

EUROPEANISATION AS A RATIONALE BEHIND POLITICAL CRISES. POLISH CASE

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After 1989, the process of adaptation to new western standards was multidimensional – countries of Central and Eastern Europe were downloading the *acquis communautaire*, adopting the market economy system and becoming subject to political conditionality. Expectations and hopes related to future membership were enormous, but they helped to create consensus among the political elite to undertake any and all steps necessary for meeting the conditions set by the EU. As Robert Ladrech noticed, from the early 1990s the European Union has had a profound effect on the democratization of countries of post-communist Central and Eastern Europe (2011:218) as well as on the evolution and restructuring of their political systems. Since the early years of transition, the CEE countries developed European-style parties; however their level of stability was still much lower than in the old member states (Lewis 2007:190). The „old“ cleavage conflicts started to coexist with a new topics concentrated on the „European agenda“ and reshaped political environment.

The Europeanisation studies have been developing extensively in the last 20 years and offered different approaches to the phenomenon. In political science, the study of the European Union was for a long time dominated by its subfield International Relations and the concept of European Integration. The result of this research are several well-known integration theories, for instance neo-functionalism or intergovernmentalism. Nowadays the subfield of Comparative Politics deals as well with the EU-related issues (Hix, Goetz 2001). In the article, the main point of reference is a group of studies where, the European Union, has been considered as an advanced instance of regional integration, and a natural part of national politics. This attitude implies a „hollowing out“ of a nation state or new opportunities for political actors (Mannin 2010, Rise 2003 et al.). The main goal of the article is to present the Europeanisation concept as a useful analytical tool in studying the dynamics of a political system. The author focuses on Polish party politics on a parliamentary level after 1997, and

selected examples of conflicts and crises that aroused over the „European issue“.

Conducting a mixed research of a legislative and executive processes in Polish parliament, the authors elaborates on the two folded impact of European integration. The EU pressures to adjust, mediate and implement different solutions, that have become a reason behind different types of conflicts and crises in political milieus. Moreover authors has presented examples where domestic political forces picked up and use the European issue as a tractable tool in intra-party political conflicts.

The EU issue as the bone of contention?

Choosing „the European issue“ as a research field could be, to some extent, misleading – among the candidate countries, Polish society represented a high level of approval of EU membership and a relatively high level of trust in the European institutions (Stach 2010). A strong desire to join the EU as soon as possible was also shared among the main political actors in the 90s and this attitude led to the displacement of socio-economic partisan conflict between them caused by political-cultural issues (Ladrech 2011:219).

The first years after the fall of communism were characterized by a strong „return to Europe“ sentiment, that resulted in the Polish government submitting the EU accession application in 1994. With the commencement of official negotiations and the obligation to change and adopt new law, fears evolved. The pro and anti-European dichotomy overlapped with the division between those citizens who were content and discontent with the economic and political transformation. During the referendum campaign the eurosceptic voices were increasingly louder and largely concerned with issues of national identity and sovereignty. Many scholars have proposed different classifications of attitudes towards the European Union and European integration (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2002, 2003, 2008, Zuba 2006, Kopecki and Mudde 2002); however we have found Rohrschneider and Whitefield’s scale (2006), that measures Polish party attitudes towards European integration, to be most useful in this context.

Kriza v politike – politika v kríze?

Civic Platform (PO – <i>Platforma Obywatelska</i>)	6,6
Left Democratic Alliance (SLD – <i>Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej</i>)	6,4
Law and Justice (PiS – <i>Prawo i Sprawiedliwość</i>)	4,0
Polish Peoples Party (PSL – <i>Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe</i>)	3,6
Selfdefence (S – <i>Self-defense</i>)	1,2
League of Polish Families (LPR – <i>Liga Polskich Rodzin</i>)	1

On a scale of 1 to 7, 1 represents the anti-European integration and nationalistic attitude, while 7 represents the strongly pro-European attitude. Source: R. Rohrschneider and S. Whitefield (ed.) Public Opinion, Party Competition and European Union in Post-Communist Europe.

