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Party-level Foreign Policy and the Mechanics of Party Competition: The PiS's Euroscepticism and Its Dominance over Right-wing Politics in Poland, 2001-2015

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Abstract
Following the collapse of the communist regime in Poland, the issue of European Union membership has emerged as one of the top issues in Poland's foreign policy. The EU membership was regarded as a symbol of the country's 'return to Europe' after an interlude of socialism. This initiated the 'Europeanization' process, which requires the harmonization of national laws and norms with those of the EU. During the EU-accession process, the symbolic importance of 'Europeanization,' combining with high level of public support for it, obliged the mainstream political parties to support the EU membership process. The strong opposition to the membership, labelled Eurosceptic stance, was largely embraced by the fringe parties. In the post-accession period, however, Eurosceptic policies became no longer confined to fringe parties and extended to mainstream politics. The right-wing Law and Justice Party (PiS) in Poland is an example of such mainstream parties, the Euroscepticism of which became explicit in the post-accession period. For representing the set of conflicting issues between member state and the EU, the party-based Euroscepticism is a useful reference to reveal the variation in foreign policy understanding of political parties. Using the dichotomy of Szczerbiak and Taggart's soft-Euroscepticism and hard-Euroscepticism, this study suggests that the Euroscepticism of the PiS that has been oscillating between soft and hard Euroscepticism helps the party to keep the other right-wing alternatives with hard-Euroscepticism at bay. From this point of view, the PiS's distinctive foreign policy in terms of its relations with the EU can be interpreted as a contributory factor behind the party's domination over right-wing politics particularly since the 2007 parliamentary elections.

Keywords
Poland, Euroscepticism, Law and Justice Party, League of Polish Families, Kukiz-15

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Party-level Foreign Policy and the Mechanics of Party Competition: The PiS's Euroscepticism and Its Dominance over Right-wing Politics in Poland, 2001-2015

Poland officially became a European Union member in May 2004. This marked the achievement of a foreign policy goal that had been pursued by all governments of the post-communist period. With a pure symbolic importance, the EU membership ended the cold-war interlude that had broken Poland's historical and cultural tie with Europe. This widely held perception undergirded the overwhelming public support in the 2003 EU-accession referendum (Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2004: 564). Nevertheless, the public euphoria created by the symbolic importance attached to the EU membership eroded for certain voters as some practical consequences of the membership became discernible – an expectation based on the utilitarian theory (Ergün and Tillman, 2007: 397).[1] Indeed, recently conducted polls in Poland confirms this expectation. November 2018 CBOS survey reports that more than 70 per cent of the Poles are opposed to Euro adoption, although Maastricht Treaty defines the Euro adoption as an obligation for all countries that became EU member from 1995 onwards (Szczerbiak, 2019: 178). Cultural and religious conservatives argue loudly that European integration neither conform with traditional Catholic values nor respect Poland's national sovereignty. The other CBOS survey in June 2018 revealed a strong opposition to taking in Muslim refugees and a poll conducted by IBRIS agency in June 2017 reported that "51 per cent of the respondents supported Poland leaving the EU if this was the only way to prevent the country being forced to admit Muslim migrants" (Szczerbiak, 2019: 179). These figures intimate that the consensus on EU membership has been vitiated by the contentious approaches on 'Poland's Europeanization.' The divergence matters because EU-related issues influence the existing social cleavages on which the party competition at the national level plays out (Dechezelles and Neumayer, 2010: 230-231).

This article focuses on the right-wing Eurosceptic parties from different party families, namely Law and Justice Party (PiS), League of Polish Families (LPR), Kukiz-15. Of the three right-wing Eurosceptic parties, the PiS has been maintaining a monopoly on appealing to conservative voters. This article seeks to explain how the PiS were able to outflank its nearby competitor through a particular emphasis on the party's dynamic foreign policy concerning Poland's part in the trajectory of the Europeanization. As a process, Europeanization requires the continuity of consistency between national laws and norms with those of the EU. The intertwined link between EU governance and national governance enables us to infer the variation in foreign policies of political parties on the basis of the party's positions on issues that have conventionally deemed component of national politics (e.g. Marks et al., 2002). This article is divided into three parts. The first part briefly reviews studies grouping the political parties by their foreign policies on the issue of Europeanization. This revision will justify the selection of the categorization, developed by Taggart & Szczerbiak (2001) and enabling this study to distinguish the PiS's stance on the European integration from those of the other right-wing Eurosceptic parties. The second part captures the nuances of foreign policy outlook of right-wing Eurosceptic parties by the content of their Euroscepticism. To do so, this part uses Chapel

1 The utilitarian theory expects that "Europeans consider the potential economic costs and benefits of European integration when forming their opinion [about the EU-accession]" (Ergün and Tillman, 2007: 392).

