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On the Deliberative Initiation of Macro-Social Change: The Case of the Round Table Negotiations in Poland From the Perspective of a Participant

Janusz Reykowski^a

[a] *Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Science, Warsaw, Poland.*

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Corresponding Author: Janusz Reykowski, Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Science, ul. Jaracza 1, 00-378 Warszawa, Poland. E-mail: januszre@warman.com.pl

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Abstract

The Round Table (RT) Talks in Poland in February-April 1989 initiated rapid transition from an authoritarian political system and a centralized, state-controlled economy to democratic capitalism. They also triggered a cascade of changes across the whole of Eastern Europe (the former Soviet block). In this paper I analyze the psychological factors that contributed to success of the talks. During the RT talks, the representatives of the ruling party in Poland („communists”) negotiated with the representatives of „Solidarity” (“democratic opposition”) - the very broad socio-political movement representing Polish aspirations to democracy and sovereignty, separate from the Soviet Union. The paper describes the organization of the negotiations (a complex structure with about 700 participants) and the sources of an initial deep antagonism between the two sides. It addresses the main psychological factors that made it possible for this antagonism to be overcome and for the development of an agreed plan to democratize the Polish political system. This includes an analysis of: the general approach to negotiations; the initial definitions of the negotiating situation and the ways in which these definitions changed; the psychological characteristics of the negotiating situation which fostered cooperative attitudes amongst the negotiations, including in particular the role of group forces. The paper also discusses more generally the relationship between psychological factors and objective conditions in achieving (or impeding) positive outcomes to negotiations around entrenched, seemingly untractable, political conflicts.



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Keywords

democracy, negotiations, political conflict, deliberation, trust

The Round Table (RT) Talks were conducted in February-April 1989 and led to the end of so called “communism” in Poland. They were perceived by Polish and international public opinion as an event that triggered cascading changes in East Europe and initiated the transition from an authoritarian political system and centralized state controlled economy to democratic capitalism. Ultimately the changes affected the political situation beyond this region and contributed to the end of Cold War.

RT evoked great interest worldwide as a rare case of a negotiated peaceful transformation of a socio-political system. One person who was especially fascinated by Round Table was Robert Zajonc, professor of social psychology at the University of Michigan. On April 7th 1989, one day after conclusion of the RT negotiations, I received from him a telegram, which said: *congratulations for the highest social psychological achievement*.

Bob was my old friend who, having Polish background, was very interested in Polish affairs. Being a famous experimental social psychologist, he had also been preoccupied for several years with human aggression and massacres, asking himself the question: how could psychology contribute to the prevention of such phenomena? That is why he was fascinated that such a great social change has been initiated without bloodshed. He was especially impressed by the fact that a number of psychologists played an active role in the negotiations (Janusz Grzelak, Piotr Paccwicz, Janusz Reykowski).

In this paper¹, I want to focus on the analysis of psychological factors that contributed to the success of the talks. I don't wish to suggest that psychology was the sole explanation of the successful conclusion of RT negotiations, but it was important enough to justify the study of the role that it did play.

Who Was Negotiating With Whom

Officially the two sides of the negotiations were described as the “ruling coalition” or “Government” vs. “Solidarity” (“democratic opposition”) - the very broad socio-political movement representing Polish aspirations to democracy and to sovereignty independent of the Soviet Union.

In fact, things were rather more complex. The Government side (or “communists”) included the ruling party along with various groups connected to the system by their socio-economic position and/or ideological and political beliefs. In this camp there were also people who, taking into consideration Poland's geopolitical situation, believed that

1) Several ideas developed in this paper emerged from discussions with Janusz Grzelak, and were presented in our joint talks at Columbia University and at the Annual Meeting of International Society of Political Psychology (Warsaw, July, 2016). During the Roundtable talks in Poland in 1989, Janusz Grzelak was a negotiator on the side of “Solidarity”; Janusz Reykowski, on the side of “Government”.

accommodation to the Communist system is the Polish *raison d'état*. They remembered the tragic consequences of attempts at democratization in Hungary (in 1956) and in Czechoslovakia (1968). Both were invaded by Soviet army (in the case of Czechoslovakia, also by armies of the other so-called socialist countries). The other side, the "Solidarity" movement, had a strong adherence to Catholic Church and was supported by the majority of the Polish society.

In the negotiations, the role of mediator had been played by the Catholic Church. It was an important role in the preparatory stage – the Church facilitated initial contacts between the two sides and helped in finding solutions in critical situations. It had a much smaller role during the negotiations proper. Although the Church was supposed to mediate between two sides, it was primarily supporting Solidarity. But it also had good contacts with the leadership of the ruling party.

It should be noted that neither side was homogenous. Both sides had among their supporters numerous groups full of fear and hostility toward the other side who, they felt, did not genuinely believe in negotiations. Such groups were hostile towards the Round Table. Some Solidarity radicals favored a confrontational approach as the way of instituting change. That is, they favored revolution. Equally, on the Government side, there were tough minded people at various levels of the power system who were against an agreement with Solidarity and against any major socio-political changes. They believed that political opposition should be suppressed by force.

The Participants in the Negotiations – Composition of the Negotiating Teams

The Government delegation consisted of various groups: high level functionaries of the ruling party and of two small coalition parties, along with representatives of the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ) - a large organization established by the ruling party, having almost 7 million members² (it perceived Solidarity as its dangerous rival). The governmental delegation also included a large number of people who were regarded as experts or as intellectual authorities and who were highly committed to the basic interests of the Polish state (security, peaceful conflict resolution, overcoming political and economic crisis). The chair of the delegation was General Czeslaw Kiszczak, the Minister of Interior. He was a close collaborator of General Jaruzelski, the Head of State.

The Solidarity delegation was composed of its leadership and its main experts, distinguished intellectuals and professionals. There were also activists and supporters of the organization representing various kinds of expertise. The chief of the delegation was Lech Walesa. Overall, there was together about 700 members of the two negotiating teams.

2) Originally it was an organization controlled by the ruling party. It was supposed to transmit party policy to working class. However, by this period it had achieved a high degree of independence.

Most of the negotiations were conducted in a palace in the center of Warsaw. At present it is the residence of the Polish president.

