

COUNCIL  
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Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe  
Conférence permanente des pouvoirs locaux et régionaux de l'Europe  
Strasbourg, 12 June 1990  
CPL/P (25) 9

STANDING COMMITTEE

THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN POLAND ON 27 MAY 1990

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Mission report of the 5 observers from the CLRAE

## 1. MEMBERSHIP OF THE DELEGATION OF OBSERVERS

The invitation addressed to the CLRAE to appoint five observers was sent by the Polish Government on 10 May, thus enabling the Bureau of the CLRAE, meeting on 11 May, to appoint the five observers. Since one of the members designated had to withdraw from the mission a few days before the elections, it was possible to replace him by another member.

The delegation comprised the following members:

Mr Morgan, Vice-President of the CLRAE (Conservative - United Kingdom)

Mr Haegi, Rapporteur of the CLRAE for relations with the local authorities of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Liberal, Switzerland)

Mr Tchernoff, Chairman of the Committee on the Natural and Built Environment (Liberal, Netherlands)

Mrs Farrington, Chairman of the Committee on Culture, Education and the Media (Labour - United Kingdom)

Mr Mentz, Vice-Chairman of the Committee on the Natural and Built Environment (CDU - Federal Republic of Germany)

The delegation was accompanied by a member of the Secretariat, Mr R Locatelli, Executive Secretary to the CLRAE. Two American observers also followed the elections and, with our consent, they took part in most of the programme.

They were the Vice-Chairman of the National Election Commission of the Democratic party and the Director General of the Association of Mayors of the United States.

## 2. Mission programme of the observers from the CLRAE

The programme prepared for the delegation with its consent is appended to this report.

The morning of Saturday 26 May and part of the afternoon and evening were devoted to a series of meetings with Mr Regulsky, Minister responsible for local government reform, Mr Stepien, Commissioner General responsible for organising the elections, Mr Makarczyk, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Stelmachowski, President of the Senate, Mr Aleksander Hall, Minister responsible for matters concerning the political parties, and their staff.

These contacts enabled us to acquaint ourselves in detail with the new system of local self government in Poland, the structure of urban and rural communes, the general organisation of the elections, the voting system and the counting of votes, the situation concerning parties and political movements in Poland etc. A large number of documents were made available to us. These preliminary contacts and the documentation enabled the delegation to take stock of the situation very thoroughly before visiting the polling stations.

Indeed, the members of the delegation wish to thank the Polish authorities for facilitating their mission by providing them with all the information and resources necessary to carry it out efficiently.

Meetings with the main political parties took place on Saturday afternoon, as well as at the dinner and during visits to polling stations on Sunday 27 May.

The morning of Monday 28 May was devoted to evaluation meetings with the Minister, Mr Regulsky, the Commissioner General, Mr Stepien and information contacts with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The mission ended with a press conference attended by the observers from the Council of Europe and the two American observers. Since the observers who had gone to the Gdansk and Cracow regions were only able to get back to Warsaw scarcely an hour before the press conference, the group decided not to draw up a statement on the spot, but to arrange for a detailed report to be drafted and be approved by the written procedure.

### 3. The importance of local authorities and municipal elections in Poland

The Polish authorities told us that these municipal elections, the first completely democratic elections since the second world war, were as important as the national elections.

The elections must be seen in the political and legislative context of Poland as it is in the spring of 1990.

For the new Polish authorities these local elections constitute a basic step in the construction of grass roots democracy. Even during the "Round Table" negotiations concluded early in the spring of 1989, the leaders of Solidarity made local self government a cornerstone of the process leading to a return to democracy. Furthermore it was at the initiative of a commission of the Senate, the second chamber elected in June 1989, that the bill setting up highly decentralised local authorities was tabled and then debated and adopted by the two houses, the Diet and the Senate. The aim in view was to destroy the powers and networks of the "nomenclatura" existing at local level, hitherto a mere administrative step in the State administration.