Hill expert survey that measures party positioning on European integration. The article concludes by arguing that the PiS's dynamic foreign policy oscillating between soft-Euroscepticism and hard-Euroscepticism should be taken into account in explaining why the party succeeded in keeping its electoral strength, and why its nearby competitors were unable to cripple the PiS's electoral support. Mindful of complex causality, the conclusion briefly touches on the other components that are expected to have been hampering other right wing Eurosceptic parties to challenge the PiS's dominance. In that regard, the lack of punitive measures against the disobedient EU members and the lack of a single-issue cleavage (peculiar to European integration), are to be mentioned.

Taxonomies of the Party-based Skepticism to the European Integration

The early years of the post-Maastricht era was marked by the emergence of conflicting views on the European integration, which had been construed as an expert-driven process, in which a plethora of technical requirements for economic cooperation were enforced (e.g., Startin and Krouwel, 2013: 67). The Treaty of Maastricht (also known as Treaty on European Union) rejuvenated the goal of the political integration, which had been set by the expression "ever-closer union" in the preamble of the Rome Treaty, but downplayed against the backdrop of De-Gaullism of the 1960s and economic exigencies of the 1970s (Urwin, 2010: 26 – 27). Broadly speaking, the political integration warrants an increase in the purviews of the European Union Commission and Parliament in the EU decision-making at the expense of the European Union Council and the national governments of the member states. Also, the aim of cultivating a loyalty "among the peoples of Europe" to supranational EU identity by means of the EU citizenship is the leading goal of the political integration. The aim of the political integration prompted competing views, which heavily bear on the national sovereignty and nativist culture (Down and Wilson, 2008: 43). 'Yes to Europe, No to Maastricht' became a common slogan for Eurosceptic parties across the political spectrum (Buhr, 2012: 544). The conflicting views on the post-Maastricht integration also harks back the division between mainstream theories of the European integration: neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism.[2] The incipient disagreement on the political integration became further visible in the media due to rising frequency of the campaigns made on the eve of each post-Maastricht Treaty (i.e., Amsterdam, Nice, EU Constitution and Lisbon) and the EU membership referenda. The optimism of the 1980s eroded and skepticism became palpable (Neumayer, 2008: 136; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2010: 798).[3] The political parties were compelled to confront the divergence in the views on the integration, prompting an increase in the salience of the European issues within the domestic politics (Whitefield and Rohrschneider, 2009: 574). In the meantime, the momentous crises such as the September-11 attack, the 2008

2 Whereas the former argues that European integration would culminate with political integration - as an inevitable corollary of the economic integration, - the latter suggests that European integration would continue insofar as interests of each member state converge.

3 There has been a long-standing discussion in the literature whether economic motives or cultural motives bolster opposition to European integration. Nevertheless, the question whether the economic and cultural motives are mutually exclusive or whether they should be treated as complementary factors has been talking point in studies on public Euroscepticism (Hooghe and Marks, 2007: 120). The negative effect of the 2008 Eurozone crisis, for example, should not be confined to economic difficulties as the crisis propped up ethnic-nationalism as well, which have been favoring the political parties with exclusionary attitude towards the immigrant populations.

Euro zone-crisis, the refugee crisis of the Arab Spring further accelerated the growth of Euroscepticism (Csehi and Zgut, 2021: 55). Euroscepticism, which was regarded as a hallmark of the fringe parties (i.e., radical left or radical right), began to be observed in the programs of the mainstream parties (Brack and Startin 2015: 240; Meijers, 2017: 420). The increase in the share of the seats that were won by Eurosceptic parties in the 2014 and 2019 European Parliament Elections also mirrors the growth of Euroscepticism across the EU member countries (Treib, 2014: 1543; 2019: 4).