The Organization of the Negotiations

The organization of the negotiations had a complex structure consisting of three levels.

- “Tables” - The main negotiations were conducted at three „Tables”: for Political Reform³, for Economic Reform, and for Trades Union reform. Their debates were observed by journalists representing both sides.
- “Sub-tables” – These negotiated various specific issues such as reforms of the media, the judicial system, youth organizations, and education⁴. Initially there were 10 Sub-tables. Each Sub-table was attached to a particular Table. In case of major disagreements amongst negotiators, the controversy was discussed on the relevant Table.
- “Magdalenka” - The official Round-Table negotiations were preceded by the so called “Magdalenka” talks (named after the place outside Warsaw where they took place). These were closed door meetings between the leaders of the negotiations (about 12 persons from each side⁵) and two high ranking representatives of the Catholic Church. The co-chairpersons were General Czeslaw Kiszczak (Minister of Interior) and Lech Walesa (Solidarity leader). The first meeting of this group was focused on preparations for the RT talks.

The participants had to agree upon the main points of the agenda and on various organizational details. It was the first face to face meeting between the leaderships of the two sides. Obviously, there was a lot of uncertainty as to whether they would be able to work together effectively. But after about 12 hours of talks they were able to agree a joint announcement, released to the media, which agreed to start the RT negotiations and setting a starting date. During the RT negotiations themselves, the “Magdalenka” group met occasionally to resolve the most difficult problems. Toward the end of the negotiations such “Magdalenka” meetings were more frequent.

To inaugurate the negotiations there was a public ceremonial event at a round table specially commissioned for the occasion. The participants in the meetings - representatives of the two sides (including Lech Walesa and general Kiszczak) and some ostensibly neutral public authorities (54 people in total) - presented their views about the state of

3) One of the two co-chairmen of the “political table” was Janusz Reykowski (Professor of Psychology at the Polish Academy of Science) representing the governmental side. The Co-chairman from the Solidarity side was Bronislaw Geremek, Professor of History at the Polish Academy of Science, and future Minister of Foreign Affairs of the democratic government.

4) Professor Janusz Grzelak was the deputy co-chairman of the sub-table for education reform representing “Solidarity”. He was also the “Solidarity” negotiation expert for all the tables. In the first democratic government he held the position of Vice Minister of Education.

5) There were some changes in the composition of participants for the Magdalenka talks.

the Polish society and about the reforms that were needed and expected. A similar event was held at the end of the negotiations. It was focused on the results of RT and on expectations for the future. These events had a primarily ceremonial function. Both were broadcast by the main television and radio stations. They were attended by more than an hundred journalists from the national and international media.

Mutual Attitudes: The Sources of Antagonisms Between Two Sides

The antagonisms between two sides of the negotiation had various causes.

Opposing Political Values

The Solidarity side perceived itself as representing the aspirations of the Polish public to democracy and national sovereignty. At the start, the majority of Solidarity representatives viewed the government side as agents of a foreign power, which was a staunch enemy of the Polish nation (Soviet Union). Moreover they considered that the government was only able to govern Poland due to Soviet military support.

Those on the Governmental side perceived things differently. They saw themselves as representing the vital interests of the Polish state. Given the geopolitical context, they felt that they had to foster good relations with the Soviet Union but at the same time try to expand the scope of Poland's independence (in fact Poland has achieved the highest level of freedom in the whole so called socialist camp). The Solidarity side was perceived by the governmental side either as reckless idealists who underestimated threats to Polish security (and freedom) or else as puppets of external powers and their agencies – notably the CIA. However, my feeling was that – as the RT talks continued – members of each side gradually came to an understanding that the other side did in fact represent an important facet of the Polish national interest.

In their seminal analysis, Fisher and Kelman (2011) noted that the way antagonistic groups perceive each other plays a critical role in the escalation and intractability of destructive intergroup conflict. The authors concluded that, for conflict resolution, it is necessary to establish a different discourse between the parties. Instead of reliance on coercive use of power, they should manifest mutual responsiveness and reciprocity in the context of a cooperative relationship. It seems that the two sides of the Polish Round Table 1989 intuitively behaved in accordance with this rule.

Opposing Interests

The main conflict of interest concerned power. Solidarity was perceived as a challenge to the existing power system. Some members of the „governmental camp” believed that the main goal of the opposition was to wrest the power from the „legal sovereign”. Members

of the Solidarity side tended to believe that the main motivation of the Government side was the protection of their power. They assumed that the Communists wanted Solidarity's assistance in economic reform, hoping that improvement of the economic situation would help the ruling party to consolidate its power.

Opposing Worldviews

While there were large differences between two parties concerning the perception and evaluation of Poland's entire postwar history, the deepest discrepancy concerned evaluations of the sixteen months of Solidarity's legal existence (August 1980 - December 1981) and the subsequent period of Martial Law – “the sixteen months” - was a time of increasing social conflict and of growing political and economic chaos. It culminated in the introduction of Martial Law and abolition of Solidarity as a legal entity. It had subsequently operated as an underground organization. Each side of the negotiations put the entire responsibility for this course of events on their opponents.

It was an extremely sensitive topic because it related to the massive use of force. During the period of Martial Law almost 10,000 people were interned and the civil rights of citizens were suspended. There were also numerous clashes between the police and demonstrators. Solidarity claimed that there were about 100 victims of Martial Law. The Government side questioned this figure as exaggerated (arguing that it included many cases unrelated to Martial Law or to the actions of the Security Forces).

Opposing Personal Experiences

Many Solidarity representatives, who were involved for several years in the illegal opposition movement, were persecuted and incarcerated - some of them for extended periods of time. Strong hostility toward the people responsible for their ordeal and for the repressive policies of the authorities was very common among them.

However, among the representatives of the Government side there were also some people who had vivid recollections of what they perceived to be vicious and unjust attacks on them, and on their political organizations, by Solidarity. This too led to strong hostility towards those they deemed responsible. Obviously, the personal costs of Solidarity representatives were incomparably higher than the other side.

