



FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
FOUNDATION For Freedom.

THE INSPIRERS!

Liberals in Central and
Southeastern Europe Lead
the Way for the Future








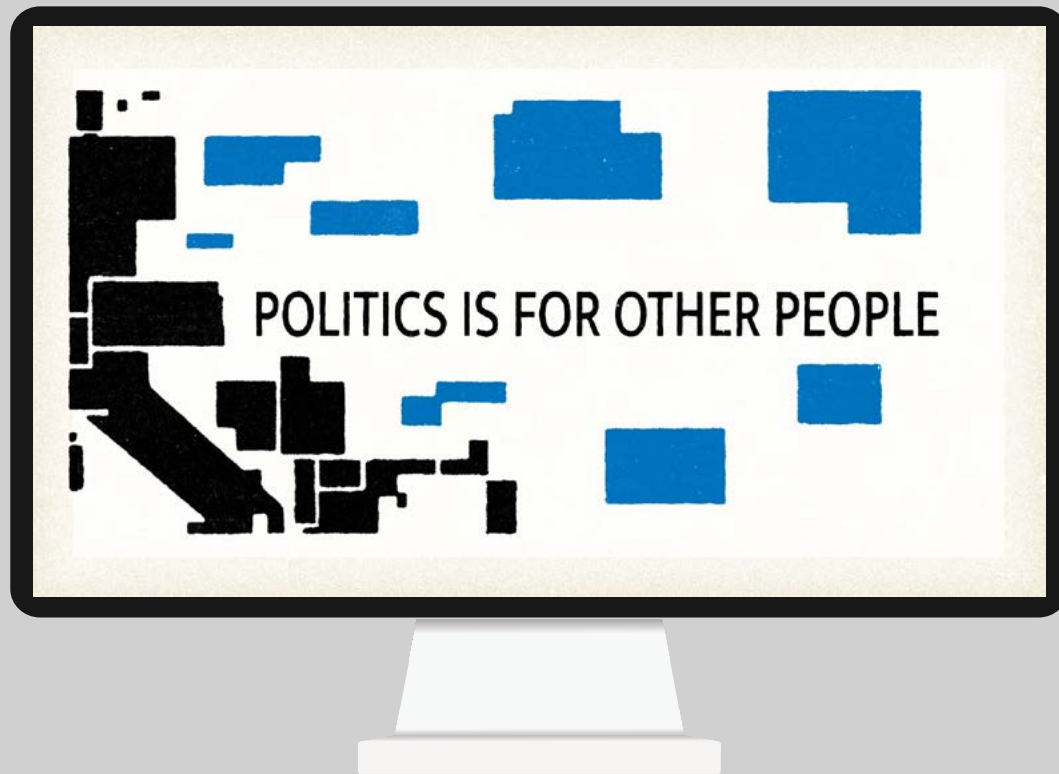
FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
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Liberals in Central and Southeastern Europe
Lead the Way for the Future

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Foreword

From Central and Southeastern Europe we mostly get negative headlines, and not much more. Nationalism, semi-authoritarian states known as “illiberal democracies”, populism, oligarchic kleptocracies – the region only seems to know deep political problems, a crisis of democracy.

But that's only part of the truth. Central and Eastern Europe also means the legacy of 1989, the legacy of the dawn of freedom and democracy. And this legacy is now more popular than ever, especially among young people. In recent years, numerous new political forces have formed in the region that are trying to bring a breath of fresh air into politics.

They develop new ideas on how to counter creeping authoritarianism and strengthen parliamentary democracy. They expose corruption among those in power, such as the Hungarian liberal movement, *Momentum*, or the Romanian party, *Save Romania Union*, which emerged from corresponding citizens' initiatives. Many of them have developed modern concepts on how to improve media communication, even if media freedom is restricted in the country. And they have learned to counter the emerging national populist tendencies in the region through increased regional cooperation.

They do this in the network of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, and also in the ALDE, the European umbrella organization of liberal parties. ALDE has founded its own “New Central Europe” working group to strengthen these approaches.