As the ambit and ramifications of European integration have been widely debated, the EU-issue voting (i.e., the role of individual opinions on European integration in shaping party preferences) gained importance across the EU countries; particularly in those with lesser institutionalized party systems (de Vries and Tillman, 2011: 10 – 11). This was a reason behind the burgeoning literature on Euroscepticism in the 2000s, in which different ways of categorization for the political parties by their policies concerning the European integration have been offered (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2001; Kopecky and Mudde, 2002; Vasilopoulou, 2011). Considering the purpose of this study, it sufficient to note that Taggart & Szczerbiak's formulation is particularly useful to capture the nuances of the Eurosceptic parties whereas that of Kopecky and Mudde is helpful to understand the causal relationship between position of a political party on the left-right spectrum and stance on the European integration (pro-integration / anti-integration). Vasilopoulou's classification enables a study to probe differences in the Euroscepticism of the political parties that are members of the same party family.[4] The way Taggart & Szczerbiak categorizes the Eurosceptic parties suits this study since the main interest of this study is in the right-wing Eurosceptic parliamentary parties from different party families in Poland during the period 2001 to 2015. In his earlier study Taggart (1998: 366) defines Euroscepticism "[as an expression of] the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration." Based on this definition of Euroscepticism as an umbrella term, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2001: 9) develop a two-fold categorization composed of 'hard-Euroscepticism' and 'soft-Euroscepticism.' The sub-category of hard-Euroscepticism covers Eurosceptic parties the policies of which "implies an outright rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration and opposition to their country joining or remaining members of the EU" (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2001: 9). Unlike the hard-Eurosceptic parties, soft-Eurosceptic ones do not have principled objection to European integration; yet they either (both) oppose the increase in the EU competence on specific areas (e.g., opposition to Euro adoption, EU's liberal cultural policies) or (and) prefer to defend the national interest without remaining outside the EU's institutional mechanisms (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2001: 10-11).

Eurosceptic Parties in Poland, 2001 – 2015: A focus on the PiS, LPR, Kukiz-15

The five Eurosceptic political parties secured seats in the *Sejm* during the period from 2001 to 2015. These parties are Law and Justice Party (PiS), League of Polish Families

4 Kopecky and Mudde's (2002: 303) four-fold category is applicable to both pro-European integration parties and anti-European integration parties. The sub-categories are labelled Euroenthusiasts, Eurosceptics, Europragmatists, and Euro-rejects. In her study Vasilopoulou (2011: 235) makes a discussion that revolve around different EU-policies of the 12 political parties (in 10 EU countries), all of which are members of the radical right party family.

(LPR), Kukiz-15, Self Defense (SO) and the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) (Styczynska, 2017: 143).[5] The purpose of this article is to make a discussion on the PiS' Euroscepticism - as a preference of its foreign policy, which should be interpreted as the distinctive characteristics of the party from the other Eurosceptic right-wing parties in Poland. Following up on this, the left-leaning Eurosceptic parties fall outside the purview of this article (Treib, 2014: 1543; Szczerbiak, 2007: 212). The 2002 Chapel Hill expert survey, for instance, showed that both SO and LPR were anti-EU political parties; yet they differ from each other in terms of scores on the left-right ideological dimension: respectively 9.25 and 5.5 - measured through a scale from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right) (Hooghe, et al., 2010). The table-1 shows the level of electoral support the Eurosceptic parties won in the elections for *Sejm* from 2001 to 2015. Founded a few months before the 2001 election, the PiS and LPR were close in vote share. Their electoral performance diverged later on. Whereas the PiS won almost 30 per cent of the vote in 2007, the LPR was voted by a mere 1.3 per cent. In 2015, the vote percentages of the PiS and Kukiz-15 were 37.6 and 8.8, respectively, yet the latter, similar to the LPR, suffered annihilation in the 2019 election.[6]

Table 1

Electoral Support of Right-Wing Eurosceptic Parties in the Elections for the Sejm (2001 – 2015)

Party	**2001**	**2005**	**2007**	**2011**	**2015**
Law and Justice Party	9.5	27	32.1	29.9	37.6
League of Polish Families	7.9	8	1.3	.	.
Kukiz – 15	.	.	.	.	8.8

