Parliaments in Transition – the Transfiguration of Parliaments at the Turn from Single to Multi Party System. An example of Polish Sejm and Senate at the breakthrough period of 1989 (the Round Table talks and partly free elections) and the first entirely free elections of 1991.

It seems obvious that “Solidarity” was of importance not only as a trade union, or as a huge social movement or, last but not least, as a political (parliamentary) power. Of course, we needed to organise ourselves, we needed an organisation, but what we needed the most was that feeling of unity, solidarity and freedom.

It was something phenomenal in global scale that this fantastic dream of unity of citizens of the country came true.

And although the idea of solidarity of people (not to mention “Solidarity” as an organisation, well, it is written forever on pages of History) stayed not for a long period in real social life, it remains an important motto and is still alive in hearts and souls of so many people not only here in Europe but also, I do believe, all over the world.

1989. So called Contract Sejm came into being. Free elections were held for the reborn Senate. Results in the Senate: almost 100 % of votes went to representatives of Solidarnoc (only one seat went to an independent).

The 1991 election had a much more interesting result. First it was a beginning as the new term elections were entirely free in both chambers. Secondly because it was significant that so many parties came took seats in parliament which was a result of the fracturing of Solidarnocs and their replacing by many other new parties. So the 1989 elections could be described as the vote not necessarily for Solidarity, but rather simply against communism.

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The Breakthrough Archives:

Let me allow to say a few words on the foundations of our project under the name “The Archives of Breakthrough”. The project establishes the study, appraisal, preservation, digitizing and presenting to the general public the documents relating to events of the years 1988 - 1991, kept in The Senate Archives, and also those being in possession of different institutions and the private persons.

Overview of the project:

1. Aims of the project.

The thorough study of archival records mentioned above, by relating to the origins and the beginnings of The Senate and its Office, independently from type of carrier of information, a possible digitizing of this part of resources and make it accessible via the Internet.

To collect this type of records, being in archives of different institutions and private persons, in digital form (we do not exclude the originals obviously) relating to the period of Polish Breakthrough.

The object of interest of our project should be at first a focus on documents of the 1988 –1991 period and before.

Putting the project just to The Senate Archives is a result of our recognition that the majority of records of Citizens’ Parliamentary Club and the considerable part of records of Citizens’ Committees are held in our Archives. We should use our status to separate ourselves from state archives as ell, which allows us to prepare our own independent initiatives, namely independence from bureaucratized working methods of Chief Management at the State Archives.

Our proposal is the answer to researchers and students who take interest in our collections in the last months which in some way is linked to the 20th anniversary of the reborn Senate and to the beginning of aggravating changes in Poland. We judge that those events should also be commemorated by documenting sources or origins of the Higher Chamber so the works may finish on 25th anniversary of modern Senate.

Talking about records involved in, these are not kept in our Archives alone. They are also stored in different archives: archives of the state, of associations, of political parties, of foundations and of those being in the hands of private persons.

The so called "global digital copy” creation will then facilitate access to such materials. We believe that after launching the project institutions and private persons alike would be willing to help to expand the range of works.
In case of success of the project the unquestionable splendor will flow down not only on Senate Archives, but also on the Senate itself and its Chancellery.

2. To begin with: What kind of material do we hold

Audio recordings:
problematic/subject teams, presidia, press conferences - 18 magnetic spools which has been partly transferred by external company on CDs in mp3 format. Probably the process of digitizing one should repeat because of non-archival way of files recording - below 128 kbps.

Cassettes
with the recordings of the OKP (Citizens’ Parliamentary Club; the press conferences) - 13 cassettes, Lech Walesa Citizens’ Committee - 15 cassettes, Presidia - 173 cassettes. The process of digitizing had just begun.

Posters and leaflets:
parliamentary elections 1989 - 274 posters as well as 8 leaflets, presidential elections 1990 - 54 posters and 9 leaflets, local elections 1990 - 3 posters. All posters and leaflets being in our supply are catalogued.

