

The New Polish Right and the EU

Clare McManus-Czubińska, William L. Miller, University of Glasgow.

Radosław Markowski, Jacek Wasilewski, Polish Academy of Sciences.

Contact: Clare McManus-Czubińska at <c.mcmanus@socsci.gla.ac.uk>

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Abstract

The Polish election of 2001 marked the reconstruction of the Polish right in parliament, the exit of the former governing parties and the entry of four new parties into parliament including, for the first time, some openly Eurosceptic parties.

There is some debate amongst academics and journalists about the character of these new parties. This paper looks at how the Polish people themselves characterised the new parties, how they placed them on a left-right scale, and how far they sympathised with them – even if they did not actually vote for them.

Although some academic commentators have argued that Europe was not an important issue in that election, our survey suggests that the ‘most important’ issues had little impact on sympathies for either old or new parties, while Europe had a strong impact – yet for essentially pragmatic rather than cultural or nationalist reasons.

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The New Polish Right and the EU[†]

The September 2001 parliamentary election altered Poland's political landscape in two significant ways. To some observers, the election appeared to be a triumph for both the left and the 'new right' political parties at the expense of established or centre-right parties.

First, as expected, the opposition Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) defeated the former governing coalition partners, Solidarity Electoral Action (AWSP) and the Freedom Union (UW), and effectively won the election – though it fell short of the absolute majority of seats 'that all the polls had predicted' (Szczerbiak, 2002c:50). That extended a trend towards the SLD, the communist successor party, which had consistently increased its vote from 13 per cent in 1991, through 21 per cent in 1993 and 27 per cent in 1997, to 41 per cent in 2001 (Castle & Taras, 2002: 117).

Table 1: Polish Election Results – 2001 and 1997

 2001 1997	
	% vote	Seats in Sejm	% vote	Seats in Sejm
Above threshold for seats in Sejm:				
SLD-UP: (Democratic Left Alliance – Labour Union)	41	216	32 (27+5)	164
PSL : (Peasants' Party)	9	42	7	27
Sam: Samoobrona (Self-defence)	10	53	1	0
PO: Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform)	13	65	---	0
PiS: Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc (Law and Justice)	10	44	---	0
LPR: Liga Rodzin Polskich (League of Polish Families)	8	38	---	0
Below threshold for seats in Sejm:				
AWSP (Solidarity Election Action)	6	0	34	201
UW (Freedom Union)	3	0	13	60

Notes: English names for parties in Sejm are as used by the Polish State Electoral Commission. The Mniejszosc Niemiecka (German Minority) also received two seats at both elections.

But second, and more remarkably, both the former governing parties were completely eliminated from the Sejm and replaced by new entrants. Four out of the six political parties or groups that won seats in 2001 were new to the Sejm. Only the SLD and its coalition partner, the peasants' PSL remained from the previous parliament. Together, the four new parties won just over 40 per cent of the vote and a total of 200 seats. Three completely new parties won a total of 31 percent of the vote and 147 seats. And in addition, Samoobrona (Self-Defence), which had taken only one percent of the vote and no seats in 1997, pushed its vote up to over 10 percent in 2001 and won 53 seats. If not strictly 'new' in terms of votes, Samoobrona was certainly new in terms of seats. And it was effectively a new party in terms of serious public attention.¹ Indeed the attention gained by Samoobrona was out of proportion to its vote – though not, as we shall argue, so out of proportion to the more widespread sympathy for it.

The defeat of the post-Solidarity Right highlighted the problems of established right-wing parties throughout Central Europe – and throughout Western Europe as well. It could be viewed against a background of public disillusionment with government performance and, to some degree, with democratic institutions and processes as well. And also within the context of public apprehension about globalising trends, including the ever-widening geographic and

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policy boundaries of the EU.² Those who stand far enough back may try to fit the trends at the 2001 Polish election into a general pan-European pattern of surges of support – not always sustained, of course – for far-right parties at the expense of the centre-right. We do not want to do that. Although their common features are of some interest, the differences between the various populist, extremist, far-left or far-right parties across Europe are significant.

Even within Poland the differences between the various new parties are striking, though there is some debate about how to describe those differences. *The Economist* (29 June 2002), noting that a ‘sepia-tinted’ Andrzej Lepper³ (the Samoobrona leader) had appeared on the cover of a weekly magazine in ‘a Hitlerian pose’⁴, went on to claim: ‘Mr Lepper has risen as Poland’s centre-right has collapsed. The only party between the populist far right and the ex-communist Democratic Left now in power is Platform (PO).’ That is an attractively simple uni-dimensional image of Polish politics, placing the SLD on the left, the PO, AWSP and UW on the centre-right, and every other party on the ‘far-right’.

It gets some support from Minkenberg who characterises Samoobrona as ‘right-wing populist’ and the LPR as ‘religious-fundamentalist right’⁵ or ‘radical right’.⁶ Similarly the *Index on Censorship* describes the LPR as ‘the most far-right’ party in the Sejm and Samoobrona as ‘the most extreme’.⁷ Noting that one LPR leader (Ryszard Bender) had campaigned against President Kwasniewski’s commemoration of the Jedwabne massacre, the Stephen Roth Institute at Tel Aviv University describes the LPR as the ‘first party of the anti-semitic extreme right in postwar Polish history to gain seats in parliament’.⁸ Similarly, the Institute’s claim that Andrzej Lepper of Samoobrona ‘has tried to distance himself from his far right past...by condemning antisemitism’ seems to imply that he was (and perhaps still is) both far right and antisemitic.

But others have contested the applicability of the ‘far right’ label to these parties. Szczerbiak (2002c:50) describes both Samoobrona⁹ and the LPR as ‘radical-populist groupings’, and the BBC describes Samoobrona as a ‘populist, leftwing’ party (*BBC News*, 29.6.02). Indeed protest, populism and extremism elsewhere in Europe has not always characterised as unambiguously ‘right-wing’. In Slovakia for example, SMER (‘Direction’) has been described as ‘left-wing’ populist, while the formerly governing HZDS (‘Movement for a Democratic Slovakia’) has been called extremist by many, but ‘some call [it] far-right, while others call [it] far-left’,¹⁰ and others conclude that ‘it does not sit comfortably [anywhere] on the left-right spectrum’¹¹.