This brochure introduces a choice of inspiring people involved in the new liberal movements. They are voices of idealism, they are voices from people who are deeply engaged and have therefore joined liberal movements in their countries. Perhaps it is the case that people in Central and Southeastern Europe are currently experiencing what a creeping loss of freedom means, and that is precisely why the liberal movements in the region appear so authentic and committed. This also includes the recognition of the EU as an area of freedom, and the rule of law is needed more urgently than ever – but also the recognition that the EU must develop even more effectively as the guardian of freedom.

Or, as Irena Bihariová from the Progressive Slovakia party puts it: “As a human being, a politician and a leader, I see the EU as a safe haven, a home, as a guarantor that it will not allow evil – even if it is committed anywhere – to become legitimate.” Perhaps the people in the “old west” of Europe can also learn something from this, for whom Central and Southeastern Europe are often enough outside the realm of perception, and recognize the liberals there as a source of inspiration.

We hope that this brochure may waken your interest in the new European liberalism of the region. We also invite you to watch our documentary “Politics Is for Other People” (<http://bit.ly/liberalmovements>) to find out more. Be inspired!

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DA, BULGARIA!

HRISTO IVANOV DA, BULGARIA!

The person: Hristo Ivanov

The well-known lawyer had a long career as an activist against corruption and abuse of office when he founded the Yes, Bulgaria! Party in 2017. In 2014/2015 he already had served as Minister of Justice, but resigned when an effective justice reform that he had launched was substantially watered down. Ivanov, who made a name for himself with spectacular measures against oligarchs who enriched themselves with state property, ensured that the advocacy of the rule of law was also the focus of the new party.

” If I were not a dad of two small kids, I wouldn't be able to do what I do.

Hristo Ivanov

” Building a party is a difficult thing, particularly if you want it to be a party and not a corruption coterie.



The political vision

Why did you decide to establish Da, Bulgaria (Yes, Bulgaria)? What are the core values of the party that are most important to you?

I started Yes, Bulgaria! because from my experience as a minister I understood that the existing political system in Bulgaria will not and cannot be reformed and we should stop expecting that someone from outside will help us. We needed a political tool specifically dedicated to mobilizing domestic public energy for rule of law reforms, reinvigoration of democratic institutions and pushing for an agenda of ambitious modernization of the country.

Our core values are freedom and rule of law as the key prerequisites for dignity and prosperity at both the collective and individual levels.

Why do you believe it is crucial to stand up for our common European values?

Our values and our way of life face the most serious pack of challenges in generations: epidemiological, economic, technological, geopolitical. All of that is exacerbated by the rise of a new wave of authoritarian trends based on a

toxic mix of populism and corruption. We stand a chance only together as a globally relevant player. Some of these challenges are simultaneously opportunities, and, again, to make the most of them we need to stick together and act as one. It's simple and without any meaningful alternative.

Why do you consider regional cooperation with other liberal parties important?

We share common values and common challenges, and we need to help each other and learn from each other. Facing the new wave of populism and authoritarianism, upgraded with new technology, we need to swiftly invent and share novel political responses, both as policies and tools for political action.



”For many years, getting into the EU functioned as the ultimate answer to all the questions. We were hoping to outsource the solution to our problems to the European level and it turns out it doesn't work like this. We need to somehow start imagining Bulgaria.

Hristo Ivanov



The party: Da, Bulgaria!

Yes, Bulgaria! is a liberal party that was founded in 2017, and advocates personal freedom and the protection of human rights, justice established by the rule of law, security through democratic and strong institutions, honest service to the public interest, wealth creation through entrepreneurship and free initiative, social solidarity in healthy and enlightened civil communities, and pluralism and freedom of public debate.



Scan here to watch our film and find out more about the project

The person: Katalin Cseh

The doctor of medicine was already a committed liberal when she joined the citizens' movement, from which the Momentum party emerged. In 2019 she ran as part of the top candidate team of the liberal ALDE for the elections to European Parliament, where

she has since been one of the two liberal Hungarian MEPs. After taking up her mandate in the European Parliament, she was elected as the Vice-President of Renew Europe. The fight against corruption is one of her foremost topics.

