

CEE National identity in CEE countries



Case study Poland

Dominika Kasprowicz

I) Smoleńsk plane crash

On April 10th, 2010 a TU-154M plane crashed in Smolensk (Russia) a 1km short of the runway in foggy weather conditions, killing all passengers on board. The plane was carrying a delegation of 96 members of the Polish elite, including the Polish President Lech Kaczynski and his wife, former President Ryszard Kaczorowski, the entire general army command, the Chief of the Polish General Staff and other senior Polish military officers, the president of the National Bank of Poland, Poland's deputy foreign minister, Polish government officials, 15 members of the Polish parliament, senior members of the Polish clergy, and relatives of victims of the Katyn massacre. An event regarded by many as the worst national disaster to befall on Poland since World War II. They were on the way from Warsaw (Poland) to attend an event marking the 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre (22 thousands of Polish officers executed by the Soviet NKVD in 1939 and 1940).

As the accident occurred on Russian soil, Russia was tasked by ICAO procedure with primary responsibility for investigation, which it carried out with international cooperation. Poland also set up its own committee to investigate the crash, and prosecutors in both countries began criminal investigations. The Russian report was published on 12 January 2011, and the Polish report was published on 29 July 2011. Both reports placed the majority of the blame for the accident on the pilots for descending too low without being able to see the ground. The Polish report also placed harsh criticism on the organization of Poland's special aviation regiment and its leaders, as well as finding deficiencies in the performance of the Russian air traffic controllers and in the airport's lighting and approach area.

These official conclusions has not been accepted by the part of the public opinion, group of victims' families and Kaczynski's supporters, his former party's members (Law and Justice party) and his twin-brother – Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of parliamentary opposition. The crash remains a traumatizing memory for many Poles - according to the polls approx. 25% of Poles believe that the crash was not an accident but a result of purposive actions (CBOS 2012)¹. The topic became a bone of contention in political discourse and in many terms overlaps with the message regarding the national identity.

The cross that has been put in front of the Presidential Palace by the Scats just after the crash. This became a place where the first manifestations and commemorations took place. The cross itself has been removed (to the nearby church) shortly after, by the officials (head of the Chancellery of the President). Since that, the „Defenders of the Cross” Association along with the opposition party and supporters („Solidarni 2010” Association) disappointed with the official undertakings (the investigation and its preliminary results, official commemorations, mainstream media coverage) here organize monthly marches and anti-government protests.

¹ CBOS (2012): www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2012/K_082_12.PDF

The biggest event takes place on the April 10th. Since 2011, the annual commemoration of this tragedy is organised separately by: the Law and Justice (PiS) - Kaczynski's party members and supporters, some of the Catholic Church officials and several TV and press agencies and the Warsaw city and state agencies. Both gather substantial audience and are transmitted via traditional and internet channels. The national character of this event is put in the front-line although the context built around the same event and symbols is apparently different.

The key element of the commemoration ceremony in case of PiS party, is the annual march that takes place in the evening on the 10th April in the capital center, next to the Presidential Palace. This event is open to the public, led by party officials and Jaroslaw Kaczyński himself, attended by thousands of people. The picture below captured the first line of the march that took place a year after the crash. The march stops in front of the Palace, where the speeches are given. The main speaker is Jaroslaw Kaczyński and members of the families whose kin has died in the crash. In the meantime, the national anthem as well as patriotic songs are sung and prayers are recited by the crowds.

At the same time anniversaries of the tragedy is commemorated during official state ceremonies, which take place in a few spots, mainly at the Powazki Military cemetery in Warsaw, where, 28 of the 96 victims of the crash are buried. The event's central place is a monument in the form of a broken longitudinal block, commemorating the catastrophe and all the victims of the crash.

The commemoration of the crash is attended the most prominent politicians: President Bronislaw Komorowski and his wife Anna, Prime Minister Donald Tusk of ministers, the Sejm and the Senate of the Parliament Speaker and Bogdan Borusewicz with a delegation of parliamentary clubs except PiS. Former prime ministers and presidents i.e. Jerzy Buzek, Aleksander Kwasniewski, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, diplomats from Celestino Migliore Apostolic Nuncio and Ambassador of the Russian Republic (Alexander Alexeyev). The largest group consisted of relatives of the passengers of the tragic flight.

