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## **Domestic Discourses on European Integration in Poland Before and After 2004: Ideology, Nationalism, and Party Competition**

by

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### **Abstract**

The topic of this paper is the significance of EU issues in domestic political discourses in Central Europe before and after EU enlargement. It focuses in particular on Poland. Poland is a critical case, not only because it is the largest of the new EU member states, but also because it is characterized by what presents itself as an intriguing paradox: although levels of support for EU membership among the population have generally been high, there has been, since the early 2000s, a growing divergence of views on EU membership among political mobilizers. Moreover, the rise of anti-EU rhetoric appears to coincide with the resurgence of nationalist politics. In 2005, a conservative nationalist party called Law and Justice (PiS) won the elections with a moderately Euroskeptic program and formed a government with two radical anti-EU parties in April 2006. Positions on Europe were also a topic in the 2007 elections that led to the defeat of the incumbent government parties. This paper asks two questions: What are the domestic political uses of anti-EU discourse for self-described centrist parties such as Law and Justice (PiS)? And what is the connection between anti-EU discourse and nationalism? The paper argues that domestic views on European integration in Poland are to be understood as the expression of a changing balance between a deeply held conviction and a strategic position related to the context of domestic political competition. It argues that, since 2001, centrist political actors have mainly used anti-EU rhetoric to serve purposes that relate to the domain of domestic political competition. They could deemphasize their deep normative commitment to European integration because EU membership had already been secured. Finally, the paper shows how domestic political competitors in Poland have intentionally conflated pro- and anti-EU rhetoric with a discussion on commitments to the “truthful” representation of the nation.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

During almost the entire decade of the 1990s the most successful mainstream political actors in Poland had a favorable view of the European integration process and were generally supportive of the idea that the country needed to become a member of the EU as soon as possible. During the 1995 campaign for the presidency, for example, Lech Wałęsa, Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Lech Kaczyński all mentioned EU membership as a crucial foreign policy goal even though they represented very different political camps and ideological preferences (party programs in Słodkowska 2003). In parliamentary elections, too, post-Communist left-wing politicians, post-Solidarity moral conservatives as well as pro-business neo-liberals all argued in favor of EU accession. In the run-up to the parliamentary elections of 1997, for example, we find positive references to the EU in electoral programs of the incumbent Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) (Słodkowska and Dolbakowska 2004:115-135), its main (and successful) conservative contender Solidarity Election Action (AWS) (Słodkowska and Dolbakowska 2004: 99-102), and all the smaller parties that could secure parliamentary representation. Even the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) and the nationalist Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland (ROP) included viewpoints suggesting that progress towards EU accession was basically self-evident.

To be sure, one of the notable things in the campaign material of the 1990s is that parties and candidates reserved very little space to discuss and explain the positive value of EU accession. Their endorsement of the EU was sometimes expressed as an explicit part of their foreign policy program, but almost as often it was a more or less tacit assumption, hidden in general remarks made about policymaking in Poland and the state of the country. Yet the unobtrusiveness of the subject in the electoral campaigning of that time does not need to be an indication of its perceived unimportance. The fact that EU membership was apparently not considered a topic that needed further elaboration may even perhaps serve as evidence of its pervasiveness as a basic, underlying policy preference among a wide range of political actors.

The twenty-first century, however, has, so far, seen a very different political discussion on this topic. Since the early 2000s, a number of political parties have given more prominence to standpoints that are critical of the EU. Radical anti-EU voices gained unprecedented salience as two extremist parties achieved parliamentary representation in 2001. But even more important was a perceptual change in the discourse on European affairs within parties that sought to be mainstream catch-all parties. In its 2005 campaign Law and Justice (PiS), the party of Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński, argued that further European integration fostered centralizing tendencies that would threaten Polish identity (PiS Program 2005: 9). Law and Justice (PiS) became successful as a party with a program that combined conservative Catholicism, nationalism, distrust of the uncontrolled free market, anti-corruption and strict lustration. In 2006, the party formed a government with the two radical parties in parliament: Samoobrona (Self-defense), the outrageous anti-establishment party of Andrzej Lepper mainly known for its roadblocks against capitalism, its populist strategies towards farmers and its view of European integration as catastrophic for Polish agriculture, and the League of Polish Families (LPR), a fringe party representing the radically nationalist, conservative and extreme Catholic right. The anti-EU image of the Law and Justice-led government attracted increased international attention when, in the context of the June 2007 Summit dealing with the constitutional treaty prime minister, Jarosław Kaczyński wielded references to German aggression against Poland in the Second World War in an attempt to obstruct the new EU “double majority” voting system in the Council, a tactical gesture that was widely interpreted as anti-European.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This paper was first presented at the conference “The European Union after Enlargement: Policies and Politics in a New Context,” European Union Center of Excellence, University of Washington, Seattle, May 1-3, 2008. I thank the participants in this conference for their comments and suggestions. This paper represents work in progress and forms a part of a larger research project on resurgent nationalism in contemporary Poland. I welcome any comments and thoughts.