During the accession years, the PiS had been a soft-Eurosceptic party. In the post-accession years, the party maintained its negative tone (sometimes slightly intensified it), but never embraced hard-Euroscepticism as much as its nearby competitors. For instance, unlike the LPR, the PiS did not campaign against the EU membership in the 2003 referendum in spite of the fact that the party has been opposed to liberal cultural policies of the EU. Representing a well-balanced foreign policy appealing to soft-Eurosceptic voters without turning against the EU, helped the PiS not only to mirror opinions of most of the right-wing voters about the EU membership but also to be construed by the EU as preferable actors to its irreconcilable nearby competitors. This buttresses the PiS's credibility (in comparison to that of its nearby competitors) in both national and international arena. This argument does by no means explain the entire puzzle behind the PiS's emergence as the predominant party of the right-wing politics, yet it should be regarded as a contributory factor. The following subsections encapsulate the Eurosceptic policies of the PiS, LPR and Kukiz-15.

5 Whether the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) was a Eurosceptic party in early 2000s is dubious. The 2002 Chapel Hill expert survey (Hooghe et al., 2010) describes the PSL as a neutral party. Beichelt (2004: 39) does not classify the SO and PSL in the same group either; yet he accepts the PSL had Eurosceptic tendencies. The PSL did not overtly campaign for NO votes in the EU accession referendum, in sharp contrast to LPR and SO (Szczerbiak, 2008: 238).

6 To exceed five per cent electoral threshold, Kukiz-15 joined to PSL before the 2019 elections. This was the outcome of a strategic calculation, rather than that of an ideological proximity. As a result of this, the Kukiz-15 won a mere 6 seats out of 460.

Right-wing soft Euroscepticism in Poland: The PiS

The foreign policy of the PiS concerning the EU has been shaped through a strategy relying on a trade-off between economic benefits and cultural concerns (Szczerbiak, 2008: 234). The way the PiS designs its foreign policy on the EU epitomizes what Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier call 'the external incentive model.' The model "assumes that the EU drives Europeanization through sanctions and rewards that alter the cost-benefit calculations of domestic actors" (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2017: 1). The PiS suggests that Poland should adopt a foreign policy that would enhance its bargaining power that would enable the country to influence the way Europeanization goes. For the PiS, on the one hand, the Europeanization should be confined to economic cooperation that would bolster each member state's economic power (Styczynska, 2017: 143). On the other hand, the party has been opposed to EU's deepening process lest the EU's permissive social policies 'degrade' the Catholic values. The results of the Chapel Hill expert survey series measuring party positioning on the European integration through a scale from 0 (strongly opposed) to 7 (strongly favor) confirm the dynamic nature of the PiS's stance on European integration between pre-accession years and post-accession years.[7] Whereas the 2002 (pre-accession) survey qualifies the party's EU policy as 'somewhat in favor,' the 2010 (post-accession) does so as 'somewhat opposes.' Exact scores assigned to the party's positioning on the EU as follows: 4.75 (2002), 3.5 (2006), 2.93 (2010), 3.8 (2014), and 2.95 (2019). In the European Parliament, the PiS has been affiliated to European Conservatives and Reformist Group emphasizing the EU's role in securing economic security of EU citizens and glossing over cultural cohesion that would form a basis of political integration. In its official website, the Group's objective is defined as follows: "… we will continue promoting a wider agenda of long-term pan-European ***euro-realist reform*** [emphasis added]. We will also carry on our hard work in securing a more flexible, open and economically vibrant EU, offering citizens and taxpayers tangible benefits"[8] The PiS refrained from embracing a hard-Eurosceptic stance since its foundation and from working with radical right parties.[9] This also provides the PiS with a protection that is similar to what Ivarsflaten (2006: 2) calls 'reputational shield' and helpful "to fend off accusations of racism and extremism." This 'reputational shield' was an apt tool for the PiS aiming to be a mainstream party with a promising appeal to large segments of the conservative voters (Dakowska, 2010: 260).[10]

The PiS campaigned for Poland's membership in the 2003 referendum. Once Poland had been admitted to the EU, the PiS began to embrace Eurosceptic policies aiming to slow down the pace of political integration of the European Union. For instance, the leader of

7 The values on the scale refer to seven categories: strongly opposes (1), opposes (2), somewhat opposes (3), neutral (4), somewhat favors (5), favors (6), strongly favors (7).

