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## IDEOLOGICAL IDENTIFICATION OF MEDIUM-LEVEL PARTY CADRES IN POLAND

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### INTRODUCTION

Ideologies are fundamental in categorising, defining and evaluating political reality. They also condition the aims inspiring actors on the political stage, constituting, as it were, a bond providing parties, social groups and societies with sets of values and convictions that unite them. We are now witnessing an evolution of traditional political ideologies, triggered off by new challenges, the changing world order, processes of globalisation and Europeanisation, while political parties in Europe seem to resign from clear-cut ideological identifications, opting for the pragmatic, thus maximising their voting scores and, subsequently, efficient management of the public sphere. Politics is ever more frequently perceived as a mere struggle for power, political ideas are seen as slogans serving the purpose of winning votes or popular support, while ideologies have become “goods on display”, hiding deeper meanings of political life<sup>1</sup>. Yet, at the same time ideologies still retain their purpose, influencing the functioning of political parties or political communities.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Heywood, *Ideologie polityczne. Wprowadzenie*, Warszawa 2007, p. 16.

The characteristic feature of most political parties in Central and Eastern Europe, also present on the Polish political market, is the absence of ideological crystallisation,<sup>2</sup> which is equally true for new parties, established within the last two decades, for those reactivated, whose tradition goes back to the interwar period, as well as the so-called post-communist ones, which transformed from the monoparties monopolising previous regimes. While parties frequently invoke ideologies in their political manifestoes, they do so in coincidental, inconsistent and eclectic ways, which causes difficulties when they are trying to identify themselves with a concrete ideological community, a political group in the European Parliament or a transnational federation of political parties<sup>3</sup>. At first glance this lack of distinct ideological identification may seem surprising, as popular belief has it that the political debate in the former Eastern block countries has involved highly ideological principles ever since the beginning of the political transformation. For many years their political scenes were greatly influenced not by ideological but by historical divisions and by the perception of the past, dividing parties into post-communist and anti-communist rather than right-wing, centre and left-wing or conservative, liberal, socialist, communist, ecological, etc<sup>4</sup>. Ideological affiliations were of secondary interest both to parties and voters, while the pivotal issue in political competition was the axiological community, as demonstrated by the judgement of the past<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> There is always, however, an exception to the rule, e.g. the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia.

<sup>3</sup> The Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) is the only Polish political party that had no doubts as to where they belong in the European Parliament, from the start opting for the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D). The other parties discussed in this article, e.g. the Civic Platform (PO) and the Polish Peasants' Party (PSL) have formed a tactical rather than program-based alliance with the European People's Party (EPP), while the Law and Justice (PiS) originally belonged to the Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN), only to initiate the creation of a new faction of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR).

<sup>4</sup> The division has lost its relevance in, e.g. Slovakia, but it is still valid in, e.g. Hungary.

<sup>5</sup> A. Antoszewski, *Wzorce rywalizacji politycznej we współczesnych demokracjach europejskich*, Wrocław 2004, p. 120.

A Hungarian political scientist, J. Simon, wrote in 2001 that in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe the division between the left and the right should take into consideration the following issues: attitude to religion, attitude to the past, continuity of traditions and the strength of national identification<sup>6</sup>. It would be difficult to overlook the fact that the issues above are more crucial in differentiating the participants of the political debate than they are in Western Europe.

In Poland the division between the left and the right in the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has more frequently involved the origins (former Polish United People's Party – PZPR *versus* democratic opposition) and cultural factors than a party's social and economic programme<sup>7</sup>. While at the beginning of economic transformation the division between the proponents of shock therapy and those who supported the idea of gradual liberalisation of the economy accompanied by a wide range of protective measures was quite clear, today it is still difficult to draw the line between the left-wing and right-wing options in the social and economic sphere.

Transition from the stage of transformation to the consolidation of democracy failed to make the Polish political scene less chaotic. The historical division (post-communism *versus* anticommunism) has lost its significance, while the ideological gap between the political parties in question, except for the national and conservative Law and Justice (PiS), is constantly getting narrower. Since 2005 the main political competitors have been two parties with Solidarity roots enjoying the highest electoral support: the right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) and the centre-right Civic Platform (PO), accompanied on the political scene by parties enjoying less enthusiastic electoral support: the left-wing Democratic Left Alliance

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<sup>6</sup> J. Simon, *The political Left and Right – what it means in the post-communist countries and Hungary*, [in:] *Transformative paths in Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. R. Markowski, E. Wnuk-Lipiński, Warszawa 2001, p. 167.

<sup>7</sup> H. Tworzecki, *Parties and politics in post-1989 Poland*, Boulder 1996; L. Wade, P. Lavelle, A. Groth, *Searching for voting patterns in post-communist Poland's Sejm elections*, "Communist and Post-Communist Studies", Vol 28, No. 4, pp. 411–425; A. Szczerbiak, *Old and New divisions in Polish Politics: Polish Parties' Electoral Strategies and Bases of Support*, "Europe-Asia Studies" 2003, Vol. 55, No. 5, pp. 729–746.

(SLD), still unable to regain its status after the crisis caused by the loss of electoral credibility following corruption scandals and factional splits in 2004, and the agrarian Polish Peasants' Party (PSL), renowned for its ability to form a coalition with any of the parties mentioned above. Since 2007 they have been the only parties represented in national parliament and the only ones whose members were elected to the European Parliament in 2009. Their central role is confirmed by the results of three consecutive parliamentary elections, when their joint electoral support scores fell between 69.4% and 95.7% (Table 1). Consolidation of the Polish party system is also confirmed by the relatively low index of the electoral effective number of parties, which in the elections of 2007 was only 3.3.

