

RECONSTRUCTION OF POLISH IDENTITY WITHIN THE EU: A FOREIGN POLICY PERSPECTIVE*

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the evolution of Poland's behaviour in the EU over the years. Such an analysis reveals that the Polish position as a member of the EU is not static and formed once and for all but is rather subject to a continuous reconstruction process. This article argues that the identity of Poland within the EU is not constructed once and for all but is rather subject to changes - specifically between Euro-enthusiasm and Euroscepticism - also affecting the interplay between Polish and European foreign policies. In the process of its candidacy to become a member of the EU, Poland endeavoured to adjust itself to EU standards and adopted EU norms and values. In the first decade of its membership in the EU, Poland had effectively downloaded the EU norms and standards and by behaving according to the logic of appropriateness it gained the necessary trust and approval from the EU. However, the current situation in Poland demonstrates that Poland has retreated from its previous course and has become Eurosceptic. This article further explores the factors behind the current distancing of Poland from the EU.

Keywords: Poland, the EU, social constructivism, identity, foreign policy.

POLONYA KİMLİĞİNİN AB İÇİNDE YENİDEN İNŞASI: DIŞ POLİTİKA PERSPEKTİFİ

Öz

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Bu makale, Polonya'nın AB'deki davranışının yıllar içindeki gelişimini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu tip bir analiz, Polonya'nın AB üyesi olarak konumunun statik olmadığını ve kesin olarak oluşmadığını, bunun yerine sürekli bir yeniden yapılanma sürecine tabi olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu makale, Polonya'nın AB içindeki kimliğinin kesin olarak inşa edilmediğini, bunun yerine - özellikle Avrupa hevesliliği ve Avrupa şüpheciliği arasındaki gitgellerle - Polonya ve Avrupa dış politikaları arasındaki etkileşimi de etkileyen değişikliklere tabi olduğunu savunmaktadır. Polonya, AB'ye aday olma sürecinde AB standartlarına uyum sağlamaya çalışmış, AB norm ve değerlerini benimsemiştir. Polonya, AB üyeliğinin ilk on yılında AB norm ve standartlarını etkin bir şekilde indirmiş ve uygunluk mantığına göre davranarak AB'den gerekli güven ve onayı almıştır. Ancak Polonya'daki mevcut durum, Polonya'nın önceki rotasından geri çekildiğini ve Avrupa şüpheci olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu makale, Polonya'nın AB'den şu anda uzaklaşmasının ardındaki faktörleri de ayrıntılı olarak incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Polonya, Avrupa Birliği, sosyal inşacılık, kimlik, dış politika.

Introduction

According to constructivists, interactions between different actors have an impact on the identity and interest formation of individual states; hence they influence the transformation of the world order. Each actor has its own distinctive “private knowledge” that derives from subjective beliefs, which can be considered one of the major explanations for the way how states frame reality (Wendt, 1999: 140–141). In this respect adding Poland’s national identity to the analysis of its foreign policy is crucial because the country represents a particularly interesting case study, as it had gone through a significant transformation for EU membership that has contributed to the reconstruction of Polish national identity. This article aims to explore the changes in Polish identity since its membership in the EU and specifically focuses on how these changes have affected the interplay between Polish and European foreign policies. In this endeavour, Poland’s path in the EU is analyzed through a constructivist lens. This article argues that the identity of Poland within the EU is not constructed once and for all but is rather subject to changes – specifically between Euro-enthusiasm and Euroscepticism – also affecting the interplay between Polish and European foreign policies, and that this mainly depends on the stance of the governing elites, and the nationalistic/populist tendency of the Polish public as well as on the widespread – and historically – negative perception of Russia in the country.

This article aims to narrow the gap in the existing literature which mainly focuses on the Europeanisation of foreign policies of EU member states (see, e.g.: Wong, 2005; Müller and Alecu de Flers, 2009; Kamińska, 2007; Pomorska, 2011) and thus lacks a more general, social constructivist International Relations (IR) perspective in the analysis of the interaction between the EU and its member states regarding the formation of European foreign policy. Thus this article applies a social constructivist framework to analyze how the reconstruction of Polish identity has affected its EU membership and European foreign policy. It inquires into the extent to which Polish behaviour in the world arena stems from the country's national identity, the identity that has been formed through interactions with other actors such as (and mainly) the EU, Germany, and Russia. The methodology used here is the application of a theoretical framework to a specific issue area. It mainly relies on an intensive analysis of secondary sources such as academic articles and books (on Social Constructivism as well as on Poland's membership in the EU and Polish foreign policy) as well as think-tank reports (on Poland's membership in the EU and Polish foreign policy). The primary sources used are mainly EU official documents (that concern Poland, Ukraine and Russia) as well as official speeches/declarations by Polish leaders/authorities (on the EU and on Polish foreign policy). The main time frame of the analysis provided here is 2004-2021 – the year of Polish accession to the EU and the last full year before Russia's invasion of Ukraine – however, historical developments are also mentioned to provide an overview. Recent developments are also referred to when and where necessary.

Theoretical and Historical Overview: Reading Polish Identity and its Stance in the EU through a Constructivist Lens

Constructivists argue that identity is not pre-given, but, rather, a socially constructed notion that is continuously (re)built through the socialization process among actors¹. Keeping in mind that the “relationship between identity and foreign policy” is “mutually constitutive” (Tonra, 2011: 1192-1193). For social constructivists, EU foreign policy is “an ideal empirical testing ground” for analysis (Tonra, 2003: 738). The social constructivist approach enables us to comprehend EU foreign policy by focusing on the interaction between actors included in the process. Constructivists analyze the EU foreign policy formation process through the identities of the actors that are continuously being reconstructed through a socialization process that shapes their interests and foreign policies. They evaluate the establishment of and developments in EU foreign policy not as pre-given and stable, but rather as a process characterized by different “phases”. Constructivists see the EU foreign policy

¹ See e.g. Wendt (1999).

as a continuously ongoing social process with the central role of knowledge transaction and sharing of understandings among the parts.