The new act, published on 19 March 1990, the final text of which was made available to us in French and English, is largely based on and in accordance with the principles enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self Government. Each "self-managed" local authority will constitute a genuine miniature parliamentary democracy, with a council elected by universal suffrage and an executive responsible to the council and elected by the latter. Local authorities have a legal personality and are called upon to take charge of all public affairs of local importance not assigned by law to other authorities. The powers set out under the act are important and range from regional and town planning, to the environment, the drainage system etc, highway maintenance, cultural and sports installations, social welfare, low-cost housing, the supply of drinking water and energy, public order, etc. That list is not restrictive, since municipal powers are clearly general in nature.

An act which had just been adopted by Parliament, a week before the elections, defined the scope of the transfer of powers to the municipalities. The new Polish communes can even exercise legal activities extending beyond clearly public utility tasks if social needs so require. Thus they will be able to set up industrial and commercial enterprises. Communes or groups of communes will own public service assets and enterprises, such as waterworks, drainage facilities, the building and managing of low-cost housing, which they will be able to manage directly, grant as a concession or even privatise. The Government lists, commune by commune, all the assets to be transferred to the municipality or privatised, thus underlining the political and economic importance of the new Polish local authorities.

Furthermore the law provides for the possibility of setting up associations of communes and intercommunal agreements based on free accession (apart from in certain large conurbations where the local authorities, corresponding to a district, will be required to set up a sort of urban community). At regional level (voivodes) the communes will set up an association which will be able to supervise the activities of decentralised State administrations in means of a small-scale Council, known as the Dietin.

Local resources will comprise the product of local taxes, global subsidies from the State and income from the commune's assets. Pending the overall reform of State finances, in 1991, local authorities will receive provisional grants.

Broad direct democracy is provided for because communal referendums are possible either on the initiative of the municipal council or as a result of a motion signed by at least one tenth of the electorate. The result of the referendum will be binding on the municipal executive. It may cover matters such as the dismissal of the municipal council or the secession of a part of the commune.

In short, the delegation concluded that the new Polish local authorities have considerable autonomy, the problem now being how to provide them with the necessary administrative and financial means.

#### 4. Local structures, the organisation of the elections and the voting system

The elections covered 2,383 communes (including 830 towns) with a population of more than 37,000,000 inhabitants (and 26,000,000 voters). It should be pointed out that Polish communes cover large areas, since the present structure remains the one which resulted from the 1975 reform leading to important mergers notably in rural areas.

The electoral system differed in towns with more than 40,000 inhabitants (100 or so) and small towns and communes with fewer than 40,000 inhabitants.

In towns with more than 40,000 inhabitants, the method used was a ballot based on an integral proportional list and each list had to be presented by at least 150 voters. The number of candidates elected varied in each electoral constituency.

In small towns and communes with fewer than 40,000 inhabitants, that is to say in most constituencies, the ballot was based on the uninominal system with one round and a majority vote. A candidate had to be presented by only 15 voters. A single candidate was elected for each constituency.

All citizens of Polish nationality, residing in the commune and at least 18 years of age, were entitled to vote, provided that they had not lost their civil rights as a result of court proceedings because they had committed an offence.

The number of municipal councillors elected was established by law: from 15 members in communes with fewer than 4,000 inhabitants to 40 in communes with 100,000 inhabitants up to a maximum of 100.

The following bodies were set up to organise the elections:

- the general Commission for the elections assisted by a commission of judges;
- the provincial Commission for the elections comprising judges;
- the municipal Commission for the elections;
- an election Committee in each polling station.

The electoral law stipulated the distribution of seats among the electoral constituencies comprising each commission. The number of councillors elected in each constituency is proportional to the number of inhabitants in the constituency. The municipal Commission for the elections proposed the number of electoral constituencies, their boundaries and the number of local representatives per constituency (in towns with more than 40,000 inhabitants). The provincial Commission for the elections took its decisions on the basis of these proposals.

Each electoral bureau counts the votes and sends the results to the municipal election Commission which establishes the distribution of seats (for communes coming under the proportional system). The provincial Commission supervises the counting of votes and announces the results to the national Commission. These commissions comprise judges or officials serving on oath. The parties and the independent candidates appointed observers. In all, some 300,000 people were involved in organising the elections.