**Table 1.** Electoral support of the four main political parties in Poland in 2001–2011 (in %)

| Party/electoral year           | 2001 | 2005 | 2007 | 2011 |
|--------------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Polish Peasants' Party (PSL)   | 9.0  | 7.0  | 8.9  | 8.3  |
| Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) | 41.0 | 11.3 | 13.2 | 8.2  |
| Civic Platform (PO)            | 12.7 | 24.1 | 41.5 | 39.1 |
| Law and Justice (PiS)          | 9.5  | 27.0 | 32.1 | 29.9 |
| Total four parties             | 72.2 | 69.4 | 95.7 | 85.7 |
| Other                          | 27.8 | 30.6 | 4.3  | 14.3 |

Source: own research based on the data from the National Electoral Commission.

The views questioning the validity of the programme dichotomy between the left and the right were first formulated soon after political change initiated in 1989. According to K.A. Wojtaszczyk, this type of analyses lost its relevance because of the transformation, responsible for the fact that fundamental political divisions in Poland are not based on ideological grounds but result from historical origins and the attitude to current political issues<sup>8</sup>. The analysis of the Polish political scene in terms of one-dimensional pattern of the right and the left is also opposed by S. Gebeth-

<sup>8</sup> K.A. Wojtaszczyk, *Partie i ugrupowania polityczne*, [in:] *Polski system polityczny*

ner, who perceives these notions as far from objective. In the situation when party political programmes combine left – and right–wing ideological, social and economic issues, their leftism or rightism are either the features professed by the parties themselves (constituting their self–identification) or the epithets attributed to them by their political opponents<sup>9</sup>.

In Poland the differences in ideological programmes are not a significant factor conditioning the potential for political co–operation. The twenty years of transformation provides examples of governing coalitions of parties rooted in the Solidarity movement (governments of 1990–1993, 1997–2001) as well as the parties genetically close to each other (governments of 1993–1997, 2001–2005). Undoubtedly, the turning point was the failure to form a coalition between the two post–Solidarity parties: PO and PiS in 2005 (despite earlier declarations), which resulted in forming new coalition patterns, based on co–operation between parties of different origins and different political programmes (2005–2007, 2007–2011). The process obviously has a wider context, as forming *ad hoc* parliamentary coalitions, or even cabinet coalitions, independently of ideologies professed by the parties involved, is becoming a standard practice in contemporary political systems. Therefore, it is worth analysing whether in Poland such practices are the manifestation of pragmatism of governance or atrophy of differences in ideological programmes and policy statements between main political parties, if not both.

This article focuses on members of two Polish political parties of different origins: the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and the Civic Platform (PO). SLD is the heir of the Polish United People's Party (PZPR) and is thus defined as post–communist, while PO was formed in 2001, embracing former anticommunist opposition – until then members of several smaller parties. These two are – at least theoretically – at the opposite ends of the left–right axis, but their common feature is that they both have evolved towards the model of an electoral–professional party with its

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*w okresie transformacji*, eds. R. Chruściak, T. Mołdawa, K.A. Wojtaszczyk, E. Zieliński, Warszawa 1995, p. 247.

<sup>9</sup> S. Gebethner, *Osiemnaście miesięcy rozczłonkowanego parlamentu*, [in:] *Polska scena polityczna a wybory*, Warszawa 1993, p. 29.

marketing aim of acquiring voters. The process frequently involves convergence of political programmes and movements “towards” and “away from” the political centre, where the well-known and easily-identifiable ideological and political differences become blurred.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The literature applies several methods of determining a party's ideological stance<sup>10</sup>. The most frequently employed is the analysis of perception of the party's electorate. The widespread use of public opinion polls renders it relatively easy to determine their average stance. Another method is the analysis of a party's political “products”, e.g. by analysing roll call behaviour or endorsed legislative decisions<sup>11</sup>. Roll call analysis requires an exceptionally meticulous selection of concrete cases of roll call voting, taking into consideration the matter being voted on and tactical agreements, compromises or even instances of “trading votes” between parties, which is a common practice, especially in multi-party systems. Some authors try to determine a party's ideological stance following the Biblical maxim of “by their fruits you shall know them”, analysing the structure of budgetary expenditure when concrete parties or coalitions were at the helm of the government<sup>12</sup>. Researchers frequently apply the method of expert surveys, appointing groups consisting of scientists, journalists and other competent observers of the political scene, who evaluate ideological stances of individual parties<sup>13</sup>. Political science also has a rich tradition of analysing their

<sup>10</sup> R. Markowski, *Propozycja „Manifesto Research Group”: metoda, wyniki, problemy – komentarz*, [in:] *System partyjny i zachowania wyborcze. Dekada polskich doświadczeń*, ed. R. Markowski, Warszawa 2002, pp. 290–291.

<sup>11</sup> K.T. Poole, H. Rosenthal, *Congress: a political-economic history of roll call voting*, Oxford 1997.

<sup>12</sup> D. Klingemann, R. Hofferbert, I. Budge, *Parties, Policies and Democracy*, Boulder 1994.

<sup>13</sup> E. g. F. Castles, P. Mair, *Left-Right Political Scales: Some Expert Judgements*, “European Journal of Political Research” 1984, Vol. 12, No. 1; K. Janda, *Political Parties: A Cross-National Survey*, New York 1980.

electoral programmes and political manifestoes, which will be referred to in the latter part of the article, comparing the results of our research with the results of analyses of party programmes<sup>14</sup>. Another method consists of examining the attitudes and preferences of political elites – usually parliamentarians – of a given party<sup>15</sup>.

