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THE QUESTION OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN THE POLITICAL CONCEPTS OF THE CONTEMPORARY POLISH NATIONAL CAMP

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to analyse the attitude of the contemporary Polish national camp towards local government in the political concepts of the two most influential political parties of this trend – League of Polish Families and National Movement. In the article are characterized the most important issues such as: the role of local government, the tasks of local government, the postulated reforms.

INTRODUCTION

The Polish national camp, until the end of World War II one of the largest political movements in Poland, was deprived of the possibility to act legally during the communist rule. The lack of ideological influence on society, which lasted for almost half a century, resulted in the fact that after the transformation throughout the 1990s, groupings belonging to this movement suffered defeats in parliamentary and local elections (Koziello, 2017; Maj C., Maj E., 2007). Only the beginning of the 21st century brought success, which was the formation of the League of Polish Families (Liga

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Polskich Rodzin, LPR), which managed to introduce its representatives to the Sejm and the Senate. The parliamentary representation of the LPR in the years 2001–2007 was so strong that for some time the party played a significant role in the socio-political life of Poland and for 15 months (2006–2007) it was part of a coalition government. The leaders of the party were Roman Giertych, deputy prime minister and minister of national education in 2006–2007, and Marek Kotlinowski, deputy speaker of the Sejm in 2005–2006 (Koziełło). After the marginalisation of the LPR at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, Polish national leaders formed a new grouping called National Movement (Ruch Narodowy, RN), initially as an association and since 2015 as a political party. RN has had its own deputies in the Sejm since 2015, and although they do not form their own parliamentary club, their presence nevertheless determines to a large extent the activities of the Confederation, the party from whose electoral list they currently hold parliamentary seats. The leaders of the party are Robert Winnicki, MP since 2015, and Krzysztof Bosak, MP since 2019, who was previously a member of parliament as one of the leaders of the LPR (Posłowie Ruchu, 2019).

What both groups have in common is that they are ideological heirs to the National Democracy, one of the largest political camps in Poland in the first half of the 20th century. Their aim was and is to create a national state in which the Polish people would have full power, and politics would be based on the principle of national egoism. This means that, in internal and international relations, the interests of the Polish nation and state will be the primary consideration, even if those interests could harm other states and nations. LPR and RN are of the opinion that the state exists to represent the ruling nation, and since Poles are the ruling nation in Poland, their needs should be put first (Program gospodarczy, 2003; Suwerenny Naród, 2016).

The aim of this article is to analyse the political concepts of LPR and RN concerning the local self-government. According to the national point of view, self-government is an integral part of public authority, issuing laws and enforcing them, so it should also undergo changes in the spirit of national values. The article poses 3 research questions: 1) what is the role of local self-government in the political thought of contemporary national

parties? 2) what should be the tasks of local government in a national state? 3) what changes should be introduced to realise national postulates? The article was written on the basis of political programmes of LPR and RN and statements of leaders of both parties.

ROLE AND TASKS OF TERRITORIAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Local self-government occupies quite an important place in the political thought of the contemporary Polish national camp. This is the result of its recognition as one of the types of public authority which can be used to pursue one's own objectives and intentions with respect to the state and its citizens. According to the nationalists, local government is different from state power in that its scope of influence covers only a part of the territory of the Republic of Poland – the voivodship, district or commune. This is supposed to be the reason for its greater effectiveness of action due to the proximity of existing problems and better knowledge of their essence, which facilitates the selection of the most optimal methods and means of solving them. A smaller area of activity also contributes to a closer relationship between the inhabitants and the local authority superior to them, as there are more opportunities for direct contacts with its representatives than in the case of central authorities. Easier access of citizens to councillors and local government officials fulfils the function of information and control. It allows regional and local authorities to learn about issues important to society which need to be addressed and to make a rational choice of the most urgent ones. Residents, on the other hand, are able to exercise more real control over their representatives' performance of their duties to the community and hold them to account. LPR and RN politicians believe that such relations create a local community based on mutual trust between authorities and citizens, in which elected representatives carry out the will of the inhabitants, while the latter submit to the decisions made (Program gospodarczy; Ramowy program, 2004; Siła polskości, 2018; Nowy porządek, 2020).