Identity politics is central to the constructivist accounts of EU foreign policy (Risse, 2012: 87), furthermore in “hard-core variants”, the CFSP “can be understood as being all about identity creation” (Tonra, 1999: 4). Thus, both EU identity and the identities of its member states are amenable to change and their identities remain in constant flux. The EU and its members unceasingly influence each other and it leads to the (re)definition of their identities. Such a (re)definition of the EU and Member States’ identities determines their foreign policies and preferences. Rumelili argues: “The identity of Europe is changing depending on who identifies with Europe, in what ways, and to what extent and what meanings and understandings relevant actors ascribe to Europe” (Rumelili, 2015: 4).

Each EU member state has its own identity that is reflected in its relations with other actors. They bring to the EU their understandings, they affect the EU’s interests, thus also its foreign policy and also identity and in turn, gets affected by them (i.e., their identities, interests and foreign policies also get transformed in this process). The EU unites states with specific characteristics and diverse identities that derive from attributes such as historical influence, culture, religion and geographical location. In these circumstances, new identities and common understandings come to the fore. The Polish case is significant in this regard as Polish identity and its foreign policy have gone through significant change during both its candidacy to become an EU member and its membership.

After the end of the Cold War, Poland immediately signalled its willingness to be a part of the Western world and emphasized its European roots. Poland was determined to succeed in joining NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004. Its willingness to join Western organizations, namely North Atlantic Treaty (NATO) and the European Union (EU) might be considered as a crucial step in the country’s redefinition of its identity and its intention to abandon its communist past. In practice, such a reframing of Polish identity meant leaving the Russian sphere of influence. So, entrance to the competitive and contrasting Western camp was the goal that Poland sought to achieve. This was mainly because Polish leaders believed that only such a Polish “return to Europe” could distance Poland from the threatening Russian Other.

Although the governing elites changed in Poland, they were consistent in their endeavours to achieve Poland’s main objective of rapprochement and integration with the West. Poland’s determination, strong aspirations, unified voice and clear approach contributed to the country being labelled as a “success story” (e.g. Follath and Puhl, 2012, Summa, 2008: 25). All levels of Polish

society expressed a wish for change and to break with Poland's communist identity. This was reflected in the attitude of Poland's new authorities who "rejected the paradigms and mechanisms of the old bloc system of security, which in fact meant a rejection of the Eastern Bloc and the eastern orientation for the sake of the western one" (Zięba, 2004: 16). Poland's endeavours along with the favourable political conditions resulted in Poland's eventual accession to the NATO and the EU. Poland's entrance into Western organizations inaugurated a new chapter in Polish history and was a significant breakthrough in the country's transformation process. Poland's identity was redefined, from the Soviet Satellite State into an independent democratic country able to draw its own path.

Poland's strenuous endeavours and the rhetoric of European identity employed by its politicians and the media resulted in its construction, along with the Czech Republic and Hungary, "as a part of Europe without which Europe cannot be whole" (Neumann, 1999: 25). Moreover, the construction of a particular Polish identity was confirmed "by the West European countries", which was reflected in the accession to the EU (Neumann, 1999: 25). Poland's accession to the EU was labelled a "success story" and it had widespread support from the Polish population. Poles felt that they regained their European identity, which had been suppressed during the years of communist rule. Romaniszyn (2016: 170) points out that "the research shows that the national and the European identities are mutually inclusive, and being a Pole means being a European".

On the other hand, Polish integration with the EU was not also devoid of problems. The uncompromising stance of Polish officials during the accession negotiations and Poland's approach to the Nice voting system² influenced the perception of Poland as a "noisy newcomer" and a rather difficult partner that was not eager to find a consensus (Longhurst and Zaborowski, 2007: 2). Szczerbiak (2012: 44) states that Poland had a "unique status as a 'geopolitical giant' but an 'economic dwarf', which gave it limited political resources to achieve its ambitions, made it a potentially extremely problematic EU member state". Poland portrayed itself as an actor that aspired to a position among "the leading states within the EU – at worst a middle-ranking power"; thus, it

² The Nice voting system issue refers to Poland's reaction to the proposal of a new voting system proposed in a draft of the Constitutional Treaty (2003). Poland argued that the new voting system for the Council of the European Union proposed by the Convention was most beneficial for the largest EU states, especially for Germany and at the same time this new voting rule was diminishing the possibility to block the decisions that would be unfavourable for Poland (Bielawska, 2012: 239). So, Poland assertively endeavoured to keep the previous votingsystem, the Nice voting system. See more e.g. (Kaczynski, 2007).

expected to be a respected partner that wanted its voice heard (Szczerbiak, 2012: 43).

Furthermore, there was also political instability in Poland. The Miller government, which took office in 2001, resigned over a corruption scandal in May 2005, just after Poland's accession to the EU. The next government, that of Belka, which was in office from June 2004 to October 2005, proved to be unstable and short-lived, and it did not succeed in efficiently shaping the direction of Polish foreign affairs. Between 2005 and 2007, three coalition parties were in office, all of which were "extremely critical towards the EU and which we have labelled 'Eurosceptic'" (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2013: 28). The new coalition of the PiS, the Self-Defence Party (Samoobrona) and the League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin) took a sceptical position on the EU, which was reflected in the rhetoric adopted by the ruling authorities. Discord among the members of this "Eurosceptic" coalition meant that it was unable to take a common stance and exercise a coherent foreign policy.