Part of the problem, especially with regard to characterising parties as left or right, is that different commentators put different weight on the various defining features of the right – individualism, pro-business, anti-tax, market liberalism, social conservatism, religious fundamentalism, authoritarianism, extremism and violence, nationalism, parochialism, racism and particularly in eastern Europe, anti-semitism.¹²

There are clearly many opinions but no consensus amongst informed journalists and academics about how to characterise Samoobrona¹³ or even the LPR. So how do the Polish public themselves view Samoobrona, the LPR and, indeed, the other ‘new’ parties? This paper aims:

- (i) to measure the extent of public sympathy for each of the new parties in the Sejm – something much wider than their shares of the vote
- (ii) to assess, from the perspective of public opinion, the location of each party on a left-right spectrum, especially the ‘new’ parties

- (iii) to look at the social foundations of party sympathies and ideological self-images – and the peculiar nature of left/right imagery in Poland
- (iv) to address the paradox of issue-importance at the 2001 election – that the ‘most important’ issues had little impact on party sympathies, while an issue which was apparently one of the ‘least important’ (Europe) correlated strongly with party sympathies.

We recognise that the public may be wrong about the character of a party. But in a democracy their views are both interesting and important, whether misguided or not. And we also recognise that the character of a party’s leadership may be very different from that of its voters, let alone the mass of its sympathisers. Moderate leaders often have extremist followers and, more dangerously, extremist leaders sometimes play successfully on the identities and fears of a much less extreme public and win the sympathy. The focus of this paper is primarily on the public, not on the parties in themselves, not on party leaders, not on party policies. It is therefore only ‘half the story’, but an important half.

The extent of sympathy for the ‘new’ parties

In one sense the real winner in 2001 was abstention, not a party at all. For one reason or another, 54 percent of the electorate did not vote (*Rzeczpospolita*, 24.9.01). Our survey¹⁴ is very accurate in terms of the party breakdown amongst voters. Like surveys everywhere, it understates abstention, but nonetheless, 41 percent of our respondents admitted that they had not voted.

Thus for example, although Samoobrona won over 10 percent of the vote it won under 5 percent of the electorate. In our survey only 6 percent of respondents said they had voted for Samoobrona. And by classic measures of party identification still less ‘identified’ with it: when asked if they ‘felt close’ to any party, only 4 percent named Samoobrona or the PO and a mere 2 percent the LPR or PiS.

Table 2: Party Votes – as percentages of voters, and as percentages of all respondents

..... PNES 2001				
	<i>ACTUAL RESULT</i> % vote 2001	Votes as % of resps who voted	votes as % of all resps	‘close to’ as % of all resps
Above threshold:				
SLD-UP	41	43	24	17
PSL	9	8	5	4
Sam	10	11	6	4
PO	13	13	7	4
PiS	10	9	5	2
LPR	8	7	4	2
Below the threshold				
AWSP	6	4	2	1
UW	3	2	1	1
	<i>(54% did not vote)</i>	<i>(41% did not vote)</i>	DID NOT VOTE 41	NOT CLOSE TO ANY 62

But votes and ‘party identifications’ understate the breadth of sympathy for parties. Our respondents were also asked to indicate whether they liked or disliked parties using a scale running from zero (= ‘strongly dislike’) to ten (= ‘strongly like’). Scores from 6 to 10 indicate that respondents on balance liked a party; scores from 0 to 4 indicate that respondents on

balance disliked a party. By that measure a quarter of all respondents liked Samoobrona and only half disliked it. (A quarter took a neutral view: 13 percent opted for point 5 on the scale, 9 percent found it ‘hard to say’, and 3 percent ‘had not heard’ of it. Less than one percent simply refused to answer the question.) So over four times as many respondents liked Samoobrona as voted for it (25 percent compared to 6 percent), and as many again (25 percent) refused to condemn it.

Of course, every party enjoyed far more sympathy than votes. Even the SLD was liked by almost twice as many as voted for it (40 percent versus 24 percent) and the rank-ordering of parties by votes roughly reflects their rank-ordering by sympathy. But what our data does show is that there was widespread sympathy for each of the four parties new to the Sejm. Their actual voters were small in number but they were representative of wider feelings amongst the electorate. They were in no sense an isolated ‘fringe’ that evoked sympathy only amongst a very small extremist minority. It is no great surprise that Samoobrona was able to increase its votes from 10 to 16 percent in the 2002 local elections, and the LPR from 8 to over 14 percent.

Samoobrona, for example, was positively liked, not only by a large majority of its own voters, but also by 34 percent of PSL voters, and 27 percent of the very large number of non-voters. Szczerbiak (2002c: 57) speculates that Samoobrona ‘may have picked up a segment of potential SLD-UP voters disillusioned with the coalition’s liberal economic policies’. Sympathy for Samoobrona far exceeded its votes however, and our data suggests that many actual SLD voters (21 percent of them) sympathised with Samoobrona despite voting SLD in 2001.

On the other hand, Samoobrona was liked by very few of the AWSP or UW voters and by only around 12 percent of PiS or PO voters, though by 31 percent of LPR voters.

Clearly Samoobrona had many sympathisers amongst the ranks of other parties’ voters. And, significantly, there was far more sympathy for Samoobrona amongst voters for the former communist SLD (as well as the peasants’ PSL) than amongst voters for the traditional ‘right’ or, excepting only the LPR, the ‘new right’.

Table 3: Percentages of all respondents who like and dislike each party

	PNES 2001 % of respondents who ‘like’ party (scores 6-10)	PNES 2001 % of respondents who ‘dislike’ party (scores 0-4)
Above threshold:		
SLD	40	35
PSL	23	46
Samoobrona	25	50
PO	20	50
PiS	26	39
LPR	17	50
Below the threshold		
AWSP	9	74
UW	9	68

We focus on party support in this wider sense of sympathy or ‘liking’ for a party. In a multi-party system, especially one afflicted by low turnout, it is natural that much larger numbers of people like a party than actually vote for it on any particular occasion. Sympathy does not require effort, nor is it exclusive. And a focus on sympathies rather than votes puts some of the dynamic back into electoral analysis. Abstainers who like a party might well vote for it in future if they felt just a bit more motivated to vote. People who like parties other than the one

for which they voted are potential defectors. And parties that detect a surge of sympathy amongst their voters for some new competitor may well feel the need to adjust their own policy or performance in order to head off that defection. Moreover, in terms of understanding how voters (and non-voters) feel about politics and parties, freely expressed sympathies provide a much more complex, subtle and realistic indicator (multiple and quantitative) than bureaucratically constrained votes (which are exclusive and categorical).