<sup>2</sup>Kaczyński argued that Poland would have had a much larger population if the Germans had not attacked the country. The double majority voting formula is based on population size (55 percent of member states representing 65 percent of the EU population) and reduces Poland’s voting clout acquired in the Nice Treaty. Poland opposed the new regulation and, in the context of the negotiations of the Lisbon Treaty in October 2007, managed to postpone its application until 2014. An additional transition period until 2017 is foreseen. After that date extra provisions (known as the the Ioannina

In addition, the self-described pro-EU contenders of Law and Justice at the parliamentary elections of 2005 and 2007 sometimes relied on a discourse that was far more outspoken in its criticism of the EU than anything that was seen during the 1990s. In 2003, the neo-liberal and pro-business party Civic Platform (PO) sought to capitalize on the inconsistencies in Law and Justice's views on Europe by developing a more nationalist and patriotic position on the EU, including its own defense of the Nice voting provisions (Szczerbiak 2007: 6). Although the Civic Platform did not want to be seen as a Euroskeptic party, its campaign in 2005 at least did not seek a radical alteration of Poland's position as a critical and "awkward partner" (Grabbe 2004) in the EU.

Significantly, opinion surveys suggest that such an increasing EU criticism within Polish domestic political party campaigning since 2000 has not been accompanied by growing levels of Euroskepticism among the broader public (Szczerbiak 2007). In other words, the surge of political Euroskepticism is probably not socially rooted. Euroskeptic parties received more votes in 2001 and in 2005, but in both elections the overall turnout was extremely low, indicating that EU-criticism was not a particularly strong element in helping bringing people to the polls. In the run-up to the 2003 referendum on EU accession, the worry of the government was not that not enough people would be in favor of accession, but rather that the turnout would be too low to make the result of the referendum valid (in the end turnout was 58.85 percent of the eligible voters; 77.45 percent voted in favor and 22.55 percent against accepting accession) (Jasiewicz and Jasiewicz-Betkiewicz 2004: 1111).

The questions that lie at the heart of this paper are: What are the domestic political uses of anti-EU discourse for self-described centrist parties such as Law and Justice (PiS)? And, since there seems to be some sort of correlation between the two phenomena, what is the connection between anti-EU discourse and nationalism?

My argument is twofold. First, I argue that domestic views on European integration in Poland are to be understood as the expression of a changing balance between a deeply held conviction and a strategic position related to the context of domestic political competition. I argue that, since 2001, centrist political actors have mainly used anti-EU rhetoric to serve purposes that relate to the domain of domestic political competition. They could focus on such short-term strategic goals (and deemphasize their deep normative commitment to European integration) because, by that time, EU membership had been more or less secured. The Euroskeptic discourses that have gained increased prominence in Poland since 2001 should, therefore, not be seen as the reflection of a growing political dissatisfaction with the entire European integration project, but as the by-product of a domestically oriented rhetorical struggle between mainstream political contenders in a changing and unstable party system in which left- and right-wing positions are still rather unspecified.

Second, since "left" and "right" have remained unspecified categories in Polish politics, the rhetorical struggle about European integration has been deliberately conflated with discussions that revolved around other dividing categorizations. A number of parties, most prominently Law and Justice (PiS), have attempted to make national identity (expressed in a defense of traditional values, national material interest, and strict vetting procedures) a central political dividing line. Ideas about EU membership and the country's position within the EU have been made part of this new political discourse of nationhood. Some politicians have hoped to use it in order to carve out a clear position for themselves against their political opponents.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, it offers some context and background through a brief exploration of the existing literature on the connection between ideological commitments and party positions on European integration in the western part of the EU. Second, it compares party positions on EU integration in Poland before and after the accession of 2004 and shows how these positions have increasingly been used within the domain of domestic political competition. The empirical analysis is based on party programs and

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clause) will make it easier for smaller countries to block a decision. On April 2, 2008, the Polish parliament ratified the Lisbon Treaty.

public party positions. Quotes in this paper come from this primary material and are my translations.<sup>3</sup> Third, it explores the extent to which there is an overlap between certain views on European integration and particular positions in the debate on nationhood politics in Poland.

## 1. Party positions on European integration in the Western part of the EU

Before going deeper into the Polish case, it is useful to explore the broader literature dealing with the topic. What have researchers said about the political uses of anti-EU discourse in Western Europe? And is there in Western Europe a connection between nationalism and anti-EU rhetoric?

With regard to the first question, most of the research concludes that there is an ideological basis for anti- and pro-EU standpoints. Aspinwall, for example, found that, in the western part of the EU, “the location of parties and governments in a Left–Right space serves as a good independent explanation of preferences on integration” (Aspinwall 2002: 82). Other research roughly points to the same conclusions (see, e.g., Marks and Hooghe 2006). Centrist parties are generally in favor of European integration; the architects of European integration have usually been among them, and they generally seem to be inclined to agree with a reduction of national state power within the European context. Extreme parties, on the other hand, both those on the right and the left of the political spectrum, tend to be critical of European integration and in some cases even seek to reverse the integration process.