Our team applied yet another method, which allows us to determine a party's ideological stance as perceived from the perspective of the attitudes, views and opinions expressed by the party cadres at an intermediate level, i.e. its middle-level elites (or *cadres intermédiaires* in French)<sup>16</sup>. In our opinion they have decisive influence on the organisation's structure, constituting a party's DNA, a real driving force behind its development. Delegates to a party congress are elected by local party organisations and backed by their legitimisation and support they may modify the party's statute and influence the rearrangement of the fundamental values underlying its ideology. If it is taken into consideration that they elect party central leadership, we can not escape a conclusion that all the important decisions made within the party depend – at least theoretically – on the opinions, attitudes and visions shared and formulated by the delegates.

Research of party cadres does not currently constitute the mainstream of political science analysis, the reasons being the evolution (reduction,

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<sup>14</sup> The Manifesto Research Group was formed in 1979 to analyse party manifestos in 19 Western democracies comparatively and within a common framework (Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987). Through several iterations of data coding efforts, the party manifesto data have been collected and expanded to most major political parties in 25 Western democracies throughout the postwar period (Budge 1992; Volkens 1995, and Budge et al 2001). Many scholars of political parties have begun to take advantage of these data (e.g., Laver and Budge 1993, Kim and Fording 1998, Gabel and Huber 2000, Laver and Garry 2000, and McDonald, Mendes, and Budge 2004).

<sup>15</sup> M. Laver, W.B. Hunt, *Policy and Party Competition*, New York–London 1992; I. Bialecki, B. Mach, *The Social and Economic Orientations of Polish Legislators Against a Background of the Views of Polish Society*, "Polish Sociological Bulletin" 1992, No. 2; H.D. Klingemann, D. Fuchs (eds.), *Citizens and the State*, Oxford 1995.

<sup>16</sup> To be precise these categories do not exactly overlap. *Middle-level elites* are the party members who have been either elected or nominated to occupy party positions in the area between the party elites and its rank-and-file, while congress or local council participants come from both middle-level elites and activists, local leaders, councillors, MPs and MEPs.

marginalisation?) of the significance of a party's membership base. The literature devoted to the evolution of a political party model has for a long time emphasised the departure from the model of a mass party towards the model of a catch-all party,<sup>17</sup> an electoral-professional party,<sup>18</sup> or a cartel party,<sup>19</sup> which affects changes in the party's internal organisation. In a mass party the members were organised along territorial structures, which elected their delegates constituting the higher level bodies, while the top of the pyramid was the party's national congress, which formally held full authority. The role of a party's members and its movers and shakers in a catch-all party is incomparably smaller. They are still necessary, but only to legitimise the "top echelons" and confirm the existence of internal democracy rather than to be granted real powers<sup>20</sup>. Catch-all parties are much more keen to communicate with their electorate than with their members, thus rendering the views, attitudes, opinions and motivations of the latter less important for the party leadership. Parties do not attach any greater importance to cultivating a permanent electoral base which relies on sound support of their members and a dense network of local party cells, especially that the combined number of political party members in Poland does not exceed 1.2% of the electorate. Party electoral machines aim at the use of "external" instruments of reaching a potential voter, which contributes to the domination of party leaders and the diminishing role of party members.

It would be a far-fetched conclusion, however, to assume that all parties in Europe are evolving from the mass party model towards the catch-all party. At the empirical level, especially in consolidated democracies, we

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<sup>17</sup> O. Krichheimer, *The transformation of Western European party system*, [in:] *Political parties and political development*, eds. J. LaPalombara, M. Weiner, New York 1966.

<sup>18</sup> A. Panebianco, *Political parties: organization and power*, Cambridge 1988.

<sup>19</sup> R. Katz, P. Mair, *The evolution of party organizations in Europe: the tree faces of party organization*, "American Review of Politics" 1993, Vol. 14; R. Katz, P. Mair, *Changing models of party organization and party democracy*, "Party Politics" 1995, Vol. 1, No. 1.

<sup>20</sup> R. Herbut, *Teoria i praktyka funkcjonowania partii politycznych*, Wrocław 2002, pp. 87-95.

encounter a pluralism of party organisation formulas<sup>21</sup>. For example, Helms shows that in the case of France, Belgium and Italy the role of the party's extra-parliamentary (bureaucratic) organisation is decisively stronger than the role played by its parliamentary elite<sup>22</sup>. Heidar and Saglie prove that the analysis of the internal organisation of parties in Norway disproves the thesis that the decision-making process is centralised at the level of party executive structures or that the role of delegates from regional structures within the organisation is being minimised<sup>23</sup>. Also in Central and Eastern Europe certain diversions from the general tendencies in party model evolution may be observed. Empirical research does not always confirm the thesis of party cartelisation<sup>24</sup>. Admittedly, in the early-1990s politics momentarily acquired a mass character, when the political stage in many countries of the region was taken over by universal organisations concentrating on anticommunist opposition, yet a process of "parliamentarisation" of politics and parties began. Organisational origins of the majority of political parties in Central and Eastern Europe were tightly connected with parliaments, while a decisive premise for their political relevance was the fact of possessing a parliamentary representation. The process was fundamental in affecting the style of the parties' activity and the character of the emerging organisational structure, which displayed a tendency for the domination of the parliamentary elite<sup>25</sup>. Parties were dominated by narrow national leadership, while the membership organisation became the weakest link.

<sup>21</sup> R. Koole, *Cadre, catch-all or cartel? A comment on the notion of cartel party*, "Party Politics" 1995, No. 1, p. 520.

<sup>22</sup> V. Ludger Helms, *Parliamentary party groups and their parties: a comparative assessment*, "The Journal of Legislative Studies" 2006, No. 6, pp. 104–120.

<sup>23</sup> V. Saglie, K. Heidar, *Democracy within Norwegian political parties*, "Party Politics" 2004, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 385–405.