” So many people say, ‘I am not interested in politics’, but you're participating in politics if you're waiting 3 months for a doctor's appointment. You're being impacted by politics if your child is rejected from kindergarten, because there's no space. You're suffering from bad politics if you're working hard and still struggle to provide for your family.

Katalin Cseh



” At one point I decided to give it a shot, and in the process I got so inspired by the vision András Fekete-Győr painted about Hungary, and the country it could become. I felt I wanted to work for that kind of Hungary.

The political vision

Why did you decide to join Momentum? What are the core values of the party that are most important to you?

I was one of the founders of Momentum. We wanted to achieve change in Hungary and create a liveable, secure, happy and more predictable future. Momentum advocates for the replacement of the present Hungarian political elite, including the government of Viktor Orbán, with a new breed of political community in Hungary. The party is generally pro-European, pro-globalization, very progressive, and anti-autocrat.

Momentum calls itself a centrist party, and rejects classification on either side of the political spectrum. Writing in its mission statement that Hungary must not be divided by ideological battles, but should be brought together by common goals.

Why do you believe it is crucial to stand up for our common European values?

Solidarity, justice and the rule of law are European values that are important to us all. We imagine the future not in

the east, but in the west; Hungary's place is not next to Russia, but to Europe. Freedom comes from the west, and we have a place there.



Why do you consider regional cooperation with other liberal parties important?

We have learned that we are much stronger when we work together. Through cooperation, we can share our experiences, we can learn from each other, and nevertheless we have a stronger influence. Liberal values and the fight against autocracy and corruption unite these parties.



The party: Momentum

In 2017, a citizens' movement was formed that called for a referendum against Hungary's bid for the 2024 Olympic Games. Before that happened, the country's populist government had to withdraw the project. Because of this resounding success, the citizens' initiative formed its own party, the Momentum Movement. The party, popular with young voters, is one of the most important opposition parties in the country. It fights the oligarchic tendencies in the country in terms of economic policy and advocates other progressive goals.

”Momentum gives representation to those who feel a gaping void of freedoms in our country, those who are angered by injustice and repression, those who essentially believe that a stronger Europe will lead to a stronger Hungary.

Katalin Cseh



Scan here to watch our film and find out more about the project

The person: Helmut Brandstätter

The journalist and former head of n-tv and editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper Kurier has been sitting in the Austrian parliament for the liberal NEOS party since 2019. Matters close to his heart include digitization and innovation, but also foreign policy. Since 2020 he has been deputy chairman of the parliamentary committee on foreign policy.

” It's a long way from political journalist to politician. One asks the question, the other has to answer. I promised from the first day that I will not answer questions where I don't have the answers.

Helmut Brandstätter

” I founded a television station and that was very complicated, but to found a party in Austria – that's kind of impossible. Matthias Strolz is my hero for doing it.



The political vision

Why did you decide to join NEOS? What are the core values of the party that are most important to you?

I have decided to support the NEOS because the topic of education has always been very close to my heart. Unfortunately, education is still "inherited" in Austria, I founded the educational project "Kurier Lernhaus" during my time as editor-in-chief at an Austrian daily newspaper to provide additional support to children from socially disadvantaged families. And NEOS with their motto "Leave no child behind", is the only party to stand up for the same chances for every child. As the only liberal force in Austria, NEOS also stands up for the rule of law and democracy, and for this we need cohesion and solidarity within Europe. NEOS, as a profoundly European party, has stood up for this from the very beginning.

Why do you believe it is crucial to stand up for our common European values? And why do you consider regional cooperation with other liberal parties important?

Unfortunately, we are currently observing a dangerous trend in Europe: Poland and Hungary are moving further and further to the right, railing against the rule of law and dividing society. Also the Austrian government repeatedly uses the EU and "Brussels" as a buffer for its own political failures. With this and with a policy of fear instead of confidence, they are aiming to divide society. In a time of crisis like this, we need European cohesion and solidarity. We can only achieve this by working together as liberal forces in Europe, by exchanging ideas and acting as one. We must offer people an alternative to fear, hate and division and paint a positive picture of the European Union. Only in this way will our children and grand-children benefit from the greatest peace project of all time and be able to live together in peace and freedom - despite different languages or nationalities, but with common values regarding human rights, democracy and the rule of law. "United in diversity" is what makes us special, and we must continue to defend this motto.