Mutual Distrust

Solidarity representatives had in mind a long list of events from the history of communist governments (not only in Poland) indicating that the communist authorities were untrustworthy: they used to break their promises or to lure their partners into submission. The leaders of the democratic opposition feared that the whole Round Table project was a trap – its secret goal being to discredit them and the whole movement. In particular, they had two kinds of threat in mind: that they may be led to endorse political solutions

which would turn out to be harmful for Solidarity, or that Solidarity, in becoming a part of the political system, would lose its identity.

The Government side also had many fears. For instance, They feared that incorporating Solidarity into the system would undermine its socialist identity. But most of all, they feared that their partners would turn out to be irresponsible wranglers who would either advance unrealistic demands or else fail to honor agreements. These fears were partly mitigated by the participation of the Catholic Church in the negotiations – which, in government eyes, enhanced the credibility of Solidarity. Indeed the Church, an organization with hundreds of years of experience in politics, seemed to be much more reliable partner.

Such fears were not uniform. In both sides there were some who were more trusting and some groups full of fear and hostility toward the other side. For these, the very existence of negotiations made little sense.

Taking all these factors into account, probably the majority members of the Solidarity delegation assumed that they had to talk to their enemies, they believed that they had to proceed with caution and remain firm on key issues. In my opinion, such attitude was less common on the Government side. Nonetheless the various oppositions described above could give rise to strong affective reactions amongst the participants: fear, anger, and hostility, that could foster aggressive and coercive tactics. No wonder that the conflict between Government and Solidarity sides in Poland was perceived by many people (including negotiators at RT) as intractable. That is, they saw this conflict as long-lasting, as resistant to negotiated settlements and as impossible to resolve (Bar-Tal, 2013).

Perceptions of the Negotiating Situation

The Approach to Negotiations: Two Kinds of Conflict Schemas

Conflict Schemas (CS) are individual or group beliefs about the nature of the conflict and appropriate behavior in conflict (Bar-Tal, Kruglanski, & Klar, 1989). One can distinguish two prototypical kinds of CS:

- Confrontational CS - the two parties are perceived as enemies, the solution to conflict is perceived as a zero-sum game, and coercion is considered to be an appropriate behavior in conflict. This triggers negative emotions and hostile behavior towards ones partner (de Zavala, Federico, Cislak, & Sigger, 2008; Zuroff & Duncan, 1999);
- Cooperative CS – the two parties are perceived as partners, the solution to conflict can potentially be satisfying to both sides, and negotiations with cooperative problem solving are a means of conflict resolution (Golec & Federico, 2004).

The typical approach to negotiations in deep-rooted conflicts is an antagonistic (competitive) orientation based on Confrontational CS. Negotiations are perceived as the continu-

ation of the battlefield by other means. Amongst some members of the RT negotiation teams and many of their supporters this was the dominant orientation. But on both sides of the table there were people who were more in favor of the cooperative approach.

From its inception, the Solidarity movement had been striving for major social change, with democratization and increasing freedom as primary goals. It declared that these goals should be pursued by peaceful means. This position was described as an ideology of „self-limiting revolution” - a term coined by sociologist Jadwiga Staniszkis. This meant that Solidarity’s objectives should be achieved by persuasion, negotiation, and settlement. However, such intentions notwithstanding, the coexistence for 16 months of Solidarity and communist authorities was in reality characterized by growing and increasingly vicious conflict.

In reality, a peaceful ideology and strong intentions to act non-violently does not guarantee that violence will be avoided. Violence can be engendered by spontaneous processes developing in large groups involved in vicious conflicts. And in 1981 such a development could not had been ruled out. The threat of violence initiated from outside (invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies) or from inside (transformation of the peaceful revolution into direct confrontation or provocation organized by hardline political actors) was, for the authorities, one of the main reasons for declaring Martial Law in Poland in December 1981 (although it was never publicly explained in such language). However, in 1989, its ideology of peaceful change predisposed „Solidarity” negotiators to treat RT as an occasion for achieving a non-violent transition.

On the Government side there was a strong faction convinced that agreement with „Solidarity” was the necessary precondition for finding a solution to the basic socio-economic and political problems faced by Poland. Even those on the government side who in 1981 supported Martial Law were, by 1989, strongly opposed to any repetition of such tactics and to any other form of violence as a means of dealing with Poland’s problems.

Such shared positive approaches to negotiations tended to foster cooperative behavior. Nevertheless, they had not eliminated the deeply rooted differences that existed between the two sides, nor had they reduced enmity, suspicion, or fear of being duped by the other side. Mere goodwill did not guarantee that negotiators would be able to overcome the psychological obstacles and find reasonable solutions to their problems. Several years after the negotiations, some of the most prominent „Solidarity” leaders acknowledged that, at the start of the negotiations, they were tortured by thought that RT was actually a trap prepared by the “communists”.

Starting Points – Competitive Positions

At the beginning of the negotiations both sides tended to perceive the situation as a form of bargaining. Solidarity wanted to achieve the (re)legalization of their organization as an independent Trade Union and to obtain legal assurances for their autonomous functioning. The Government demanded that Solidarity take part in the forthcoming

parliamentary elections and that it should compete for the approximately one third of parliamentary seats on offer. The remaining two thirds would be divided between the ruling party (Polish United Workers Party) and its two coalition partners. It was hoped that the participation of Solidarity in the political process would help in the implementation of economic reforms which were widely unpopular but viewed by the Government as necessary.

Solidarity, in turn, perceived this demand as a cost that had to be paid for restoring the Solidarity movement. And this cost was great because to participate in such skewed elections would make it part of a discredited political system. However both sides understood that the presence of Solidarity in parliament could play an important role in validating deep economic reform – but only if Solidarity remained to be viewed by Poles as an independent organization that represented the people.

There was also another important reason for the demand of the Government side that Solidarity should be incorporated into the “official” political system. This related to memories of the events of 1980-1981 – of the clash between a monocentric hierarchical state and an autonomous organization - which remained vivid in everybody’s minds. To me, there was a tacit understanding on both sides that the revival of Solidarity without modification of the political system was a recipe for disaster. As before, it would lead to major destructive consequences. And that could not be allowed to happen.

The initial aspirations amongst the Solidarity delegation were modest: they expected significant but relatively few changes within the system: such things as the re-legalization of Solidarity; greater freedom of speech and access to the mass media, more elements of a free market economy. The goal was to get as many political concessions as possible while preserving the greatest possible distance from the “communist” political system.