8 More information can be found in https://ecrgroup.eu/about (last access date: 31 May 2021). The PiS repudiates that it has been a Eurosceptic party. The party describes itself as "Euro-realist) The term euro-realist. Szczerbiak (2008: 232).

9 It is true that in the period after the 2005 legislative elections the PiS formed a coalition government with Self-Defense and League of Polish Families, yet the foreign ministry was assigned to PiS (Szczerbiak, 2019: 180). Anna Fotyga was appointed as the foreign minister during the coalition government. Fotyga has been serving as a member of European Parliament since 2014.

10 Markowski and Tucker (2010: 6), for example, do not include the PiS in their studies examining the relationship between 'euroscepticism and emergence of political parties in Poland' on the grounds that the PiS' Euroscepticism is the result of strategic considerations, not ideological orientation

the party, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, opposed to Lisbon Treaty's ratification on the grounds that the Treaty would entitle Germans to claim compensation for their possessions they were obliged to leave under Potsdam Treaty and would grant rights - such as same-sex marriage - that do not conform to Catholic values (Dakowska, 2010: 266). Indeed, the Treaty was ratified by the Sejm in April 2008 when PiS was in opposition. It was the 2015 legislative election that brought the PiS back to power; then, the party refused to implement the agreement concluded between its predecessor, Civic Platform, and the EU for accepting refugees from North African and Middle Eastern countries. Frequently criticizing 'the Franco-German axis' for hijacking the European Union to achieve their own foreign policy goals, Kacyznki argues that a countervailing bloc, including the Central and East European countries, should be formed (Csehi and Zgut, 2021: 61; Szczerbiak, 2019: 182 – 183). The party deems the Brexit process strong evidence for the necessity of change that would reshape the European Union as a quasi-intergovernmental platform that refocus on economic cooperation (Szczerbiak, 2019: 181). The PiS's legislative affairs that brought changes to the judiciary system in Poland created a major conflict between the party and European Union (Csehi, and Zgut, 2021: 61). Still, the PiS should be regarded as a soft-Eurosceptic party owing to its support for the continuity of the Poland's strong economic ties with Europe and its opposition to the idea of cultivating relationships with Russia (Cadier and Lequesne, 2020: 4).

Right-wing hard Euroscepticism in Poland: The LPR and Kukiz-15

The League of Polish Families was founded as the amalgamation of various right wing catholic groups a few months before the 2001 elections (Szczerbiak, 2002: 61). With its nativist ideology supporting monoculturalism and deeming different cultures hazard to the cultural purity, the party was described as the most Eurosceptic actor of the party competition from 2001 to 2007 in Chapel Hill expert surveys (Hooghe, et al., 2010; Bakker, et al., 2015). Using the arguments that the EU's liberal policies would decay the Catholic social and individual values and EU's supranationalism would weaken the national sovereignty, the LPR campaigned against Poland's EU membership in the 2003 referendum (Jasiewicz, 2008: 7; Szczerbiak, 2019: 179). With such a content of opposition to EU membership, the LPR epitomized radical right perception of the foreign policy (de Lange and Guerra; 2009: 535; Dakowska, 2010: 60). The fact that LPR was the only political party with an overt opposition to EU membership for cultural reasons allowed the party to attract devout churchgoers, voting against EU membership in the referendum. Indeed, the party had performed relatively well for a radical right party in the 2001 and 2005 elections, winning 7.9 and 8.0 per cent of the vote, respectively. In the meantime, the question whether Poland should be an EU member had begun to lose its relevance to party preferences with the successful completion of the membership process. The LPR, however, failed to adopt a revised and realistic foreign policy that was compatible to new title (EU member) of Poland and faced with an abysmal electoral performance in 2007, consigning itself to a complete defeat. Allocation of a large amount of EU funds to agriculture by the PiS-led coalition government, providing generous subsidies to farmers during the period between 2005 and 2007 elections, might have accelerated dramatic vote-loss of the LPR, claiming the EU membership would not benefit farmers. Remember that the PiS's electoral support increased to 32.1 per cent in 2007, when the party's

campaign strategy aimed at appealing to religious, conservative and rural voters. The PiS, for example, recruited then member of European Parliament, Janusz Wojciechowski, formerly a prominent figure within the PSL (Millard, 2010: 151 – 155). It should be noted that Wojciechowski has been serving EU Commissioner of Agriculture since 2019.