The policy pursued by the PiS government significantly affected Polish–EU relations and contributed to the perception of Poland as an uneasy partner that insisted on maintaining its approach without compromise. This rather demanding attitude adopted by the new government and supported by Polish President Lech Kaczyński was not welcomed in EU circles.³ The government took a negative stance regarding Germany, the country at the core of the EU and that had strongly supported Polish membership: "The Kaczyński twins, Lech and prime minister Jaroslaw, view Berlin as a threat to Polish sovereignty, and are convinced that Chancellor Angela Merkel has abused her role as EU president to push the German national interest" (Traynor, 2007). The narratives used by Polish authorities had seriously shaken Polish–German relations and contributed to the common view of Poland as a problematic and difficult actor. The negative attitude of the governing elites and the digging up of the past was not consistent with the EU's representation as a peace project that aims to unite nations. The course of foreign policy adopted by the new government also suggested that Poland had not learnt the rules prevailing in the EU and its institutions. Thus, as Bieńczyk-Missala (2016: 104) argues: "the first years in the EU made it evident that Poland had no clear vision of the future of the Union. It took time for the country to gain experience and develop a constructive approach to policy within Europe".

During its early years in the EU, Poland distanced itself from new initiatives. This was reflected in its approach towards the idea of the Constitution for Europe, and it was later continued in the debate on the Lisbon

³ Lech Kaczyński was Jaroslaw Kaczyński's twin brother; he served as the president between 2005 and 2010.

Treaty. The Polish president, Lech Kaczyński clearly expressed his reluctance to agree to the changes that were planned to be introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, and he insisted that Poland was not going to lose its rights or pool them further at the EU level because he believed that would limit the Polish voice in the EU (Euroactiv, 2008). Kaczyński even saw this as a threat to Poland's national interests. He refused to sign the Lisbon Treaty and he made his decision depend on the Irish referendum, maintaining that efforts were "now pointless" due to the Irish rejection of the treaty (Castle and Dempsey, 2008).

Poland's concerns about losing its sovereign rights and its sensitivity about this matter stemmed from the Polish identity which was strongly shaped by the experience of loss of sovereignty in the past. The scrupulousness of Polish officials towards any changes that could affect Polish independence was caused by meanings formed in the years when Poland remained under the invasion of other actors, and these meanings were strongly embedded in the citizens' and democratically elected governing elites' minds. Thus, these circumstances had a crucial impact on the Polish approach towards the EU. Bieńczyk-Missala (2016: 104) emphasizes: "The Polish government supported a vision of a European Union of sovereign member states rather than a federation of states". On the other hand, the then Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk from the Civic Platform (PO) expressed support for the Treaty of Lisbon, stating: "We are convinced the treaty's ratification is in Poland's best interest [...] It is hard to accept a situation where Poland would be put in the same position as Ireland, a very troublesome position" (The Irish Times, 2008). Tusk declared that "Poland should ratify the treaty as soon as possible" (The Irish Times, 2008). Finally, on 10 October 2009, the Polish president signed the Lisbon Treaty with opt-outs from the EU Human Rights Charter.

The contradictory positions towards the EU exposed the discord among Polish governing elites. Although both the centrist PO party and the conservative Law and PiS "agreed that membership in NATO and the EU provided the foundation of security and development of the country, and both were in favour of strengthening relations with the United States", their approaches to foreign policy framing regarding other issues and how these goals could be realized differed (Bieńczyk-Missala, 2016: 103). While the PiS administration "was and is Eurosceptical, distrustful towards Germany, and with very limited initiatives in the relations with Russia", the Civic Platform government, which was in office from 2008 until 2015, was "strongly pro-European" (Bieńczyk-Missala, 2016:103). Thus, these mixed signals negatively influenced the Polish image in the international arena. The struggle among the governing elites in Poland exposed the immaturity of Polish foreign policy and divisions within the ruling group.

A new period in EU-Poland relations began with the office of Donald Tusk's Cabinet, on 16 November 2007 and lasted until 16 November 2015⁴. It was the stage when Poland began actively – and what is even more important, successfully – uploading its national interests and preferences onto the EU's agenda. The redefinition of Poland's behaviour has resulted in the strengthening of Poland's position in the EU and reinforced the reconstruction of the European understanding of Poland. At that time Poland proved that it effectively downloaded the EU norms and standards, by behaving according to the logic of appropriateness Warsaw gained the necessary trust and approval from the EU. Poland's learning ability facilitated Poland's potential to upload its interests onto the EU agenda, and the establishment of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) may serve as a case in point.

The Tusk government greatly contributed to the reconstruction of Poland's European identity. Kamińska (2007: 2) points out: "Poland had developed a new Post-Cold War identity, with a new role for the country, as the regional leader, predestin[ed] to promote democracy in the neighbourhood and import knowledge about Eastern Europe to her Western partners". However, the Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* – PiS) government that came to power in 2015 proved to take on a different course in their foreign policy strategy that once again caused the shift in the perception about Poland in Europe. Along with the PiS government the third phase in the interplay between EU foreign policy and Polish foreign policy has begun. This phase has manifested that Poland's downloading EU norms and values was not deep enough and internalization by the domestic actors did fully not take place.

The PiS government retreated from the Euroenthusiastic path followed by the previous government and abandoned the willingness to download the EU standards to the domestic level. Buras (2017) contends that "PiS since they came to power in 2015" aimed at "the de-Europeanisation of Polish domestic and foreign policy" (Buras, 2017). In his view, PiS government has "neither reject[ed] the EU as such, nor oppose[d] Poland's EU membership" but it "reject[ed] the paradigm of 'Europeanisation' that ha[d] informed Poland's transformation over the last 25 years" (Buras, 2017)⁵.

⁴ On 16 November 2015 the Cabinet of Beata Szydło was formed by coalition of right Law and Justice party (PiS), centre-right Poland Together (PR) party and right United Poland party (SP).