In fact, both sides had rather limited expectations concerning an acceptable outcome to the negotiations. They shared the belief that, given the international situation and the internal Polish context, a rapid change of system would be a dangerous enterprise and that any proposals for change must be addressed with great caution. In reality, there was no immediate threat from the Soviet Union. Gorbachev had declared that he was not going to follow the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine - according to which, an attempt to turn any “socialist” country towards capitalism was not just an internal concern for this country but a concern for the whole family of socialist countries. This doctrine justified the right of military intervention into those countries that undertook reforms. Gorbachev’s stance notwithstanding, one should remember that he had many enemies both inside the Soviet Union and beyond. Indeed he was opposed by the majority of those who were in power in the so called socialist countries. One could easily imagine that destabilization in Poland could instigate a coup against Gorbachev in Moscow and lead to a collective intervention by Poland’s neighbors. Thus, it was not clear how far one

could go with reforms of the political system without provoking a counter-reaction by the external and internal enemies of change.

Redefinition of the Situation: Negotiation as a Common Problem Solving Task

The most important change that occurred in the course of negotiating process was the gradual development of an understanding amongst negotiators that they had not only opposed but also common goals. Some indications of this understanding already emerged at the first Magdalenka meeting. This was the first face to face encounter between two groups. For some of the members of Solidarity delegation this was uncomfortable situation. They had to sit down with people whom they perceived as their staunch enemies. Their greatest problems were with General Czesław Kiszczak, Minister of Interior, who was their main host (the villa in Magdalenka belonged to the Ministry of Interior). Kiszczak was perceived as personally responsible for persecution of the Solidarity activists and for implementation of all the coercive and violent acts against the opposition during Martial Law and afterwards. For some of the Solidarity negotiators, the very idea of shaking hands with him was odious and they sought to avoid it.

However, in spite of the tensions between the two groups, the first hours of the negotiations passed rather peacefully. Kiszczak, who was chairing this meeting, avoided any pressure on the other side. If the negotiators came across difficult issues, he suggested the they should be moved to the end of the meeting. Instead, he proposed that the negotiators focus on issues that were relatively easy to agree upon. It turned out that after several hours there was quite a long list of issues that could be solved. This way of structuring the meeting had a positive influence on mood of the negotiators on both sides.

This experience had helped in dealing with the more difficult parts of the negotiations. Finally, at the midnight, the two teams agreed to prepare a statement for the press about the meeting and to announce their key decision to start the Round Table negotiations on a specified date. At this moment probably the majority of the negotiators had feelings of great relief and a sense that, after all, it was possible to achieve progress together.

The Change of Conflict Schema

The posture of the negotiating teams representing parties divided by a long history of antagonism is necessarily highly competitive. This means that they are likely to attribute and expect sinister intentions from the other side, to resist their proposals suspecting traps, and to keep rigidly to their own position. Such a competitive posture can be a major obstacle in negotiations. Perhaps unexpectedly, one of the distinctive characteristics of the Round Table Talks was ability of both sides to assume a cooperative orientation. It

implies that there was a clear awareness that any agreement must be acceptable to both sides and it required each side to have a good understanding of the other's problems and perspectives.

An important precondition of taking a cooperative orientation is perceiving the situation as a common problem solving task. On the "political table" of RT, the task was to construct a plan for the democratic transformation of the political system⁶ which allowed for the introduction of major reforms all its main institutions while avoiding a counteraction by the internal and external opponents of reform. During the negotiations the ability to see the situation in these terms increased. However, there was always some mixture of competitive and cooperative orientations (bargaining and debate). This is probably a general phenomenon in negotiations. As noted by Druckman and Olekalns (2013, p. 336), "*Negotiators do not use the same strategy throughout a negotiation. Instead, they cycle through periods of cooperation and periods of competition as they search for a mutually acceptable outcome*".

It is therefore important to retain a sense of balance. While the two sides did develop a sense of common endeavor equally, each of them retained a very clear awareness of their divergent views, divergent interests, and even divergent hierarchy of values. This leads us to address the specific situations that could contribute to the increase of cooperation between two sides. Let me give two illustrations.

At one of the Magdalena meetings there was a discussion about introducing a new institution into the Polish political system – a senate. While both sides accepted this idea in principle, there was major disagreement over how it should be constituted. The Government side proposed that members of the Senate should be nominated by certain organizations, but this was rejected by Solidarity. This led to an impasse. Suddenly and unexpectedly, one of the Government representatives (the future President of Poland, Aleksander Kwasniewski) came up with a proposal for free elections to the Senate. Obviously, this enhanced the plans for the democratization of the political system. It meant that, unlike the process of election to the Sejm (the lower house of Parliament), elections to the Senate would not be limited by any political agreements. Solidarity was sympathetic to this proposal. After some hesitation, it was approved by General Jaruzelski and members of the Politbureau. And, as it later turned out, free elections to the Senate had a great impact on the process of democratization in Poland.

This event is an illustration of the phenomenon that Druckman and Olekalns (2013) described as a turning point in negotiation... "*it is a change from earlier events triggered by impasse... [it] consists of an action taken by one of the parties with consequences for both...*" (p. 332). The authors describe various kinds of turning points. This specific one belonged to the category "expectancy violation". *...that events move negotiations forward because they violate the negotiators' expectations of how the other party will behave*" (p.

6) This was also a task of the Magdalena meetings. There was, however, a strict rule that the outcomes of the closed door Magdalena meetings were brought for discussion to the relevant "tables".

348). In fact, the proposal of free elections was a total surprise because it changed the main underlying principle of these negotiations - the principle implicitly imposed by the Government side that, at this stage, the reforms had to be limited so as not to overthrow the existing system. Free elections to the Senate were a major step towards democracy. It is quite possible that this step had a positive impact on the further negotiations because it lent some credibility to the conviction that there was a common goal of both sides - democratization of the political system.

Another example of a turning point in RT negotiations concerns a crisis point close to the conclusion of the talks. One of the organizations participating in the talks on the Government side made an attempt to undermine the agreements that had been made and to compromise Solidarity. In this situation the Government delegation and Solidarity acted together in order to overcome the crisis.