” **What is Europe?
What is the European Union?
Of course, it is the rule of law,
it is democracy.**

Helmut Brandstätter

neos

The party: NEOS – Das Neue Österreich und Liberales Forum

Already when it was founded in 2012, the NEOS party set new standards in questions of party democracy. The statutes allowed citizens to participate in the development of the program and in the voting process for candidates to be nominated. Their strategy for the use of new media and branding became a model for many new liberal parties in Central Europe. Progressive on social issues, it advocates a market economy and more economic freedom including lower taxes, less regulation and more motivation for entrepreneurship. Its goal for the European Union is a strong, unified United States of Europe.



Scan here to watch our film
and find out more about the project

The person: Monika Rosa

Since 2015 she has represented the newly founded Nowoczesna party in parliament. The political scientist is among other things a co-founder of the magazine Liberté. In parliament she is a member of the committees for national and ethnic minorities,

for social policy and family and for health. In Poland, which is currently ruled by the national populist Rule and Justice party, she is known throughout the country as an advocate for women's rights and the Silesian language.

”In 2015, when Law and Justice took all the power, Nowoczesna was seen as the most active party in Parliament. We were full of energy and thought we'd fight with Law and Justice to change Poland. It was everything but fun.

Monika Rosa

”I believe that ordinary people, and I'm an ordinary woman, can make extraordinary things.



The political vision

Why did you decide to join Nowoczesna? What are the core values of the party that are most important to you?

I never wanted to become a politician. I could not see any party that represented my views, and then in 2015, in face of the oncoming storm of right-wing populism, a new liberal movement in Poland was created. It was a movement that spoke with normal, human language, not party newspeak. It was a movement that drafted a vision of a more European, more open and inclusive Poland for all. It was Nowoczesna. I joined it to support its fight for freedom and equality for all.

Why do you believe it is crucial to stand up for our common European values?

I am Silesian, I am Polish, I am European. European values are my values. They are values of all Polish people who

decided in a referendum, without the smallest doubt, to join the Union, and still support the integration. This was our choice to build modern Poland on pillars of participative democracy, civil society, rule of law, and respect for human rights. European integration is a matter of our safety, on so many levels. The only alternative we have is gloomy and fearsome.

Why do you consider regional cooperation with other liberal parties important?

There is so much that connects us: common history, common values, common and unique experience of a struggle for freedom against populists. If we cooperate closely, we can learn from each other and find the best solutions faster. We, Central European liberals, simply cannot afford not to talk to each other. It's a cliché but it's so true: together we are stronger!



”There's less and less space for democracy in Poland, unfortunately.

Monika Rosa

.Nowoczesna

The party: Nowoczesna (.N)

The Nowoczesna party (the name means Modern), founded in 2015, made it into parliament as the fourth-largest party in the same year. The party is progressive on social issues and advocates, among other things, for the rights of sexual minorities – still a very difficult terrain in Catholic Poland. In terms of economic policy, it is clearly oriented towards the market economy and advocates economically efficient ways for environmental policy. Since the 2019 election, the party has eight MPs.



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The person: Irena Bihariová

The lawyer, who belongs to the Roma minority in Slovakia, and who up to now has dealt with extremist acts of violence and racist crimes has been chair-woman of the Progresívne Slovensko (Progressive Slovakia) party since 2020, becoming the first female leader of the party. Minority concerns and the fight against discrimination are also matters of the heart here.

” *In order to compete with the extremists, a large part of the traditional parties became inspired by them. Then it was just a rivalry over who is the bigger populist, more anti-Roma or likes migrants less. Resisting this was actually the starting point where Progressive Slovakia was born.*

Irena Bihariová

” *I didn't grow up in an intellectual environment. We didn't read any books. We measured wealth by the number of yoghurts and whether electricity and gas were paid for. That is why today I have a natural, genuine empathy for those, who out of anger and frustration, seek paths toward extremists.*



The political vision

**Why did you decide to join Progressive Slovakia (PS)?
What are the core values of the party that are most important to you?**