Kukiz-15 claimed to be an anti-establishment party, challenging the bi-polar structure of the party competition in which PO and PiS had been the prominent actors (Kosowska-Gastol and Myślik, 2019: 13). In the 2015 presidential elections, Pawel Kukiz, who was to be Kukiz-15's founding leader, performed well, taking the third place with 20 per cent. This was surely an auspicious beginning for the party; yet the party's subsequent decision to associate with far-right groups negatively affected its future. Many moderates of the party were predisposed towards other alternatives; plunging the party into a political extremism. Securing 42 seats out 460 in 2015, the party suffered a disappointing electoral result; whereas its under-achievement helped the PiS to win the majority in the *Sejm* (Marcinkiewicz and Stegmaier, 2016: 2-3). Should Kukiz-15 follow soft-Euroscepticism, it could win more votes, given the fact that the socio-economic issues were less importance to electoral preferences in the 2015 parliamentary elections (Markowski, 2016: 1312). The Kukiz-15's conservative and nationalist outlook on social and economic lives shaped its hard-Eurosceptic policies. Conceiving of European Union as a collection of nation-states, neither the Euro adoption nor the Euro-zone was accepted by the Kukiz-15, arguing that national symbols and national sovereignty must be protected firmly. Even though the EU concurred with Kukiz-15 in its criticism about the PiS-backed encroachments on the judicial independence, Kukiz-15 argued that Poland did not need conferring with the EU. Unsurprisingly, Kukiz-15 was also opposed the EU's plan for the resettlement of refugees across the EU countries (Szczerbiak, 2019: 183). Kukiz-15 softened its Euroscepticism and formed an alliance with PSL for the 2019; yet this effort did not reverse its declining reputation, bringing the party to the edge of annihilation with its 6 seats in the *Sejm*.

Discussion and Conclusion: The PiS's dominance in right-wing politics

The PiS has been the preeminent party of the right-wing politics in Poland since 2005 elections. Not only the party's nominee for presidency won the last two elections, the party was also able to form the first single-party majority government of the post-communist Poland in 2015. This article argues that its flexible and dynamic foreign policy helped the PiS in two ways. First, the PiS distinguished itself from the other right wing Eurosceptic parties that were marginalized partly due to their inflexible and impractical foreign policies. Second, the PiS's flexibility in adjusting the dose of criticism of the European integration created the perception in the minds of the conservative voters that the party were not subservient to the EU's policies. Jaroslaw Kaczynński speech criticizing Miller's government conjures up the PiS flexible foreign policy towards the EU: "You have to reject the dogma that we have to accede to the Union in 2004. … I am determined supporter of Union accession and a determined opponent of joining on these conditions. … In this situation you have to present the matter in a very tough way – either they change the conditions, or we discuss a different date" (quoted from Szczerbiak, 2008: 232).

The lack of realistic EU sanctions on Eurosceptic governments of the member states enables the PiS to strategically oscillate between soft and hard Euroscepticism. The