⁵ It should be noted at this point that the Polish backslide from democracy and its reluctance to download EU policies can also be explained through the conceptual framework of de-Europeanization, however, because this article especially focuses on the shift in Polish identity and its reflections on the interplay between Polish and European foreign policies, social constructivism was preferred as its analytical conceptual framework. On the

Changes in Polish Identity: Euro-enthusiasm and Euroscepticism in Poland after EU Membership

Kołodziejczyk (2016: 18) argues that “the poor political experience in the first years after accession was an excellent lesson, and Poland was able to learn from it”. Tusk’s government, which took office in 2007, framed a new agenda for Polish foreign policy, and it also reconsidered Poland’s approach toward the EU. It was during the Tusk government that Polish foreign policy got crystallized. In 2009, foreign affairs Minister Radosław Sikorski (2009) announced: “we already know that it is safer to sail the stormy waves of global politics and economy not on a national boat, but on a European liner”. The narrative employed by the Tusk government indicated that Poland had learnt its lesson and realized that it could achieve much more by acting according to the European rules of the game. In other words, a logic of appropriateness started to prevail in Polish foreign policy. The main objectives of Polish foreign policy were defined as follows:

- A Poland strong in Europe, a patron and promoter of Europe’s eastern policy;
- Poland as a strong link in the North Atlantic Alliance;
- Poland as an attractive brand: a country of success which loves freedom and knows how to share freedom;
- Poland as a country which supports its diaspora and which is fuelled by its vitality;
- Polish diplomacy as an effective service (Sikorski, 2009).

The foreign policy exercised during Tusk’s government contributed to the perception of Poland as an influential player ready to compromise and open to constructive discussion. Furthermore, Poland seemed to learn that it could gain more when it followed the rules prevailing in the EU, such as by forming coalitions and building good relations with other members to achieve greater support for its ideas, as in the case of the EaP and Poland’s support for Ukraine. In December 2008, Poland joined the Schengen area, which was Poland’s next step in integration with the EU. This was an evidence of the strengthening of the trust between both actors.

Polish foreign policy between 2007 and 2014 turned out to be more stable, with Polish authorities more willing to compromise. However, the domestic discords between the president and prime minister undermined the image of Poland as a serious and influential actor. Tensions between President Kaczyński

and Prime Minister Tusk led to significant disagreements in the area of foreign affairs that resulted in a negative and unfavourable perception of the country (Kamińska, 2014: 44). The president and the prime minister “clashed repeatedly on the division of competencies” (Hebel, 2008). The acrimonious relations between the ruling authorities in Poland negatively echoed in the international arena.

However, the situation changed after Bronisław Komorowski won the presidential election in July 2010⁶. Since Komorowski was a member of the Civic Platform, the prime minister and president had their roots in the same liberal-political party, with the result that their views on Poland’s future were harmonious. This was positively reflected in Poland’s behaviour on the world stage. There were significant developments in Polish foreign policy, and Polish officials became more constructive and pragmatic. Foreign minister Radosław Sikorski’s attitude became more flexible and pragmatic, with his strategy based on building good relations with other member states such as Germany and Sweden. The Tusk government’s approach was welcomed by the EU and its members; furthermore, it enjoyed the support of the Polish people.

The Civic Platform – the Polish People’s Party (PO-PSL) coalition cabinet was reelected in November 2011 and remained in office until September 2014. Popular support for the coalition decreased in comparison to the election of 2007, although there was more satisfaction than dissatisfaction with it (CBOS, 2011). Tusk’s government introduced major changes in Poland, and the coalition’s foreign policy strengthened Poland’s position in the EU. Their approach was economically and politically successful. Despite the global economic crisis, Poland remained “Europe’s growth champion”⁷ (Piatkowski, 2015; Piatkowski, 2018). In 2009, Jerzy Buzek was appointed president of the European Parliament, and in 2014 Donald Tusk became the President of the European Council (The Chancellery of the Prime Minister, 2014). The appointment of two Poles to crucial positions in the EU might be perceived as a reward for Poland’s good performance and for grounding its position in Europe. Kołodziejczyk (2016: 10) argues that “after slightly more than a decade, Poland made a significant leap forward”; became “the leader of economic growth in the EU”; and “the symbolical crowning achievement so far was the appointment of Donald Tusk to the office of President of the European Council in the tenth year after accession”. This assignment rewarded the endeavours of Tusk’s government and contributed to the new understanding that Poland had been transformed into a strong player.

⁶ President Bronisław Komorowski’s predecessor Lech Kaczyński died in an airplane crash in Russia on 10 April 2010.

⁷ See more about Poland’s economic growth e.g. Fredriksson (2019).

Upon Tusk's resignation, the new prime minister, Ewa Kopacz, was appointed by President Bronisław Komorowski on 15 September 2014. She was the head of the PO-PSL coalition government from 2014 to 2015. Kopacz (2014) highlighted the achievements of the preceding government, contending that "[t]hanks to the predictable and credible policy of recent years Poland finally joined European first league and began to discover the role that is corresponding to its potential and aspirations". She also announced that one of her cabinet's main objectives would be the continuation of "further strengthening of [Poland's] position in the European Union" (Kopacz, 2014). However, this positive state of affairs did not last very long and the course of events changed with the election of a new government on 25 October 2015.

The conservative and Eurosceptic PiS candidate Andrzej Duda won the presidential election, and in 2015 the PiS formed a coalition with the conservative-liberal party, Poland Together (Polska Razem – PR), and the Catholic-nationalist party, Solidarity Poland (Solidarna Polska – SP). Thus, the PiS held both the presidency and the government. From the outset of PiS's rule, it seemed that relations between the EU and Poland would be difficult. Poland did not attend the Valletta summit on migration due to the official ceremony of changing government. President Duda explained that "he was not aware of the Valetta summit taking place on the same day", an attitude that was perceived by many as "either a sign of the sheer ignorance of his advisors or pure arrogance" (Buras, 2015). The cabinet of Beata Szydło marked an era of harder relations between the EU and Poland. The new government initially refused to fulfil the refugees' agreement concluded with the EU that had previously been agreed by Tusk's government. Poland's refusal to accept 6,200 asylum seekers was explained through the statement that the approval of the EU quotas "could be a problem for Poland's homogenous society" (Cienski, 2017). Political discourse about refugees suggested that Poland was a rather unwelcome place for refugees. Controversial changes introduced by the Polish government caused deterioration in relations between both sides, as new reforms posed a threat to media freedom and the rule of law.⁸ Prime Minister Szydło declared that because the government was democratically elected, the reforms were "the decision of Polish citizens" (The Chancellery of the Prime Minister, 2016).