After accession became reality, party attitudes did not change significantly, although the Left Democratic Alliance (SLD) was assessed as the most pro-European party (Paczeński 2010a: 257). Moreover the parties that contested Polish membership and negated the very project of the EU (such as the League of Polish Families and Self-defense) were decried by the public and did not manage to enter Parliament after the elections in 2007 and 2011. Last but not least, the attitude towards European integration did not result in new social cleavage (Paczeński 2010, Lewis 2011).

Nevertheless, the above-mentioned widespread acceptance of the EU membership being the main goal of Polish foreign policy after 1997 was confronted with escalating conflict within the domestic party system. Thus, the question of adjustment to EU expectations became one of the sources of internal political struggle. This process was fueled by the low durability of Polish governments. Parties initially supporting the governments in power became their opposition and this influenced the attitude towards the EU institutions as well as the Polish stance towards them.

The chart below presents the election results and coalition partners, where (in red) coalition cabinets that have been prematurely dissolved have been put in brackets.

Kriza v politike – politika v kríze?

Party name	1997	2001	2005	2007	2011
Election Action Solidarity (AWS)	33,8%				
Freedom Union (UW – Unia Wolności)	13,4%	3,1%	2,5%		
Civic Platform (PO – Platforma Obywatelska)	-	12,68%	24,14%	41,51%	39,18%
Polish Peasant Party (PSL – Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe)	7,3%	8,98%	6,96%	8,91%	8,36%
Left Democratic Alliance (SLD – Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej)	27,1%	41,04%	11,31%	13,15% ¹	8,24%
Law and Justice (PiS Prawo i Sprawiedliwość)	-	9,50%	26,99%	32,11%	29,89%
League of Polish Families (LPR – Liga Polskich Rodzin)	-	7,87%	7,97%	-	-
Self-defense (Samoobrona)	-	10,20%	11,41%	-	-
Palikots Movement (Ruch Palikota)	-	-	-	-	10,02%

Source: Polish Electoral Commission (PKW)

The adapted research schedule concentrated on the parliamentary level of politics. The main rationale behind this decision was the fact, that the need to adapt national law according to EU requirements resulted in a high frequency of „European acts“. During the third term of Polish Parliament (1997 – 2001), over 43% of all proceeded acts were related to the *acquis communitare*. After 2004, such legal acts were a systematic and constant feature in the legislative process. Therefore the mixed analysis of the legislative level's actions was expected to delivered extensive material. On the other hand, the qualitative and quantitative research could help in evaluation of the two main hypothesis that the „European issue“ on the Polish parliamentary level could serve as an illustration of the multidirectional Europeanization process as well as that multidirectional Europeanization process should be considered as a significant factor behind party politics' conflicts.

The legislative procedures during the terms preceding Polish accession (1997 – 2001, 2001 – 2005) were very intense in terms of screening as well as adopting

¹ Leftist and Democrat coalition includes Left Democratic Alliance, Democratic Party, Social democracy of Poland and Workers Union. Coalition entered Parliament, but was dissolved in 2008.

the laws. The qualitative analysis of the procedures reveals several interesting modes of Europeanisation: the declared „general consensus“ among political elites had been broken and contrary to what was expected, disagreements on the „European issue“ could be observed within the political blocs. These changing voting patterns were particularly evident in the pre-accession period.

Both mainstream and opposition parties, with their respective pro-European and eurosceptical attitudes, were guilty of manipulating the discourse on EU law adaption and mediation for their own political advantage and consequently, both often stalled the process. One meaningful shift in party cooperation was exemplified by the signing of the Pact for European Integration. This declaration was signed in 1998 by the leaders of the major political forces at that time: Jerzy Buzek (RS AWS), Bronislaw Geremek (UW), Leszek Miller (SLD), Maciej Plazynski (PO). The agreement was not supported by the Law and Justice (PiS), League of Polish Families (LPR), Self-Defense, and Peasant Parties. It was renewed in 2003, but only SLD as well as other minor parties (SKL, UP, UW, PLD, RS) supported it.