Moving away from the purely economic left-right dimension, one might ask if nationalism, both in its more radical and moderate forms, is also a good indicator of a party’s position on European integration in Western Europe. That certainly seems to be the case with radical parties. Not only because of their radical position on a left-right ideological spectrum do they oppose Europe, but also because their narrative of Europe fits within the radical master frame that these parties use: the frame that considers the protection of the imagined unity of the nation as a predominant policy option. On the basis of expert surveys, Marks and Hooghe (2006) conclude that in Western Europe there is a strong correlation between a political party’s adherence to traditional, authoritarian and nationalist values and its view on European integration. Often anti-immigrant parties are anti-European parties and oppose European integration for the same reason that they oppose immigration: because it regards growth in the number of foreigners as a threat to the national community.

Yet, while anti-EU views are most salient in the case of extreme nationalist parties, there seems more ambivalence when nationalist parties are less radical. When it concerns more centrist parties, nationalism in Western Europe does not seem to be such a clear predictor of party positions on European integration. Moderate right- or left-wing parties, with a slight tendency towards traditional, authoritarian and nationalist values are not always that outspokenly critical of the European integration project. Regionalist and nationalist minority movements, for example, may even be very much in favor of the European integration project, at least when they do not hold an extreme position on immigrants. The Flemish nationalist party in Belgium (the New Flemish Alliance, N-VA), to name just one striking example, argues against the existence of Belgium as a state by relying on the classical nationalist argument that “their” nation (the Flemish nation) is a more “natural” entity with objectively knowable borders that should coincide with an independent Flemish state. But their nationalism does not stand in the way of a relatively stark pro-EU attitude, since they believe that a certain form of European integration could be beneficial in bringing about Flemish independence. These Flemish nationalists have traditionally relied on culturalist reasoning to support particular aspects of the European integration project. For example, they welcomed the monetary union not because of any belief in its intrinsic value for the European economy but because of their belief that it would protect Flanders (not Belgium) against the risks of globalization (Beyers and Kerremans 2001).

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<sup>3</sup>I have used the party campaign material collected by the Instytut Studiów Politycznych of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. I relied on the Institute’s archives in Warsaw and on the following Institute publications: Paszkiewicz (1996), Skłodowska (2001a), Skłodowska (2001b), Skłodowska (2003), Skłodowska and Dolbakowska (2002), Skłodowska and Dolbakowska (2004), and Skłodowska and Dolbakowska (2006). I also thank the Institute for hosting me for desk research in their archive in the late spring of 2007.

According to Keating (2004), European integration has provided a new discursive space within which to project nationality claims. For that reason, one can find other political parties across Western Europe emphasizing a greater form of independence within an international context that has fundamentally changed the nature of the national state. These “counter-state nationalists,” as Brubaker calls them (Brubaker 1999) may have held diverse views on how intergovernmental or supranational the EU should become, but they have in general been supportive of the European integration project because it is seen as leading to a diminishing of state control over regions and an increased externalization of competences and functions that were previously centralized at the level of the state. Even traditional radicalized left-wing opponents of European integration among the nationalist regionalists in Western Europe, such as the Galician and the Breton movements, have come to see the EU in a more favorable light thanks to a gradual shift of the emphasis in the European integration discourse towards more social solidarity (Keating 2004: 371).

In sum, the picture in Western Europe is that radical parties tend to be critical of EU integration, among them radical nationalists. Moderate counter-state nationalists, on the other hand, are often pro-European, as are minority nationalists.

In postcommunist Central Europe the picture is roughly similar, but not entirely. What *is* similar is that radical parties on the left and the right of the economic ideological perspective tend to be against European integration. Moreover, as in Western Europe, radical nationalists, both those who seek to support the existing borders of the state and those who want to homogenize the putative national population or “protect” that population from growing ethnic heterogeneity, are very often suspicious of any efforts towards European integration. And particular regional nationalists in Central Europe, such as the Silesians, or national minority movements, such as the Hungarians outside of Hungary, may have expressed themselves politically in favor of the European integration project in the hope that it will improve their position as minority groups.

What seems different in Central Europe, however, is that there have been a number of important self-described centrist parties that make use of nationalist arguments and take a critical and self-protective view in matters of European integration, but do not completely reject the European integration project in the same way radical parties would do. In Poland, the party that would fit such a description is the Law and Justice (PiS) party. At some points in time, the Civic Platform (PO) – although it has not used nationalist arguments in the same way Law and Justice has done – may have fallen into that category, too. Parties in other countries that at certain points in time would have fit that description would be the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) in the Czech Republic and the Christian Democratic Party (KDH) in Slovakia.

How should we interpret this group of nationalist-oriented centrist parties? There is some discussion in the literature about whether they are *really* opponents of the EU or whether their opposition is rather just an empty political gesture. Should their position on the EU be seen as a deeply held and ideologically based view, or is it rather the reflection of a short term political strategy?