Psychological Factors Fostering a Cooperative Orientation in the Negotiations

Negotiations can be looked upon as a kind of communicative action. Jurgen Habermas (1984), the famous German philosopher and sociologist, developed a theory of communicative action that was highly influential among researchers of deliberation (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Macedo, 1999; Rosenberg, 2003). He described some preconditions of effective communication - facilitating collective problem solving. Some of these conditions were developed spontaneously in the course of the Round Table negotiations. I would stress the following:

The Attitude of Equality

From the very beginning, the principle of equality of the two sides was observed even in small technical details. For example, it was assumed initially that both sides would have an equal number of participants in the various bodies of the RT. The delegations to the Magdalenka meetings were transported separately in two small busses (the bus of the hosts arrived first) and both buses were treated as privileged vehicles - police at crossroads gave them the right of way. At the first meeting of the political table, the co-chairs (Geremek and Reykowski) agreed that they would rotate chairing every two hours and that Geremek would be the first to preside (on the grounds that the first letter of his surname came earlier in alphabet). It was also agreed that members of the two teams would alternate in taking the floor.

The Attitude of Mutual Respect

Respect was demonstrated in the polite forms used to address the other side. While there were also some isolated incidents of aggressive utterances by some of the members of the

negotiating teams, the chairpersons immediately made efforts to prevent any escalation of such behavior.

The Perspective Taking Approach

This is an approach that consists in attentive listening to problems presented by the other side, and attempts at understanding their perspective. It also requires participants to make efforts to present their own opinions, needs, and points of view as clearly as possible, making them intelligible to the other side. Such behavior is radically different from behavior observed in many political arguments, where each side listens only to itself and concentrates on attempts at deprecating the position of the other. This and the previously mentioned rules of behavior were an implementation of the principle of partnership⁷.

Rational Analysis of Differences and Readiness to Seek Just Solutions

In negotiations between partners who have a long history of enmity, and where at least one side has a memory of serious wrongdoings attributed to the other side, there are likely to be strong emotional reactions which act as a major obstacle to reaching any constructive solution to existing problems.

Out of awareness of this danger, we agreed to exclude any debate about the past from both the political table and also the Magdalenka meetings. We accepted that these issues should be addressed in other contexts, but not during discussions aimed at solving present social problems and focused on shaping the future. This effectiveness of this practice appears to be validated by subsequent research showing that contacts between feuding groups may be helpful in improving their relations as long as they don't discuss the past (Bilewicz, 2007). However, it turned out that some departures from this rule may be desirable insofar as reference to certain past events could be helpful in justifying certain reforms as necessary. For example, some former practices of the security forces could be invoked as an argument for why changes in the law were now necessary.

The rules of conduct described above were not intentionally devised by any person or any specific body. They were developed spontaneously. The process of spontaneous development of the group norms was described on the macro level (in crowd behavior) by the emergent norm theory (Turner & Kilian, 1987) and by Steve Reicher in his social identity model of crowd behavior (Reicher, 1984, 1996, 2003). The social identity model can be applied not only to large groups but also to smaller ones as well. It emphasizes

7) It was my intention to implement this principle in my own approach. This is why – for instance in my opening statement to the first meeting of the political table - I listed the problems that were important for both sides and required common efforts for their solution. This presentation met with a positive response from some members of the Solidarity team, despite the fact that they had different opinions and voiced disagreement with some of my theses.

the role of group processes in the non-deliberate, spontaneous generation of the rules of collective behavior, considered by group members as obligatory.

The Role of Group Forces

Group forces operate differently in ingroup and intergroup contexts. This was already demonstrated in the early work of Abelson (1964, 1979), who had developed a mathematical model of social influence effects (communication and persuasion) in social networks. He concluded that such a dynamic “...underlies political homogeneity within groups and political polarization among groups” (Huckfeldt et al., 2004, p. 12) This finding corresponds with Social Identity Theory (SIT) developed by Henry Tajfel and his co-workers (Tajfel et al., 1971; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Research on group dynamics based on SIT has shown that the ingroup context fosters homogenization and convergence of beliefs, enhancing similarity of group members and building shared cognitions. (Bar-Tal, 2000; Hogg, 2003; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tindale et al., 2003; Turner et al., 1987; Turner & Reynolds, 2003). Disagreements and conflicts in the ingroup context generate dissonance and a motivation to re-establish consensus within the group (Matz & Wood, 2005). We may describe these processes as Synergic Tendencies (ST).

By contrast, intergroup contexts foster polarization - increasing distance, creating a propensity for negative reactions towards the outgroup and also generating convictions about ingroup superiority (in morality, competence etc.) over the outgroup. These can be described as Antagonistic Tendencies (AT). AT are likely to facilitate competitive conflict schemas, ST, cooperative ones (Reykowski, 2007).

The ingroup-outgroup distinction is a consequence of social categorization processes and formation of social identity. Marilyn Brewer (2007) observed that “*Social category differentiation provides the fault lines in any social system*”. Such a fault line existed at the start of the Round Table negotiations between representatives of two sides. Its depth was related to the history of their relationship - both the history of the last decade (vicious conflict 1980-1981, Martial Law, prosecution of the underground Solidarity movement) and the whole postwar history of conflicts between the ruling communists and various opposition groups. The elimination or reduction of such a fault line may be an important factor in the success of negotiations. On the basis of SIT we may expect that such a modification may occur as a result of re-categorization. That is, progress depends upon the formation of an inclusive category to which both sides see themselves as belonging.

The Role of Common Goals

One possible way of achieving such re-categorization is formation of a common goal (Sherif, 1958). The very early empirical study of group conflict showed that formation of superordinate common goals - that is, goals that are important for both groups

but neither group can achieve them without participation of the other - resulted in a lowering of intergroup tensions (Sherif, 1958). This finding has been confirmed by other studies indicating that intergroup hostility can be reduced by activating a common identity incorporating the two groups. A systematic description of this phenomenon has been provided by the Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). The model is based on the research showing that re-categorisation of self and others as belonging to the common category reduces prejudice and discrimination. It also has been found (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2007) that activation of such a common identity does not have to suppress the separate identities - both identities may remain active (dual identity).

