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Introduction

This volume is a collection of sociologico-political studies which examine the process of systemic changes underway in Poland, in short – systemic transformation. It deals with salient theoretical and practical dilemmas apparent in this process, highly complex in terms of scale, direction and pace. The transition from the system of real socialism to liberal democracy and free market economy has understandably elicited the interest of many academics. The authors of this publication were perfectly aware that transformation as a subject is a serious challenge for political science research. Historically, the first to occur was the transformation of the political system, followed by changes in the economy. The most difficult and slow to set in were shifts in social awareness. Reaching civil society eager to participate in democratic institutions has not been a smooth road. The course of this complex transformation process was beset with problems and marred by ills in political, economic and social life.

The scholarly debate presented in this book is grounded on several basic theoretical and methodological premises. The first is the holistic and functional approach to the analysis of the transformation process. For this is a process taking place in the macro-social scale embracing society as a functional whole; a process stimulated by auto-dynamic factors which activate the potential for self-development existing in Polish society. The second premise calls for studying transformation as a category of social dynamics, treating changeability as an immanent trait of each society, discovering what was, what is and will or could be in the future, concentrating on the tendencies and course of systemic change rather than depicting society in terms of social statics. The third premise stresses the heuristic value of the dilemma as a category of analyzing the processes of social dynamics. The emergence of society, its endurance and changes bring attention to the issue of the persistent calculation of developmental alternatives – so vital to the course and results of transformation. Transformation is or can be a spontaneous process only to a limited degree; in order to avoid chaos and fluctuation it is necessary to introduce model solutions based on rational social choices. And this presupposes activism in recognizing social opportunities and establishing the optimal proportions between continuity and change in the process of Polish transformation.

The papers in this publication have been organized within four subject categories. The first section includes theoretical and methodological studies, the second contains perspectives on the transformation of the political system, the third

analyses the shifts in Polish society's political culture, while the fourth explores the changes in Poland's international role and position and the challenges this poses to Polish foreign policy.

This publication is the outcome of many years of research on systemic transformation pursued at the Institute of Political Science, University of Warsaw. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of transformation as a subject matter of research we have invited contributions by academics from other institutes of Warsaw University's Department of Journalism and Political Science.

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