Their position is comprehensible, I argue, when we pay greater attention to the way these parties themselves have framed their EU-related standpoints. I believe their EU-related arguments communicate different things at the same time and that by untangling those things we might get a better understanding of what the dynamics of their EU criticism precisely are. It seems to me that in analyzing party positions on EU matters within the party programs of these parties we have to be aware of two important properties of these positions.

First, we might get a better understanding of the mechanism at work when we consider EU-related opinions in the party programs as narratives that not always relate to the same dimension of European integration. Within these narratives a distinction should be made between those that talk about EU integration as a *normative goal* and those that see EU integration as a *political practice*.

Second, their positions become more comprehensible if we realize that EU-related arguments can be used in order to perform different functions. They might be used to communicate a party ideology, but they may simultaneously be used to carve out a position in the domestic political configuration. Depending on the

needs created by particular domestic circumstances, parties might find it more useful to emphasize either the normative or the pragmatic dimension of EU integration.

If seen in this perspective, EU-related arguments and domestic party positions on European integration will be more accurately understood as the result of a changing balance between a deeply held conviction and a strategic position related to the context of domestic political competition. Parties might have similar views on goal and practice (either negative or positive), or they may have different views on these two dimensions. They might choose to emphasize one or the other, but they always hold views on both dimensions at the same time.

When there is a difference, and when they emphasize the negative consequences of EU integration as a political practice (and deemphasize the normative dimension), then, my hypothesis is, they usually do so for reasons related to short-term strategy, not to the underlying ideology of their party. They will do so more easily when there is certainty about the long-term prospects of European integration because then the potential risk is lower that a short-term strategic standpoint that is critical of EU integration will also be understood as a complete rejection of the EU project.

Since the time that the Central European countries have been able to guarantee membership, centrist parties that are in principle not against EU integration as a normative goal have increasingly tended to emphasize arguments that are related to (and critical of) the political practice of European integration.

In the remainder of this paper I show that this way of reading the empirical material available in Poland clarifies a number of recent developments in party positioning on EU integration.

## 2. European integration in Polish party narratives before and after 2004

Let me start with an overview of the narratives on European integration as they have been told in party programs in the run-up to the five latest parliamentary elections in Poland. Because of its particular significance, I have also included the campaigns that political parties organized in the run-up to the 2003 referendum on EU accession. What dimension of European integration have parties chosen to focus on when they presented the matter to their potential voters? The following table shows, for each of these election years, which political parties have included which kind of EU-related arguments in their central party program.

**Table 1: EU-related arguments in central party programs**

Election year	The normative value of European integration		The political practice of European integration	
	Parties arguing in support of	Parties that are critical of	Parties arguing in support of	Parties that are critical of
1993	PSL, UD, UP, KPN		SLD, PSL, UD	UP, Ojczyzna, KPN
1997	UP, Blok dla Polski, AWS, UW, ROP, UPR, SLD		SLD, PSL	Blok dla Polski, AWS, PSL
2001		LPR	SLD, UW, PSL,	PSL, PO, PiS, LPR
2003	PO, PiS	LPR	PSL, SLD	Samoobrona, PSL, PiS, UP
2005		LPR	SLD	PSL, LPR, PiS
2007	PO, LiD		PO, LiD	PiS, PSL

**Notes:**

(1) This interpretation is based on my reading of the party programs collected by the Instytut Studiów Politycznych (see footnote 2). For the October 2007 election I used the programs as available through the websites of the various parties.

(2) An alphabetical list of abbreviations is included as an appendix at the end of the paper.

Before going further I have to point out that this table can only be a crude indicator of what Polish political parties have highlighted in their narratives about European integration. There are a number of important caveats. For example, presented here are only those parties that entered into parliament, which, of course, is somewhat of a reduction especially for those elections that left a great number of parties outside parliament (e.g., in 1993). Moreover, the party material that has been used forms only a part of the entire communication that parties have set up with their potential voters. This mapping exercise does not take into account opinions voiced by individual politicians during interviews and debates in the public media. Parties that did not express any opinion on EU-related matters in their manifestos (e.g. the KPEiR [Alliance of Retirees and Pensioners] in 1993) were obviously not included, although individual politicians might have had a particular opinion on European integration that they perhaps voiced elsewhere. This is also the case for parties that are widely known to be critical of the EU. In 2001, Self-Defense (Samoobrona), for example, did not include any negative statements on the EU in its program, basically because the whole program simply ignored the existence of the EU. Moreover, this map says nothing about how radical or how moderate statements about the EU are; it only attempts to trace the *kinds* of arguments that have been made.

All of this taken into account, however, it seems to me that this overview may still catch some important trends since it relies on the material that has been approved by parties (and not simply on the personal convictions of an individual politician) and gives an idea of where the emphasis lies in the narratives of parties that have had some success in elections. Moreover, I am interested not in analyzing all parties here, but mainly in contextualizing the EU rhetoric of the more recent centrist parties, both those who are more or less pro-European such as the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), the left-wing umbrella group Left and Democrats (LiD) and Civic Platform (PO), and those that have become increasingly known as outspoken critics of EU integration, such as the Solidarity Election Action (AWS, later Solidarity Election Action of the Right, AWSP) and, most crucially, Law and Justice (PiS).