Common identity can emerge as a result of activation of the existing latent structures - that is, preexisting identities. For example, the different identities of members of different political parties can be subsumed under the more inclusive identity of citizens of the state. But common identity can also be forged by situational factors. Reicher (2003) attributed the process whereby common identities are situationally formed in large groups to a growing awareness of a common fate (often imposed by the actions of an outgroup). But the temporary emergence of common identity might also be due to the awareness of a common goal that might facilitate arousal of the temporary „we” feelings (see also another descriptions of the mechanisms of the common identity formation in small groups: Postmes, Haslam, & Swaab, 2005).

Undoubtedly, during the RT negotiations several factors primed the shared awareness that both teams had common tasks – notably, to prepare a program of democratization and free market reform. It was agreed that the pivotal part of this program was the inclusion of Solidarity as an independent political actor into the ossified political system. The formation of such a common goal is more probable when the negotiation has an atmosphere that is void of hostility and that supports positive relations between partners. In case of the Round Table, the initial behavior of the negotiators fostered a deliberative climate in the meetings. Attitudes of equality and mutual respect, attempts at perspective taking, the avoidance of topics the might evoke strong hostile emotions – all these played a part in the promotion of thinking in „we” terms.

The most important effect of a common goal is the formation of a group with a common temporary social identity („we negotiators”). Common identity then activates Synergic Tendencies that decrease perceived intergroup differences and promote more perspective taking, further facilitating cooperation. All in all, a virtuous spiral is created which mitigates against divisions and disruptions in the negotiations. During such fraught negotiations there are many controversies and potential collisions. Intergroup rivalries prompt participants to try and enforce their own positions. Common goals, common group formation and the resultant Synergic Tendencies inhibit such attempts and facilitate a search for cooperative problem solving.

The thesis that the negotiators in RT developed a common (temporary) identity may suggest that it was a state of mind shared by all participants. Of course it was not. In this case as in the case of other group identities - group members differed considerably in their degree of identification. Perhaps, apart from the main negotiators, many RT participants did not feel that they had a common goal or a common identity with the other side. Moreover, it is rather doubtful whether even main negotiators of RT would describe their psychological state entirely in these terms. I am talking here in terms of *tendencies* rather than firm attitudes.

Objective Preconditions

The main thesis of this analysis is that the dynamics of negotiation and their effects depend to a considerable degree on psychological factors such as the perception of the conflict situation, the construal of the psychological environment of the negotiation (i.e. its normative framework), and the kind of group processes activated during negotiations. However, in addition to subjective factors, a number of objective factors played an important role in the course of the negotiations, both before and during the RT talks.

One such group of factors is related to power relationships. In the case of RT, the dominant characteristic of the situation was a power equilibrium. Both sides of the conflict were both strong and weak. The "Government" side was strong because it had the army and security forces, the support of about 25-30% of the population, and could draw on common fears that the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact countries could intervene to inhibit radical anti-government action. The Government side was weak because it was unable to improve a near-catastrophic social and economic situation), it was unpopular among majority of Polish society, and it had simultaneously to cope with internal conservative critics who believed in the hardline politics. The latter were tough-minded individuals and groups occupying important positions at various levels of the power system,

The Solidarity side was strong because it had a broad support amongst the population (~70 - 75%), it had relatively a well developed organizational network (in the underground), it had the support of the very powerful Polish institution - the Catholic Church - and last but not least, it had various forms of support from the West. Solidarity was weak because in the 1982-1988 period, mainly due to Martial Law, its social support had dwindled (its initiatives and appeals had a noticeably declining impact on the society), the authority of its leaders was declining, and new political forces not related to Solidarity were appearing on the horizon.

One might assume that, because neither side was strong enough to prevail in any confrontation, this made the danger of confrontation remote. But the wave of strikes in 1988 initiated by a young generation of workers (who were unaffected by the overwhelming experience of political helplessness amongst those who had experienced Mar-

tial Law) indicated the appearance of the new societal forces that were more willing to take on their opponents directly. This possibility – and the need to avoid it – was salient in the minds of both sides at the RT.

The other factor facilitating negotiations was the dominant mood in Polish society. There is a considerable body of data relating to where this stood at the end of the 1980s. It comes from public opinion studies and from the research of scientific institutions – conducted mostly by the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Science (Adamski, 1989; Adamski, Jasiewicz, & Rychard, 1986; Koralewicz & Ziółkowski, 1990; Reykowski, 1993). The data indicated that – among the majority of the Polish citizens – approval of a centralized, nondemocratic political system had declined. The great majority had a preference for democratic institutions, support for the privatization of the economy (given a lack of trust in central planning) and the decline of hope that “socialism” could be reformed in a way that would result in the improvement of people’s living conditions. At the same time there was great dissatisfaction with living conditions and increasing pessimism about the future (Kwiatkowski, 2004, p. 787). When people were asked to name the most important problems facing Poland, the two most popular responses were: “*Overcoming the crisis - economic stabilization*” and “*Peace in the country, political stabilization and national reconciliation*” (Kwiatkowski, 2004, p. 794).

We can conclude that, in spite of all the disappointments with the existing system and pessimism about the future among the great majority of Poles, there was no revolutionary mood. People wanted a change, but peaceful change. The RT agenda (democratization, free market reform) was the best way forward to satisfy such societal demands.

Was the Success of RT Inevitable?

One may argue that success of RT was predetermined by the objective situation – defined by such factors as the political changes in the Soviet Union (creating a window of opportunity for democratic reform in Poland), the equilibrium of power between Solidarity and Government forces, desire to defuse new confrontational forces in society, broad social support for peaceful change, and the interest of both sides in reforms. However, perhaps the most important factor was the objective interdependence of the two antagonists – neither could attain their goals alone without taking those of the other side into account. All these features of the situation pushed the two deeply divided sides towards some kind of agreement.

The fact that the objective situation potentially favored a negotiated solution to the existing social conflict does not however mean that such a solution was inevitable. People may take advantage of existing opportunities and work together towards conflict resolution, but they could equally take a confrontational course. This might happen if they don’t understand the opportunities available to them, have aggressive tendencies, are not able to cooperate, or mistakenly believe that in the (near) future the situation would change radically in the interest of their group. In this instance the Polish elites

on both sides did appear able to take advantage of the situation. They constructed that special instrument, designed to help in the search for an innovative solution to the nation's problems - the "Round Table".