All the representatives of the parties questioned by the delegation said they were satisfied with the organisation of the ballot and its impartiality.

## 5. Political movements and parties in Poland

The contacts and documentation referred to under (2) above and (7) below permitted the delegation of observers to obtain a fairly accurate idea of the political scene in Poland at the time of the municipal elections.

Poland is a country in which political parties are still in the process of coming into being. Grass-roots political and social life is being radically overhauled and the great majority of the population is still numbed by the impact of the old "party" which it utterly rejects, to such an extent that the mere word "party" has a negative connotation.

It is thus not surprising that a movement based on the trade unions and the citizens' committees set up spontaneously in most communes receives far more votes than the political "parties", whether connected with the previous system or not. That explains both the limited number of candidates other than those campaigning under the "Solidarnosc" label or the independents, and the election results.

Not a day goes by without the political scene changing and new parties being set up. The national election Commission counted some 80 organisations which can be regarded as political parties with a national vocation, 270 organisations which can be compared to regional or local parties, and 660 other organisations of different kinds supporting candidates but not claiming to be parties. The latter include a wide variety of organisations ranging from the inhabitants of a street to the Franco-Polish friendship association, the list of members of staff of an enterprise or even the association of blood donors.

The delegation received a list of 80 parties and information about those on the list which represent something substantial, albeit relative as we ourselves observed when considering the results.

#### Left-wing

- Polish Socialist Party (opposition party, more closely connected with the social doctrine of the Church)
- Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (the successor of the former Unified Workers' Party of Poland : POUP)
- Polish Social Democratic Union (derived from the POUP but no longer based on Marxism-Leninism)

#### Peasant movements

- Polish Peasant Party - Solidarity
- Polish Peasant Party (the result of the union of the unified peasants allied to POUP and another peasant party)
- Independent movements
- Confederation for an Independent Poland (radically anti-Communist group)
- Democratic Party (first allied to POUP, but subsequently forming an alliance with Solidarity after the elections of June 1989)

Movements based on Christian Democracy

- Labour Party (in favour of property shared among workers)
- Social Christian Union (ecumenical organisation of a number of Christian religions, formerly allied to POUP)
- PAX (previously allied to POUP, of Catholic nationalist inspiration in a socialist system)
- Polish Social Christian Association (previously allied to POUP)

Nationalist movement

- National Christian Union (centred on a national policy based on the Christian ethic and the social order based on the family)
- Movements with liberal and conservative tendencies
- Democratic Liberal Congress (young entrepreneurs)
- Union for a realistic policy (in favour of the liberal economy)
- Polish Political Movement (liberal conservative, centre-right)

This long list of political parties and movements covers only a very small part of the political preferences of the Polish people, because as the percentage of candidates and the votes cast show (see 6 and 9), most of the Polish population is in favour of "Solidarnosc" and the "Civic Committees" which back that movement as well as independent candidates (particularly in the countryside).

There is no need to describe Solidarnosc, the well-known trade union movement. The Polish phenomenon of "Civic Committees" does however call for further explanation.

These Civic Committees were set up outside Solidarnosc, on the occasion of the parliamentary elections in June 1989, first within the districts (voivodes) and subsequently the communes, or even the districts and quarters of towns. There are more than 2,000 Civic Committees, each with a maximum number of approximately 100 members. Some take the name of Solidarity, with its consent, but sometimes two of them compete in the same town. In the provinces they are usually offshoots of the farmers' Solidarity trade union. These committees first organised themselves on a community basis in order to assist the population to face up to social and housing problems etc. But gradually they became a political force and prepared local elections whilst training new local political leaders. They derive their inspiration from the programme of Solidarnosc, but also preserve their independence and do not always support candidates put up by "Solidarity". At the national level there is a National Committee of Civic Committees which endeavours to provide for co-ordination, does not exercise central authority, but confines itself exclusively to offering advice and assistance. The same is true in the voivodes. These Civic Committees are undoubtedly the political force which was best prepared for the local elections and succeeded in putting up more candidates than the numerous parties.