#### *Focus on European integration as a norm: a consensus in the 1990s*

If one examines the views on European integration in Polish party programs since 1993, one finds that throughout the 1990s most major mainstream political parties have emphasized their will to participate in the European integration project. Although there is, even as early as 1993, discussion about whether the political practice of European integration is ideal and whether Poland should agree with the course taken, there seems to be, on a deeper level, agreement on the normative value of European integration. And many parties seem to be inclined to highlight this conviction in their party programs. The most pro-European parties in the first half of the 1990s argued that Poland needed to become a member of the European Union “as soon as possible” (as the Freedom Union [UW] formulated the matter in 1995; Paszkiewicz 1996: 312). Others were more hesitant about the timing and the modalities, but still accepted the principle. Parties that sounded critical of the process of enlargement and the benefits Poland might have from a closer association with the EU apparently still wanted to emphasize that the underlying principle was good. This preference was usually framed as part of a larger argument about the “return” of Poland to Europe after the cold war and the unification of the continent.

Poland’s culture and national economy were often portrayed as inextricably bound up with European culture and economy. There were almost no parties, and certainly no mainstream parties, that explicitly opposed the underlying principle. Variation is to be found here in the degree to which the parties emphasize either cultural or economic dimensions. According to the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) in 1993, Poland had “the particular, moral right to seek [economic] support from the side of Europe” (Skłodowska 2001: 176). The Democratic Union (UD) argued in that year that being part of the European integration process was “the logical consequence of our argument that it is our choice to belong to the world of democracy, peace and economic progress” (Skłodowska 2001: 297). Other parties linked the normative standpoint with a cultural idea. The Electoral Action Solidarity (AWS) argued that European accession was an economically useful response to a cultural given: “we will help to create the unity of the continent based on the Christian roots of our civilization” (Skłodowska and Dolbakowska 2004: 107).

Underlying such cultural pronouncements was, of course, hardly hidden, a discourse about geopolitics. Poland's eagerness to join the EU has been framed in a context that starts from the assumption that a Europe that includes the whole of "Eastern" Europe will remain a fiction, because there is still and will be a crucial political dividing line between the West and the East of the continent. As Hagen writes "In many respects, the East–West dichotomy has continued to serve as Europe's dominant geographical paradigm despite the end of the Cold War, although important shifts and debates over new lines of demarcation and definition are underway" (Hagen 2003: 509). In the 1990s, Polish parties overwhelmingly sought to shift the border of Eastern Europe to the East in order to present themselves as part of the West. All main contenders in all the parliamentary elections between 1991 and 2001 linked issues of international policy with the allegedly precarious position of Poland between two powerful countries, Germany and Russia. And Polish independence was largely seen as "independence from Russia." In this way, European Union membership was seen as something that could guarantee such a form of independence.

All of this did not preclude a certain hesitance about the concrete direction of the European integration process. The Solidarity Election Action (AWS) argued in 1997 that, in terms of political practice, they preferred to be part of a Europe that would not be supranational but rather intergovernmental in the Gaullist tradition of "l'Europe des Patries" ("Europa Ojczyzn") (Ślodkowska and Dołbakowska 2004: 107). But the dominance of the cultural, economic and geopolitical frame had a strong effect on the position of those parties that sought a more anti-European course. Even rabid nationalists could not formulate a basic objection against the European unification project without condemning themselves to the margins of the political spectrum. A lot of radical-oriented nationalist parties in the 1990s, therefore, did not formulate a radical anti-EU stance. When they formulated criticism of the EU project, they framed those arguments as "euro-realist" arguments or arguments that would not go against the basic assumption that the inclusion of Poland in Europe is essentially a good thing (Neumayer 2008: 142). Self-defense (Samoobrona), for example, which would become known as the most virulent anti-EU party at the end of the decade, was in the first half of the 1990s still making proposals based on the viewpoint that, as the party formulated it, there is "a valid need for European integration" (Paszkievicz 1996: 91).

Also, when nationalist arguments were used to oppose to the arguments of the pro-market reform parties in Poland, they did not contain strong overtones of anti-Europeanism. When the Confederation of an Independent Poland (KPN) in the elections of 1993 issued an attack on the Balcerowicz shock-therapy privatization policy, it did so within a nationalist framework. Its program material promised to effectuate "the replacement of the currently implemented anti-national and anti-Polish economic model of the Balcerowicz plan." At the same time, such a "nationalization" of economic reform did not lead the party to disengage from European economic reforms. In its 1992 program, the party argued that "Poland, as a country between East and West, has weighty obligations in the new organizations of our region and in helping to create a unified Europe of nations from the Atlantic to the Asian Sea" (Paszkievicz 1996: 53).

#### *Focus on the practice of integration in the run-up to the accession and after 2004*

When EU membership became a tangible and realistic political goal for Poland, political mobilizers became less reticent about their criticism of the European integration process. In contrast to earlier periods, there were now important radical parties that did not shy away from framing their own view as being against European unification *in principle*. Moreover, centrist parties that were critical of certain elements in the practice of the European integration process did not emphasize as much the fact that they were still supporting the normative validity of the European integration project.