But we can also think of occasions when people involved in an intractable conflict failed to capitalize on their opportunities and were unable to develop a constructive dialogue. One such example is the tragic failure of the Camp David Summit (July 11-24, 2000) - the meeting between the delegations of Israel (led by Prime Minister Ehud Barak), of the Palestinians (led by PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat), and of the American administration who were to play the role of mediators (led by President Bill Clinton).

There were several objective conditions that favored an agreement. First, the key negotiating goal - attaining peace in the Middle East - was plainly very important for both sides. Each paid a high price for the continuous military confrontations between them. Second, a negotiated agreement was supported by the very powerful mediator - the United States. Third, Ehud Barak was (reportedly) prepared to extend an offer of peace conditions for Palestinians that was more favorable than anything on offer from any of his predecessors. Moreover, Barak was eager for a deal, wanting to achieve it during Clinton's term in office, and had surrounded himself with some of Israel's most peace-minded politicians (Shyovitz, 2007). Indeed, his very political future depended on success of these negotiations. Fourth, there was the majority of Israeli society - and also a large proportion of Palestinian society - had a strong desire to achieve peace. And fifth, there was high interdependence between the two sides.

However, others factors - of a more psychological nature - posed serious obstacles to constructive negotiations. The first such factor was a deep mistrust between the parties. According to Malley⁸ and Agha⁹ (2001), Arafat was persuaded that the Israelis were setting a trap. He had very little trust in Barak, especially since the Prime Minister had refused to stop the ongoing building of Jewish settlements on Palestinian territory. The Palestinian negotiators, with one eye on the summit and another back home, would not accept proposals that were formulated in ambiguous terms. Such formulations had served to bridge differences between the parties in the past, but, in their view, had subsequently been interpreted to Israel's advantage. And the Israelis "...held their cards private... partly because they feared the Palestinians would use the Israeli offer as a starting point, not an end goal" (Malley & Agha, 2001). This mutual mistrust was never overcome.

The second factor was related to domestic political conditions. Both delegations were rather cautious when it came to accepting an agreement, for they would have to sell the deal to their people. The Palestinians felt cornered, and increasingly saw themselves as the victims of the talks.

8) He was a member of the U.S. peace team and helped organize the 2000 Camp David Summit.

9) Senior associate of Oxford University.

Thirdly, the negotiations took the form of hard bargaining. There were no attempts at mutual perspective taking or common problem solving. According to Szlomo Ben Ami, a member of the Israeli delegation, "...the Israeli side were prepared to compromise on the key issue of the status of Jerusalem, but they needed a face-saving formula to help sell the agreement back home. The Palestinians, however, had no interest in helping the Israelis. To the contrary, they wanted to humiliate them." (Shyovitz, 2007).

Authors who have analyzed the Camp David Summit tended to focus primarily on various mistakes made by negotiators. For example, according to Malley and Agha, all three participants at the Summit - the Israelis, Americans and Palestinians - made serious tactical errors (Shyovitz, 2007). A somewhat different perspective is presented in a paper entitled "Why Camp David II Failed: A Negotiation theory Perspective" published in the Harvard Negotiation Law Review (Rosenberg, 2012). Its author observed that the negotiations were finished when Yasser Arafat decided to walk away from the negotiation table and "...dozens of theories circulate trying to make sense" of this decision. „Yet, analyzing Camp David II through a negotiation framework provides a straightforward answer: no ZOPA¹⁰ existed between the two parties. ...a ZOPA within which the parties can reach a mutually beneficial agreement is a necessary condition to reaching an agreement" (pp. 3-4).

The paper argues that, for the Israeli delegation, the Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA) was worse than agreement with Palestinians. This was because the Israelis were fundamentally concerned with (in Ehud Barak's words): "...the security of Israel, those things that are holy to Israel, and the unity of our people" (Barak, 2002). The point of negotiations, for them, was to achieve such peace and security. The alternative was prolonged warfare. By contrast, for the PLO, the best alternative was better than agreement. Their fundamental interest was in securing the right of return for Palestinian people, something not guaranteed by peace. Hence, the "Palestinian people might have had a long-term interest in holding out." (Rosenberg, 2012, p. 7).

This analysis explains the failure of the negotiations as a consequence of the large discrepancy between the negotiating goals of the two parties. However, these goals can be seen as a kind of cognitive construal of the situation and of the possible strategies of conflict resolution. Cognitive construals are potentially subject to modifications. Such modifications may result from certain practical actions (such as warfare, intifada, external intervention, amnesty etc) but they also might occur in the course of negotiations. In other words, if both sides are motivated to find solutions perceived as mutually beneficial, they are more likely to reconstruct their view of the situation and find solutions that both might accept. I have argued that the major factor involved in the facilitation of such an outcome is the activation of Synergic Tendencies. In negotiations that deal with very difficult problems, Synergic Tendencies can motivate people to make persistent efforts at finding solution beneficial to both parties. It seems that Camp David meeting involved

10) ZOPA - Zone of Possible Agreement

nothing more than hard bargaining between two hostile groups who were facing an extremely difficult task.

It is not my intention to criticize the participants at the Camp David Summit for the failure of their efforts. Perhaps, in the specific historical circumstances, finding a constructive, peaceful solution of the very complex socio-political conflict was beyond anybody's capacity. But still, one can argue that important cause of the failure was not only the lack of a ZOPA between the two parties but also the lack of any psychological will to find a ZOPA.

Concluding Remarks

Characteristically, the analysis of whether negotiations succeed or fail tends to focus on the issues that the negotiating parties want to agree upon or else want to obtain from the other side. Within this framework, we study the tactics of each side, their mistakes, the barriers that they were or were not able to overcome – and so on. In the present analysis, I have focused on something else: on negotiation as a specific kind of human interaction. I have concentrated primarily on the psychological factors that influence the attitudes and behavior of the participants in negotiation. My aim was to identify the conditions under which both sides make some effort to develop a shared understanding of conflict situation and begin to cooperate around a common task. This approach is based on the assumption that the success or failure of negotiation depends not only on difficulty of the task itself (the complexity of the problems to be resolved), but also - to a considerable degree - on the psychology of the negotiators who may be better or worse disposed to finding constructive solutions to the controversies they confront. The outcome also depends on the characteristics of the psychological situation that is created during negotiations.