'Far right', 'populist left', moral panic or rural defence?

As former communists, even if now Blairite, the SLD would seem fairly unambiguously 'on the left', while the UW and AWSP as members of Europe-wide centre-right 'Internationals' may seem fairly unambiguously 'on the right'. But the location of other parties is open to debate.

Our respondents were asked to place themselves and each party on a scale from zero (= 'left') to 10 (= 'right'), though they could indicate that they 'had not heard of' a party or that it was 'difficult to say'. (Less than one percent refused to answer.) They had few problems placing the SLD or the AWSP (around 12 percent 'hard to say') and not much greater problems placing themselves or the other parties (around 20 percent 'hard to say').

Public perceptions of party locations: The Polish electorate put the SLD very close to the left (at '1'), the AWSP close to the right (at '8'), and both the UW and PO on the centre-right (at '6'). The only surprise here is that the electorate's scale of left and right ran so little beyond the SLD and AWSP despite their fairly moderate policies.

More surprisingly however, the Polish electorate placed the PiS and the LPR between the UW and AWSP, and not further out on the 'far right'. Still more surprisingly, on average, the public placed both the PSL and, more remarkably, Samoobrona almost at the centre. Indeed Samoobrona was the only party placed exactly at the centre ('5'). In the questionable language of journalistic commentators our data therefore suggests that the spectrum of Polish politics runs from the left to the moderate right, through a populist and extremist centre! In the eyes of the Polish electorate Samoobrona might perhaps be 'populist' or 'extremist' but it was certainly not 'on the far right'.

Based on average scores, parties such as the SLD and AWSP could be placed so far to the left or right only if a consensus of electors placed them there (as indeed they did). But parties could be placed 'on average' at the centre for two very different reasons: either because a consensus regarded them as centrist, or because there was no consensus about their location. In fact almost half the electorate placed the PSL at points '3', '4' or '5' on the spectrum. So there was some degree of consensus about the PSL. But by contrast, while 22 percent placed Samoobrona at the exact centre-point '5', the rest placed it at points widely dispersed across the whole spectrum.

Given the tendency of some respondents to use the exact centre-point on 11-point scales as another form of 'hard to say' it might be more reasonable to conclude that Samoobrona was perceived by the Polish public as 'off the left-right spectrum' or, equivalently, that the spectrum was perceived to be 'irrelevant to Samoobrona' – rather than that Samoobrona was perceived to be located in the exact centre.

Table 4: Polish electors' perception of the position of parties on the left-right spectrum

	SLD		PSL	Sam	UW & PO	PiS & LPR	AWSP			
0=left	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10=right

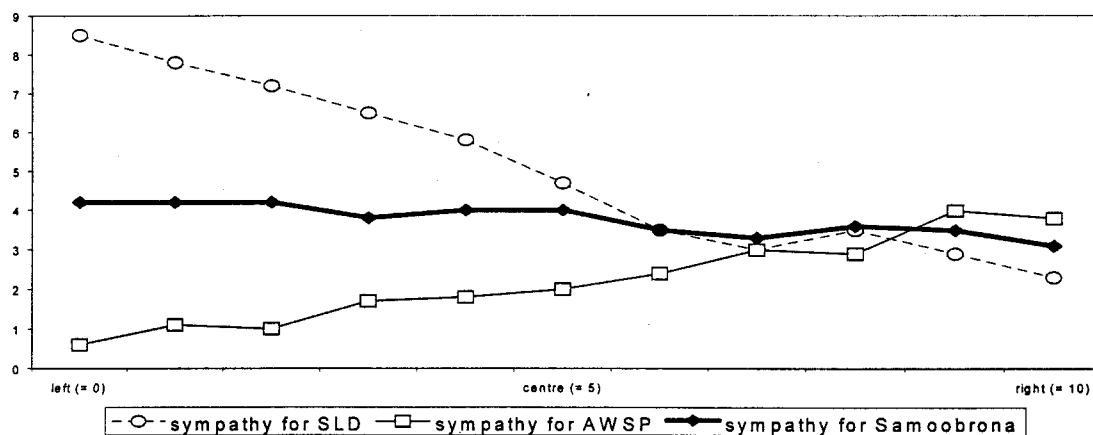
Locating parties by their sympathisers: Another way of locating parties on the left-right spectrum is to see whether they are more popular amongst self-described right-wing electors than amongst self-described left-wing electors, or vice versa. How well does sympathy for each party correlate with respondents' own positions on the left/right spectrum? Being self-consciously right-wing correlates strongly with liking the AWSP ($r = +0.34$) and even more strongly with disliking the SLD ($r = -0.57$). And the general pattern of these correlations tells the same story as electors' perceptions of the position of the parties. Again, it puts the PO, PiS and LPR between the AWSP and the UW. And it puts Samoobrona and the PSL near the centre. There is a small (though not statistically significant) correlation between being left-wing and liking the PSL. More remarkably, there is a somewhat larger (and this time statistically significant) correlation between being left-wing and liking Samoobrona.

Table 5: Correlations between Polish electors' self-placement on the left-right spectrum and how much they like each party

SLD	Sam	PSL	UW	PO	PiS +28 LPR +28	AWSP
-57	-10	-5 (ns)	+12	+27	+28	+34

Positive correlations indicate that right-wing electors like the party more than left-wing electors do

Party sympathy across the left/right spectrum



And this is no statistical quirk. Across the spectrum from self-described left to right, the score for liking the SLD drops steadily from 9 to 2. And the score for liking the AWSP climbs steadily from 1 to 4. But the score for liking Samoobrona stays almost constant. It is a little higher on the extreme left, than on the extreme right, but only by one point. And it is no higher on the extremes, taken together, than it is in the centre. Indeed, in contrast to every other party, the peak for liking Samoobrona occurs 'off the spectrum' rather than at any point on it – amongst those (22 percent in all) who find it 'hard to say' where they themselves stand on the left-right spectrum. Amongst these self-consciously 'off the spectrum' people, the score for liking Samoobrona reached 5. Nowhere on the left/right spectrum did it exceed 4.