Among center-oriented parties, this new self-assured and openly self-reflective anti-EU discourse now became mainly the hallmark of the post-Solidarity political groupings that had formed the main partner of the 1997 government. They were never a real threat to the EU accession process. Solidarity Election Action (AWS) was a grouping of parties that had been able to cooperate in order to defeat the Social Democrats of the SLD, but in reality it remained a rather unruly political association that, after three years of tension with its coalition partner in government, the more progressive and pro-Europe oriented Freedom Union (UW), saw itself



forced to lead a minority government until the elections of 2001. In the run-up to these elections, several parties quit the Solidarity Election Action (AWS) and formed new coalitions and alliances. Among one of those new conservative political forces was Law and Justice (PiS) of the twin brothers Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński, who tried to profit from their image as “owners” of the “real” heritage of the Solidarity movement as well as their reputation of being strict on justice matters and moral issues.

The 2001 program documents of Law and Justice (PiS) reveal a perceptible change in the centrist discourse on EU membership. Although the party admitted that it did not seek to withdraw from the process, it did voice, more than any centrist party before it, severe criticism of the way in which the negotiations were led and, quite significantly, it suggested that membership was not supported by the population and therefore could produce “fatal” consequences:

Today, our accession to the EU poses an immense problem. Precisely this goal, of all the matters that we have to undertake in the international arena, is the most important as well as the most controversial one. The decision to enter the Union must be a decision taken by the people in a referendum. In order to make that referendum meaningful, the Poles have to be presented a credible document that describes all the side effects of entering the Union, both the gains and the losses. Without such a document the decision will be taken blindly, and later, when there will be difficulties, it may be questioned by the majority, with all the ensuing fatal consequences. (Słodkowska 2002: 94-95)

These were the words of warning issued by a party that considered itself to be in the conservative mainstream of the political spectrum. If this position is not directly anti-EU, it did create the possibility of becoming associated with parties that were more outspoken in their fundamental criticism of European integration, such as the League of Polish Families (LPR). The League of Polish Families, which registered as a new party in April 2001 and gathered several radically conservative groups, argued in its first official election material the following:

We stand today before this question: will we realize Polish programs or also programs that are foreign to Poland? In consequence – will we have work, and will we eat Polish bread, and will we live in a Polish house? Or will we also, in the context of the European Union or another contemporary tower of Babel, import unemployment, eat foreign bread and live on the streets? We choose for an independent and sovereign Poland. (Słodkowska 2002: 243)

In this quote, the League of Polish Families (LPR) used the metaphors of the Babel tower and the Polish bread in order to reinforce the old theme of the Polish independence struggle. In the 1990s “independence” meant “free from Russia” and accession to the EU was seen as a way to guarantee this freedom. In the above quote, EU membership is portrayed as a threat to Polish independence. A bleak view of the job market and the economy is invoked within this frame without it being connected to any discussion about the reality of the European economy. The party argues that EU membership entails a crucial loss for Poland, and it finds it unnecessary to provide any evidence for the claim that accession will make unemployment soar.

Parties that were aiming more at a mainstream electorate, such as Law and Justice, did not go as far as LPR in its condemnation of the European integration project, but the possibility for some sort of connection between the two parties on this level was not excluded. Law and Justice remained silent enough on whether they condemned the EU in principle that they made an association thinkable with those who did condemn it.

All of this points, it seems to me, to the increasing strategic utility of being critical of the European integration project. A party like Law and Justice (PiS) could deemphasize its deeper belief in the value of European integration and try to capture that part of the electorate that was represented by the fundamental anti-Europeans of the League of Polish Families (LPR). There are a number of specific circumstances that made anti-EU arguments specifically useful for Law and Justice (PiS) in the period between 2001 and 2005.

First, the party's turn to EU criticism came right at the moment of a failed conservative government and at the eve of the successful return of the post-communist social democrats to power. The pro-European SLD won the elections of 2001 overwhelmingly. Their candidate, Aleksander Kwaśniewski had already won the presidency a year earlier. And it was the prime minister of an SLD-led government, Leszek Miller, who negotiated Poland's accession into the EU at the Copenhagen Summit in December 2002. Since the SLD had negotiated the accession, all the opposition's rhetorical energy could go to the idea that the deal was badly negotiated. Since the basic decision about membership had been taken, moderate parties gained a position in which they more safely and more confidently could go into the direction of radical Euroskepticism. There was for anti-SDL opposition parties no need at that point anymore to be careful with criticism or to conceal it as "Euro-realism". Since the SLD had already secured membership for Poland, the costs for voicing EU-critical remarks would not be that a loss of membership. The normative argumentation, linked with a cultural, geopolitical or economic "return to Europe" stance, was abandoned by almost all moderate parties and a more pragmatic discussion about the positive and negative sides of this particular EU-accession deal emerged.