According to the LPR's draft constitution of 2005, local government should perform public tasks not reserved by the constitution or laws for

the bodies of other public authorities. The essence of these tasks had to be, first and foremost, to satisfy the needs of the self-governing community, which was classified as the self-governing unit's own task, and then to perform other public tasks if it resulted from justified needs of the state (Konstytucja IV RP, 2005). In its 2020 election programme, however, the RN called for the implementation of the subsidiarity principle at the local government level. This meant that boroughs, districts or voivodeships should perform those tasks that they were able to carry out with their own resources and on their own initiative. It was contrary to democracy to delegate such tasks to units on a higher self-government level or to state authorities (Nowy porządek).

Based on other party documents and statements by LPR and RN politicians, the responsibilities of local government can be concretised. The first of these was to serve local communities. This meant diagnosing existing problems that were important for the residents of a given local or regional community and solving them in line with public expectations. The second duty was to manage the subordinated area efficiently and effectively. This obliged local authorities to take decisions that would serve the development of a given local government unit by pursuing an appropriate social, economic and cultural policy. Among the specific tasks that the politicians of the national camp required of local government were: 1) supporting local economic entities, 2) actively raising external funds, 3) investing in projects that could generate income for a given local government unit in the future, 4) counteracting unemployment, 5) opposing social exclusion of the sick, infirm and elderly, 6) ensuring universal access to health care 7) ensuring that the inhabitants are able to satisfy their basic needs, especially owning their own homes, 8) creating vocational education for the inhabitants, adapted to the needs of the local labour market, 9) developing local infrastructure, and 10) developing public transport. The third duty mentioned by the party leaders was to relieve the state administration of tasks that could be carried out at the level of the commune, district or province. It was argued that the authority closest to the citizens was best able to identify or foresee the nature of the problems that arose, and to take appropriate action to solve or prevent them. For this reason, it was believed that if a given self-government unit was capable of

achieving the objectives set, then it would not be necessary to involve a higher level unit or state authorities (Ramowy program; Z troską w przyszłość, 2006; Siła polskości; Eckardt, 2004; Wierzejski, 2004; Kowalski, 2005; Sulowski, 2006; Bosak, 2017; Winnicki, 2017).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORMS

To ensure that local government performed its duties in a lawful and effective manner, the national camp proposed several reforms. The first of these was the reform of local government administration. It was believed that the administration had to be characterised by qualities such as competence, efficiency, honesty and cheapness. In terms of competence and efficiency, people were to be hired who had appropriate knowledge and qualifications in law, economics and administration, as well as experience in public work if possible. Open and universal competitions for managerial positions were to serve this purpose. One of the criteria for verifying whether a person was suitable for a job in local government administration was to be a change in the management of municipal assets. The LPR put forward a proposal to create social supervisory boards in local government companies, whose members would perform their functions free of charge for a certain period of time needed to evaluate these people's qualifications. Those positively evaluated would have priority for employment in local government administration. The second way of implementing the principle of competence and efficiency was to be the improvement of employees' qualifications. This was to be achieved by organising training and courses through which civil servants would acquire new knowledge and skills useful in their professional work. The LPR and RN wanted to implement the principle of fairness by: 1) limiting direct contact between those interested in a given decision and the officials making the decision, 2) making all administrative decisions public for public inspection, 3) controlling all cases in which public interests coincided with private interests, and 4) introducing financial and criminal liability of officials for illegal actions. Cheapness meant reducing the administration to the minimum necessary. It was believed that an audit of posts in local

government units should be carried out and it should be decided which posts were needed and which should be abolished as unnecessary (Polska zasługuje, 2004; Z troską w przyszłość; Suwerenny Naród; Nowy porządek; Paprota, 2004; Wierzejski; Bosak).