Between 1997 – 2001, a centre-right conservative party called Election Action Solidarity (Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność Prawicy, AWP) was established and together with the Freedom Union (Unia Wolności, UW) formed a centre-right government led by Jerzy Buzek. The new government continued with the economic transformation, although the heterogeneity of the coalition was very high. The fragmentation within the coalition began in 1999 and reached its breaking-point in the 2000 presidential election. After the power shift in 2001, the Social-Democrats continued this pattern of fragmentation although at that time new voices started to appear. The agrarian, populist „Self defense“ Party and the radical, right-winged, Catholic League of Polish Families were considered the main forces opposing European Union.

Despite the opposition, the process of accession into the EU was continued by the Social-Democrats started by the former Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek in 1998. The ongoing debates between Poland and the EU concerned the remaining nine chapters left in the negotiation process. Although, all these issues managed to avoid major critique and ultimately resulted in the transformation of the party stances, discord within the coalition was often induced by the Polish Peasant Party (PSL), a junior partner in the coalition, as it was undermining negotiations on agriculture. The Party's declared priority was to ensure the best possible conditions for Polish farmers. Major concerns included direct payments from the EU and the Polish budget as well as the perceived threat of land being purchased by foreigners. Therefore, PSL used a wide range of legislative tools to stress its position. The growing conflicts

within the coalition led to its demise in March 2003. The „European issue“ became the main source of contention, while in many other aspects, PSL still supported the minority government. The main coalition party (SLD) also faced internal challenges, namely that in 2004, the parliamentary club split into two factions, which inevitably led to the party’s decline in relevancy within the political sphere.

Confrontations on EU matters between the social-democratic cabinet and the opposition groups had their roots in the very first parliamentary debate. On the one hand, MPs from the previous administration pledged full support for the continuation of the integration process. Conversely those who opposed it, attacked the government and declared that they will concentrate their energies on overhauling the aforementioned ruling. The opposition group was composed of three types of stances and their respective political parties included: the pro-European Civic Platform (PO) party; the eurosceptic Law and Justice (PiS) party; and the euro-rejectionist League of Polish Families (LPR) and populist Self-defense. Despite their differing approaches to the integration process, no European initiative went unnoticed and all parties responded to them in some way. All initiatives including the mandatory government reports on the negotiation progress, conclusions from final talks (Kopehnagen 2002) as well as summaries from the parliamentary European Commission and government press conferences, even new act proposals were all subject to critique. Opposition groups differed in their strategies aimed at complicating the process of integration into the EU. The political parties LPR, Self-defense and other minor parliamentary groups made attempts to stop the integration process. The Civic Platform party (and to some extent PiS and PSL) was more focused on providing criticism that drew attention to the party itself and highlighted its opposition status in the public eye.

What’s more, the areas of interest for the opposition differed as well. The League of Polish Families continued to confront all the „pro-European“ parliamentary attempts of the government during the plenary sessions of the Polish Parliament (Sejm). LPR also confronted government representatives who were presenting e. g. current reports on the EU issues. The LPR party also frequently attacked pro-EU decisions and for example, took actions to suspend negotiations with the European Union such as calling for a referendum (a tactic partly supported by PSL). Actions undertaken by other opposition parties at the different levels of the legislative process frequently were concerned with the merits of each piece of legislation e. g. amounts paid to the EU budget by Poland, defense of the voting system adapted in Nice (beneficial for Poland), transitional periods in the labor market etc.

Furthermore, the „European issue“ served as a political weapon that targeted government and its officials involved in the negotiation processes. For example, Self-defence proposed a law (supported by PiS, LPR and other minor nationalist and conservative Catholic circles) that would prohibit government representatives to work for European Institutions. Another example is a series of speeches targeted at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that called for the dismissal of Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Danuta Hubner, a Minister for European Affairs responsible for the coordination of the negotiation process at the ministerial level. An interesting aspect of the Europeanisation process and its transformative effect could be observed after the 2003 referendum, where 77,45% Poles voted in favour of the accession. Thus, the anti-European stances of the biggest opponents, LPR and Self-defence, were expected to be changed. Parliamentary based projects of these two parties had reflected this transformation long before it became an official (electoral) party line. For example, in August 2003, after the referendum results had been announced, all parliamentary clubs jointly supported the resolution on „working on strong Polish position within the EU“. Also the acts that were designed to increase harmonization were not met with as much objection as before (Simlat 2011).