<sup>24</sup> P. Gueorguieva, S. Soare, *Peut-on parler d'une cartellisation des partis politiques en Europe central et orientale? Les cas bulgare et roumain*, [in:] *Des partis pour quoi faire? La représentation politique en Europe centrale et orientale*, ed. A. Roger, Bruxelles 2003, pp. 103–120.

<sup>25</sup> R. Herbut, *op.cit.*, p. 110.

We also should not ignore the so-called post-communist groupings and successor parties,<sup>26</sup> which entered politics 20 years ago supported by a considerable organisational base, especially the bureaucratic apparatus. Despite the decline in the number of members, they may still be perceived as organisations whose election results (even though not always a runaway success) result from internal strength and cohesion as well as a large membership base.

However, it is true that most parties in Central Europe are dominated by their “centres”, maintaining only the appearance of autonomy of local organisations, which in reality are denied the right of participating in the decision-making process. The party “rank and file” are activated solely for the purpose of important political campaigns or to legitimise the decisions made at the top. Herbut writes that: “The effect of elitism is additionally reinforced by the fact that the party’s bureaucratic structures do not so much serve the purpose of coordinating local organisations but in fact provide services to the parliamentary organisation. ‘Overpowering’ the latter, they intensify the impression of their detachment from a mass membership party.”<sup>27</sup> Tangible manifestations of party leadership’s lack of interest in their membership base was described by P.G. Lewis<sup>28</sup>. When in the mid-1990s he asked the secretary of the Polish Peasants’ Party (PSL) about the number of party members, the latter not only proved ignorant and was unable to provide credible data, but also replied that the ability to mobilise the members for street demonstrations and protests is more important than their absolute numbers.

About a decade ago, in a sense in contradiction to general trends, we decided to initiate transnational research of party cadres in Central and Eastern Europe as part of a project of the Centre d’étude de la vie politique – Centre for Studies of Political Life (CEVIPOL) from the Free University

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<sup>26</sup> P. Kopecky, *Developing party organizations in East-Central Europe. What type of party is likely to emerge?*, “Party Politics” 1995, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 515–534.

<sup>27</sup> R. Herbut, *op.cit.*, p. 110.

<sup>28</sup> P.G. Lewis, *Political parties in post-communist Eastern Europe*, London 2000, p. 98.

of Brussels. The following part of the article presents the most important findings and conclusions.

### **RESEARCH OF MEDIUM-LEVEL PARTY CADRES IN POLAND**

As part of a project initiated by the Centre d'étude de la vie politique – Centre for Studies of Political Life (CEVIPOL) from the Free University of Brussels, the research of two Polish political parties: the Civic Platform (PO) and the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) was carried out in 2008–2009 by a scientific team from the University of Wrocław. A survey of delegates for SLD regional congresses was done in April and May 2008 in all sixteen provinces of Poland. We received 1569 completed questionnaires, which constituted ca. 70% of congress delegates<sup>29</sup>. A similar survey was carried out for the Civic Platform (PO) in March 2009, when the party's regional councils were held, i.e. its collegial bodies with fewer participants than regional congresses, but still attended by members representing local organisations. Here we received 507 completed questionnaires, which constituted 74% of regional council participants.

Questionnaires were in each case formulated in the same way. The questions were divided into groups and were concerned with economic development, tax and redistribution policy, system of values, opinions, political declarations, among others, which aimed at establishing the delegates' ideological profiles. Additionally, the candidates were asked to identify themselves along the left – right axis as well as to indicate their party's stance. The left – right dimension constitutes the key aspect in political competition, enabling comparative research of party systems, and allowing the positioning of political parties in one ideological space. The research enabled the respondents to define their own political views and

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<sup>29</sup> The specific character of party congresses prevents more precise determining of the number of participants. The number of delegates entitled to participate in a congress is known, they sign attendance registers, congress proceedings are published, votes are counted, but the data never coincide.

place their party on the left – right scale comprising eight points, where “0” denoted extreme left and “7” – extreme right.

The research initially included four levels where the processes of de-ideologisation and depolarisation of Polish political parties may be observed, i.e. the level of political messages and electoral appeal, that of individual voters and aggregated groups, the manifesto level and the level of party cadres. Taking into consideration the complexity of the research issue and the need to apply uniform research tools, this study narrows the subject of the analysis to the last of the levels listed above, i.e. the party cadres. The research project provided material enabling a comparison of the cadres from both parties playing a leading role in political life in Poland, being represented in the parliament and possessing governmental relevance.

Candidates' answers were analysed with the use of selected statistical-descriptive methods, including: factor analysis, analysis of variance and limited multivariate analysis<sup>30</sup>. We also intentionally imposed certain limitations on this study in order to avoid generating an excessive amount of statistical data presented in tables.

#### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTIES

Until recently the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) counted twice as many members as the Civic Platform (PO). Established in April 1999 and registered a month later, it is slightly older, as PO was established in January 2001 and registered in March 2002. SLD has ca. 70 thousand members, PO – ca. 46 thousand. Both parties have governmental relevance and are

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<sup>30</sup> Factor analysis is the method aiming at reducing a great number of random variables to a smaller set, which is achieved by assuming that certain groups of random variables represent the variability of the same factors, i.e. random variables in a given group to an extent depend on each other. Analysis of variance (ANOVA), created by in 1925 by Fisher, enables examination of observations dependent on one or many simultaneous factors. The method explains the probability with which selected factors may cause differences between observed group means. We also attempted several multivariate analyses to establish more complex diagrams of relations exceeding tabular data, which is possible thanks to the use of multiple regression method or the method of main components analysis, among others.

politically represented at all levels of power. PO enjoys the status of the ruling party, while SLD is in opposition. SLD's political programme positions it on the left, while PO is a modern liberal–conservative party.