The second type of reforms concerned property and financial matters of local self-government units. The draft LPR constitution stipulated that each entity was entitled to property and other property rights. Local government assets included those entities that serve the local community in meeting its basic needs, i.e. water and sewage companies, power and gas companies, sewage treatment plants, transport companies, as well as natural resources located in the territory of a given local government unit, such as fossil deposits, renewable energy resources and forests. The national groupings were of the opinion that these assets should constitute an important and reliable source of income for the local authorities and contribute to their economic self-sufficiency and development. For this reason, they opposed the sale of national assets that are important for the life of local communities without the consent of these communities. In this way, the intention was to protect against the uncontrolled sale of public utility companies to private or foreign investors, which could lead to the purchasers raising prices for the services they provided and to a deterioration in the standard of living of the inhabitants. In order to strengthen local governments in terms of assets, it was proposed that they could acquire, free of charge, shares in enterprises owned by the State Treasury that were directly related to the implementation of tasks by a given unit. As regards the financial matters, the draft LPR constitution granted local governments a share in public revenues in line with the tasks they were assigned. Those revenues were to include own revenues from local taxes and fees, as well as general subsidies and targeted subsidies from the state budget. The LPR and RN proposed that self-governments be given greater financial independence than existed at the time. The intention was to achieve this by giving local authorities the freedom to set tax rates on their own territory and to participate in taxes set by the state. It was believed that these changes should stimulate the pro-development policy of local authorities, as their income was to be determined to a greater extent than before by effective regional and local

activity, and not by a decision of the central authorities (Konstytucja IV RP; Polska zasługuje, 2004; Z troską w przyszłość; Suwerenny Naród; Siła polskości).

The third change proposed by the Polish national camp in the 21st century was to ensure that local governments pursue policies that are in line with the Polish *raison d'être* and national interest. National politicians argued that, following their accession to the European Union, some voivodships were guided in their actions by particular interests, not always in line with the overriding objectives of the state, for example closer cooperation with the German *Länder* than obedience to the authorities in Warsaw. A lack of consideration for these goals or their disregard by regional authorities could have contributed to the gradual disintegration of Poland and, as a result, to a *de facto* loss of control by the central authorities over parts of the state. Therefore, it was intended to ensure the state unity of the Republic. The LPR's draft constitution did not allow local government units to join international associations of local and regional communities or to cooperate with local and regional communities in other countries. It also wanted to eliminate the independence of local governments in obtaining funds from the EU. The government was to receive EU financial aid and decide on the distribution of funds among the voivodeships. In this way, the intention was to subordinate local authorities to state policy. The national camp also proposed positive solutions. These included the creation of a programme for the economic, cultural and social integration of the western lands with the rest of Poland. Development-oriented investments in these areas, favouring their modernisation and improvement of the inhabitants' standard of living, were to contribute to convincing the communities there of the benefits of remaining loyal citizens of the Republic. The second proposal was to promote patriotism in local government activity. According to the politicians of the LPR and RN, the state should support and activate local governments in ensuring appropriate development conditions for Polish entrepreneurs, who would create new jobs and increase the incomes of individuals, while opposing foreign concerns that monopolised markets, eliminated competition and, frequently, failed to pay taxes. The above methods were deemed necessary to maintain the unity of the state and to ensure that local governments did

not act against its interests ((Konstytucja IV RP; Polska zasługuje; Z troską w przyszłość; Siła polskości; Paprota; Wierzejski; Sulowski; Bosak).

CONCLUSION

The essence of local government in the political thought of the League of Polish Families and the National Movement is to treat it as a type of public authority, with limited powers and scope of action in relation to central government. Its task is to support and supplement state bodies in the performance of their functions. While the legislature and the executive branch decide on the directions of state policy and set the goals that the Republic of Poland should pursue, local government units make them more specific and adapt them to regional and local circumstances. Thanks to a limited area of activity, they can better define the problems of their respective communities and choose the most appropriate methods and means to implement the decisions of the state authorities. This makes it possible, on the one hand, to pursue a policy appropriate to a given local government unit, ensuring the best possible implementation of the needs and interests of the local population, and on the other hand - ensuring the fundamental interests of the nation as a whole and of the Polish state.

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