The next government was also formed by the PiS in coalition with PR and SP, and Morawiecki's cabinet was formed in December 2017. The new Prime Minister declared "continuation rather than change" and his tone towards the EU seemed to soften, which "reflected a major motive behind the sudden

⁸ The new bill proposed by the PiS government posed a threat to the balance of powers in the country since the new law planned to replace the Supreme Court judges with judges nominated by the government. It was argued that this reform would undermine the rule of law in the country. See more: BBC News (2017).

leadership swap: lessening friction between Brussels and Warsaw” (Broniatowski, 2017). The spreading wave of populism and turn to nationalism in Europe created a fertile ground for the conservative and nationalist ideology of the PiS party. Furthermore, the refugee issue was portrayed as a threat to European and Polish culture; strengthening right-wing parties, which gained popular support and were elected to the most important offices in the country’s administration.

Polish identity was reframed from being a constructive partner in the EU during the Tusk government to becoming a difficult and unpredictable player during PiS rule. Poland’s Euro-enthusiasm and its aspirations to be at the core of EU decision-making were replaced by Euroscepticism. Moreover, polarization in Polish foreign policy and the clash between Tusk and PiS continued even when Tusk became President of the European Council: the relations between the two sides were “so bad that Poland was the only country to vote against his re-election as EU president in March”⁹ (Deutsche Welle, 2017), and this contributed to the image of Poland as an unpredictable player. Although Tusk’s government succeeded in framing a foreign policy that empowered Poland’s self-projection as a strong and important player in the EU, the situation was drastically changing. Poland’s foreign policy agenda underwent a transformation process, and the PiS government’s policy of “getting up off Poland’s knees” and “leaving the policy of mainstream” contributed to the loss of its influence in the West (Kokot, 2016) and to the negative construction of Poland’s image. A close alliance with Hungary, ruled by the far-right leader Victor Orban who also has a reputation for controversial views and for going against the EU stream, has fostered the perception that Poland lacks a crystalized foreign policy and that it was not a coherent entity that could speak with one voice.

Poland’s current attitude marks its position as a member that is moving away from Europe’s core and might even be considered as Europe’s Other that is gradually departing from European norms values and ideas. A case in point is the introduction of a new juridical law¹⁰ in December 2017 that became a bone of contention between the two sides¹¹. Poland was warned by the Commission that the Covid recovery fund for Poland would not be released in case Poland did not make significant progress in the area of the rule of law (CNN World, 2021). Although the EU reached an agreement with Poland about the steps necessary for unblocking the funds (Ptak, 2022), the dispute between the EU

⁹ Donald Tusk was re-elected as the President of the European Council on 9 March 2017.

¹⁰ See more about the changes in judicial system in Poland adopted by PiS: Democracy Reporting International(2018).

¹¹ The rule of law crisis is perceived to be very serious since it even “poses an existential threat to the EuropeanUnion” (Monciunskaitė, 2022: 50).

and Poland over the rule of law remains unresolved. Jarosław Kaczyński claimed that Poland has fulfilled its obligation but the Commission did not act its part, he added that Poland “do[es] not fit into German-Russian plans to rule Europe” and that “[a]n independent, economically, socially and militarily strong Poland is an obstacle for them” (Cienski, 2022). Such rhetoric suggests the continuation of the U-turn in the construction of Polish identity from being in alignment with the EU standards for altering it.

The polarization and instability present in Polish politics undermine Poland’s endeavours to project itself as an influential and credible actor. Thus, as Rotfeld¹² (2004:106), former deputy of foreign affairs, has suggested “the greatest threat to Poland is the instability of its domestic situation and the imbalance between internal and external policy is enormous”. Therefore Poland might be for the EU either a stable pillar that facilitates the EU’s development or an obstacle that hampers the unity of the EU and that deepened to the high extent of the “style” of behaviour that Polish governing elites prefer to adopt. Poland’s stance since its accession has changed dramatically, and so do the perception of Poland has been revised and Poland’s overall potential to influence positively the EU.

Within the span of a few years, Poland has transformed as a country from a “rising engine of European integration” (Bajczuk, 2011: 1) to a “threat to European solidarity” (Stephens, 2016). Thus, the understanding about Poland has been redefined, which might be considered as proof of the constructivist assumption that the social world is in a continuous process that is reflected in actors’ identities and, hence, their foreign policies.

Changes in Polish Identity and the Interplay between Polish and European Foreign Policies

After accession to the EU, Polish foreign policy elites realized that the country did not have a clearly defined foreign policy. During the accession negotiations, the major aim was to gain membership in the EU as quickly as possible. However, once the main objective of Polish foreign policy had been achieved and Poland had become an EU member, Polish elites could not agree on the shape of Polish foreign policy. The lack of a coherent official Polish foreign policy agenda and the continuous changes in the Polish political arena significantly contributed to the perception that Poland was a country without a crystallized vision of its future. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Andrzej Olechowski (2004: 20), argued that the successful accession to NATO and the EU ended a particular stage in Polish foreign policy, commenting that Poland did not have a defined strategy for the future nor a vision of its future position

¹² Adam Rotfeld served also as the Polish foreign minister in 2005.

in the EU. Thus, it became clear that after the main objectives of Polish foreign policy had been fulfilled, Poland needed to pursue new goals and reframe its foreign affairs agenda. Moreover, a lack of experts and educated officers familiar with the EU's rules hampered adaptation processes (Kamińska, 2014: 221). Furthermore, the rotation of the ruling elites seriously limited the establishment of contact between the EU and Poland, undermining the possibility of building consistent cooperation between both sides (Kamińska, 2014: 221).

