

Democracy is a team sport

interview with Paweł Tomasz Długosz

**KOD'S
TEAM**

DEKODER

DECODER: You live abroad, in San Francisco. What's the perspective over there concerning the situation in Poland? Is there any interest among Americans in regards to the breaking of democratic norms by an European nation?

PAWEŁ T. DŁUGOSZ: I haven't seen genuine interest. What Americans are going through at the moment with the constant state of disarray in the White House, is eating up all of their attention. In other words, America has enough problems of their own and not concerning themselves with Poland.

Do you hold a grudge against Poles that chose a party that's actively dismantling democratic foundations in Poland?

Quite frankly, no, I don't. However, I do have a problem with the fact that Poles (as did Americans) disregarded their privilege: the right to vote. Democracy is a team sport; maybe 28 years isn't quite enough time to grasp that? When I attended middle school, we had lessons of Social Education – that was so... enlightening: a little bit about how the world functions and how Europe is a cluster of so many nations. What we need is more instilling about how Poles can make their country better through awareness & civic engagement.

Do you think that's KOD's role?

KOD and many other kinds of civic movements now find themselves being one giant express exercise in civic engagement. But yeah, KOD should educate, engage and not just be reactionary towards PiS. It should have a plan B and plan C, if what it opposes (the current judiciary reforms) stays on course.

Let's hope that KOD's management is up to the task and has such a plan. What made you get

involved with KOD?

Numbness & utter feeling of helplessness – that's what drew me towards KOD on the West Coast. I know you might be wondering: *Wait a sec... what's KOD doing in the States? What can they possibly do there? What can they know about the situation back home?*



Paweł Tomasz Długosz,
Photo: Karolina Zapolska

Exactly how can Poles living abroad help?

Our role is pretty specific due to our geolocation: we can simply build/tighten the community around Poles living here, which is true everywhere to some extent. They're also, well, a bit musty so to speak. We can connect people with the situation in the motherland as long as you have the right to vote in Poland. I don't see a reason not to get involved? Since 2014 I've had the good fortune of having two passports. I'm a dual-citizen, and thus have a dual set of responsibilities. A lot of folks from our group within the Bay Area (we're all in different cities) don't have dual citizenship. They'll be forced, or they're actively planning to go back. They don't want to be idle, they want to act.

It appears that the recent events in Poland united KOD POLONIA. A

lot of groups became active

– they protest in front of embassies and they write petitions. Do you think this state of heightened engagement among these groups will continue?

This is the second wave of involvement: now's THE moment where we can build something anew, rally people together and steer their energy. No one should be indifferent. Donate to pro-democracy movements, talk about the situation in Poland via traditional media, and be above divisions. But I must warn them: don't be overly reactive, have a long-term game plan. Otherwise you'll burn out.

You mentioned a while ago that your middle name, which you use, is in honor of your English teacher. Can you tell us something about it?

(laughter) Why not? Tomasz Chrzęszcz was my English teacher back in my middle school in Sanok, Poland where I grew up. Tall guy (tallest out of all the teachers) with a ponytail, beard, always wearing a sweater and a fan of System of a Down, a band which I adored at the time. He was liked by every student. Took a pretty interesting approach towards teaching. I've thought about becoming an English teacher mainly because of him. My best friend also took on his middle name after him during Confirmation. I have no clue as to what Mr. Chrzęszcz is up to or where he is in the world, but he left a lasting positive imprint on me and many other people.

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