In a rural environment, the independent candidates are usually well known figures who are respected by the population, but in certain cases these "independents" are in fact representatives of the old regime. Generally speaking, however, the population knows how to distinguish between genuine and sham independents and is helped in that by the Civic Committees.

The election campaign was not very stimulating because the party programmes were neither precise nor very diversified. In particular, the resources available were very limited and often derisory (small amateurish electoral posters, few public meetings). Access to the media was regulated and all the representatives of the parties we met said that they were satisfied with the application of the rules. However, the debates were not very stimulating, not least because the candidates lacked the experience to conduct such debates.

In the countryside, the independent candidates conducted a door-to-door type campaign. There was no rule governing the financing of parties apart from the requirement that it must be made public. Aid from abroad was therefore possible, but in general frowned upon by the population and therefore rarely sought after.

Apart from the political force represented by Solidarnosc, the Civic Committees and the movements based on the trade unions, the other parties are handicapped either because of their past (POUP and its former allies) or their newness and the absence of organisation.

The Government, urged on by other political forces, accordingly felt it necessary to introduce a law on the parties and tabled a bill in Parliament. The Diet has just amended this bill rather drastically, in general by making it more difficult to set up new parties (1,000 signatures necessary to set up a party, although the Government had not established limits, placing a ban on finance from abroad, and modifying rules governing access to the media which were not adequately clear and complicated conditions governing legal existence). This bill is to be debated by the Senate and the final result of the parliamentary debate is awaited. The Government is not very satisfied with the changes made because they are likely to defend existing parties and legal aspects of the bill are also subject to criticism.

Things are moving in Poland, but although discontent caused by the economic and social austerity policy pursued by the Government might be one of the causes of absenteeism at the elections this does not seem to have helped parties, particularly not the parties representing the old regime. In certain quarters fears are expressed about the revival of nationalist and xenophobic movements, although the results of the municipal elections do not seem to have confirmed them.

Solidarity, which represents a very large section of the population, particularly in highly urbanised and industrial areas, embraces a number of trends and opinions. Will it develop into a large party or a number of parties, as some advocate? Future developments will provide the answer.



6. Candidates present and the function of the system of appeals and decisions of election commissions

The number of candidates and their "political pluralism" are certainly an important factor when it comes to judging the "free" and "democratic" character of an election.

The following figures illustrate the situation and will make it possible to judge the results better:

Number of communes: 2,383  
 Number of seats to be filled: 52,028  
 Number of candidates: 147,327  
 National average of candidates per seat: 2.8

In towns with more than 40,000 inhabitants (proportional list system)

Candidates per seat: 4.6 on average

In smaller towns and rural communes

Candidates per seat: 2.6 on average

It is clear that in towns candidates were distinctly more numerous: we observed on average between 4 and 9 lists, most put forward by parties' and certain independent lists. It was more general to find in rural zones 2 or 3 candidates, frequently independent.

In 2,091 constituencies (out of 47,254 constituencies with a majority uninominal system) there was only one candidate (often independent) and in 45 no candidate stood. This indicates the lower level of politisation of campaigns and the difficulty in finding candidates in these rural constituencies, despite the efforts of parties and Civic Committees. The reply given to our observers who questioned electors in constituencies with only one candidate about their reasons for voting was, "To show our determination for change at local level as well".

The division of candidates presented by party was indicated to us by the national election commission :

- In smaller towns and rural areas (majority system)
  - 24% Solidarnosc Civic Committees
  - 8% Polish Peasant Party
  - 2.5% Solidarnosc Peasant Party
  - 1% Democratic Party

The remainder: other parties, miscellaneous organisations and most of all independent candidates.

- In towns with more than 40,000 inhabitants (proportional system)
  - 23% Civic Committees, Solidarnosc
  - 12% other groups of citizens and candidates indirectly linked to Solidarnosc
  - 9% Democratic Party
  - 6% Confederation for an Independent Poland
  - 5% Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland
  - 5% Polish Peasant Party
  - 3% predominantly Christian Democratic parties

It is worth recalling here the problems encountered in the course of organisation, appeals and decisions taken by the relevant judicial bodies. As these were the first completely free elections in Poland for very many years, the whole administrative and judicial machinery set up faced a difficult test. In general, the system worked very satisfactorily and there were very few disputes and appeals.

