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The electoral engineering in Poland since 1989

The dissertation focuses on the problem of the electoral engineering in Poland since the beginning of the transformation of Poland's political system in 1989.

Elections definitely can be considered as a complex process and the electoral systems used for them may take a variety of forms. The development or the stabilization of democracy does not necessarily mean that there is a limit to the differences in opinions on specific electoral systems and their constituent elements, or to restrict proposals for change. On the contrary, the development of the modern societies requires the adaptation of electoral systems to their changes.

Changes in electoral systems may come as a result of some objective factors or they may appear to improve the electoral process (e.g. its technical side), but a part of the electoral process is different it is intended to align the electoral system to the current interests of its applicants. This kind of changes concerning the electoral system, influencing the electoral process at any stage, along with the interests of the decision-maker changing the likelihood of obtaining the particular election result, but not having a direct influence on the election choices of the voters should be specified as the electoral engineering and the subject of the thesis.

The variability of the system over time is not synonymous with the phenomenon of the electoral engineering. Moreover, it may also involve deliberate resignation from changing the electoral system (when its current form serves the political interests of the decision-maker). It is therefore advisable to examine the variability (and stability) of the electoral system in terms of the political interest of the individual influential policymakers.

The dissertation focuses on this topic, namely electoral engineering with regard to the elections to the Sejm of the Polish People's Republic and the Republic of Poland, since 1989 to the actions undertaken during the seventh term of the Sejm (2011-2015).

Within the study being the subject of the thesis, the process of creating and modifying the electoral system for the Sejm of the Polish People's Republic and the Republic of Poland, during the 9 consecutive terms during the 26 years, has been analysed.

Researched political processes have therefore taken place in a variety of conditions. Research analysed the decision-making processes of several dozen proposals - both global, linked to the introduction of a new electoral system, and aimed only at changing specific elements of the system at a given moment in time. Apart from the individual projects, the decision-making process related to their procedure and the positions of individual decision-makers have been analysed.

The proposals have referred to all of the elements of the electoral system in the narrow sense: the legal norms shaping the broadest possible electoral offer (e.g. by applying the exclusion from passive electoral law and the rules on the minimum participation of individual genders in the lists of candidates), the constituency structure (from single-mandate districts to one country-wide district, electoral formula - including the methods used (both majority and proportional representation methods) and the legal election thresholds (their absence or introduction - at different levels, both at the district level and nationwide level, in relation to votes and the number of seats obtained), as well as voter's right to vote directly (from closed lists to open lists with preferential and optional preferential vote, simple to composite and number of votes from 1 to number of seats in constituency).

The study has allowed a positive verification of the previously set hypotheses. The practice of electoral engineering confirms that the institutional actors of the electoral system make, in the vast majority of cases, rational decisions. It should be borne in mind that this pertains to the perception of one's own interest at the moment of making a decision, which does not necessarily translate directly into the benefit at a later time. In some cases, due to the erroneous assessment of one's ability to gain public support, the decisions made have been extremely unfavourable to their authors, but this means that they lack the ability to properly define their own interests, rather than the incompatibility of their actions with their perception of their own political interest.

In some cases, the use of electoral engineering has proved to be ineffective, which resulted from the use of improper tools for the purpose. This was a consequence of a misappraisal of the functioning conditions and the capabilities of the individual groups. This applies both to the elements of the system actually applied and those that have not been finally implemented.

Part of the effects about the use of electoral engineering, negative from the perspective of the decision maker, was predictable. They were the result of inability to adapt to the current conditions or ignore threats, misjudging of chances, expecting benefits of other components of the system, or lack of readiness to bear certain political costs.

It is important to be aware of these processes and their possible consequences, both among those directly involved in them, as well as with civil society institutions and the citizens themselves, whose electoral decision may undergo, due to electoral engineering, excessive deformation.

It should also be noted that the use of electoral engineering tools had an impact on the

stabilization of the political system, although it was not always consistent with the intentions of policy makers. Most often, the use of electoral engineering tools has contributed positively to the stabilization of the political system.