The creation of a socially liberal political party had been expected in Slovakia for more than ten years, and this expectation was firmly tied to one particular person, Ivo Štefanko. Ivo was a friend of mine, a well-known leftist intellectual, and later the godfather of the Slovak start-up scene. When the expected decision to leave the business and establish Progressive Slovakia was finally made, I was approached to be among the first of its founders. It was a clear choice for me, precisely because of the credibility of the leader, Ivo, and the fact that we shared the same values with the other founding members. Most importantly, we were united in an understanding of politics as something based on a long-term vision of a free, fair, green, modern and well-functioning country that overcomes its conservative prejudices about itself and dares to make a radical transformation.

Why do you believe it is crucial to stand up for our common European values?

As a human being, a politician and a leader, I see the EU as a safe haven, a home, as a guarantor that it will not allow evil - even if it is committed anywhere - to become legitimate. I am extremely proud of EU values: most notably the emphasis on human rights, the rule of law, social justice and a green planet, and this is what gives it an exceptional spirit over all other countries and continents. The EU must remain a trendsetter and an uncompromising advocate on these issues, in which its role is irreplaceable for the whole world.

Why do you consider regional cooperation with other liberal parties important?

Today, all the major threats that our countries are facing, are global; be it a climate crisis, a reduced ability to defend democracy, extremism or hybrid threats, just to mention a few. It is therefore unrealistic to deal with them on our own. At the same time, these threats attack precisely those values whose protection normally belongs to the portfolio of liberal parties. Their mutual cooperation, consultations, exchange of experiences, and sharing of good practices is therefore much more acute today than ever before.

” It became a feature of the DNA of Progressive Slovakia that we believed that Slovakia can do better than what was on offer.

Irena Bihariová



The party: Progressívne Slovensko (PS)

The Progressive Slovakia party, founded in 2017, was able to succeed in local elections in 2018 with its socially modern program. One of its candidates was elected mayor of the capital, Bratislava. In the national presidential elections in 2019, its candidate Zuzana Čaputová, who has since become the progressive figurehead of her country, triumphed. And in the European elections in the same year it even became the strongest party. The success was only tarnished by the fact that the party narrowly missed entry into parliament in the 2020 national elections. It shows, however, that the party, the most visible opposition to populist positions, has since grown again. The party promotes a socially liberal agenda with an additional focus on environmental issues.



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SAVE ROMANIA UNION (USR)

The person: Dan Barna

The lawyer, having also a master's degree in project management, has significant professional experience as an International Certified Trainer and European Funding Consultant. In 2016, he became State Secretary in the Romanian Ministry for European Funding in the Dacian Cioloș cabinet. In the same year, he joined the

USR party, where he became chairman the following year. In 2019 he placed third in a run for the office of the Romanian President. After the last national parliamentary election in December 2020, he was elected USR PLUS deputy in the Romanian Parliament and the country's deputy prime minister.

” At USR, what we hope to achieve in 5-10 years is to convince people that from high school to the rest of their lives it is their duty and their power to be part of politics.

Dan Barna



” In 2016, I heard the rumor that the Save Bucharest movement had decided to run nationally. At the time I was wondering whether to go back to my business or try a political career. So I walked into their local branch in my hometown, Sibiu, and it was love at first sight.

The political vision

**Why did you decide to join the Save Romania Union (USR)?
What are the core values of the party that are most important to you?**

I never could've joined one of the old parties. I wasn't happy with the way things were going in Romania and I thought that politics was one of the main reasons for the missed opportunities that this country had. So, under no circumstances could I see myself joining a party that lives on graft, red tape and corruption. So I kept my distance from politics until USR appeared. They were different, they were honest and they were saying "enough". I found their attitude credible and their will strong. I decided to join, because at times I had had enough of the above, too. But, as many other members, I thought that I was alone in thinking this. I wasn't.

In short: liberal democracy. I care deeply about personal freedoms, I care about a strong pro-western orientation and I think there are no alternatives to these. In order to have a healthy democracy, we need to be there to defend it and enhance it.

Why do you believe it is crucial to stand up for our common European values?

