To our wives,
Julia Braun and Sandra Scheinberg,
and our children,
Daniel, David, Ellen, and Martin
percent of the total vote, thereby failing to reach the 5 percent threshold required for parliamentary representation. According to reliable sources, another extremist group, Self-Defense, led by Andrzej Lepper, has contacts with Lyndon Larouche's group in the United States via the Schiller Institute in Germany. Self-Defense has used violence repeatedly at local levels, on occasion successfully. The government has been reluctant, however, to clamp down on this group with the full force of the law. It should be pointed out, though, that in the 1993 election Self-Defense won only 2.78 percent of the national vote.

Other extreme groups are even more marginal. In March 1994 Janusz Bryczkowski set up the Polish National Front (PNF), which has many of the characteristics of a fascist organization. Bryczkowski, evidently, had links with the communist secret police. More recently, he has openly praised the Nazi Party as a model. The PNF apparently has links with skinheads and has drawn memberships from other small extremist groups. Bryczkowski organized and financed Vladimir Zhirinovsky's visit to Poland in March 1994 and was invited to Saddam Hussein's birthday in Iraq.

Extremism thus appears to be a marginal factor. Still, marginalization does have certain negative aspects. In the 1993 parliamentary elections, in which only 52 percent of the voters cast ballots, 34 percent of those who went to the polls gave their support to parties that failed to win any seats because they did not reach the required percentage threshold for entry. Only part of these "nonrepresented" voters had supported extremist parties, but the failure of such a large group of the population to gain parliamentary representation, particularly during a period of transition (as successful as that may be to date), is inherently dangerous. It is only to be hoped that those parties that succeeded in getting into parliament will manage to act as political "sponges" that can absorb the support of the voters whose parties were left out of parliament.

There are indicators, though, that suggest that all is not well, that there is a potential for extremism. For example, a poll taken in spring 1994 showed that, incredibly, 36 percent of the population in Poland believes that the minuscule Jewish minority wields too much influence. Given the facts, this can hardly be viewed as anything but dangerous mass political fantasy and ultimately an obstacle to the development of what Zbigniew Brzezinski called a mature political culture. Therefore, there are important questions to ask and warning signals to be evaluated. The first step is to assess the momentum of democratic transformation.

**Momentum**

There have been several significant developments in Poland that should provide valuable insights into the momentum of transformation. Reassuringly, there are, it seems, vital signals that indicate that the momentum of democratization has been maintained and remains sustainable. Although in the September 1993 elections the victors were a coalition of the Democratic Left Alliance (a successor to the former Communist Party) and a former partner of the Communist Party, the Polish Peasant Party, the vote was not one in support of the past. The two governing parties had undergone major changes and came to accept social democracy. There was no attempt to return to a central command economy or to alter the democratic structure that had been put in place. The government, led by Prime Minister Waldemar Pawlak of the Polish Peasant Party, emphasized that macrostabilization was to be achieved through a program of fiscal discipline designed to reduce the budgetary deficit significantly. Furthermore, the government strongly supported the enhancement of trade relations with Western European states. Last, the government continued to press strongly for Polish membership in NATO and in the European Union. Thus the Polish people had voted, in September 1993, for a change of government, not of the political order. In most respects, the Pawlak government seems to have honored that wish. Similarly, the election of Aleksander Kwasniewski—the leader of the Democratic Left Alliance—as president in the November 19, 1995, election was not a signal of a return to the communist past. Kwasniewski had run a slick American-style campaign and emphasized his commitment to democracy and political consensus.

For the democratic political order to succeed, it must progress and it must maintain momentum. That is, democratic institutions and processes must be widened and deepened. In this regard, the signals become more mixed and democratic forces must be alert to potential dangers that can negatively affect the momentum of transformation. In particular, difficulties in accomplishing three democratic goals—the depoliticization of key ministries, the devolution of power to local governments, and separation of church and state—can cause considerable long-term damage.

**Politics**

First, when totalitarian systems, where political control is paramount, move toward democracy, where civil society emerges, depoliticizing the various ministries and building up an independent civil service is of primary importance. This depoliticization has been only partially achieved in Poland. The process, started by democratic forces in 1989, proceeded slowly and imperfectly and seems to have been slowed down further by Prime Minister Pawlak's coalition. By insisting, for instance, that Democratic Left Alliance deputy ministers be appointed to the Ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Internal Affairs in the government, Pawlak likely further politicized those ministries. In addition, in June 1994, the cabinet failed to approve guidelines designed to separate political from career posts in the Foreign Affairs Ministry. Instead, the new government gave the communist "profes-
rope. Since Poland wishes to become a member of the European Union, that is a fair standard. And since Poland is still in a transition period, Adam Michnik's arguments about the fragility of democracy in Poland are persuasive, at the very least as caveats. Second, even if Western European standards of democracy are reached, this is not a guarantee against extremism, particularly right-wing extremism. In all democracies society must continually struggle against extremist instincts, organizations, and activities. The most successful democracies cannot afford to be complacent on the issue of extremism.

In Poland the response to the warning signs of extremism is less than adequate. Some loss of momentum, perception of the majority as primary victims, insensitivities toward minorities, inadequate progress on law and legality, and an insufficient understanding of the issues of refugees and immigrants can spell major problems for the future. As has been discussed, the most visible manifestations of extremism, particularly of the right-wing variety, are clearly not the greatest danger in Poland. Poland needs to understand its past and deal with the changes in the region. Though some issues may be unique to Poland, Warsaw must also probe the same general transformational problems that the other postcommunist states are facing. Except for complacency and a refusal to take preventive measures, there is no reason Poland should not be able to resolve these problems successfully.

Notes

7. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
17. Ibid.