The most controversial question concerned the way communes were divided out into electoral constituencies. Twenty appeals were presented, and the tribunal of judges assigned to the national election commission approved six, the others being based on an incorrect understanding of the law. In other cases, the dispute emanated from small villages demanding to become constituencies.

In the matter of the membership of local elections commissions, concerning over 200,000 persons, only nine appeals were presented and 1 approved. A single case of a boycott was notified in the village of Niwistka which demanded to be recognised as a mountain village and so benefit from the aid connected with such a classification.

When it comes to the nomination of candidates (over 147,000) the main problem was posed by seats without candidates (finally 45 at the close of the proceedings). This was principally due to the fact that the people were not confident that the changes were going to last or to ignorance of the nomination procedure. Appeals concerning the nomination of candidates were mainly concerned with the identification of parties. Some 20 of the appeals presented questioned the utilisation of the term "Solidarnosc" and were upheld by the electoral tribunal. Only in one was a candidate challenged as unsuitable to stand for election, having been convicted for an offence in accordance with the law.

The actual campaign, either by posters, through the local press - which was very active in presenting candidates - or radio and television gave rise to only very few appeals, mostly for libel. In general, the campaign provoked little emotion and was of only limited interest. The main reason was that the electorate was not used to taking part in election campaigns. Apart from the parties, the independent candidates and the media failed to make the right appeal to the public, for want of resources and experience.

#### 7. Observation in polling stations

The actual observation function was made possible thanks to the logistic support of the Polish authorities, in five separate groups, two in Warsaw and the surrounding region, two in Gdansk and the surrounding region and one at Cracow and its region. Each group was made up of an observer plus, when possible, an accompanying official from the Council of Europe (and two members of the Warsaw information unit), and in all cases an interpreter whose services were made available by the Polish authorities, together with an official car and chauffeur.

The two Warsaw groups were able to visit some 30 polling stations and the other two some 20 further polling stations. Our visits were to inner cities, the outskirts of cities, more important villages and rural communes, in the light of the different electoral systems.

We were able to make visits as we chose, without advance notice, and it was very easy to choose which polling stations we were to visit because they were well signposted and not difficult to find. Visits to polling stations were arranged in advance only when a television team wanted to film our observation mission.

The members were free to visit the polling stations, to check the ballot boxes to see that they were properly sealed, and the voting booters.

Thanks to the different discussions and contacts, including those with the persons in charge of elections commissions and counting, it was possible to have full knowledge of the details in which the elections were materially organised, concerning choice of premises, the official information provided to electors, distribution of equipment to the different election commissions, questions concerning security while voting and counting were going on, instructions concerning the arrangements for counting in each station. The replies obtained were very satisfactory and we were able to verify during our visit to various premises that the instructions were effectively being carried out.

Numerous interviews were carried out with those in charge of the premises, the members of election commissions and electors. Satisfactory answers were given to our technical questions designed to verify the members' familiarity with procedures. Similarly, the electors questioned never appeared to have any difficulties in understanding how they were to fill in their ballot papers, although on Wednesday 30 May the official results showed 2.97% spoilt ballot papers.

The group which went to Cracow (Mr Tchernoff) was also able to visit the electronic calculation centre which was responsible for counting at the voivode level (second counting) in parallel with the counting by hand procedure. This electronic system was being tested for the first time in Cracow, and assuming that the test proves successful, its utilisation should be extended to the whole country for future elections. The programme, which was drawn up under UNIX, appeared to be entirely comparable with what is to be found in Switzerland or the Federal Republic of Germany for this operation.

The two observers who went to Gdansk, Mrs Farrington and Mr Morgan, also met numerous representatives of political parties and their candidates.

One of the Warsaw groups (Mr Haegi) was also able to be present at the start of ballot paper counting and accounting operations.

The general impression from the visits was excellent. The voting premises were all extremely well organised and, surprisingly, very easy to identify from outside. In all cases, the procedures seemed to us to be free from fraud, and in particular in the smaller communes the atmosphere was frequently relaxed; we noticed that numerous couples turned up to vote with their children. We saw a roughly equal representation of the sexes, and of all age groups.