Second, the connection between anti-EU rhetoric and anti-SDL opposition was reinforced by the fact that the SLD's record on domestic and foreign policy proved to be largely unsuccessful. Although the government had successfully negotiated the country's accession to the EU, it could not remedy problems of unemployment (in 2002, the domestic unemployment rate rose to 18.1 percent) (Towalski 2003). Moreover, in the course of 2002 and 2003, SLD politicians were increasingly mentioned in the context of bribery scandals, a fact that severely marred the reputation and the popular base of the party. One important case, soon known as the "Rywin affair," reached newspaper headlines as early as 2003.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the position of prime minister Leszek Miller was damaged because of his implication in another infamous scandal, the Orlen affair.<sup>5</sup> These scandals soon came to symbolize the downfall of the entire left in Poland.

All of this played a significant role in the June 2003 referendum for EU accession, which was held in circumstances in which almost all opposition parties in parliament voiced some form of criticism of the membership process. Apart from the main governing party, the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), only the pro-business Civic Platform (PO) mobilized in favor of accession.

On May 2, 2004, just one day after Poland's accession to the EU, Leszek Miller resigned from his position as prime minister, opening the way for what would be a one-year SLD-led government under the premiership of Marek Belka, an ex-finance minister whose candidacy even within the SLD was seen as controversial and certainly among the group of former SLD politicians who had established a new party called *Socjaldemokracja Polska* (Polish Social Democracy, SdPI). The poor result of the SdPI in the elections for the European parliament in June 2004, however, made SdPI deputies continue to support the SLD-led cabinet for the time being in order to avoid downright defeat in early Sejm elections. When, in the autumn of 2005, Sejm elections were eventually held, they did, as expected, turn into a disaster for the SLD as well as the SdPI.

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<sup>4</sup>In December 2002, Lew Rywin, a film producer, had approached the company Agora, the publisher of Poland's liberal newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* and, suggesting that he represented people well-placed in government, requested a bribe in return for pushing through adjustments in a draft bill on electronic media that would be favorable to the publisher. The parliamentary commission set up to investigate this affair over the course of 2003 revealed an image of the SLD as "arrogant, cynical and morally corrupt" (Kochanowicz 2007: 8) and led to a division in the party. Politicians from the SLD establishment were also named in corruption scandals about money laundering in the gambling industry and involvement in organized crime (Jasiewicz and Jasiewicz-Betkiewicz 2003).

<sup>5</sup>Miller was accused of having arranged, in 2002, the dismissal of the chief executive of the oil refiner and petroleum retailer PKN Orlen (Polski Koncern Naftowy Orlen), one of Poland's largest companies. According to a former state treasury minister in the government, Miller had sought to replace the dismissed CEO with someone favorable to the government (Dudek 2005: 470). In this case, too, a special parliamentary investigation commission was set up. The commission energetically examined corruption allegations and unearthed dubious connections between politics, industry and the secret services; but it also created a forum for politically inspired accusations and counteraccusations (Jasiewicz and Jasiewicz-Betkiewicz 2004: 1153).

## European integration, party competition and nationalist mobilization

What is the relationship between EU criticism and nationalism in Poland? As I have shown, there is no intrinsic link between the two phenomena. In the 1990s there were political actors who argued that EU membership was to serve as a guarantee for independence, which is, of course, the ultimate nationalist concern. In the 2000s, however, a number of developments reinforced the connection between nationalism and euro-critical political stances.

One element in this is the continuing lack of clarity about what constitutes the “left” and what the “right.” Since 2001, Law and Justice (PiS), which combines ideas that can be seen as left- and right-wing, has attempted to make another political division more central to the debate. During the 2005 campaign it was clear that the focus of competition would be between two post-Solidarność groups, the Law and Justice party (PiS) and the Civic Platform (PO). In order to highlight the differences between these two catch-all parties, Law and Justice (PiS) made the choice to frame its own policy preferences as matters of “national interest.” It did so in the first place by reframing its stance against the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). The party did not simply argue that the implosion of the SLD was caused by corruption in that party, it also argued that corruption was a symptom of a wider problem: the refusal to break with the communist past and the refusal to defend the Polish nation against foreign (Russian) interests. Law and Justice reframed its protest against corruption as a fundamental criticism of all self-described left-wing politics. The party argued that corruption illustrated the theory that the Polish left-wing politicians were still deeply implicated in a well-defined network of people with roots in the communist establishment.

In an interview conducted in April 2004, Jaroslaw Kaczyński offered a succinct demonstration of how anti-corruption, opposition against left-wing political parties, ideological conservatism, and national belonging could be discursively constructed as deeply intertwined phenomena. When asked whether without Law and Justice the battle against corruption would become impossible Lech Kaczyński answered:

Not only the battle with corruption. It is about the destruction of countless pathological power structures, and also about deep state reform, which encompasses ideological and moral foundations. One also has to reveal the entire evilness of the last fifteen years; one has to refer, in the process of building a new state, not to abstractions, but to the real, increasingly malfunctioning moral and ideological convictions among Poles, particularly convictions related to feelings of national belonging. (Kurksi 2004)

By constructing a tight association between the narrative of anti-corruption and the promotion of “national” values, the Law and Justice (PiS) campaign effectively accused left-wing politicians of national betrayal. Their adherence to the left was simply interpreted as a service to foreign powers. This Manichaeian conception of the political reality was reinforced by insinuating sentences in the program documents, such as: “The Poles have the right to know who served Moscow, and who fought for an independent Fatherland. Who was an executioner, and who was a victim” (PiS program 2005: 18).