The Polish electorate's clear perception of the SLD on the left and AWSP on the right, plus the relative popularity of the SLD amongst self-described left-wingers and of the AWSP amongst self-described right-wingers suggests that Polish electors have a fairly clear perception of what they mean by left and right. And therefore it argues that the lack of

correlation between the left-right spectrum and either perceptions of, or sympathies for, Samoobrona is not the consequence of the electorate's confusion about these terms but rather the consequence of their clear perception that these terms do not apply to Samoobrona. The public's reluctance to apply the 'left-right' political spectrum to Samoobrona mirrors that of Samoobrona's leaders themselves who have 'always tried to portray it as a party that is neither left nor right' but committed to 'the true interests of Poland and the Poles'.¹⁵

Of course the concept of the right could be 'stretched' to include anything other than the SLD-defined 'left', but that leaves it bereft of meaning. And that is certainly not the way the Polish public use the concept.

Concurrent sympathies: Although voters could only vote for one party in the Sejm they could sympathise with two or more. Concurrent sympathies provide a third way to understand how the public locate parties on some mental map. There were particularly strong positive correlations (at $r > 0.40$) between sympathies for the UW and PO, between sympathies for the LPR and PiS, and between sympathies for the LPR and AWSP. In each case the pair of parties were located at the same or adjacent points on our perception-based left-right spectrum.

But other factors produced concurrent sympathies. There was a particularly strong correlation between sympathies for the UW and AWSP, coalition partners in the former government, although they were further apart in terms of left-right perceptions. And there was a particularly strong correlation between sympathies for Samoobrona and the PSL. They were located at adjacent points on the perception-based left-right spectrum – though we have argued that Samoobrona is really located 'off the spectrum' rather than at its centre. More significantly perhaps, both Samoobrona and the PSL sought to represent rural discontent.

Conversely the largest negative correlations were between sympathy for the SLD on the one hand and the PO ($r = -0.15$), LPR ($r = -0.20$), or AWSP ($r = -0.29$) on the other.

Overall this pattern of correlations fits the plausible but not very exciting model of electors liking pairs of parties that were similar in terms of left-right ideology, while regarding pairs of ideologically dissimilar parties with a combination of sympathy for one and antagonism towards the other.

Far more interesting are the lower but much less obvious correlations between sympathy for parties which are located at different points on the perceived left-right spectrum and which are not obvious allies. Sympathy for both the PSL and Samoobrona correlated most with sympathy for the PiS and LPR, less but still positively with sympathy for the SLD, and least with sympathy for the AWSP, the UW and especially the PO – all evoking the image of a community of the discontented rather than a community of the right. Significantly, sympathy for Samoobrona correlated more strongly with the SLD, the defining party of the left than with sympathy for the AWSP, the defining party of the right.¹⁶

Social foundations of ideology and party sympathy in Poland

Polish sociologists such as Tadeusz Szawiel and Mirosława Grabowska have 'consistently found a powerful relationship between religion and left-right self-identification: in Poland, religion appears to play a much larger role in determining whether people identify themselves as right-wing or left-wing than any other socio-economic factors' (Castle & Taras, 2002: 159). Indeed within our survey respondents' own descriptions of themselves as left or right correlate strongly only with religiosity, and not with class, income, education or rurality.

And religiosity plays a larger role than income in the perceived left-right pattern of Polish party sympathies. With the exception of the UW, sympathy for each party is significantly correlated with social background. But sympathy for the SLD and the AWSP, perceived by the Polish public as the defining parties of the left and right – as well as sympathy for the more narrowly religious LPR – correlates more strongly with religiosity than with any other measure of social background. Religiosity also rivals income as the social factor most strongly linked to PO sympathy. So the left-right dimension in Polish party politics reflects religiosity rather than class or income.

Table 6: Correlations between social background and party sympathies or self-described ideology

	SLD	Sam	PSL	UW	PO	LPR	PiS	AWSP	Self-described 'right-wing respondents
	rx100	rx100	rx100	rx100	rx100	rx100	rx100	rx100	rx100
gender (female)	–	–	–	–	–	+15	–	+10	–
Family income (high)	–	–17	–	–	+12	–10	–	–	–
education (high)	–	–35	–18	–	–	–15	–	–	–
size of place (large)	–	–31	–25	–	–	–12	–	–	–
church attendance (frequent)	–16	–	+11	–	+10	+26	+10	+18	+20
President was wrong to apologise for Jedwabne	–	+11	–	–	–10	–	–	–	–

Correlations less than 0.10 are not shown. All correlations shown are significant at the one percent level. (Feelings that the Presidential apology was wrong also correlated negatively with SLD sympathies and positively with right-wing self-placement: at -0.09 and $+0.07$, which were both significant at the five percent level)

Size of place: from village up to large city. Education: from none up to university. Family income: from not enough to live on up to enough for a good living. Church attendance: from never up to several times a week. Attitude to President's apology: 'right' / 'not completely wrong, but unnecessary and inadvisable' / 'wrong'.

But there is something uniquely religious about LPR sympathy. Religiosity correlates more strongly with sympathies for the Radio Maryja¹⁷ backed LPR than even Polish perceptions of its location on a left-right axis would imply. And LPR sympathy also correlates with (female) gender, a village/small-town background, low education and low income. Conversely however, religiosity correlates relatively weakly with other aspects of the pattern of party sympathy – only weakly with PSL, PO and PiS sympathies, and not at all with Samoobrona sympathies.

Respondents were asked their views on President Kwasniewski's recent commemoration of, and televised apology for, the war-time massacre of Jews in the village of Jedwabne: was it 'right', 'wrong', or 'not completely wrong, but unnecessary and inadvisable'? Support for the President's apology correlated positively with PO and SLD sympathies (at $r = 0.10$, 0.09 respectively). Conversely, opposition to the President's apology at Jedwabne, which perhaps exposes latent anti-semitism, correlated positively with Samoobrona sympathies ($r = +0.11$). But, significantly, it correlated hardly at all with sympathies for the LPR ($r = +0.01$) despite the Stephen Roth Institute's characterisation of the LPR. Whatever the views of LPR leaders, anti-semitism amongst the public went with sympathy for Samoobrona not the LPR.