#### MEMBERSHIP PROFILE

##### **Age, sex**

The average age of a party member is 51 for SLD and 47 for PO. In the group of young people or those nearing middle age (below 40) the differences between the parties are slight, constituting of only 1%. Perceptible age disparity between the parties is only seen in the range of 40–49 years of age and above 60. SLD members include a considerably greater number of older people – about a quarter, while this age group counts only 8% in the case of PO. The answers provided by the respondents show explicitly that party policy is the area mainly cultivated by men, who constitute over 80% of delegates in both parties.

##### **Professional profile**

Party activity involves performing various public functions, but it is hardly possible to determine whether this is the result of increasing pragmatism and de-ideologisation. The research confirms that a party in power implements the strategy which W.C. Muller and K. Strom<sup>31</sup> as well as many Western–European politologists call *office-seeking*, which was confirmed by a high percentage of members from Donald Tusk's party (PO) whose jobs are connected with politics. On the other hand, SLD's opposition status involves temporary loss of access to public positions and offices, which even to a greater extent than the crisis of ideological and programme identity causes internal crises of party leadership and the sense of inability to taking over the power. An additional factor is that the situation of the biggest left–wing party in Poland is quite specific, as it is confronted with the Law and Justice (PiS), which since 2007 has become the greatest

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<sup>31</sup> W.C. Mueller, K. Strom, *Policy, office or votes; how political parties in Western Europe make hard decisions*, Cambridge 1999.

opposition party and reduces public discourse to the dispute with the ruling PO, excluding other political actors.

Civic Platform exercises power in the government, parliament and in the regions, governing most provinces and thus, being able to offer its members many public functions. This aspect distinctly differentiates both parties: every other PO activist declares that his or her job is connected with politics, while among the SLD members it is only one person in seven. This may be the reason why in the last 5 years a growing number among the general public in Poland<sup>32</sup> has perceived the PO as a party willing to take over as many offices as possible for its own people (in 2006 this view was expressed by only 11% of the respondents, in 2011–55%). It is worth noticing that the number expressing a similar opinion concerning the SLD also increased (6% in 2006 and 27% in 2011).

**Table 2.** Connection between the job and politics N = 1040, N = 468

| Q. : <i>Is your job connected with politics?</i> |   | yes  | no   |
|--|---|------|------|
| Civic Platform (PO)                              | % | 45.7 | 54.3 |
| Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)                   | % | 15.5 | 84.5 |

#### **Party membership history and involvement in party activity**

Family tradition, which may have affected political socialisation and the forming of political views, is a distinct factor differentiating both parties. In the SLD identification with the party is to a greater degree handed down from generation to generation; the left-wing cadres have much more frequently quoted the family tradition as a factor motivating them to join the party. In the case of PO the factor is marginal, possibly because it is a young party, whose founders are still at the helm of the party leadership and the family tradition has not had sufficient time to form. In terms of “party membership history” SLD’s members seem to be faithful to one political standard. Nearly 97% answered that they had not belonged to any other political party other than the Social Democracy of the Republic

<sup>32</sup> Opinion poll by GfK Polonia for the daily “Rzeczpospolita”, *Coraz lepszy Sojusz oraz unikalne PSL*, [27.06.2011].

of Poland (SdRP) and the SLD. The question was concerned with the period following 1989 and proves the party's great homogeneity. Today's SLD groups the people who in the first years of the Third Polish Republic almost exclusively joined the ranks of the post-communist party of the left, i.e. SdRP. PZPR transformed into the SdRP in January 1990, which involved a change of the name, political programme, structure and leadership. SLD incorporated the whole SdRP, which constituted the act of continuation rather than discontinuation on the left wing, maintaining material and symbolic assets of the party, due to which many successors of monopoly regimes in Central and Eastern Europe from the very start became highly institutionalised left-wing parties<sup>33</sup>. PO activists present more heterogenic experiences. Ten years on, it presents to the electorate the image of a coherent party rather than a conglomerate of several factions. This is important for the party leaders, as in the view of the respondents' answers, nearly half of them had been active members of other parties, which poses the risk of PO's disintegration in the face of a potential crisis.

**Table 3.** Membership in other parties after 1989 N=1496, N=500

| Q. : <i>Were you a member of another political party?</i> |   | yes  | no   |
|---|---|------|------|
| Civic Platform (PO)                                       | % | 48.0 | 52.0 |
| Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)                            | % | 3.1  | 96.9 |

There is one more distinctive feature, testifying to different ideological and political experiences of both parties' members, i.e. membership in the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) and the Independent Self-governing Trade Union "Solidarity" (NSZZ Solidarność) before 1989. In the SLD the legacy of the regime monopoly still seems alive, as ca. 60% of the respondents were its members prior to 1989, while for the PO this proportion is barely 7%. Additionally, in the SLD there is a direct relationship between the age and the membership in the PZPR. In the group of 50+ years of age,

<sup>33</sup> A. Antoszewski, *Wzorce rywalizacji politycznej we współczesnych demokracjach europejskich*, Wrocław 2004, pp. 198–199.

which at the time of the research amounted to two thirds of its members, nearly 90% had belonged to the ruling party in communist Poland. This relic of the post-communist past was for a long period of time a cause of embarrassment, which the new, modern political formation felt obliged to dissociate itself from. This specific complex of membership in the monoparty may burden a considerable number of party cadres. The respondents who confirmed the fact are more active in the public sphere than those who did not belong to PZPR, as over two thirds of the former PZPR members are today performing today various public functions. About one third of the PO cadres admit former links with Solidarity (NSZZ Solidarność), which does not necessarily confirm the party's post-Solidarity roots, yet the proportion is significantly high, considering the fact that there are other parties which also embraced the trade union's former activists. Still, former Solidarity members are to a lesser degree still involved in public sphere social and political conditions. Contrary to the SLD, barely one third of them admit that they perform a public function.