It's a simple experiment that every Romanian did at some point. What if we weren't members of the EU? It's not a difficult experiment. We just have to take a look across our Eastern borders. Do we like what we see there? Do we want those kind of difficulties, those kind of struggles? I can assure you that we don't.

Why do you consider regional cooperation with other liberal parties important?

Because we're not alone in this project. If things go in a wrong direction in Hungary or in Poland, we will have specific effects in Romania. Also, for as long as we are Europeans we need to act European, too. It's not enough to be a good national politician. Europe should always be on our agenda and in our hearts. And that means we need to work very closely with our liberal counterparts. No one will make it on their own.



The party: Uniunea Salvați România (USR)

The Save Romania Union party was formed in 2016 mainly as an anti-corruption movement that primarily fought the attempts of the then social democratic government to protect government-related corruption suspects by means of emergency decrees. A more extensive program is still in progress. The Save Romania Union is a modern center-right party promoting an economically liberal agenda with an additional focus on environmental issues. USR stands for the core liberal and European values.

”In Romania, after a thirty year transition, there exists the wrong perception that decent people take care of their families and their own lives, while politics is dirty and for others.

Dan Barna



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The person: Dacian Cioloș

The agronomist is also a politically recognized expert in his field. In 2007/08 he was the Minister of Agriculture in Romania and from 2010 to 2014 he held the position of the EU Commissioner in the sensitive area of the common agricultural policy. As Prime Minister from 2015 to 2017,

he led a technocratic government in Romania made up of non-party ministers. In 2018 he founded the liberal PLUS party, for which he ran for the EU parliament the following year. Since then he has been chairman of the Liberal Renew group in the European Parliament.

” Politics means for a time to assume a responsibility for others, for the community.

Dacian Cioloș



” A civic movement was being built on the street during protests against changes in the justice law aiming to protect the leader of the ruling party. I was thinking how to help, how to contribute to the structuring of this movement. I proposed forming a civic platform to not only protest on the street, but to start preparing new ideas.

The political vision

Why did you decide to establish the Party of Freedom, Unity and Solidarity (PLUS)? What are the core values of the party that are most important to you?

I founded PLUS party together with several collaborators from the Government that I led in 2016. We have noticed a lack of representation of an important segment of Romanian society in domestic politics and our goal was to fulfil this need and create an alternative political movement, fresh and with a clear message.

For almost three decades, Romanian citizens had to choose among retrograde socialism and conservatism. Between these political currents there was no well-defined political movement that could provide and produce a strong leadership with chances to govern Romania starting with 2021.

The core values on which we launched our political platform are liberal: the need for justice, solidarity and social security, individual freedom and free competition. For PLUS, the free market and private property are essential to generate and ensure individual and collective prosperity.

Why do you believe it is crucial to stand up for our common European values? And why do you consider regional cooperation with other liberal parties important?

We are a deeply pro-European political movement. We undoubtedly defined this orientation from the beginning in a context in which the ruling party's anti-European public discourse was very strong.

From the beginning we developed relations with European liberal parties and this cooperation led, after the 2019 European elections, to the formation and consolidation of the Renew Europe group in the European Parliament where we are founding members.

I consider it our duty to have clear values of pro-European and liberal orientation as in Europe and Romania there are illiberal authoritarian tendencies and populist parties that can disintegrate the European construction.



” The eastern part of Europe does not mean corruption. In some parts of society this is a behavior coming from the past, but the new generation comes with innovation, with a new vision for Europe.

Dacian Cioloș

+plus

The party: Partidul Libertate, Unitate și Solidaritate (PLUS)

Dacian Cioloș was the driving force behind the founding of the party PLUS (Party of Freedom, Unity and Solidarity) in December 2018. The centrist party, which represents a pro-European agenda, ran a successful campaign in the European elections the next year. In the 2020 national elections, it achieved a respectable result of over 15% in a common list with the moderate party USR (Save Romania Union).



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in Bratislava, Slovakia (March 3, 2018)

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People celebrating the Budapest Pride March in Budapest, Hungary (July 6, 2019). Momentum's leader András Fekete-Győr and MEP Katalin Cseh can be seen in the front

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Sejm, the Lower Chamber of the Polish Parliament

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