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O&A: JACEK MAJCHROWSKI

Maintaining momentum

KRAKOW IN POLAND HAS LOW UNEMPLOYMENT BUT THE MAYOR IS STILL KEEN TO ATTRACT COMPANIES IN HI-TECH AND OUTSOURCING INDUSTRIES THAT CAN OFFER JOBS TO THE CITY'S BURGEONING GRADUATE POPULATION AND SPECIALIST WORKFORCE. HE TALKS TO **COURTNEY FINGAR**



CURRICULUM VITAE

JACEK MAJCHROWSKI

2002

Krakow
Mayor

Also
Co-president of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions

Previously
Jagiellonian University, professor

Q Krakow has been doing well economically and is a strong performer in attracting FDI. How can this momentum be maintained?

A We will work very hard to maintain this momentum, but it is not all about us and it depends on other factors that we need to take into consideration: legal regulations established by parliament, the general economic environment, and [how] local governments in Poland [operate].

Q What would you like to see from the national government that would support your economic development efforts?

A Perhaps I will turn your question around: the most important thing for us would be not to get support from the government, but instead I would like them not to bother us.

Just to give you one example, Jaroslaw Kaczynski is the leader of ruling party [Law and Justice]. 'Kaczynski's top five', as we call it, is the list of social initiatives that the government is trying to introduce. It does a lot for the people in terms of financial support from the government. However, for local government – in the case of Krakow – this means that next year we will lose 200m zlotys [\$51.8m] from the initiatives that he is introducing.

I am a lawyer by profession, [but I also read a lot about] political history, with a particular focus on the mid-war period, and what I am noticing now, not only in Poland but all around the world, basically is [that events are] very similar to what was happening in Europe in the early 1930s: nationalism, populism, protectionism. [It's] the exact same phenomena – and it did not end well.

Q What can you do as a city leader to help counteract it?

A The role of mayors is not really significant here; it really all depends on the general politics of the government. Poland is heading in a direction to be a more centralised country, diminishing the role of local governments. However, at the same time [the government]

seems to allow certain nationalist movements – or people with this outlook on the world – to be more active.

There is a body in Poland called the Joint Commission of Government and Self-government. It used to be a very important body and its main role is to issue opinions on certain laws that are about to be introduced in Poland. These opinions are not binding in any way. But now what happens is that most of the ideas are created by members of parliament independently and this body is never consulted about these laws. So the government never really asks for the opinion of local governments.

I've been in office for quite some time and this is the eighth government that I have worked with. The tendency has always been to marginalise the role of local government, but now it is much more visible than ever.

Q Among the things you can influence at the local level, what are main economic priorities as mayor?

A Historically, Krakow's economy has relied on heavy industry, but the situation is changing and over the past couple of years we've been trying to attract investors focusing on hi-tech industries and outsourcing. We want businesses to be clean, eco-friendly and at the same time, of course, we want to attract investors who hire [as many people] as possible. We have 23 universities and colleges in Krakow and we have lots of graduates every year and, of course, most want to stay in this city and so we need to offer them jobs – and that's what investors do. They offer lots and lots of jobs and they create work.

At the moment we have about 70,000 people working in the outsourcing sector. They work in 30 languages and the processes are becoming more and more specialised. They were just doing basic processes when companies were first starting operations here but now it is all much more specialised and requires much more [expertise] from potential employees.

Unemployment in Krakow is at about 2%, which is a really good situation for us. What we are lacking perhaps is basic jobs – we don't really have many people working in these basic professions anymore. However, we are trying to counteract it and ensure that our educational system still creates the right training for these roles. ■

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