After Poland acceded to the EU, socialization between the EU and Poland was difficult for both sides because Poland's behaviour deviated from the standards prevailing among the older member states. Even though Poland has undergone the Europeanisation process but "on important occasions, [it] also forcefully insisted on its national interests in its dealings with the EU" (Müller and Alecu de Flers, 2009:18). In certain cases where its national interests were at stake, Poland was not open to constructive discussion but rather tended to insist on furthering its own preferences. In other words, Warsaw was not ready to reach compromises. Such an approach stemmed from Poland remaining a long time in the Soviet Union's sphere of influence and the Polish political system was characterized by dependency on its Big Brother¹³.

Poland's first steps in its independent foreign policy formation process were deeply influenced by Poland's previous identity. Even though Poland was willing to transform itself it needed time to learn how to behave after the end of the Cold War. In this regard, the redefinition of Poland's relationship with Germany was a crucial element in the reconstruction process of Polish identity. Reconciliation with Germany was one of the cases that exhibits the fact that gradually Poland was coming to understand that the actions driven by the logic of appropriateness and eagerness for constructive discussion opened new opportunities for Poland in the EU. Through social practice, Poland has learnt that in order not to merely download the EU rules but also to get the ability to upload its national interests and preferences into the EU agenda, Warsaw's approach necessitates reconsideration. Such a redefinition of Polish behaviour has inaugurated the second stage in the relationship between the EU and Poland.

A significant Polish contribution to European Foreign Policy had been giving a significant boost to the EU's relations with its Eastern neighbours. From the beginning of its path to the EU, Poland expressed its support for strengthening the relations between the EU and its Eastern partners. The

¹³ Big Brother in this context regards the Soviet Union. The main characteristic of the foreign policy conducted by the Polish People's Republic (PRL) was a dependency on the Soviet Union which was reflected in Poland's relations with the outer world (Weremiuk, 2014: 43).

“Eastern dimension” had a high priority in the Polish foreign policy agenda and even on the eve of the Big-Bang enlargement, Poland submitted a “Non-paper with Polish proposals concerning policy towards new Eastern neighbours after EU enlargement”, in January 2003. This non-paper declared that “Poland would like to contribute to shaping Union’s policy towards its future eastern neighbours understanding that, however important, this is only a part of the EU external relations and the Union’s neighbourhood policy” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, 2003: 85). This stance also continued after its membership and Poland expressed its interest in guiding and actively participating in the definition of the Eastern Dimension of the EU’s foreign policy. The Polish position on the Eastern dimension was evidence that “[i]ndependent and transformed, Poland had developed a new Post-Cold war identity, with a new role for the country, as a regional leader, [predestined] to promote democracy in the neighbourhood and import knowledge about Eastern Europe to its Western partners” (Kamińska, 2008: 2).

Framing the EU’s agenda for relations with its new Eastern neighbours was both a great challenge and an opportunity for Poland to manifest its reconstructed identity. Legucka (2013) argues that older EU member states also gave Poland a “constructive role” in creating European foreign policy towards Ukraine and Belarus; in an attempt to see whether, despite its bitter past, Poland would be able to maintain good relations with its Eastern neighbours. Thus, the way in which Poland chose to pursue a foreign policy towards its Eastern neighbours might be considered a test for Polish identity and the country’s position both in the region and in the EU. Browning and Joenniemi (2003: 474) argue that Poland’s Eastern Partnership initiative “constitute[d] a legitimate move in reflecting an apparent Polish ambition to contribute constructively to the Union’s policies in a new and challenging environment”.

The Eastern Dimension was inspired by the Mediterranean policy promoted by Spain, and by the Northern Dimension initiated by Finland (Meister and May, 2009: 1). Both of these frameworks were perceived by Poland as effective tools for the uploading of member states’ national interests into EU foreign policy (Pomorska, 2011:5-6). Although Poland continuously referred to the Eastern Dimension, this was not included in the ENP framework in 2004. Poland’s inability to influence the EU’s agenda towards the East in the first few years after its accession was regarded by analysts to be the result of Poland’s inexperience in acting according to the “Brussels game” (Kamińska, 2014; Pomorska, 2011: 6). When the ENP was established Poland expressed its discontent about the ENP’s shape, claiming that this policy lumped widely divergent countries together under the same framework. It became clear, therefore, that Poland was aspiring to play a significant role in defining the EU’s foreign policy toward the Eastern neighbours.

At the beginning of its membership in the EU, Poland was not prepared to present its projects about the Eastern Neighbourhood and get the necessary support from the Union and other member states. The lack of awareness about the rules prevailing in the EU foreign policy formation process, alongside the demanding attitude of the Polish authorities, contributed to Poland's uncompromising reputation. Because Poland's approach was not in line with the rules prevailing in the EU, which were based on the continuous exchange of ideas and the willingness to compromise (i.e., acting with a logic of appropriateness) its Eastern policy endeavours were not taken seriously, and did not gain support¹⁴.

Poland realized that it had to change its approach to achieve its Eastern Project. In the meantime, domestic and external circumstances were favouring the establishment of the Eastern Project. In the context of the domestic situation, shifts in the Polish government led to a significant reconstruction of Polish foreign policy. Along with the nomination of Radosław Sikorski as minister of foreign affairs in 2007, a new, more dynamic, and clearer foreign policy began to be pursued by the country as mentioned before. In 2008, Sikorski listed his five priorities, making clear which one occupied the first place: "Poland strong in Europe, patron and promoter of its Eastern policy" (Sikorski, 2008:17). He highlighted that "Poland [would] be a normal European country when it has normal European neighbours on both sides of its border" (Sikorski, 2008: 3). Moreover, developments in the East, as well as assertive Russian behaviour in the region and its imperialist aspirations which became clear with the Georgia crisis of 2008, reinforced the Polish narrative about the "Russian threat" and led to increased interest in the Eastern dimension among the EU member states. The "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine that took place from 2004-to 2005 demonstrated the necessity to create a specific framework for the region, and the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 helped to prompt the preparation of the EaP project (Stańczyk, 2011: 192).