above-mentioned 'external incentive model' allows the EU to influence the domestic politics of the candidate states (as was the case in Slovakia in 1998); yet, which sanctions does the EU have against a democratic-backsliding in a member state has been long-lasting talking point.[11] The Populist SMER's (Direction) coalition with Slovak Nationalist Party, the PiS's coalition with LPR and SO were exemplars of democratic-backslidings that occurred in the 2000s (Rupnik, 2007: 24). In the 2010s, the Fidezs in Hungary and the PiS in Poland have been stoking up illiberal policies against which the EU still has not produced a countervailing reaction. As briefly mentioned earlier, after winning a majority in the *Sejm* in 2015, the PiS, for instance, pushed through a set of legislation that set back rule of law and fairness of elections for compromising independence of judges and electoral commissioners (Sadurski, 2019: 13 – 20). The EU's response could not go beyond making recommendation for restoring the rule of law – a recommendation that can be easily ignored by the PiS government which has so far been confronted by the idle threat posed by the Article 7 of the Treaty on the European Union (Csehi, and Zgut, 2021: 61). The article provides that EU "… may decide to suspend certain rights deriving from the application of the Treaties to the Member State in question, including the voting rights of the representative of the government of that Member State in the Council"; nonetheless, the decision whether that member state violated the EU values - stated in the Article 2 of the same treaty (e.g., freedom, equality, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and so on) - is taken by unanimity, the achievement of which seems to be very unlikely.[12] For instance, Hungary's Viktor Orban has already stated that his government would vote against an initiative that imposes sanction on Poland (Politico, 7 June 2018; Appel, 2019: 7).[13] The Court of Justice's rulings as part of infringement procedures did not hamper the PiS's authoritarian-leaning legislations that appeal mainly to devout Catholic voters.[14] Embracing a populist discourse, the PiS government repeatedly argue that the change in judiciary is a necessity for cleaning the establishment contaminated by the 'corrupt' judicial system. In an interview made on the eve of the 2019 parliamentary election, Kaczyński's responses evoke his above-mentioned statement before the 2003 accession referendum. Insisting on the idea that Poland does not need following the EU's recommendation, Kaczyński stated that the PiS government would be determined to continue with the reform process: "if the society trusts us, we will return to this [changes in the judicial system]. … Repairing the country is difficult without a deep reform of the courts, because they are in a way the final barricade, the last decision-making level in many issues – civil, criminal and administrative" (Politico, 10 October, 2019).[15] After the 2019 election, the PiS continued its single-party majority government for winning 43.6 per cent of the vote and 51 per cent of the legislative seats.[16]

11 With its decision excluding Slovakia in the list of candidate states in 1997 Luxembourg Summit, the EU gave the signal that Slovkia's bid for EU membership would be likely to fail as long as Meciar's authoritarian-populist understanding remained in power. After the 1998 election, pro-EU government coalition under Dzurinda's premiership came to office and Slovakia began accession negotiation following the 1999 Helsinki Summit.

12 For full text of the Article 7 of the Treaty on the European Union https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012M007 For full text of the Article 2 of the Treaty: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/treaty/teu_2012/art_2/oj

13 https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-article-7-test-for-eu-on-rule-of-law/

14 Until now four infringement procedures have been started against Poland. For more information: https://www.politico.eu/article/brussels-launches-4th-infringement-procedure-over-polands-rule-of-law/

15 https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-launches-another-infringement-case-against-poland/

16 http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/poland.html

Surely, its Euroscepticism appealing to both soft and hard Eurosceptic conservative voters through strategic maneuvers was not the single reason behind the PiS's dominance in Poland's right-wing politics. Nor did the EU-issue voting emerged as a separate dimension on which party competition took place. Instead, the EU-issues were embedded into 'frozen' social cleavages on which party competition takes place; the Europeanization exerted a limited influence on the competition accordingly (Marks and Wilson, 2000: 434; Mair, 2001: 41; Marks et al., 2002: 586; Marks et. al., 2006: 169). In Poland, the disputed views on the issue of Poland's role in the European integration have been embedded into the cleavage between liberals and conservatives; prevailing the party competition since the 2005 parliamentary elections. The leading competitors of this cleavage have been Civic Platform and the PiS, indeed together winning 80 per cent of the seats in the Sejm in four elections in a row (Markowski, 2016: 1317).[17] Nearby competitors emerged; yet none of them were able to challenge the "PO vs. PiS-based electoral competition cartel", so to speak. For example, accusing the PiS of not defending the Polish interests within the EU, the Confederation, which includes, *inter alia*, a few former LPR members, competed for Catholic votes in the 2019 election. As had been the case for LPR and Kukiz-15 in previous elections, with its 6.8 per cent of the vote the Confederation remained far away from challenging the PiS (Markowski, 2020: 1519). Despite the ebb and flow of its relations with the EU, the PiS has been able to maintain its viability partly owing to its strategic Euroscepticism, in sharp contrast to its near-by competitors embracing hard-Euroscepticism.

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