Traditional paper files :
- Henryk Wujec Archives (the underground activist, Lech Walesa Citizens’ Committee Secretary and then Solidarity Citizens’ Committee Secretary) - 7,16 running meters [rm] (partly in mess, incomplete or damaged),
- underground press 1989 - 0,44 rm (partly well ordered and elaborated),
- Solidarity Citizens’ Committee - most of them are relating to the1989 elections - 3,25 rm,
- Citizens’ Committees - conferences, problematic teams, province files, international matters - 3,5 rm,
- the personal records of Citizens’ Parliamentary Club - 0,6 rm,
- the records of the Round Table - 0,34 rm,
- the press office of government - 0,45 rm,
- The Citizens’ Parliamentary Club - the sessions of Club and the Presidia - 9,8 rm,
- The Fund of National Gift - 4,08 rm,
- The Parliamentary Club of Democratic Union – so called Bronislaw Geremek mail - 1,1 rm and many, many others.

After many tries we discover just what was to discover actually, that the only reasonable solution letting us to preserve all kinds of materials is digitization, and, which is obvious, the higher resolution the better.

3. Schedule of works to be done.
It would be most advisable if we could begin our work referring to the files of Civil Parliamentary Club (indeed, we have started the works at the beginning of the year). This should include the structure of the files and the traditional inventory cards as well as their equivalents in our data base. Of course it all needs time and skills. It is obvious that on the way to success there is a huge amount of technical actions, sometimes boring a bit and sometimes becoming even a kind of journeywork, but - if successful - we will be proud at the end.
While having done this part of the collections we have proceed to the Citizens’ Committees’ documentation in a similar way.

We estimate, that the realization of the project will be approximately take about 5 years (since the moment of the beginning). Therefore the project should be finished on 25th anniversary of the reborn Senate.

The next step will be material of the parties, provided for the Project, alas there are no such conveniences as inventories. We must take into account that big difficulties may occur during works on those materials. Plus remember that the part of records (especially mentioned Henryk Wujec Archives) is not in archival order, rather.

On time of those serious works, already since the moment of the beginning, the access to this part of records in our Archive will not be easy for external users (or even there will be no access), otherwise any of daily work or the project works would just stop. After completion all works, only digital copies will be accessible to the public. It is absolutely indispensable to get a new full-time or regular post for someone who must be linked only to realize our subject.

Therefore a separate room with shelves and suitable technical equipment such as computer, scanner and so on is needed. We could also store the worked out / elaborated documentation there. Now there is a chance to get and to possess such room. It is a great chance to get the former Senators and Representatives engaged in our work but also they could use the results of the works in their individual purposes, so it would be a kind of mutual co-operation on the field. We count on documentation and co-operation of former Speakers and Deputy Speakers of the Senate as well.

Certainly, we do need some IT staff help mainly in order to work on most proper method of linking the scans to the data base and place of electronic files storage. It is also about online access, namely should those scans be accessible in ‘full archival shape’ or just as miniatures or thumbs to preview only. The similar problem concerns recordings as well as photos.

5. Supplementary information.

In March this year we started our co-operation with Mr Wlodzimierz Puzyna, former MP and at present the rector of Higher School of Public Administration in Szczecin. In years 1989-1990 he was the Deputy Chairman of the Citizens’ Committee of Szczecin Region. Doctor Puzyna is in Szczecin the participant of the project of State Archive, aiming to reproduce history and records of the Citizens’ Committee in Szczecin. Because the Senate Archives possess the Szczecin Citizens’ Committee’s documents which State Archives in Szczecin do not possess, and the same State Archives can boast with files WE do not possess, we established the exchange of copies of records and planned the further co-operation with these State Archives, also over “global digital copy”.

Let me proudly announce that these days the Polish Academy of Sciences released the publication based in significant part both on our work and the documentation we possess entitled “1989 Elections. Solidarity-Opposition Side Documents. Volume 1: The Headquarters”.

And it would be not quite irrelevant to mention that the Extraordinary Meeting of the Association of European Senates had just been held in Gdansk and the topic of the conference was “Democracy in Europe twenty years after the first free elections eastward of the Berlin Wall – Europe and the World twenty years after the Cold War”.