

We need to talk about Poland

Challenging European values and the respect for the rule of law

With the kind support of **METRO GROUP**

On 18 February 2016 the European Movement International engaged Brussels stakeholders in the first public debate about Poland, following the discussion MEPs held in Strasbourg. What emerged from the exchange was a vivid image of political polarisation in Poland, coupled with a complex economic aspect.

The discussion, moderated by **Petros Fassoulas**, Secretary General of the European Movement International, featured: **Marcin Świącicki**, Member of the Polish Parliament (Civic Platform), President of the European Movement in Poland; **Prof. Zdzisław Krasnodębski**, Member of the European Parliament (ECR); **Annabelle Chapman**, Warsaw-based Journalist writing for *The Economist* and *POLITICO Europe*; **Ivonne Julitta Bollow**, Head of Eastern Europe & International Affairs, Corporate Public Policy Division, METRO GROUP.

Marcin Świącicki, Member of the Polish Parliament from Donald Tusk's Civic Platform party, as well as President of the European Movement in Poland, was asked why the Polish "democratic crisis" had sparked such a strong reaction by the EU and the wider international community whereas the actions of Prime Minister Viktor Orban's Fidesz government has not. Mr Świącicki's analysis indicated that the reason behind the pan-European reaction was the symbolic role of Poland in Eastern Europe as a model country for reforms in the region. Policies violating this symbolic democratic order, cradle of the freedom movement "Solidarność", were harder to accept for the rest of Europe. Another factor is the worrying pace of undemocratic reforms. What took Orban 3 years, the PiS government managed to achieve in roughly 3 months. Interestingly, the Law and Justice party leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, a self-confessed admirer of Orban-style "illiberal democracy," publicly stated in October 2011 that he wants to "bring Budapest to Warsaw."

 European Movement @EMInternational - Feb 18
#Poland - let the discussion start
#EurMove @PetrosFassoulas
@AB_Chapman @MarcinSwiecicki
@ZdzKrasnodebski



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Prof. Zdzisław Krasnodębski ECR MEP, Polish sociologist, social philosopher and publicist, proposed that the negative reaction towards recent reforms in Poland is down to communications problems. There is a misunderstanding around what the government is trying to achieve, often due to the fact that nobody is willing to invite representatives of the ruling Law and Justice Party to take part in debates on Poland, which results in the creation of a one-sided image advocated by the western media. He stated that saying something is fundamentally wrong in Poland is now perceived as propaganda.



Róża Thun @rozathun · Feb 18

KrasnodębskiPIS at @EMInternational: "We have more democracy now than ever before. More pluralistic media, more debate. We don't need lessons"



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The Professor questioned the legitimacy of concerns regarding democracy, quoting the 40% support PiS won in the last elections. He also made a point regarding the division into a Europe of East and West, stating that after 25 years of democracy in Poland the country does not need foreign preaching. Taking a step forward, Poland should serve as a basis for self-reflection for the so called "West", especially taking into consideration that the EU is witnessing grander problems nowadays than the rule of law in one of its member countries. Respect for different countries, political parties and equality is the best way to make Europe a better place, he concluded.



European Movement @EMInternational · 18.02

Respect for different countries, political parties and equality - this are ways to make Europe a better place
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Annabelle Chapman, a Warsaw-based journalist writing for the Economist and POLITICO, was challenged on the issue of legitimacy of the KOD, the “Committee for the Defense of Democracy”, a grassroots citizens’ initiative, which can appear on the surface to be isolated in its actions. It sparks big protests, but it does not carry substantial social support; farmers, the Catholic church with its big influence, left wing young people who do not value liberal democracy over social issues – all these groups support the government’s actions. Ms Chapman pointed out that there is a growing civic awareness in Poland, meaning that people want to go their own way, not necessarily following Brussels or even their own government. The KOD is currently facing many challenges, including the government’s attempts to delegitimise it. From a journalist’s perspective, she challenged the statement of Prof. Krasnodębski stressing the importance of the media dialogue with all stakeholders, the government, opposition and citizens. Ms Chapman invited the audience to differentiate between the domestic rhetoric of the Polish government “speaking for national interest” and the real economic impact of their actions. She wrapped up by saying that it is great that people talk about Poland - yet Poland is not a problem *per se*; the problem is more specifically the changes introduced by the government. She also warned the public against structuring the debate as “Poland vs. the EU”.

European Movement @EMInternational Feb 18

.@rozathun former EMI Vice-President taking the floor in our debate on #Poland #EurMove



Ivonne Julitta Bollow, Head of Eastern Europe & International Affairs at METRO GROUP, argued that protectionism can be catastrophic for business in Poland. Ms Bollow urged the European Union to take a closer look at the developments in Poland and other countries of the Visegrad Group and investigate what causes lie beneath their actions. She took the legislation put in place for international companies as an example, stating that it creates a lot of damage for the free market. She emphasised that the pushback in European values we are witnessing right now comes together with a painful pushback in liberal economic principles.

The discussion then opened to include the audience. Views in favour and against the Polish government’s reforms were expressed, among others from Roza Thun MEP who took to the floor from her position in the audience to give an

impassioned appraisal of the threats to the rule of law in her country.

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Event Follow Up

Pictures from the event can be found [on Flickr](#).

Read [Marcin Świącicki's comments](#) in the post-event interview (FR).

Check out the EMI Briefing "[Poland in the Spotlight](#)".

Event site link: [European Movement Debates the Latest Developments in Poland](#) .

Contact us!

If you have any further inquiries, we will be happy to address them.

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The European Movement is an international organisation open to all political, economic, social and cultural trends in civil society. Its objective is to contribute to the establishment of a united, federal Europe founded on the principles of peace, democracy, liberty, solidarity, and respect for basic human rights.