The experience of the Round Table seems to demonstrate successful outcomes are possible even in highly unfavorable circumstances. It also suggests some of the psychological conditions that may impact the outcome. On the basis of my experience and analysis of the RT negotiations I can point to the following as being of critical importance to successful agreement:

- A cooperative (vs. adversarial) approach to negotiations,
- A definition of the negotiation as a common problem solving task (vs. bargaining based on the assumption of a zero-sum game or on the assumption that „we know better what is the best solution of the existing conflict”),
- The formation of a “temporary common identity” based on membership in a group united around a common task (vs. membership in two separate groups hostile to each other),

- The creation of a “deliberative environment” - that is to say, a normative structure that promotes the formation of a “common task” orientation (vs. an orientation towards „defeating ones rivals”).

Where these conditions are obtained, they are likely to engender Synergic Tendencies and thereby maximize the probability that negotiations will progress. At the same time, in order to avoid leaving an unrealistically optimistic impression, I have to add two key caveats to my overall argument.

First, although I stress the importance of psychological factors for successful outcomes to political negotiations, I am not suggesting that they play a dominant role in the whole process. Important as they are, they are only a component in a complex, multidimensional set of social, political, and economic determinants of the course of events in major social conflicts. Daniel Bar-Tal’s theory of intractable conflict describes the system of psychological, political, economic, and cultural factors that develop as a result of extended large scale social conflicts and which become the major source of those processes that block attempts at conflict resolution (Bar-Tal, 2013).

The second caveat refers to the outcome of the RT and the extent to which the negotiations genuinely had an impact on Polish society. The most obvious outcome is that the RT talks ended with a signed agreement concerning political and economic reform in Poland. It was a very large document containing many details. The first major step toward these reforms was the parliamentary election that took place on June 4th 1989 (first phase). This was a spectacular success for Solidarity and, as a result of it a new government was formed in September 1989 under the leadership of Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki – a leading member of Solidarity. Thus, the RT agreement led to the implementation of fundamental reforms in Poland – the formation of democratic institutions and of a free market.

Nonetheless, very quickly, much of what had been carefully negotiated became overtaken by the course of events. History went on its own way. There was however one fundamental fact that cannot be taken away - the negotiated agreement paved the way to basic socio-political change: the formation of democratic capitalism in Poland. Admittedly, it did not eliminate deep antagonisms between those who were connected with the old system and those who were against it – despite the fact that the majority of the former group actively supported the new system. Moreover this antagonism continued to have a major impact on political life in Poland after the RT. It is only recently that a new division in Polish society seems to have replaced this old one – the division between pro-democratic and right wing authoritarian forces.

Controversy Around the Round Table '89

In spite of its historical success, the legacy of the RT remains very controversial in Poland. During the negotiations, and especially in the following years (up to now), the RT was the focus of very strong criticisms based on political and moral arguments.

The political arguments were rooted in the proposition that the negotiations were needless and indeed detrimental to the interests of the Polish society because the system in Poland was on the verge of collapse and would have fallen down all by itself. The Soviet Union had no intention and no capability of preventing such a collapse. So the negotiations contributed to the political and economic “survival” of supporters of the old regime.

These arguments are based on hindsight - on the belief, after the event occurred, that it was bound to occur and that wise people would be aware of this in advance. The fact that the system fell is used to infer that it had to fall, and soon. But the crisis of the regime in Poland did not predetermine its outcomes. In fact, there were various possible scenarios for how the dynamics of the crisis might unfold, for example: a transformation to “authoritarian capitalism”, as in China; the downfall of Gorbachov and a return to the traditional policies of the Soviet Union, meaning a collective intervention by the Warsaw Pact armies (democratization in Poland had many enemies both amongst its neighbors and in SU); bloody revolution and the violent elimination of either the existing regime or its enemies. Recent events in North Africa illustrate still further possible outcomes to political crises. Instead, the RT negotiations paved the way to liberal democracy and a free market economy.

There are also moral arguments: cooperation and compromise with staunch enemies is an act of betrayal. Such moral arguments, based on the idea of historical justice, do not take into account the fact that the other side also had its own moral arguments. The main one of these consisted in the belief that the vital interests of the Polish nation required an accommodation to its geopolitical situation. Any attempt at a major departures from the imposed political model could have resulted in a major disaster (the fate of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 serving as examples). In such circumstances, cooperation with the reform-minded parts of the establishment in order to extend the sphere of freedom was a patriotic obligation. In this way, Poland was able to achieve a much higher level of freedom than all the other countries in the region.

In reality, the main enemies of the RT are right-wing politicians with strong authoritarian tendencies. This is the position of the current Polish government which is seeking to dismantle the most important democratic institutions in this country. The success of the right-wing populist party in Poland has nothing to do with the Round Table. It is related, on the one hand, to the great disappointment with economic reforms in Poland among many social groups. On the other hand, to wider processes that have developed in Europe and in many countries outside Europe.

Economically, the transformation process led to great success. Poland has one of the highest rates of GNP in Europe. But this was achieved by means of a neoliberal economic policy (one which has dominated the Western World for some 30 years and had great influence on the Polish economy) which created large social groups that were disadvantaged by the system. Among these were many Solidarity activists who, after their great victory, became unemployed (over many years the rate of unemployment was between 15 and 20%). Such people lost any sense of economic security or any hope of improvement in their economic situation. They developed a feeling of being left behind by their erstwhile leaders who conspired with “communists” in the RT. Together, this elite acted to their own advantage but to disadvantage of the large part of the Polish society. Those people have become staunch supporters of the current government.

In sum, I want to suggest that the sharp criticisms of the RT process have two major socio-psychological reasons. The first one is the disappointment with its results among social groups who were bereft of advantages of the social change. In other words, it is due to the failure to include all of the population in the economic benefits of the new Poland. The second one is related to the concept of social life as the zero-sum game, where there is no room for negotiated agreements. For politicians with such worldview criticism of the RT is convenient weapon in political battles – it serves the delegitimization of their rivals.

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