It is an official event, state rank, in accordance with the protocol, assisted by Polish army guard of honor, the priests of several denominations, and of course the media. The ceremony is reserved for persons invited, the audience can only watch the events from a distance. After the speeches given by the President and representative of the families, clerics recite ecumenical prayer. The announcer read the names of the 96 victims of the disaster. The army gives three volleys of honor, and the delegations lay the wreaths at the monument.

II) European Union – future of the integration process and the Polish membership

For Poland and other CEE countries, accession to the EU provided symbolic confirmation of their Europeanness, regained after the period of communist rule. High hopes were accompanied by several concerns and fears, including “dissolution” in the European multicultural space as well as some economic fears. Apart from that, Poland evinced interest in joining the European structures and took the first steps toward transforming its political and economic system. This is how processes of Europeanization overlapped with the democratization and transformation of the political scene. While the political scene was consolidated and the development of stable patterns preceded the EU in the old member states (Landrech 2011: 231)², patterns of inter-party competition in post-communist countries were constantly changing; the level of party system institutionalization was lower, and electoral volatility was higher than in Western democracies (Bielasiak 2005; Lane, Ersson 2007).³ Moreover, in the majority of post-communist countries, party-system consolidation and accession have emerged at the same time (Pridham 2011:64).

Polish politics has always been embedded in history, and one may still experience it in domestic and foreign policy. Some phenomena, such as the tradition of opposing the state as well as the strong position of the Catholic Church, need to be taken into account when discussing contemporary politics. In the first years of transition, the Polish political scene had demonstrated the tendency to lean toward the Right; this trend was also visible previously and was even commented on by Stalin who claimed that “communism suits Poland like a saddle does a cow” (Bachmann 1995: 44). The strong anti-communist approach in society was backed by the Catholic Church, which traditionally supported the opposition and has been perceived as a mainstay of Polish national identity, not only under communism but also throughout history.

The peripheral location and geopolitics of Poland generated the permanent fear of its two great neighbors and “significant others”: Germany and Russia; thus, “the construction of Polish national identity was dominated by the interpretation of history as a process of continuous struggle between those two neighbors” (Góra, Mach 2010: 222).⁴ This has resulted in the strong conviction among citizens that Polish national identity is under constant danger and that there is a need to protect it.

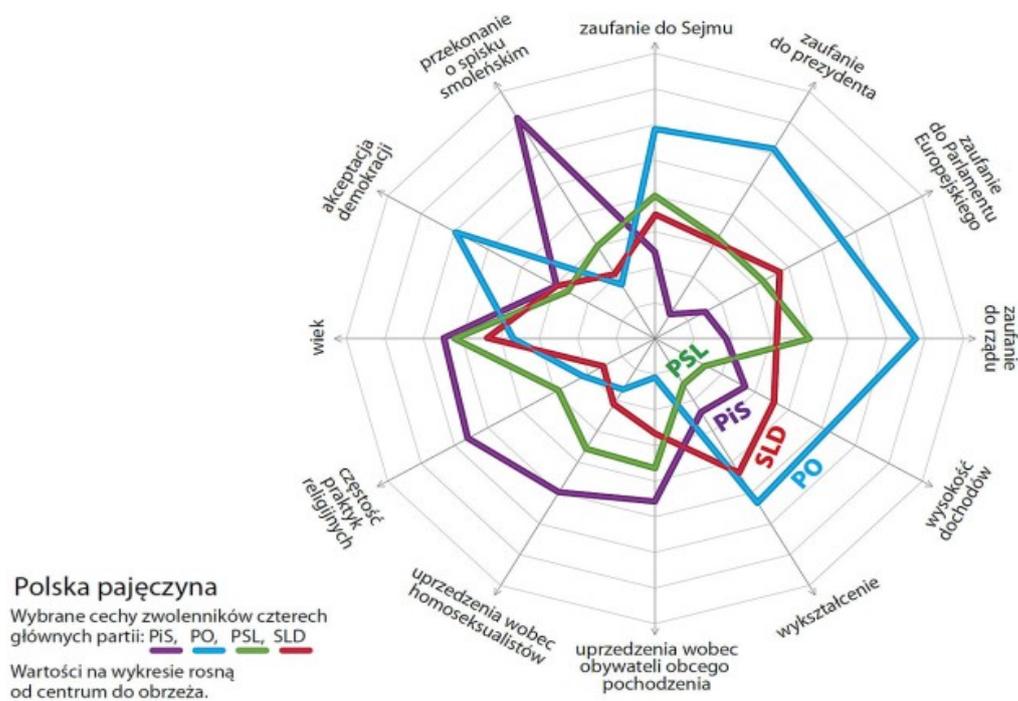
That influences also today's discussions regarding the EU. On the other hand substantial financial aid Poland received in the last years as well as new-international perspectives that opened for the young

² Landrech R. (2011): Europeanisation and party system instability in post-communist states. In *Europeanising Party Politics? Comparative Perspectives on Central and Eastern Europe*. Markowski R and Lewis P (Eds.). Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press

³ Bielasiak, J. (2005) Party Competition in Emerging Democracies. *Democratization*. 12(3): 331-356.; Lane, J.-E. and Ersson, S. (1997), Parties and Voters: What Creates the Ties?. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 20: 179–196.