Certain technical points of detail were noted: the absence of accounting in connection with the number of ballot papers actually deposited in the ballot boxes, the utilisation of a voting booth by a whole family at the same time, the fact that certain electors did not use the voting booths for filling in their ballot papers (with older persons often preferring to sit down outside the booth, where by chance a chair was available !).

Some electors were questioned about these practices of family voting, and said that they no longer had any secrets and that the Poles no longer intended to be at the mercy of bureaucratic rules, even rules concerning voting procedures.

On the whole, the way in which the local elections proceeded can be regarded as entirely similar - apart from certain details - to what is noticed in most of the countries of Western Europe, and the observers felt that they permitted the exercise of the vote in a manner that entirely conformed with democratic principles.

The observers concluded that in no way could these technical details affect either the result of the vote or the free and equitable character of the elections.

In conclusion, it can be affirmed that the unanimous opinion of our delegation - to which the American observers also subscribed - was that the municipal elections were democratic, free, equitable and very well organised.

The representatives of the different parties we met were satisfied with the way in which the voting operations proceeded.

The opinions expressed by the ambassadors with whom certain observers had meetings fully confirmed these impressions.

#### 8. Contact with the press and media

The press, radio and television were interested in the observation mission and filmed the observers in polling stations in the three main cities visited. Members of the delegation of observers and the Secretariat were interviewed about their impressions.

At least 50 journalists were present at the press conference held at the end of the mission, on Monday 28 May, as were the radio and two television channels. Judging from the questions asked, the international press, including the North American press, was well represented.

The Sunday and Monday evening television news broadcasts featured our fact-finding mission.

#### 9. Election

When we left Poland, only the election turn-out was known, plus some non-official partial results.

The turn-out was only 42.13%, although opinion polls and forecasts had suggested that it would be between 55 and 60%. Furthermore, observations at the end of the afternoon in the polling stations and the chart indicating turn-out levels in the different regions showed fairly clearly that turn-out was higher in towns and industrial areas than it was in the country, which goes against the trend noted generally in the Western countries. In fact, turn-out in industrial areas in Silesia, Poznan and Gdansk was round about the 50% mark, which is not an unusual rate, at Warsaw round about the 43% mark while in a number of more rural regions it was between 35 and 40%.

The general reasons for a lower than predicted turn-out, although it is perfectly respectable when compared with local elections in other countries of Western Europe, are probably as follows, on the basis of the impressions we received in the course of our different contacts:

- a certain disillusionment in a part of the population, and in the ranks of Solidarnosc, where it was hoped there would be a more radical break with the representatives of the former regime not to say a disavowal of the regime
- the tough economic policy carried out by the government (freeing of prices and pegging of wages),
- a lack-lustre election campaign for which the programmes were not very diversified, carried out with pitiful resources and without professionalism or any real sense of the media,
- failure to grasp the issues at stake on the part of the population which had been for too long deprived of free local administration and which, as a consequence, is not yet ready and able to assess the importance of the elections, especially since the tasks involved (definition of transfer of powers) had only just been decided on by Parliament,
- unawareness of the real power which will fall to locally elected representatives in the decision-taking process in a population used to dealing with local government officers who are mere cogs in the wheels of central government ;
- the failure of the Polish authorities to introduce arrangements for voting by correspondence or proxy
- the fact that for the first time members of the armed forces and university students were obliged to travel to their constituencies of origin in order to vote.

Further specific factors can possibly explain the lower level of turn-out in the countryside:

- the rural communes resulting from mergers carried out by the former regime created excessively large communal units which meant that inhabitants could not identify with their commune,
- the need to travel up to 10 km in order to vote, which is too big a distance given the low proportion of car owners,
- the majority voting system, the small number of candidates in rural constituencies and the small number of parties and political movements compared with the independent candidates, which meant that the elections enlisted little enthusiasm in rural areas.