During the 2003 referendum campaign, Polish eurosceptic and euroreject parties emphasized their two areas of interest endangered by the European integration process: economy and identity (Styczyńska 2012), while other parties emphasized the importance of a „return to Europe“. Pre-accession debate about Poland's place in the EU was historically determined by „Polish integration dilemma“ – fear of being „excluded“ together with fear of being „absorbed“ (Riishoj 2008:114).

When accession became a reality, political parties needed to define themselves in the context of EU membership. Left wing parties (SLD among others) emphasized the advantages of full membership and postulated active politics, in terms of not only a policy-taker but also policy-maker. Others, such as Civic Platform and Law and Justice, were characterized by an unstable and changeable rhetoric, a combination of both high hopes and expectations in the area of the economy, as well as fears of political domination (Cebul 2009: 168).

One of the exceptions was the League of Polish Families, which still claimed that only withdrawal from the EU structures may guarantee both economic prosperity and security. The League's core argument against EU membership both before and after accession is that Poland can only develop outside the EU system, because the latter is a „neo-colonial“ project that promotes a „civili-

sation of death“ by propagating moral decay: euthanasia, abortion, drugs and sexual perversions (Sokolewicz 2003, Góra and Mach 2010).

In spite of the success of the social-democratic government in the EU accession process, economic stagnation and decline in public support, accompanied by series of corruption scandals, led to a shift of powers in the 2005 elections. Consequently, the bipolar party system changed and the new axis of power had been designated between two right-leaning parties – PO and PiS. New government formed in 2005 was characterized by a nation-oriented, euro-skeptical stance. Three parties supporting this government were: PiS, LPR and Self-defense. Under this term, Polish intra-party competition once again was based on the „European issue“. The most important were the opinions, motions, amendments and votes where the disjointed opposition found critique of foreign policy and negotiations led by the Polish government at the EU level as common ground. The different approaches toward various aspects of Polish membership and new solutions like the Constitutional Treaty influenced the level of coalition cohesion. The two Prime Ministers – Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz and Jarosław Kaczyński cooperated at the parliamentary and ministerial level with the two main parties of European opposition, although this cooperation was far from being perfect. During parliamentary debates the junior coalition partners contested the EU accomplishments on which the PiS party had congratulated itself.

The need to harmonize national legislation with the EU has repeatedly been used from 2005 till 2007 in the Polish parliament by the opposition in intra-party struggles. The legislative proceedings sharply criticized the law, which did not comply with the EU. One of the MPs argued: (...) *During the debate in the Parliament asked the government to express an unequivocal position on the compatibility of legislation with EU law and possibly by members of the coalition declared the amendments that will remove the discrepancies. (...) We can not accept the draft law, which in a moment will be vetoed by the President. The president finds that the parliament again sent him a law, which is not compatible with European Union law. The Government takes this responsibility, and the Civic Platform Parliamentary Club made a proposal to reject the bill in its current form.*² This, the biggest opposition party of that time has continued to underline its position by bringing the draft resolutions on matters of integration like funding from the state budget subsidies the EU Constitutional Treaty (2004 – 2006).

The early elections in 2007 brought to power a two-party coalition (PO, PSL) led by the Prime Minister Donald Tusk. Change in the party programmes and

² Biuletyn nr: 2297/IV: <http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/Biuletyn.nsf/wgskrn/NPR-64>.

manifestos during the 2007 parliamentary campaign was based also on the change in attitudes towards the EU and 3 years of membership experiences. Governing parties emphasized coherence between Polish national interest and European Union's interests, as well as the ability to influence European politics and decisions undertaken by European institutions.