Poland formed a coalition with Sweden to initiate the Eastern Partnership project. As a result, on 26 May 2008 Radosław Sikorski and Carl Bildt, foreign ministers of Poland and Sweden respectively, proposed an ambitious programme to the EU's General Affairs and External Relations Council in Brussels. The proposal was welcomed by the EU, and the Commission issued a communication to the European Parliament and the Council. The joint Polish and Swedish project aimed to develop closer relations between six post-Soviet countries¹⁵ in the ENP and the EU. The Polish decision to present the Eastern Dimension idea together with Sweden bore fruitful results. Thus, this calculated

¹⁴ See e.g. Copley and Pomorska (2014); Kamińska (2014:194-195).

¹⁵ Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

move revealed that Poland was learning its lesson in terms of playing “the Brussels game”¹⁶. The Polish authorities had concluded that a coalition with Sweden, a country that was regarded as an experienced and respected EU member and that would soon be holding the EU Presidency, could boost the chances of success for the Eastern Project (Copsey and Pomorska, 2014: 425). Furthermore, the coalition with Sweden aimed to soften the perception that the EaP was a project directed against Russia. The EaP was formally launched in Prague on 7 May 2009 and had been a great success for the Tusk government. Tusk’s cabinet with Sikorski, who served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, proved to be more successful than its predecessors in furthering Polish foreign policy priorities and integrating them into EU foreign policy. The Tusk government, in this regard, was more open to dialogue and turned out to be more flexible. This approach caused the reconstruction of understanding about Poland as an influential European player that not merely pushes forward its interests but also aspires to promote the EU’s norms and standards further eastward. So, the establishment of the EaP is an example of the successful export of Polish ideas to the EU agenda (Kamińska, 2014: 280).

Nevertheless, this positive perception of Poland in the EU got totally reversed with the PiS government’s policies which came to power in 2015. Polish identity also took a new bend with the PiS government as nationalism rose to a new height in the country and Euro-scepticism peaked. The EU domestic and international crisis resulted in the rise of nationalist and populist parties in Europe, including in Poland where the national-conservative Law and Justice (PiS) received strong support. When the PiS returned to power in 2015¹⁷, Poland began to pursue different policies, one based on the bitter experiences of the past¹⁸ and that was often antagonistic to EU policy. Moreover, the style adopted by the newly-elected governing elite initiated a critical juncture in Polish foreign policy, changing Poland’s “style” of conducting its foreign policy.

The retreat from democracy in Poland (Bąk et.al, 2017) led to serious confrontation with the EU. The Union expressed its discontent by raising the possibility of sanctions against Poland.¹⁹ Since the beginning of the passing of controversial laws in Poland, the EU has been following the course of events and has been expressing its discontent. However, the lack of improvement in Poland led to the triggering of Art.7 (1)²⁰ of the TEU in December 2017. The

¹⁶ “Brussels game” term is used by e.g Kamińska (2014).

¹⁷ PiS had previously been in power from October 2005 to November 2007.

¹⁸ See more e.g. Belavusau (2017), Sawicka and Skibicki (2017).

¹⁹ The introduction of sanctions requires the unanimity of all members of the EU.

²⁰ European Commission (2017) explained “The Procedure foreseen under Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) aims at ensuring that all EU Member States respect the

democratic backslide in the country seriously damaged Poland's image and raised doubts about its credibility as a foreign policy actor as well, reducing its potential to influence EU foreign policy. For example it undermined Poland's status as a source of inspiration for the transition for Ukraine (Balcer, 2019).

Several international developments also fed into the divide between Poland and the EU. The migration crisis of 2015 was one of those issues dividing the EU and Poland. In ethnic and national terms, Poland is one of the most homogeneous countries in the EU (European Union, 2019) – 96,9 per cent of citizens are of Polish ethnic origin and 85,9 per cent of the population is Catholic (The World Factbook, 2021). Therefore during the migration crisis in 2015, the quotas proposed by the EU²¹ to accept refugees from the Middle East and Africa had been a challenge for Poland. Although the Civic Platform government with Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz has agreed to host refugees, the PiS government that came into power in October 2015 opposed the decision adopted by its predecessors. The perspective to accept refugees from countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria was perceived by the PiS as a threat to Polish security. Refugees were often portrayed by conservative authorities as the Other that pose a threat to Polish culture and national identity. Furthermore, mandatory migrant quotas were perceived by Poland as EU interference in the country's sovereignty.

Poland's Eurocepticism was reinforced by the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. The UK was one of Poland's close partners within the EU since both countries had often similar views on the issues discussed on the EU table such as their staunch Transatlanticism and their shared an assertive stance in relations with Russia. The UK was in a way a counterbalance for France and Germany's lead in the EU, and, that was advantageous for Poland. Furthermore, the PiS government was planning to cooperate with the UK to push for the reformation of the EU towards a "Europe of Homelands" (Gostynska-Jakubowska, 2019). Along with Brexit, Poland lost a partner in shaping the EU and especially its foreign policy.

Another aspect that has pushed Poland to the Eurosceptical course had been some member states' stance toward Russia. Russian assertive behaviour²² in the

common values of the EU, including the Rule of Law. It foresees two legal possibilities in such a situation: a preventive mechanism in case of a 'clear risk of a serious breach of the [Union's] values' (Article 7(1) TEU) and a sanctioning mechanism in the case of 'the existence of a serious and persistent breach' of the Union's value, including the Rule of Law (Article 7(2) and Article 7(3) TEU). Article 7 TEU has until today not been used". It should be noted that the European Council has not taken a decision about the application of Article 7 against Poland yet.

²¹ For more, see: European Commission (2015).