Table 6a: Party sympathies and votes – by attitudes towards the President's Jedwabne apology

	Mean sympathy score (out of 10)			Percent of votes		
	Sympathy score if feel President's apology was.....			Vote if feel President's apology was.....		
	right	unnecessary & inadvisable	wrong	right	unnecessary & inadvisable	wrong
	mean score (out of 10)	mean score (out of 10)	mean score (out of 10)	% vote	% vote	% vote
SLD	5.5	5.1	4.5	50	41	35
Samoobrona	3.6	3.9	4.4	6	12	17
PO	4.0	3.6	3.2	19	11	9
LPR	3.3	3.5	3.3	4	10	7

These correlations translate into modest but very clear patterns of both sympathies and actual votes. The PO vote was twice as high amongst those who thought the apology was right and the Samoobrona vote was three times as high amongst those who thought it was wrong. But LPR sympathies and votes were highest amongst those who thought it was 'not completely wrong, but unnecessary and inadvisable'.

This lack of correlation between latent anti-semitism and LPR sympathies is in fact far more significant than its modest correlation with Samoobrona sympathies.¹⁸ To put it in perspective, in our data, the correlation between latent anti-semitism and Samoobrona sympathies is less than one third the size of the correlation between Samoobrona sympathies and rurality or low education, and less than one third the size of the correlation between LPR sympathies and Catholic religiosity. Though visible, the correlations with anti-semitism barely exceed our threshold for entries in table 6. They are amongst the weakest of the patterns that we have discussed.

PSL sympathy correlates most with a village or small-town background and to a lesser extent with low levels of education. Conversely Samoobrona sympathies correlate most strongly with low education¹⁹ however ($r = 0.35$) and to a slightly lesser extent with a village or small-town background. In addition, Samoobrona sympathies, unlike PSL sympathies, correlate fairly strongly with (subjectively) low family income. Indeed, low income correlates more strongly with liking Samoobrona than with liking or disliking any other party.

So though it does tap somewhat into latent anti-semitism, in most social-background terms Samoobrona sympathy does not have the profile of the 'right' – neither in the class or income terms which define the 'right' in other countries, nor in the particularly Polish conception of the 'right', which is to say in terms of Catholic religiosity. In terms of Catholic religiosity Samoobrona's profile is neither left nor right, and in terms of class and income its social background profile is on the left, not the right. To describe Samoobrona as 'far right' is to misrepresent its attractions and its dangers. 'Left-wing populist' might be a better description of its attractions, as these terms are generally used in other countries – though not as these terms are used by the public in Poland itself.

In social-background terms, the extreme Catholic religiosity of LPR sympathisers should put it on the far-right (in Polish terms), while their low income and education fit the profile of the left (as the term is used in other countries). Within Poland, Catholic religiosity clearly wins, and the Polish public place the LPR on the right but perhaps it would be placed still further to the right if its supporters were not relatively poor. But although public sympathy for the LPR correlates very strongly with Catholic religiosity it does not correlate at all with our index of latent anti-semitism.

The paradoxical significance of 'unimportant' issues

Supporters of Poland's bid for EU membership watched aghast in 2001 as eurosceptic or even anti-EU parties were elected to the Sejm for the first time. (*Financial Times*, 25.9.01: 12). The LPR was the only one of the new parties that was openly against joining the EU in principle. It advocated an economic union with the USA instead.²⁰ But if Samoobrona was less extreme in principle it was more extreme in practice. Its reputation had been built in large part on its use of direct action – originally to protect defaulting farmers from their creditors, later to protest against EU imports and the general impact of moves towards EU accession on Polish farmers' livelihoods.

The 2001 elections seemed to demonstrate that a significant part of the Polish population, which had previously been enthusiastic about the principle of EU entry and uninterested in the details, now had increasing reservations about whether Poland should join. Once the focus turned to the details of entry, there were sound reasons for such reservations. Undeniably, Poland has special problems with EU accession because of its large agricultural sector and its long 'external' border.²¹ Even amongst those with reservations our survey suggests that a majority would have voted for EU entry in a referendum in 2001. But they would have much preferred to postpone the decision. And if faced by an early and unwelcome referendum they would vote for entry reluctantly, if at all.

All the characterisations of Samoobrona and the LPR as 'populist' – whether left or right-wing populist – imply a glorification of charismatic leadership coupled with antagonism towards restraining institutions and towards anything 'foreign'.²² Andrzej Lepper and Father Tadeusz Rydzyk of Radio Maryja supply the charisma. On the other side, the EU is both a frustratingly restraining institution and something very 'foreign'. So it is not surprising that Krok-Paszowska puts opposition to 'cosmopolitanism and internationalism' at the heart of Samoobrona's ideology²³ or that Minkenberg argues both Samoobrona and the LPR 'mobilised their electorate around the issue of opposition to Poland's accession to the EU'.²⁴

Looking behind the raw election results however, others have dismissed the importance of EU entry as a significant issue in the 2001 Polish election – and certainly as an explanation for the sudden success of Samoobrona or the LPR. Szczerbiak (2002a: 16-17, 35) for example, argues that 'the EU was not a salient election campaign issue': even Samoobrona 'did not once lead on the EU as the main focus for its TV campaign for the day' and it gave the EU 'only one oblique reference' in its election programme.

In our survey also, respondents rated EU entry as a relatively unimportant issue. We asked respondents to rate ten issues on a scale from zero (= 'definitely less important than other issues') to 10 (= 'an issue of extreme importance as compared to other issues'). Fully 84 percent rated unemployment as an issue of 'extreme importance' (at point '10'). That was followed by crime (55 percent 'extreme importance'), tax (37 percent), social safety-nets (31 percent), agricultural subsidies (30 percent) and then EU entry in sixth place (with only 15 percent). Foreign investment, the role of the church, privatisation, and the treatment of the former nomenklatura attracted ten percent or less.

But paradoxically, the two 'most important' issues – unemployment and crime – did not correlate at all well with party sympathies. (See table 7) These were priorities for people who liked and disliked each and every party. Even PiS (the 'Law and Justice' party) sympathisers had no monopoly of concern about crime, and no very distinctive position on it.

Conversely, it was the less consensually important issues that discriminated much better between those who liked or disliked particular parties. Sympathy for the SLD correlated strongly with positions on two, and only two, of these ten issues: the role of the church ($r = 0.23$) and more strongly still, the treatment of the former communist nomenklatura ($r = 0.34$). Those who liked the SLD wished to go easy on the nomenklatura and hard on the church. Sympathy for the AWSP followed an inverse pattern: AWSP sympathisers wished to go hard on the nomenklatura and easy on the church.

