

The last such summer.

Will 'minibus Poland' leave for history?

MICHAŁ WRÓŃSKI

This bill will finish the 'minibus Poland' – stated one of my interlocutors, when in mid-July I was preparing a material on the work on the amendment to the act on the collective public transport (CPT). He has stated that – what is worth emphasising – with a real satisfaction. Instead, I was seized with doubts. Because the 'minibus Poland' are hundreds, if not thousands, of various size companies, which transport people there, where no other carrier would drop in. In places, where you could look in vain for Pendolino, Polski Bus, or even good old PKS. So the 'minibus Poland' is frequently the salvation. The fact that this sector is aware of that, and draws pretty obvious conclusions, could be a problem. Not necessarily to the passengers benefit. As a result, the free transport market changes sometimes into 'free-for-all'.

A few days before I have heard the announcement of 'minibus Poland' twilight, I had an opportunity to be in one of its strong centres – in Zakopane. When on the official town hall website I found the timetable of carriers there, for a moment I believed that something has changed and that the times, when the departure schedule was determined by the driver, evaluating whether more or less it would be worth for him to move, left for history. No, they did not.

The first morning journey was not realised. The driver counted passengers and considered that there was no business and kindly, but firmly, sent the entire group to the next bus, adding to comfort us, that the next one is 'regular' and that it will definitely go. In fact, it went, albeit I suspect that it resulted from descent occupancy (our group supplemented the group already waiting for the departure) rather than

from this 'regularity'. Three days later I tried to return to this Zakopane, having finished a rucksack tour in the Tatras. It was pretty late, so there were two options: to try to hitch or to count on catching the last bus. A bus was still waiting in the car park in Palenica Białczańska. Or perhaps I should rather say 'it was lying in ambush'. Because when some travellers took already their places the driver communicated that yes – we would go, but the fare is not PLN 10 (as usual), but PLN 20. When it has turned out, that the passengers

”

A bus was still waiting in the car park in Palenica Białczańska. Or perhaps I should rather say 'it was lying in ambush'. Because when some travellers took already their places the driver communicated that yes – we would go, but the fare is not PLN 10 (as usual), but PLN 20.

in no way would like to be treated as sheared sheep, a waiting game started. Finally it ended up with a draw, because after 45 minutes and appearance of another few late travellers, the fare went down to PLN 15. To appreciate this gesture the driver informed us that a taxi at this distance would cost PLN 100 (in case someone would still have doubts). However, I kindly report (if this is to be read by anybody from the tax office in Zakopane) that the aforementioned lesson was not accompanied by any tickets or receipts from a fiscal till to commemorate this evening trip.

I could add at least a few similar stories. The vehicles condition, the fiscal issues, or the safety regulations – the related situation in the 'minibus Poland' happens to be much varied (since certain travel from Korbiewów to Żywiec I already know that there is no such number of passengers, which could not be 'somehow' accommodated in a bus). In a nutshell – the system existed, but in no way it satisfied standards, that

could be expected by passengers in the centre of Europe, in the second decade of the 21st century.

Will the amendment to the act on CPT, introducing a model, in which the local governments will order services and determine standards to be met, cancel such pathologies? I will believe, when I see. Certainly in the urban transport, where the playing cards are theoretically dealt by the local government ordering the service, the observance of standards until quite recently looked differently.

However it is the fact, that the act makes the public transport outside urban areas a public issue, while so far it remained (contrary to the name) the domain of a private business. Making it public will allow passengers to obtain certain – even indirect, because assigned to local government authorities – influence on how this transport should look like. So far they had none. The only thing they could do, if they did not like something, was to get out, slam the door and walk.

What is important, this change does not have to mean that thousands of jobs operating today in the 'minibus Poland' will disappear. After all, the demand for their services will remain. ■

Michał Wróński | journalist
of Local Governments Portal
(www.portalsamorzadowy.pl)
e-mail: michal.wronski@portalsamorzadowy.pl