#### **Religious denomination structure**

One of the elements of the research was the declaration of religious faith and involvement in religious practices. It should be noted that none of the relevant parties in Poland has a typically religious character; neither does any party directly refer to Christian-Democratic or Christian-National values. The respondents were asked whether they were religious and what religion they professed. The results proved quite surprising, especially in the case of SLD, where nearly two thirds of the members define themselves as religious. This score exceeds the proportions in many Western-European parties belonging to the political family where religion plays the primary role, constituting their conservative or Christian-Democratic views. 93% of professed believers in the PO contradicts any attempts of defining the party as liberal or modern, secular right wing. The dominating denomination is Roman-Catholic Christianity, which was indicated by over 90% of believers in the PO. In the SLD the religious mix is even more distinct, as ca. 95% of all believers belong to the Roman-Catholic Church. Such religious denomination structure does not diverge from the religious divisions among the Polish population, as according to

the Central Statistical Office,<sup>34</sup> 94% of the population are Roman Catholics. Considering the above, the PO members are more typical when compared with the “average” Polish religiousness, while on the left two groups of similar proportions may be distinguished: relatively frequently practising believers and non-practising non-believers. This structural aspect of religiousness is significant in evaluating the role of the Church, the role of religious symbols and religion itself in public life as well as in terms of general ideological views, which will be discussed further.

As it turns out, a relatively high level of religiousness does not go hand in hand with the approval of the Church understood as a hierarchical institution. In the SLD faith, agnosticism or atheism are accompanied by distinct anticlericalism and objection to exposing religious symbols in the public sphere. In the case of PO, the party is divided into two, not always equal groups. On the one hand ca. 62% believe that the Church exerts too much influence on public authorities and 77% were against revealing the mark in religious instruction on school certificates, on the other – a majority of 53% as opposed to 34% were in favour of maintaining the presence of the cross in classrooms, public offices and state institutions.

**Table 4.** Attitudes to selected issues connected with the role of the Church, religion and religious symbols in public life (in %)

|   | for  |      | Against |      |
|---|------|------|---------|------|
|   | SLD  | PO   | SLD     | PO   |
| The Church in Poland exerts too much influence on public authorities  | 92.5 | 61.8 | 4.3     | 34.2 |
| Crosses should be displayed in classrooms, public offices and state institutions  | 9.5  | 53.1 | 80.0    | 34.9 |
| The mark in religious instruction should be taken into consideration in evaluating a student's average academic performance | 2.0  | 19.1 | 94.0    | 77.3 |

<sup>34</sup> Central Statistical Office, “Yearbook” 2009, data for 2008.

ATTITUDES TO THE POLITICAL VIEWS  
AND IDEOLOGICAL STANDPOINTS

We focused on two dimensions which facilitate to determine ideological similarities and differences between the two parties: the social-economic dimension, consisting of six notions – economic interventionism, inequality of earnings, linear tax, social benefits, trade unions, flexibility of employment from the ideological viewpoint, where the respondents expressed their opinions about seven statements concerning abortion, legalisation of illegal drugs, euthanasia, extramarital and same-sex relationships, death penalty, accessibility of condoms and the significance of discipline in the education process

It transpired that within the social-economic dimension PO is dogmatically (over 90% respondents) in favour of restricting the role of the state in the economy, introducing linear tax, restricting the influence of trade unions and flexibility of employment. On the other hand, there is a fluid faction of the SLD cadres who believe in liberal economic measures (between 31.5% and 67.2% relative to the aspect) and a faction of unequivocal proponents of etatism, elimination of inequalities, tax progression and traditionally understood forms of employment. In this respect PO seems more consistent, while the left once again confirms how difficult it is to find a place for it on the left – right axis. Detailed data are presented in Table 5 below.

**Table 5.** Attitudes towards selected social-economic issues (in %)

|   | for         |             | against     |             |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|   | SLD         | PO          | SLD         | PO          |
| 1. State intervention in the economy should be restricted | <b>67.2</b> | <b>98.6</b> | 29.6        | 1.2         |
| 2. Inequality of earnings should be reduced               | <b>82.1</b> | 31.6        | 16.2        | <b>66.1</b> |
| 3. Linear tax should be introduced                        | 30.6        | <b>96.5</b> | <b>61.5</b> | 2.0         |
| 4. Social benefits should be related to earnings          | <b>80.5</b> | <b>71.8</b> | 17.9        | 24.8        |

|  | for  |      | against |      |
|--|------|------|---------|------|
|  | SLD  | PO   | SLD     | PO   |
| 5. Trade unions should exert greater influence on current social and economic issues | 61.9 | 4.4  | 35.1    | 94.4 |
| 6. Approval for temporary employment   | 65.4 | 90.5 | 31.5    | 7.7  |

PO (N=507); SLD (N=1423)

The data concerning the ideological viewpoint are also considerably disparate, thus proving heterogeneity of views within the parties. In this dimension PO members' views are the least consistent and most divided on the majority of issues which they were confronted with. On the other hand and quite surprisingly, some of the SLD cadres presented conservative attitudes towards same-sex marriages, extramarital relationships and legalisation of soft drugs and are inclined to support authoritarian solutions (death penalty, discipline in schools). Members of both parties are most divided on the issues of abortion, euthanasia, discipline in schools and the accessibility of condoms, while they oppose legalisation of soft drugs to a similar degree and display an ambivalent attitude towards the need to enter marriage in order to have children, reinstating the death penalty and discipline at schools.

