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War against poverty or war against the poor? How the public discourse in Poland shapes attitudes towards social policy objectives.

It is without the question that attitudes of general public are to a large extent shaped by the public discourse presented and influenced by the media. The story of post-communist transition is also the story of creation of the new elite which sets up the agenda in the public debate. Hence, the costs of transition to capitalist economy were high for the substantial part of the society, the issue of social policy and strategic planning in this sphere was not high on the agenda during the past two decades in Poland. The public debate was to large extent monopolized by neoliberal discourse. Quality press has withdrawn its interests in social affairs leaving the field to populist and tabloidized mass media. It is connected with the fact that costs were unequally distributed in the society and new elites – policy makers, media workers and owners were among the beneficiaries of the changes.

Paradoxically, in Poland global economic crisis created yet another occasion for the politicians to justify withdrawal of the state from its obligation in economic and social sphere.

Using as a theoretical frame concept of welfare culture developed by Birgit Pfau-Effinger, I will attempt to present how elites contribute to public recognition of certain ideas and values which influence the attitudes towards social policy and its objectives.

The paper will be based on the findings from the PhD project empirically based on several resources: interviews with MPs from the Committee of Social Affairs in Polish parliament, analysis of media debates and parliamentary discussions regarding the objectives of social policy and state's responsibility in this sphere. I will claim that distrust of the general public in Poland in political institutions manifested by one of the lowest voter turnovers in the world is also a result of the above mentioned phenomena.