Sympathy for the PiS also correlated moderately with attitudes to the church and the nomenklatura, but surprisingly not with attitudes to crime. Despite the allegedly authoritarian character of PiS ('Law and Justice'), sympathy for that party did not reflect public willingness to be 'tough' on crime at the expense of the 'basic freedoms of average citizens' – though it did reflect a notably tough attitude towards the former nomenklatura.

Not surprisingly, sympathy for the Radio Maryja backed LPR correlated very strongly with attitudes to the role of the church ($r = 0.32$) though also quite strongly with attitudes towards the nomenklatura.

UW sympathies correlated best with opposition to progressive taxation ($r = 0.18$) and PO sympathies with support for privatisation ($r = 0.18$ also). In terms of policy, the PO was the most pro-market of all the parties, and its support reflects that. But there were some even stronger correlations with PO sympathies. Dissatisfaction with democracy and nostalgia for communism correlated particularly with antagonism towards the PO ($r = -0.23$) and still more with sympathy for Samoobrona ($r = 0.30$).

Table 7: Correlations between party sympathies and issues or values

	----- Correlations with party sympathies -----								% who rate issue as of 'extreme importance' %
	SLD rx100	Sam rx100	PSL rx100	UW rx100	PO rx100	LPR rx100	PiS rx100	AWSP rx100	
Correlations with Issue priorities:									
with importance of.....									
unemployment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	84
crime	-	-	-	+10	-	-	-	-	55
tax	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	37
social safety-nets	-	-	-	-	+14	-	-	-	31
agricultural subsidies	-	+22	+20	-	-	+14	-	-	30
EU entry	-	-14	-	+12	-	-	-	-	15
foreign investment	-	-	-	-	+12	-	-	-	10
role of the church	-	-	-	-	-	+16	-	+13	9
privatisation	-	-15	-	-	+15	-	-	-	8
treatment of former nomenklatura	-24	-	-	-	+15	+19	+12	+19	4
Correlations with Issue positions:									
with position on.....									
unemployment: inflation also matters	-	-11	-	-	+12	-	-	-	84
crime: tough on	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	55
tax: flat percentage rate	-	-14	-	+18	+12	-	-	+13	37
social safety-nets: no	-	-11	-	+11	+13	-	-	-	31
agricultural subsidies: no	-	-19	-16	+13	+13	-	-	-	30
EU entry: yes	-	-22	-16	-	+13	-14	-	-	15
foreign investment: welcome	-	-16	-16	-	+14	-	-	-	10
role of the church: high influence	-23	-	-	-	+11	+32	+16	+26	9
privatisation: fast	-	-20	-16	+14	+18	-	-	-	8
treatment of former nomenklatura: punish	-34	-	-	-	-	+14	+15	-	4
Correlations with democratic values:									
satisfied with way democracy works in Poland	-	-13	-	-	+19	-	-	+14	
democracy is a better system than others	-	-17	-	-	+16	-	-	+10	
prefer democratic system	-	-10	-	-	+11	-	-	-	
does not matter whether democratic or not	-	-16	-	-	+11	-	-	-	
Correlations with nostalgia for communism:									
The pre-1989 regime was...									
generally better	+17	+25	+13	-10	-19	-	-	-13	
ran economy better	+14	+30	+17	-10	-23	-	-	-12	
own living standard better	+10	+21	-	-10	-15	-	-	-11	
Correlations with attitudes to governments:									
support new government (SLD-UP)	+46	+11	+11	-	-14	-15	-13	-23	
supported 1997 government (AWSP-UW)	-34	-12	-	+14	+27	+22	+19	+32	

Correlations less than 0.10 not shown. All correlations shown are significant at the one percent level. Issues have been listed in order of 'importance'.

But despite their low importance-ratings, EU and EU-related issues also had an impact, especially on sympathy for the PSL and Samoobrona. Attitudes to agricultural subsidies (a key issue in EU negotiations) was in fact the strongest policy correlate of sympathy for the

PSL ($r = 0.20$). And opposition to EU entry tied with attitudes towards agricultural subsidies as the strongest policy correlate of sympathy for Samoobrona ($r = 0.22$).

Indeed, sympathies for five of the eight parties correlated significantly with attitudes towards EU entry or agricultural subsidies, usually both. Sympathies for the LPR also correlated with opposition to EU entry – which might be expected from the policy of the LPR leadership and more generally from the possibility that LPR sympathy might reflect a degree of moral panic, or perceptions of a threat to Catholic culture if Poland were merged into a more secular Europe. But we should stress the weakness rather than the strength of this relationship between LPR sympathies and attitudes to EU entry in 2001. At 0.14 the correlation between LPR sympathies and opposition to EU entry is far less than the correlation of 0.32 between LPR sympathies and attitudes to the role of the church within Poland. If LPR sympathies reflected moral panic they therefore seemed to reflect fears that the Catholic church and culture was being side-lined within Poland by Poles, rather than that Polish culture would be eroded by merging Poland into a wider Europe.

Overall, our analysis of issue and value positions places SLD sympathisers towards the left and AWSP, LPR and PiS sympathisers towards the right – though in terms of attitudes to the church and the nomenklatura²⁵ rather than in terms of economic or class issues. It places UW and PO towards the right on more economic grounds.

But it places PSL sympathisers on a cross-cutting rural axis, tending to support agricultural subsidies and oppose privatisation or EU entry. Our most interesting findings relate to Samoobrona however. Sympathy for Samoobrona correlates not just with rural support for agricultural subsidies and opposition to EU entry but also with opposition to privatisation and foreign capital, with support for progressive taxation, social safety-nets, and cutting unemployment at any cost – and with nostalgia for the pre-1989 regime, a distaste for democracy and, as we noted earlier, an element of antisemitism. That is undoubtedly an anti-democratic profile, but not a consistently right-wing one.²⁶ The analysis of issue priorities and positions confirms our view that Samoobrona sympathies reflect ‘left-wing’, ‘neither wing’, or ‘rural’ populism rather than ‘far right’ attitudes.