**Table 6.** Attitude towards selected issues in ideological viewpoint (in %)

|  | for  |      | against |      |
|--|------|------|---------|------|
|  | SLD  | PO   | SLD     | PO   |
| 1. Abortion for social reasons should be banned          | 15.0 | 55.8 | 79.0    | 38.5 |
| 2. Soft drugs should be legalised                        | 20.0 | 16.1 | 74.0    | 80.8 |
| 3. Euthanasia should be legalised                        | 52.0 | 29.0 | 34.5    | 62.6 |
| 4. If you want to have children, you have to get married | 28.0 | 45.8 | 60.5    | 50.4 |
| 5. Death penalty should be brought back                  | 43.5 | 37.4 | 45.7    | 59.4 |
| 6. Condoms should be accessible in secondary schools     | 74.5 | 51.1 | 14.3    | 39.2 |
| 7. First and foremost, schools should teach discipline   | 47.8 | 34.9 | 42.4    | 61.1 |
| 8. Same-sex marriages should be legalised                | 37.0 | 11.8 | 48.0    | 81.7 |

Furthermore, in our study we decided to adopt the qualitative approach to members' ideological affiliations. We have applied a two-dimensional axis which enables us to present on the one hand the identification with leftist social liberalism or rightist conservatism, and on the other – with the tendency for imposing restrictions or granting permissions. We assumed, that in an ideal model, social liberal doctrine co-occur with non-restrictive declarations, while conservatism in its pure form is bound up with rigoristic and authoritarian features.

Such a bi-polar division would be probably sufficient in a normative study, but due to the empirical data we collected, it was worth analysing, in which cases and to what extent did party members move their political position out of doctrine. In our case, we also aimed at clarifying internal cohesion of party members. Considering the above, we placed PO and SLD on two identical axes, forming four areas. One axis constitutes the space between social liberalism and conservatism and the other between permissions and restrictions. Such a way of modelling political positions enables us to characterize existing variations of political beliefs. We examine the difference between ideological standpoints resulting from pure social liberal and conservative thought presented in the table above and attitudes expressed by the members. The statements were placed in one of the following schemes:

1. In every statement the simple majority of pro or contra answers was selected,
2. Depending on the match, it was finally put on the upper (similar to social democratic doctrine) or lower (similar to conservative doctrine) part of the figure,
3. The more permissive it was, the more left it was and the more restrictive the more right from the centre of the figure.

Analysis of the positions occupied by the party cadres' views show that in the case of both parties they diverge from traditionally, and thus rigidly, interpreted ideology and party programme, in some cases radically differing from the model assumptions of political doctrines or even occupying a position on the other than expected end of the spectrum. In the case of SLD there are two features, which surprisingly resemble the conservative point of view and these are: legalisation of same sex couples and

legalisation of soft drugs. Such an attitude reminds us of the fact, that more than half of middle – level party elite of SLD were members of PZPR, the party which, similarly to other like – minded parties of the Soviet bloc, shared some conservative values. The spectrum of viewpoints of PO members is divided into rightist and conservative protection of the traditional model of a family, objection to euthanasia and soft drugs and a more progressive standpoint in favour of: liberal education in schools, condoms, interdiction of the death penalty and informal marriages.

Research in both parties was carried out during congresses, when personal changes are usually made and political initiatives emerge. In view of the acquired answers it is obvious that SLD is the party where programme changes are the most anticipated. Nearly 60% of the cadres anticipate changes in political programmes, while another 30% expressed moderate support for the demand. In the PO the number of those expecting changes is the same as the number of proponents of maintaining the *status quo*. No difference in expressed evaluation was found among those who have been members from the beginning of the party's existence and among the newcomers. Also no positive correlation was observed with the variable expressing former membership in another political party, which means that neither diversified party membership history nor the length of present membership among the PO cadres bear any relationship to their will to modify the party's political programme.

## CONCLUSIONS

The general impression seems to be that the extent of ideological differences between the researched parties is relatively insignificant. Obviously, the members of both PO and SLD do not profess identical views, each party has its own specific character and programme and therefore the answers provided by their members differ. It is hardly surprising that the PO cadres are more liberal in the area of economy and their views on many issues place them more to the right than those of the SLD members. Their attitude to the previous regime is much more critical than in the case of the SLD, while the latter – hardly surprising again – maintain

a greater distance from the Catholic Church than the PO members, thus positioning themselves on the left side of the political spectrum.

An attempt to find the area where the views presented by the cadres from both parties would decisively differ failed to yield any results. It was not any of the symbolic issues: privatisation, the role of the state in the economy, the question of morals, the European Union, foreign policy... Not a single issue could be isolated which would justify the thesis that there exist two opposing blocks. Neither PO nor SLD present two antagonistic visions of the world, while their cadres are by no means divided by an ideological chasm. There are more pragmatists than ideologues among the delegates to party congresses and members of regional councils. Their pragmatism is not tantamount to opportunism. They declare that they joined the party ranks not to pursue political careers; neither did they want to attain public office. The reasons for joining were different but several key ones emerge, even though they are not the same for either of the parties. Among the main reasons the PO members mentioned the need to repair the state and willingness to assist in the development of their community or region. According to Kitschelt's typology,<sup>35</sup> this is a typical example of pragmatism of those who, appreciating concrete achievements, become involved where practical action is most appreciated<sup>36</sup>. The most important motivation for the SLD cadres was what they saw as a chance of changing society, which may be considered a purely ideological motive, which, however, does not translate into a consistent ideological viewpoint.

The middle-level elites of both parties are liberal in terms of social and economic issues, if not ultra-liberal when compared with their counterparts from Western Europe and simultaneously conservative considering the issues of morals. While attempting to categorise the answers from the PO and SLD delegates to the questions concerning the latter, several dif-

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<sup>35</sup> H. Kitschelt, *The logics of party formation: ecological politics in Belgium and West Germany*, Ithaca 1989.