The euroreject parties did not enter Parliament and Law and Justice (PiS) became the main opposition party (PKW 2007). This party stressed the necessity of strengthening relations with America and proposed a Europe of Nation model instead of deeper integration of the EU (PiS 2010; Podgórzanska 2007:140 – 141). As Szczerbiak and Bil (2008) noted, the European Union and European integration were much more visible in the programmes of the political parties during 2007 campaign than during earlier ones. One may find that in 2007, the Civic Platform (PO) devoted to the EU 16 paragraphs of its programme, while none in 2005 and 2001. Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) shared the same pattern (3 paragraphs in 2001 and 2005, and 11 in 2007). Eurosceptics and eurorejects were discussing the EU issues more widely in 2005 than in 2007 (Szczerbiak and Bil 2008:17). The eurosceptic Polish Peasants Party (PSL) during the accession period changed its rhetoric from the 2005 elections, claiming that only „membership in the united Europe gives Poland a chance of civilization, social and economic development“ (PSP 2007: 11). Regarding the presence of EU issues in the Polish political party programmes and manifestos one may observe a change in rhetoric. From the 2007 election campaign, postulates started to be more focused on the future shape of the EU rather than the legitimacy of membership (Grzesik-Robak 2008). Eurorejects were left behind the mainstream politics and eurosceptics started to operate within the frame of similar ideological groups in the EP³ and addressed Polish-EU relations in more pragmatic way.

A productive method of integrating opposition parties into the European project was involving them in the process, which can be illustrated by two events. First, when the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty was a priority for the EU Parliament (Sejm) passed a Resolution on EU Reform in December 2007 that was in favour of Poland ratifying the Treaty as soon as possible. The resolution expressed hope that the Government would put forward proposals at the EU level to concretize the provisions of the Treaty on EU energy solidarity and that it would be possible for Poland to withdraw from the British Protocol. The Sejm

³ Eurosceptic and euroreject arguments are present in discourse of several small political parties. Polish branch of Libertas may serve as an example. In the 2009 EP elections, some of former League of Polish Families members were active in this project, but gaining 1,4 % of votes did not result in EP mandates.

also expressed the belief that the adoption of the Treaty would contribute to the strengthening of the role of national parliaments in the EU and their greater involvement in national debates on European issue. In April 2008, the Sejm agreed to ratify the Treaty. The only party contesting the Resolution was Law and Justice (PiS), the biggest opposition of that time. The cooperation of the PiS party and the president Lech Kaczyński (former PiS member) resulted in increased tension in the Parliament and a series of resolutions calling on the President of the Republic of Poland to ratify the Treaty.

Secondly, since 1997 the potential to chair the European Affairs Committees in the Polish Parliament, was an attractive endeavor for the political parties and their ambition to do so motivated cooperation between the coalition and opposition. Well-known and influential members of various parliamentary caucuses sat on the committees. The participation in the committee provided opposition parties insight into the integration process and government's actions, while enabling the chairs of the committee to take control over a substantive part of legislation concerned with EU issues. Participation in this committee became particularly important for the MPs after 2009. Following specific changes to EU law, the Commission gained in power. These changes were mainly related to the increased influence the above-mentioned committees could have on the Council of Ministers. The law regulated cooperation between the Parliament and ruling government, in areas such as: European Union law, the implementation of EU law and potential candidates for certain positions in the European Union's institutions. It is composed of a maximum of 46 deputies that proportionally represent those parliamentary clubs and alliances that consist of at least 15 members.

Also on the level of policy, the Committee for European Integration was the main administrative body of government dealing with programming and coordinating of policies related to Poland's integration into the European Union; adjusting Poland to European standards; as well as coordinating the activities of state administration concerned with foreign aid. This institution significantly influenced Europeanisation process, which is proved by the fact that the committee has been led by many successive Prime Ministers and has a great influence on relations between governments and deputies. With regard to this last statement, one may find as an example the series of votes of non-confidence for the Ministers of that Committee. These votes were considered a symbolic expression of disagreement to the governments' European Policy.

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