The impact of attitudes towards Europe on party sympathies

Our survey allows us to explore the impact of EU attitudes on party sympathies in more depth than other issues. What, for example, was the nature of the linkage between PO or Samoobrona sympathies and opposition to EU entry. We know that Samoobrona sympathisers tend to oppose EU entry and PO sympathisers favour it. But why? Is that because Samoobrona sympathisers object to the terms and conditions of entry? Or because they fear the erosion of Polish culture? Or because they value Poland’s hard-won and recently acquired sovereignty? Or do they have an irrational fear or hatred of foreigners? There is a fairly strong correlation ($r = 0.18$) between liking Samoobrona and simply agreeing that the EU is ‘bad for Poland’ but, by itself, that does not tell us much about the reasons for their attitudes towards entry.

We asked respondents a wide range of questions about attitudes towards both ‘Europe’ and the ‘EU’. Ranking a selection of these questions by the degree to which they correlate with Samoobrona sympathies is quite revealing. (See table 8) Top of the list comes the fear that EU entry would damage the respondent’s family’s living standards ($r = 0.21$). Even fears that EU entry would damage agriculture correlate less well ($r = 0.15$). And fears that EU entry would damage Polish state or private businesses, come still further down the list.

Table 8: Correlations between party sympathies and European issues

	----- Correlations with party sympathies -----							
	SLD rx100	Sam rx100	PSL rx100	UW rx100	PO rx100	LPR rx100	PiS rx100	AWSP rx100
Correlations with the following attitudes.....								
EU is bad for Poland	-	+18	-	-12	-15	+11	-	-
EU entry would damage own family's living standards	-	+21	+16	-	-22	+11	-	-
tightening eastern borders is bad	-	+17	+10	-	-10	-	-	-
Identity: exclusively Polish, not at all European	-	+16	+10	-	-	+13	-	-
EU entry would damage agriculture	-	+15	-	-	-11	-	-	-
keep Zloty	-	+12	-	-	-	+10	-	-
EU entry would damage Polish private enterprises	-	+12	-	-	-13	+11	-	-
EU threatens freedom in central Europe	-	+11	-	-	-11	-	-	-
EU threatens Poland's independence & culture	-	+11	-	-	-15	-	-	-
EU entry would damage state enterprises	-	+10	-	-	-14	-	-	-
An influx of foreigners with different culture would be bad	-	+10	+10	-	-	-	-	-
EU officials are corrupt & wasteful	-	-	-	-10	-15	-	-	-
Sovereignty more important than international cooperation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Correlations less than 0.10 not shown. All correlations shown are significant at the one percent level. Entries, other than the first line, are ranked in descending order of correlation with Samoobrona sympathies.

Attitudes towards keeping the Zloty correlate much less well ($r = 0.12$) with Samoobrona sympathies. There is not much evidence of a politically significant Polish equivalent of the British 'keep the pound' sentiment. Nor, on the basis of the correlations in the table, is there much evidence that Samoobrona sympathies reflect fears that the EU threatens Poland's freedom, independence or culture ($r = 0.11$).

There is more evidence ($r = 0.16$) that Samoobrona sympathies reflect relatively parochial identities (identifying exclusively with Poland and not at all with 'Europe') but not that their opposition to the EU reflects a hatred of foreigners. Attitudes towards whether an influx of foreigners 'from different countries and cultures' would make the respondent's local area a 'better or worse place to live and work' correlates only marginally ($r = 0.10$) with Samoobrona sympathies, and attitudes towards international cooperation not at all.

Correlations with PSL sympathies are weaker. The only EU attitude that correlates more than marginally with PSL sympathies is the fear that EU entry would damage the respondent's family's living standards ($r = 0.16$).

But correlations with PO sympathies rival those with Samoobrona sympathies. In particular there is a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.22$) between PO sympathy and the expectation that the respondent's family living standards would benefit from EU entry. And notable, though weaker, tendencies amongst PO sympathisers to deny that EU entry would threaten Poland's independence and culture ($r = 0.15$) and to defend EU officials from the charge of corruption ($r = 0.15$ also).

What does all this tell us about the nature of support and opposition to EU entry? First, that it hardly affects sympathies for the SLD and the AWSP – the classic left and right in Polish terms. And it does not have much impact on sympathies for the AWSP's former ally, the UW, or the PiS (Law and Justice Party).

Much more surprisingly it seems to have only a modest impact on sympathies for the overtly anti-EU LPR. At grass-roots level, if not at leadership level, sympathy for the LPR reflects concern for the status of the church within Poland now – far more than a concern for the future of Poland's Catholic culture within an enlarged Europe.

But support and opposition to EU entry has a strong impact on sympathy for the PO, PSL and Samoobrona. And in each case it primarily reflects hopes and fears about its effect upon family living standards. In particular, on the evidence of the correlations in our table, Samoobrona sympathisers' opposition to EU entry is primarily pragmatic, not a reflection of cultural fright or xenophobic nationalism. It does not reflect much attachment to symbols like the national currency. Indeed it does not even seem to reflect fears for Polish agriculture so much as fears for family living standards. It is intensely practical.

Conclusion

Andrzej Lepper and his methods of gaining publicity are notorious. Verbally and physically they lack restraint. They do not respect due order and process. They are on the fringe of democracy, and occasionally slip over it. Like the party's leader, Samoobrona sympathisers – who constitute at least one quarter of the entire electorate let us remember – are also not very enthusiastic about democracy either in principle or in practice.

But this very broad mass of sympathisers have not generally engaged in any kind of direct action themselves. (And we did ask them!) They sit on the sidelines, take note, and often give tacit approval, but they do not participate. Many indeed, voted for other parties while sympathising with Samoobrona. Lepper had also engaged an image-consultant for the 2001 election, toned down his disorderly conduct and, in Szczerbiak's (2002c: 58) view, had succeeded in presenting himself as 'the most credible radical defender of the interests of economic transition losers'. Our data would support the view that Lepper's voters and potential voters (i.e. his sympathisers) had 'grown from those hurt by the fall of communism to include those who fear being hurt by EU membership'.²⁷

But it does no good to demonise this large section of the Polish electorate as the 'far right'. Samoobrona sympathisers are not a small fringe of extremists. They are not in most respects 'on the right'. They are in many respects, 'on the left' (as our table 7 shows) though it would be as realistic to say they are simply 'off the spectrum' of left and right. Their hurt was not imagined and their fears are not irrational. They did not have merely psychological problems but practical problems – not so much unfounded fears of foreigners (table 8) as a more well-founded view that EU negotiators have driven too hard a bargain in an 'unequal treaty' which would damage their family's living standards. Lepper has recently claimed in the Sejm that Samoobrona is not an anti-European party but only concerned that the conditions for membership are so unfavourable that Poland should say 'no' to EU membership (*Gazeta Wyborca*, 4.12.02). Whether that claim is true or false, our analysis suggests it certainly speaks to the concerns of his sympathisers and reflects the basis of his actual and, more significantly his potential, support.