The provisional results available when this report was drawn up indicated the following:

- in towns with more than 40,000 inhabitants  
overwhelming victory for Solidarnosc (and its Civic Committees) which often achieved a rate in the region of 85% (putting forward approximately one-quarter of the candidates);

- in smaller towns and the countryside

the electors gave their preference to independent candidates and the peasant parties (including that referred to as "Solidarnosc").

Overall, the provisional results were as follows:

41.4%	Civic Committees and Solidarnosc
38%	Independent candidates (it is very difficult to gauge their real allegiances)
6.5%	Polish Peasant Party
4.3%	Solidarnosc Peasant Party
2.25%	other peasant parties
1.7%	Democratic Party
0.7%	Party representing the trade unions subscribing to Communism
0.65%	Candidates representing minorities
0.28%	Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (former Communists)
0.1%	Confederation for an Independent Poland

It is fair to conclude that Solidarnosc will have triumphed in the large towns, with independent candidates coming out on top in rural areas, the ex-Communist parties and movements and extreme right movements suffering a resounding defeat, and the peasant parties doing well in both rural areas and towns.

10. Political contacts and relations between Poland and the Council of Europe

The presence of observers was welcomed enthusiastically at a particularly delicate juncture in the political evolution in Poland, which is anxious to join the family of European democratic countries as soon as possible.

Throughout, of course, there were interesting exchanges of view on the country's future and immediate problems, in particular with Mr Novak, Director of the Studies and Planning Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr Novak met a part of the delegation at 8.30 am on Monday, that is before the groups which had gone to Gdansk and Cracow had returned to Warsaw. He informed us first of all about the new organisation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which henceforth will have a General Directorate for relations with international institutions, with a specific section concerned with relations with the Council of Europe.

Mr Novak outlined the new political priorities of the Polish Government, the first aim being Polish entry into the Council of Europe and an association contract with the European Communities, with a view to possible membership within 10-20 years. He spoke on the excellence of relations with the Council of Europe. He also told us that it would be a welcome gesture for the Polish authorities if accession as a full member could be achieved before the 3rd of May 1991, a symbolic date for Poland given that it was the bicentenary of the proclamation of the first Polish democratic constitution which was at the time the second democratic constitution in the world to be established.

In the matter of the new parliament, a number of political forces hope that the Government will organise elections before the end of the year, but the most likely solution at the moment is that elections will be held in March 1991, and on this point there is a maximum of political consensus.

The members of the delegation contacted the representatives of the Council of Europe information and documentation unit opened in Warsaw under the umbrella of the Canton of Geneva, and were able to see for themselves the excellent work being carried out; several Polish authorities were extremely complimentary and members noted the achievements in disseminating information about the work of the Council of Europe in connection with local government. The unit also provided considerable support, making for the success of the mission.

Everyone pressed for its activities to be maintained and continued - and assurances on this head were given to the Polish authorities - up until the moment of accession to the Council of Europe.

Following its contacts with representatives of the Government, parties and candidates, the delegation was also convinced that extensive action would have to be undertaken to help the new Polish local authorities assume their new duties efficiently, by means of the following:

- dissemination of straightforward and precise information (the kind of work performed by the information and documentation unit);
- more detailed consideration of the principles and practice of a self-administered form of local government ;
- help with the training of the newly-elected officials (52,000) and new local government officers (300,000); here the action already put in hand by the Council of Europe in conjunction with the 15 training regional centres and the IULA projects with Community funding represent a useful, but probably insufficient starting point ;
- assistance in connection with technical equipment for the new local authorities, certainly the most urgent and important sphere at this stage, for which no precise action has been carried out.

The delegation intends to give further consideration to these matters in the Bureau and Standing Committee, on the basis of the resolution adopted by the CLRAE at its last session in March (Resolution 213).





In conclusion, the delegation feels that through these free and democratic elections and the new legislation on local self-government, Poland has broken new ground in its advance towards a true grass-roots democracy one that reflects the citizens, their shared environment, the circumstances of their everyday lives. The new local councils so elected replace in full the local foundations of the former nomenclatura. Poland is the first country emerging from a communist regime and the first to tackle genuinely political change in depth and lay lay the foundations on which a democratic state can be built.

