

Interview of the Marshal of the Senate Bogdan Borusewicz for the Kumudra Weekly (Rangun – BIRMA)

-What is your overall impression on the reforms in Myanmar?

Bogdan Borusewicz: I believe that these reforms are progressing in the right direction. Allowing the opposition to participate in parliamentary elections has been absolutely essential and I hope that Burma will continue on its path towards democracy. But it will certainly not happen at once.

- What kind of challenges did Poland face during transition its transit time?

The most difficult challenge was to reform the economic system and to move away from the centralised state-run economy. These were the most difficult changes, because they also entailed the highest social costs. Relatively speaking, the political transformation was easier, as it was based on free suffrage.

- And what kind of lessons should Myanmar learn from Poland's transition to democracy?

First of all, political changes should be carried out step by step. There is no need to do everything all at once. But it requires a very consistent approach. Any attempts to halt this process must be opposed. At the same time, one must respect one's opponents and strive to achieve gradual progress in implementing reforms. Democratic elections give rise to changes. Economic reforms, however, should be introduced simultaneously as a comprehensive package.

- How did Poland transform its military to become a democratic institution?

The size of the Polish Armed Forces has been reduced to a quarter and the Army has been placed under civilian control. A civilian has been appointed as the minister of defence. All special services have also been placed under civilian control.

- And how did Poland use the independent media as the tool to support the transition?

Censorship was abolished in Poland at the beginning of the transformation period. The relevant laws were revised, resulting in the establishment of a large number of new newspapers and magazines, as well as radio and television stations. Private and public media could operate freely for the first time, providing a basis for changes and greatly contributing to the strengthening of political freedoms of citizens. The wider access to information and the freedom of media gave impetus to changes that were taking place in Poland then. A government independent institution was set up to issue broadcasting licences to electronic media.

- Both of Polish and Myanmar societies were largely influenced by socialist and communist ideologies in the history. What are the scars of it?

After over 20 years of systemic, political and economic transformation in Poland, there are now few traces of the socialist system. Perhaps the best evidence of this is the fact that the former headquarters of the communist party, i.e. the building of its Central Committee, now houses the stock exchange. In the socialist era, it was a place where the most important political decisions were taken. Today, it is where investors trade in corporate shares and securities. It also houses the Financial Centre, which has become the symbol of capitalism and of the economic transformation.

- Some people criticize National League for Democracy (NLD) that the party relies on the image of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi too much. What would you advise NLD?

Even people with a history of involvement in the previous system now dissociate themselves from it and no longer rely on the communist ideology. All issues associated with the previous era are looked into by an institution specially set up for this purpose: the Institute of National Remembrance. It is tasked with investigating crimes committed in the communist times. For example, it investigates whether or not individuals who are subject to a vetting review had ever been recruited as agents of the security service.

- Myanmar has deep relations with China and now it has been engaged with the west. How do you think Myanmar should behave between the West and China?

It should support its leader. It is very important that Burma has such an authority figure in its struggle for democracy. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is a Nobel Peace Prize winner with huge international renown. Without her, it would be much more difficult to initiate democratic changes and to gain support of other countries. It is especially important at the beginning of the reform process.

-What is the biggest threats do you think for Myanmar in this transition time?

It depends which way Burma will decide to follow and which model it will choose. However, the Chinese model may be propagated to slow down political change.

- What kind of dangers Myanmar should be aware of during economic transformation process?

The greatest risk is associated with the fact that many people in Burma may initially be disappointed with economic changes brought about by the introduction of a free market economy. Some people may expect that it will be a paradise on earth. Burma has a large percentage of national minorities. In Poland, minorities account for only 3% of the total population. It is therefore important to build a positive model of national relations.

- If you want to advise DASSK something, what would it be?

She knows the realities of life in Burma much better than me, so I cannot really advise her. I can only tell her about Poland and about changes that have taken place in my country.

- When will you visit Myanmar and what would be your mission?

I am planning to visit Burma in the second half of October. Of course, the aim of my visit is to express support for democratic changes.

-Do you have any special messages to Myanmar people?

Democracy with its free market economy is an important value which allows everyone to benefit from his or her enterprise. The democratic system enables everyone to become actively involved in their pursuits. However, people should not expect that all problems will disappear once a democratic system is established. Democracy is also associated with a range of problems, but these problems are of different nature. The same can be said about the free market. And any such new problems will have to be solved. One should also remember that opposition, which is strong in a dictatorship, loses its strength in a democratic state, in a natural way, because people tend to have different views on how democracy should be practised. One has to be aware of this and not to worry about it too much. It is simply how this process usually evolves.