²² War in Georgia, annexation of Crimea, and Ukrainian–Russian conflict.

region recalled Poland's fears about Russian neo-imperialistic aspirations. During the Georgian conflict, President Lech Kaczyński highlighted that Russia sought to dominate in the region and subdue the countries in its proximity, he said: "Today Georgia, tomorrow Ukraine, the day after tomorrow the Baltic states, and then, perhaps, the time will come for my country, Poland" (Polskie Radio, 2019). Poland's accession to the EU was, for Poland, a chance to leave the Russian sphere of influence and Poland did believe that it could use the EU leverage to limit the Russian threat. However, in practice, the Polish expectations in this regard were not fully met because the EU did not efficiently address Polish concerns and the member states' stances remained deeply divided over the Russian issue until Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Although on the occasion of the Russian annexation of Crimea and aggression on Ukraine all member states agreed to impose sanctions²³ on Russia, after some time countries such as France, Belgium, Italy, Austria, Croatia, Greece and Bulgaria preferred to negotiate a compromise with Russia (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2020). France was insisting on the improvement of relations with Russia (Deni, 2020) and Italy agreed with Moscow on boosting economic relations (Isachenkov, 2018). These countries had not perceived Russia as a threat before it invaded Ukraine, and this differentiated them from Poland, as the latter had still perceived Russia as a threatening Other and a strong enemy.

Poland's threat perceptions regarding Russia also got exacerbated with the completion of the Nord Stream gas pipeline transporting gas from Russia to Germany through the Baltic Sea, in 2011. Furthermore, the initiation of the Nord Stream 2 project in spite of Poland's and the Baltic States' objections reinforced Polish fears and undermined Warsaw's trust in the EU. This project recalled Poland's fears deeply ingrained in the country's identity about its two powerful neighbours: Germany and Russia cooperating against Poland. However, the situation changed due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine²⁴ in February 2022. This invasion has further complicated the relations between Russia and the EU and its member states, and, has also proved that Polish security concerns regarding Russia were not baseless. As a response to Russian aggression on Ukraine, the EU has imposed economic, trade and financial sanctions on Russia (European Commission, 2022). The norms and values celebrated by the EU were attacked in its close neighbourhood and in this difficult moment, the EU has behaved in line with its identity and condemned

²³ The restrictive measures imposed by the EU on Russia were "diplomatic measures, individual restrictive measures (asset freeze and travel restrictions), restrictions on economic relations with Crimea and Sevastopol, economic sanctions, and restrictions on economic cooperation" (European Council, 2020).

²⁴ At the time of writing, Russia has continued its military aggression against Ukraine, see e.g. BBC News (2022).

Russian military aggression on Ukraine and also “strongly condemn the involvement of Belarus in this aggression against Ukraine” (European Council, 2022).

All in all, the examples covered so far suggest that the Polish position depends to a large extent on the governing elites because the two clashing sides of Euroenthusiasts and Eurosceptics have contrasting visions about Poland’s role in the EU and about the EU itself. The reshuffling of high-level positions impacted the framing of Polish foreign policy and Poland’s approach toward the EU. In a democratic system, it is important which political group will be able to persuade people to vote for a particular party. The economic and migration crises that shook the continent had a great impact on the formation of “Euro-sceptic patterns” (Grosse, 2019: 7). Thus, during those times right-wing parties in Europe enjoyed great support because of references to threats to “European” and “national” identity and culture. Economic crises made it easier for parties on the right to gain endorsement.

On the other hand, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Warsaw’s stance in this regard have “transformed Poland’s international image”, which started to be praised in European capitals (Buras and Zerka, 2022). Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has destabilized the region and it confirmed Poland’s concerns regarding Russia. However, it is worth mentioning that the behaviour of the EU and its members has also been of great importance to Poland. It is possible to assume that in the situation when Poland seizes any signs of the EU and/or its members sympathizing with Russia, it might further distance Warsaw from the EU and deepen the element of suspicion in Polish identity. However, it is rather difficult to estimate how the position of each member state toward Russia will be in the near future. It might be assumed that such kind of critical situation will reframe the current order and shared understandings. Time will tell how the situation evolves and how it affects the identities of the actors involved, including Poland and this might be the subject of future research.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Polish behaviour in the EU is a reflection of the Polish identity, which is not fixed once and for all but is redefined through social interaction with other actors. Therefore the Polish changeable stance in the EU is a reflection of Polish identity. The above analysis has demonstrated that Poland’s stance within the EU is unceasingly reconstructed according to the circumstances occurring in the social world. The EU itself is changing so its members’ ideas, the appearance of new conditions such as the initiation of Nord Stream 2 or rising populism in Europe have affected Poland’s understanding and its identity, that in turn is reflected in Poland’s behaviour. A perspective of the EU being more centralized, without the UK and with many members that

sympathize with Russia despite its violating international law is something that Poland is afraid of and not willing to accept since such conditions are against the preferences deriving from Poland's national identity. The aforementioned circumstances along with rising populism in Europe, which also found fertile ground in Poland, cause the country to be distanced from the EU. One may claim that currently, Poland seems to not seek the EU favour by aligning itself to the EU norms and values but rather prefer to swim against the current by redrawing its path. The recent Russian invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated that Polish threats perceptions from Russia were not baseless and that the country was, indeed, pursuing neo-imperial policies as Poland has always claimed. Furthermore, the Russian behaviour toward Ukraine led to the reconstruction of understandings about Russia in Europe. It might be claimed that such a redefinition contributes to the fact that Europe now defines Russia as "Other" just as Poland has for decades. Russia has become the "Other" for Europe in a similar way as Poland defines Russia as its "Other". However, this topic remains beyond the scope of this article and necessitates further research.

All in all, this article has revealed that Poland's position in the EU is in a continuous (re)construction process. At one point, Poland was Euro-enthusiastic and had the potential to be one of the main pillars of the EU, but Poland has also experienced Eurosceptics in power who were not merely sceptical about the EU project but also posed a threat to European norms and values. Thus, Poland's role in the EU has been shaped by its domestic circumstances and social relations, which is reflected in Polish foreign policy in the EU context.

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