DEMOCRACY AND SOCIETY 08.09.2022 | Maciej Gdula

'In these times people expect cooperation in the EU'

The Polish opposition member Maciej Gdula accuses the PiS government of using the issue of reparations to distract from domestic political problems

Why is the PiS (Law and Justice) Party's focus right now on reparations?

If we want to understand why PiS is rising this issue, we have to take into account, the internal political situation in Poland. The governing PiS party is facing difficult times due to a rising inflation rate, problems in energy supplies, scandals related to corruption during the coronavirus pandemic, the ecological catastrophe on the Oder river and – last but not least – its struggle in getting EU recovery funds. For several years the popularity of the PiS government was based on two pillars: firstly, on its agency in matters of social policies and, secondly, on its fight against different 'threats'. At the moment the administration is only able to react to crises (lack of agency), so it wants to use the second option. After elites, the LGBT+ community, and refugees, Germans have become 'the threat'. In the coverage of PiS-leaning and government-controlled media Germans are responsible for the war in Ukraine (the Nordstream pipelines) and do not want to bare their true responsibility for World War II and pay reparations.

One should not neglect that in all European countries there is a growing sentiment of pride related to the help for Ukraine and the feeling that other countries are not doing as much as they can and should do. If that sentiment stays on the level of private opinions, it does not affect European politics. Looking for a strong topic during the electoral year (the next parliamentary election is scheduled for autumn 2023), PiS has decided to rearticulate this feeling in internal and international politics raising claims for reparations. I am very concerned about this move as it can bring divisions to Europe during these hard times.

What is the stance of the social democratic political alliance *Lewica* on reparations?

Polish People – especially left-wing voters – are aware that the reparation campaign is a political electoral strategy, not a genuine demand related to a political program. It was not raised by the PiS party for seven years (Poland is governed by PiS since 2015) and appears just one year before a demanding election.

People voting for the Left - and opposition voters in general - are not in favour of a conflict within the EU during the Russo-Ukrainian War. In these times people expect cooperation. Nevertheless, one must consider that some voters perceive the putting on hold of recovery funds by the European Commission as lack of cooperation on the part of the EU.

How do you asses the state of Polish-German relations in light of this?

I am sure that raising the issue of reparations now is a true gift for Vladimir Putin. He can present the EU as divided in contrast with a united Russia. But even more: he can say that Nazi crimes are still not settled in the West – the same West that supports, unsurprisingly, 'Ukrainian Nazis'. The PiS party acts irresponsibly and is very unconvincing in advocating the seriousness of war and starting an internal dispute within the EU at the same time.

Do you think that raising claims on reparations will affect the strength of Europe's reaction towards the war on Ukraine?

Concrete actions like sanctions and common energetical projects in Europe are very important. Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the level of the imaginary. A united Europe acting together in solidarity with Ukraine, in defence of democracy and human rights, is a potent image of our Union. The start of the reparations campaign will spoil this image.

***Lewica* would like to strengthen ties with Germany in the future. How you are planning to do this?**

We should cooperate on projects that affect the future of our societies and the European Union. We have the issue of green transformation, the European Army and, more generally, of the resilience of our societies towards an aggressive Russia. We have to take part in rebuilding Ukraine. Poles and Germans should act together on this matter to strengthen the Ukrainian independence and sustain its democratic aspirations.

Focusing on the future, we cannot forget the tragic past. We have to

remember the dark times of World War II and the Nazi past of Germany. If we neglect this we will leave the space for those who will use it to divide people and create distrust and hate. The European Union was created to sustain peace after destructive wars. We have to actively remember this.

The interview was conducted by Barbara Szelewa.



Maciej Gdula
Warsaw

Maciej Gdula is a member of the Lewica, a left-wing parliamentary group in the Polish Parliament, and a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

-