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- ¹ Detailed election results may be found in *Rzeczpospolita* (27.9.01) 'Na Wiejskiej fotele podzielone' and *Polityka* (6.10.01) 'Kto wypuścił Leppera?' ['Who let Lepper in?'], pp. 3-9. And for the detailed composition of the new Polish Sejm see *Rzeczpospolita* (19.10.01), 'Sejm IV kadencja', *Rzeczpospolita* (20-21.10.01) 'Nowy Sejm, nowy rząd'. See also Sanford (2002: 187-188) and Castle & Taras (2002: 102-104).
- ² See *The Guardian* (27.6.02), 'The Grim Wedding' by Timothy Garton Ash; *The Guardian* (3.6.02), 'Fortress Europe pulls up the drawbridge' by Larry Elliott; *The Observer* (23.6.02), 'Europe's enlargement challenge' by Charlotte Lindberg Warakaulle; and *The Times* (25.6.02) 'EU entry will cost Big Bang Ten too much' by Rosemary Righter.
- ³ Until 1980, Andrzej Lepper was a member of the former communist party. After graduating from an agricultural school, he worked as a private farmer. In 1991 he led a hunger strike of farmers who were unable to pay off their loans. And in 1992 he formed the Samoobrona trade union (Castle & Taras, 2002: 180). For further information about the leadership style of Andrzej Lepper see Drozd-Piasecka (2001: 47-84) and 'Profile: Andrzej Lepper' by Tim Whewell (30.1.02), *BBC News Website* (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/1789229.stm>). Krok-Paszowska (2003) offers an interesting analysis of the origins, background and role of Samoobrona and argues that the political party is bound together by its populism.
- ⁴ *Wprost* (26.5.02) also made comparisons with Hitler and Mussolini.
- ⁵ Minkenberg, p.347.
- ⁶ Minkenberg, p.350.
- ⁷ Irena Maryniak. 'Goodbye solidarity and welcome to Poland's New breed Democrats'. *Index on Censorship* contribution to *Eurozine* (28.03.02) p.4. Accessible at www.eurozine.com/article/2002-03-28.
- ⁸ www.tau.ac.il/anti-semitism/asw2001-2/poland.htm.
- ⁹ Indeed, Szczerbiak (2002d) has argued that Samoobrona may emerge as a political force capable of picking up the votes of left-wing sympathisers who are disappointed with Poland's economic performance. But he also described the LPR's core electorate as belonging to the "radical right".
- ¹⁰ Jolyon Naegele. 'Political Extremism In Eastern Europe - On The Wane Or Going Mainstream?' RFE/RL (13.5.02).
- ¹¹ Haughton (2001:763). Haughton (2001:750) also reports that the HDZS was rejected by all three major party groupings in the Council of Europe.
- ¹² See Minkenberg, p.337 on definitions and p.344 on anti-Semitism in Poland.
- ¹³ See for example the contrasting opinions of Minkenberg (2002: 351) and Szczerbiak (2002d).
- ¹⁴ The Polish National Election Survey (September 2001). It is a random sample representative of the adult population of Poland (18 and above), funded by a grant from the Polish National Science Foundation (Komitet Badan Naukowych) to the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences with additional funding from the UK ESRC under grant R000223685 to Glasgow University. Fieldwork, by CBOS, started on 29 October 2001 and ended on 11 November. 1794 interviews were completed. (The refusal rate was 22 percent.) The data-set has been weighted by gender, age, educational attainment, place of residence and economic activity.
- ¹⁵ Krok-Paszowska, 2003, p.125.
- ¹⁶ A factor analysis of party sympathies towards all eight parties tends to isolate the SLD from all others, distinguishing Snow White from the seven dwarfs. More useful is a factor analysis of sympathies towards the seven dwarfs. A three-factor solution explains over two thirds of the variance in sympathy for these seven parties. It groups together the old governing coalition of UW and AWSP in one factor (the 'right'), the PiS and LPR in a second ('moral panic?'), and Samoobrona and the PSL in a third ('rural fears' or 'rural defence?'). The PO is linked most closely with the UW/AWSP factor but to a lesser extent with the PiS/LPR factor.

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- ¹⁷ Radio Maryja was not just a Catholic radio station but an extremely Catholic radio station, often at odds with the church hierarchy. Szczerbiak (2002c: 62) describes it as a 'fundamentalist Catholic nationalist broadcasting station'.
- ¹⁸ The lack of correlation between latent anti-semitism and LPR sympathies fits with Minkenberg's (2002: 347) typology of LPR. He identified LPR as being a radical, right-wing party but identified its form of right-wing radicalism with the religious-fundamentalist right rather than with the Fascist-authoritarian right or the racist-ethnocentrist right.
- ¹⁹ Which may explain why highly educated journalists and academics are so unsympathetic to it: it is not their kind of party.
- ²⁰ See *Rzeczpospolita* (25.7.02). Also for further information about LPR's attitude towards the EU see *Rzeczpospolita* (12.8.02). Szczerbiak (2002a: 12-13) lists a series of unambiguously anti-EU statements by LPR leaders.
- ²¹ For a discussion of the impact of EU integration on Polish agriculture and rural areas see Wilkin (2001: 231-245). Other EU integration problems and challenges facing Poland are analysed in Blazyca et al (2002: 263-276) and in the *East European Constitutional Review* (2002: 33-36).
- ²² These are the three defining characteristics of 'populism' cited, for example in Schopflin (1994: 138).
- ²³ Krok-Paszkowska, p.125.
- ²⁴ Minkenberg, p.351.
- ²⁵ Castle & Taras (2002: 161) and Szczerbiak (2002b: 553-572) also note the connection between left-right identification and attitudes towards the treatment of the former nomenklatura.
- ²⁶ Similarly, Haughton (2001) describes the HZDS in Slovakia as populist, authoritarian and anti-democratic (2001: 751) though it does not sit not anywhere at all on the left-right spectrum (2001:750).
- ²⁷ *The Economist* (29 June 2002).