<sup>36</sup> Kitschelt distinguished three types of party activists: ideologues, who are party intellectuals uninterested in concrete problems and an activity at a local level; lobbyists, who, coming from trade unions, community initiatives or interests groups, have experience in community work and appreciate concrete results and, finally, pragmatists.

ferent dimensions came into view. In both parties there is a capacity for progressive attitudes towards the questions of sexuality and family (approval of abortion, tolerance of same-sex marriages). Another aspect may be defined as moderately progressive views on social values understood as open-minded attitude to the questions concerning the freedom of choice (euthanasia or legalisation of soft drugs), while maintaining a traditional stance concerning the family and the requirement to enter marriage to have children. Finally, there is the third dimension, comprising the delegates' opinion concerning the upbringing of children, expressed by the support of "conservative education", i.e. promoting the spirit of school discipline and opposing the availability of condoms at school.

We are thus faced with a different kind of reality than it is in the case of Western Europe, even though, obviously, the region is far from uniform. Different countries see differently the role of the state, their degrees of centralisation and specific political cultures are different. It is sufficient to compare great differences between etatistic and centralised France and liberal, decentralised Germany and the consequences this fact has for the party systems. Even if we agree that globalisation and European integration are causing the gradual convergence of political systems and restricting ideological debates,<sup>37</sup> European democracies still maintain clear and distinct divisions in essential political issues. Ideological debate does not eliminate the possibility of forming coalitions by parties from differing groups or the evolution of political programmes of individual formations, but disparate visions of the world expressed by the British Labour Party or the Conservatives, historical debate in Spain or the ongoing public discussion of ethical issues in Western-European systems prove that political parties in Western Europe distinctly differ from each other. Similarly as in the USA, where the difference between the Democrats and the Republicans for decades has not been as distinct as it is now. If we are to believe the proponents of the thesis of Americanisation of European politics, we should expect that the differences on our continent will soon increase instead of disappearing.

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<sup>37</sup> J.M. De Waele, P. Magnette (eds.), *Les démocraties européennes. Approche comparée des systèmes politiques nationaux*, Paris 2008, p. 7.

It can not be denied that Europe is confronted with the process of convergence of political party programmes, yet still in the public sphere identifications which almost like reflexes motivate voters to support concrete political formations are very much alive. The right still distrusts the state (the French right does so to the least extent) and believes in providing security, lowering taxes, superiority of private rather than state ownership, etc. The left still believes that inequality may and should be decreased and that the state should play an active role in this process, that the rich should pay higher taxes than the poor, etc. Each actor on the political stage has their symbols, mythical origins, political icons, heroes and a characteristic way of practising politics, corresponding with the expectations of their electorate. Our research seems to prove that in Poland, similarly as in the remaining countries from Central and Eastern Europe, political and ideological differences are decisively smaller, almost non-existent. It would be necessary, indeed indispensable, to carry out similar research among the members of the Law and Justice (PiS) as it would have been, in previous years, to diagnose the Self-Defence (Samoobrona) and the League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin, LPR). It is very probable that the great divisions between party cadres do exist, but not where we were looking for them, not between the members of the centre-left and the centre-right parties but between the liberal modernisers from the PO and the SLD on the one hand and the conservative block on the other. It is the existence of the strong national-conservative party that brings the cadres from the Civic Platform and the Democratic Left Alliance politically together.

What are the consequences of this situation for the Polish political party landscape? What are the conclusions from the presented research? If ideological issues are not especially important for party members, what becomes significant is the creation of the party image and political marketing – many books have been devoted to the subject. Absence of strong ideological cohesion has its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, the party leadership finds it decisively more difficult to mobilise party cadres around the “just cause”. The fact that they do not have crystallised views or that their views on too many things differ, may cause internal crises, when the party needs to make a decision about symbolic issues. On the other hand,

this presents the leadership with a wide margin of freedom in shaping the party's image and autonomy in making decisions necessitated by the pragmatism of power. There is no danger that party rank and file will interpret the decisions made at the top as the betrayal of ideals, as it sometimes happens in, e.g. social-democratic parties of Western Europe.

The fact that Polish political parties hardly differ in terms of their political programmes is not our discovery – it has been emphasised before by many researchers. Yet, the fact that weakness of ideological identification is confirmed by the research of their cadres, has its consequences for the whole political system. The elites of contemporary political parties all over Europe are becoming increasingly more similar. Leaderships of parties (especially of those in power) give very similar answers when addressing questions about the economy, propose very similar therapies of, e.g. dealing with crisis, but this does not necessarily have to be tantamount to party mimetism. In Western Europe pragmatic elites lead parties whose activists are uncompromising in defending opposing social visions. Party leadership, aware of economic and political reality, may be prepared to compromise even in key ideological issues, especially if the aim is to form a government coalition, still, “ideological purity” remains a characteristic feature for the party's rank and file, who spring into action during the carnival of democracy, i.e. electoral campaigns, thus polarising the political scene. Parties acquire a distinct character, fight for something and defend something, present coherent visions of society and politics and thus voters find it easier to believe that on election day they are presented with a real alternative.

Our research showed that in Poland political parties are pragmatic at all levels, not only in parliamentary clubs and among top leadership, but also locally, among the rank and file. Political commentators have even called it “post-politics”, where there is no room for ideological discussion and debate on fundamental issues. Pragmatism of the political actors may thus explain insufficient mobilisation of party cadres, low membership, and low attendance on election days. Pragmatism can not kindle political emotions. If parties seem too similar to each other, too focused on problems far away from real life, why join the party, why become an active member and, finally, why vote?