Another element that reinforces the connection between nationalism and EU criticism are the attempts of centrists and radical politicians to “nationalize” moral issues. Any development coming from outside Poland was framed as potentially threatening to the traditional moral order of Poland. Underlying the mobilization campaigns of Law and Justice (PiS) was a political understanding of the Polish nation that reduced it to a morally homogenous nation under the constant threat of anti-Polish, anti-religious and, therefore, immoral enemies. Mainly through its close association with Radio Maryja during the 2005 campaign and its formation of a government with the League of Polish Families (LPR) a year later, PiS suggested that it endorsed a discourse that amounted to, as Brian Porter’s poignant phrase about another historical era goes, a nationalism that “hates” (Porter 2002). Since the League of Polish Families (LPR) was built on political traditions deeply rooted in a politics of blaming a “nationalized” other (in particular the Jews), the whole government’s conservative plank (in fields ranging from women’s rights to bioethics) could be seen as “nationalist,” and was indeed as such presented by the government parties themselves.

In sum, the debate on political positions on the EU integration process has been conflated with a discussion of what it means to be the “true” representative of the Polish nation and the Polish traditional moral order. Such invocations of the nation have been used in order to carve out particular positions in ethical debates (gay rights, euthanasia, abortion) as well as in the areas of how to deal with the communist past (lustration) and with economic reform.

When political elites now argue for or against European integration, they deploy competing narratives about the meaning of EU membership. For certain parties, EU membership is actively framed as related to current threats to traditional values. For others it represents an opportunity to break with the political and cultural traditions of the Soviet era.

The fact that EU criticism was “nationalized” is clear, for example, from the fact that, during the discussion about the EU accession negotiation, the opposition parties mostly criticized the question of land ownership. Jasiewicz and Jasiewicz-Betkiewicz (2003:1052) point out that, although the topic was of secondary importance for the EU, Polish parties questioning the accession agreement put strong emphasis on the topic of the right of foreign individuals and companies to purchase land in Poland. Political mobilizers argued that the current deal would open the door to Germans who would be interested in buying land from the territories in the west of the country that had been “regained” from Germany after the Second World War.

The response of the pro-European neo-liberal, pro-business party Civic Platform (PO) to this type of conflation of EU criticism with moral order arguments came somewhat belatedly. In 2001, Civic Platform (PO) had still based its campaign on the idea that the normative consensus on the principle of EU integration did not need to be made explicit, since it seemed that this consensus was still largely in place. In the most recent election campaign of 2007, Civic Platform opted for a more explicit and offensive defense of the *principle* of European integration. It highlighted the idea that the Polish nation had always been part of European civilization and that Law and Justice (PiS) had done nothing but distance Poland from that cultural zone. In this more offensive pro-EU position, the narrative was clearly a response to the anti-European nationalist framings of Law and Justice (PiS). Civic Platform added that EU membership had to be defended in order to protect the material well-being of the nation and to improve the international standing of the country. This presented an attempt to reconnect pro-EU arguments with Polish nationalism.

## Conclusion

This paper has explored the political uses of EU-related arguments in Polish domestic politics since the beginning of the 1990s and finds that the EU critical positions that do not seem socially rooted or popular in electoral terms are comprehensible when seen in the context of the rhetoric of action and reaction between political parties. The paper has shown that domestic views on European integration in Poland are to be understood as the expression of a changing balance between a deeply held conviction and a strategic position related to the context of domestic political competition. Since 2001, centrist political actors have mainly used anti-EU rhetoric to serve purposes that relate to the domain of domestic political competition. They could deemphasize their deep normative commitment to European integration because EU membership had already been secured. Finally, I have shown how domestic political competitors in Poland have intentionally conflated pro- and anti-EU rhetoric with a discussion on commitments to the “truthful” representation of the nation.

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**Annex 1: Political parties – abbreviations, full name and translation**

AWS	Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność (Solidarity Election Action)
Blok dla Polski	(Bloc for Poland)
KPN	Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej (Confederation for an Independent Poland)
LiD	Lewica i Democraci (Left and Democrats)
LPR	Liga Polskich Rodzin (League of Polish Families)
Ojczyzna	Katolicki Komitet Wyborczy “Ojczyzna” (Catholic Election Committee “Fatherland”)
PiS	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice)
PO	Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform)
PSL	Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish Peasant Party)
ROP	Ruch Odbudowy Polski (Movement for Poland’s Reconstruction)
Samoobrona	Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland)
SLD	Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Democratic Left Alliance)
UD	Unia Demokratyczna (Democratic Union)
UP	Unia Pracy (Labor Union)