⁴ Gora, M, Mach Z. (2012): 2010, Collective Identity and Democracy. The Impact of EU Enlargement, RECON Report no 12

generation create a contra punctual for the europceptic views. All these is crucial to an understanding of the nature of Polish politics and are often used in the rhetoric of supporters and opponents of European integration in the 90s but also today. The political communication over the EU integration future and Polish membership is one of the elements that constitute different political camps and core electorates.



Source: Diagnoza Społeczna 2011⁵

As PiS refers to the EU in the election manifesto (2011):

“The second challenge relates to our status in the European Union. These are issues of great importance that gives a chance for realization of our national interest. Our status in the EU regards questions concerning our relations with Russia, which clearly sought to obtain tacit consent of the authorities of the Union in order to weaken our status in that relations. In brief, EU-Russia agreement applies in relation to our country only to the extent that at any given time is accepted by Russia. We are committed to genuine improvement in relations with Russia , but we will also determination of the total defend a full-fledged character of the Polish membership in the European Union – that would lead Russia to fulfill all obligations arising from its agreement with the Union.”

“The most important issue related to the EU Membership is sovereignty of Poland nation. Law and Justice invariably backs the concept of Europe od sovereign states, and strongly opposes federalist tendencies, we will definitely strive for such changes in the Constitution, which clearly define its overarching

⁵ Diagnoza Społeczna (2011): www.diagnoza.com/pliki/raporty/Diagnoza_raport_2011.pdf

nature to all regulations in force in our country, and therefore also against primary and European law, and enable effective control of compliance of applicable law in Poland EU to our constitution. We will strongly oppose the decision that deepen our dependence on regulation of adopted at EU level in these areas, which have not yet been regulated. Euro zone issue (e.g. the Euro Plus Pact) and the sphere of culture and customs.”

“The ultimate exponent of the voluntary nature of membership in the European Union is vested each Member State. It has been confirmed in the Treaty Lisbon, but it is also necessary to establish respective internal procedures. The point is that today or in the foreseeable future use of the possibility of - Law and Justice clearly favours.”

As PO refers to EU in their manifesto (2011):

“Most of our activities in the field of foreign policy is implemented through the European Union. Effectively pursue our right the state can enter only through skilful our interest in the wider European interest.”

“The European system is constant negotiation process in which the most important is strength of arguments. It is not enough to be right, you still need to convince her partners. Both in the wider international environment, as and in the European Union. Civic Platform knows how to build effective coalitions, how to negotiate and how to convince partners to our right. “

“We believe that the answer to the current crisis and uncertain international environment is "no less, and more Europe", which is why we support the strengthening of EU institutions as well as closer coordination the economic policies of individual Member States, as well as completion of the single market. Within the Presidency we prepare EU regulations and directives that reinforce economic governance in the Union, and their aim is to secure sustainable Europe before the next crisis (the so-called six-pack).”

“The antidote to fear for Russia is a modern and strong Poland, having a reliable allies, a strong position in the European Union and excellent relationships with its other neighbors in the East. We are convinced that Poland will continue play a key role in shaping the new calculates the European Union. We walked into the circle countries that have influence on the final shape decisions taken in the EU, and this position will effectively well established.”

It has been shown that electorates of four main parties and their characteristics, generally speaking the level of trust to the EU and its institutions is one of the distinguishing features of the centrist Civic Platform (PO), on the opposite, the lowest level of trust is one of constitutive features for the conservative Law and Justice Party (PiS) supporters for permanent Polish participation in the EU - but rather to confirm the provisions of the Polish constitutional status and statutory indisputable principle of sovereignty, which implies our right to unilaterally decision to withdraw from the Union.

The national identity issue in the context of the EU has been communicated directly and frequently by the both sides. The table below presents a fragments of original texts and translation of the political manifestos of the two main opponent parties Civic Platform and Law and Justice Party where the EU issues