panufnik, just one year before his untimely death, made a momentous return visit to Poland. In 1991, he received British knighthood. Despite its very contemporary character, Panufnik’s music displays appeal, craftsmanship, classical beauty and direct human expression.

This concert was warmly applauded by the audience and considered one of the best presentations in the Skalny Lecture and Artist Series. All performers were excellent and deserve high recognition. Separate words of appreciation belong to Joseph Werner, an outstanding pianist with unparalleled dexterity. He is an excellent chamber music player, who performed both as an accompanist and as a member of a trio ensemble.

*Dr. Polakowski teaches Polish language at the Skalny Center*



“From Chopin to Penderecki”: Emily Tworek Helenbrook, Joseph Werner at the piano.



“From Chopin to Penderecki”: Zuzanna Szewczyk



“From Chopin to Penderecki”: Sabina Slepceki, violin; Joseph Werner at the piano.



From Chopin to Penderecki”: Sabina Slepceki, Joseph Werner, and Ignacy Grzelazka playing Piano Trio op. 1 by Andrzej Panufnik



## Rethinking Poles and Jews in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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the 21<sup>st</sup> opened with a much brighter picture. Whereas an album could be published in the mid-'80s announcing the extinction of Polish Jewry, 20 years later the Chief Rabbi of Poland, serving Warsaw's Nozyk Synagogue, estimates that just since the year 2000, he has officiated at some 30 weddings, 25 *bar mitzvahs*, 70 *bris/brit milahs*, and 25 conversions. It is true that the Polish Jewish community will never be the 3.5 million strong it was on the eve of WWII, constituting 10 percent of the general population. However, it is a healthy enough community that Jews in Poland today—of all ages—have several and varied religious as well as secular options nationwide through which to express their Jewishness. More significantly, while spiritual leaders (e.g., Rabbi Michael Shudrich) and monetary injections (e.g., the Lauder Foundation or Taube Foundation) needed to be brought in from outside in the first decade, today Poland boasts rabbis from the generation coming of age since 1989, a fully enrolled Jewish school in Warsaw, and babies born into families that openly rejoice in their Jewish identity.

So there are indeed Polish Jews with whom to talk. The next question is whether there are Polish Catholics who want to talk . . . and the

answer is a definite yes. In fact, a dialogue had been ongoing since the late 1970s; hence, once the dam broke in 1989, this work began exponentially gaining speed. By the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it had encompassed the scholarly study of Judaism, Polish Jewish history, and the role of Jews in Polish history, as well as interfaith and interpersonal dialogue between Polish Christians and Polish Jews and even Polish Muslims. It has led to a situation in which bookshop shelves are heavy with *Judaica*, the landscape of synagogues and cemeteries is noticed and tended, and the cultural heritage—in art, architecture, music, etc.—is quite manifestly celebrated. One finds, too, all manner of contact and interaction between Polish Christians (from local government officials in small towns to the prime minister and president of the state) and Polish Jews on the one side, with Jews from all over the world on the other. This means dealing with some still difficult questions when Polish pupils sit down to talk with their Israeli peers who come on pilgrimages to Holocaust sites located in today's Poland, or when Polish university students march with an international group of Jewish adults, participating together in the annual March of the Living.

Poland, like any other country, is not by any means a paradise void of anti-Semites, but the "anti-anti-Semites" are increasingly active. In fact, the study and preservation of the Polish Jewish historical and cultural legacy has been and con-

tinues to be done primarily by Polish non-Jews. Without their contributions of time, energy, and often funds, the material and spiritual aspects of Polish Jewishness would not be growing today. Just in recent years, schoolchildren participated in the unveiling of a plaque in memory of the Jewish community of Siedlce, art students along with the city's mayor scrubbed graffiti from gravestones at the Jewish cemetery in Czestochowa, and a standing-room-only crowd of people of all ages and walks of life attended a conference on the Polish Jews of Przemysl.

Best of all, gradually but progressively, notice is being taken of this positive evolution: more and more journalists from outside Poland—from the Jewish Telegraph Agency to the *New York Times*—are covering this story. It was also the focus of a 2006 edited volume—*Rethinking Poles and Jews: Troubled Past, Brighter Future* (R. Cherry, A. Orla-Bukowska, 2006). Polish Christian-Polish Jewish relations are very much alive and kicking, and seen as integral to the civil society of the post-1989 democratic state. This news needs to be spread and celebrated everywhere Poles and Jews live—not only in Poland or Israel, but in the United States and the diaspora around the world.

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