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# Two Faces of Polish Populism

## The Causes of the Success and Fall of Self Defence and the League of Polish Families

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### Abstract

Zwei populistische Parteien – Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej (Selbstverteidigung der Republik Polen, SRP) und Liga Polskich Rodzin (Liga der Polnischen Familien, LPR) errangen bei den polnischen Parlamentswahlen von 2001 einen spektakulären Erfolg, der es ihnen nicht nur erlaubte, in den Sejm, sondern auch in eine Koalitionsregierung einzuziehen. Doch erlitten beide Formationen 2007 eine schwere Wahlniederlage und verschwanden nach den Europawahlen von 2009 faktisch von der politischen Bühne. Dieser Beitrag analysiert und erklärt – unter Rückgriff auf das Modell des „Spiegelbildes“ – die Gründe für Erfolg und Scheitern der beiden Parteien. Es wird die Auffassung vertreten, dass das sozial-ökonomische und politische Klima, die Struktur des polnischen Parteiensystems, die Muster innerparteilichen Wettbewerbs wie auch die Verortung der populistischen Parteien auf der Regierung-Opposition-Achse die wichtigsten Erklärungsfaktoren für Erfolg wie Scheitern liefern. Darüber hinaus erwies sich die populistische Identität als in hohem Maße bedeutsam. Ihre Besonderheit wird mit den „zwei Gesichtern“ des polnischen Populismus und der Kombination von vertikaler und horizontaler Exklusion zu erfassen versucht.

For over a quarter of a century populism has been in the center of political science research. Though we have undoubtedly come closer to understand the essence of this phenomenon, there are still parts of it which cannot be explained even by the most comprehensive theories or approaches. As R.B. Collier notices, “The populist label has been attached to such a wide variety of political movements (right and left, from above and from below) that it is hard to stabilize any core meaning that can work rigorously as an analytical concept.”<sup>1</sup> The reality of

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1 Ruth B. Collier, Populism. In: The International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, ed. by Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes, vol. 17, New York 2001, p. 11814.

Poland after 1989 fully confirms this observation. It is difficult to find unquestionable criteria according to which any given political party could be defined as populist. Thus, existing analyses have acknowledged the Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL),<sup>2</sup> the Confederation of Independent Poland (Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej, KPN), and Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS)<sup>3</sup> as populist parties.

It seems that in most cases the populism of these parties is identified rather with demagogy, and the only parties truly deserving the populist label are Self Defence of the Republic of Poland (SRP) and the League of Polish Families (LPR), both having emerged as parliamentary groups after the elections of 2001. Both parties were characterized by exclusion, so typical for populist groups, which is reflected by two dimensions: the vertical one (which excludes the elite from any variously-interpreted people or nation) and the horizontal one (excluding all "others" that do not fit into an established homogeneous community).

The present article aims, firstly, to find the causes of the spectacular success of SRP and the LPR – their entrance into the Sejm in 2001, their success in the elections to the European Parliament (EP) in 2004, their entrance into the government in 2005. Secondly, it explores the causes of the parties' later defeat – in the 2007 elections and in the elections to the EP in 2009. We argue that, among many other factors, the three main causes of both success and the defeat were as follows:

- the socioeconomic and political climate which was favorable for populists in 2001 and 2005, yet unfavorable in 2007 and 2009;
- the placement of the populist parties on the Opposition-Government axis. In 2001 and 2005 SRP and LPR were both parties of the Opposition, which allowed them to openly criticize the ruling elite and the status quo in the context of vertical and horizontal dimensions of exclusion. With the parties' entrance into government in 2005 such criticism was no longer possible. Its lacking undermined the dominant aspects of their populist identity;
- changes in the structure of the Polish party system and in the models of inter-party competition. At the time of the 2001 elections, the populists took advantage of new opportunities offered by the Polish political scene – the decline of large political groups (especially of the Solidarity Electoral Action – AWS) and the creation of a new political configuration. As early as the 2005 elec-

2 See Joseph Held (ed.), *Populism in Eastern Europe. Racism, Nationalism, and Society*, New York 1996, p. 185; Maria Marczevska-Rytko, *Tendencje populistyczne we współczesnym ruchu chłopskim*. In: *Dzieje i przyszłość polskiego ruchu ludowego*, Warszawa 2002; Kazimierz Baścik/Jan Zalewa (eds.), *Przebudowa i przyszłość*, Warszawa 2002, pp. 443–458; Aleks Szczerbiak, *The New Polish Political Parties as Membership Organizations*. In: *Contemporary Politics*, 7 (2001), pp. 58–59.

3 See Stefan Stępień, *Populizm w programach wyborczych do parlamentu w 2001 r.* In: Maria Marczevska-Rytko (ed.), *Populizm na przełomie XX i XXI wieku. Panaceum czy pułapka dla współczesnych społeczeństwa?*, Toruń 2006, pp. 166–170.

tions and fully after the 2007 elections, there was a tendency for a bi-polarization of the Polish political scene between the Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO) and PiS. As this tendency increased, it proved fatal for the smaller political parties, including the populists.

We have consciously conducted our analysis according to a “mirror image” model of causes for the parties’ success and defeat. We have analyzed both of these aspects in terms of an identical configuration of causes; this has allowed for a more understandable verification of those causes.

We have also consciously chosen to provide a separate discussion concerning elections to the European Parliament (EP), analyzing both the successes of the populist parties in these elections (2004) and their defeat (EP elections 2009). Elections to the European Parliament are peculiar: they have a second-order nature, meaning that they draw less attention and interest; provide less motivation for political parties, their candidates, and their voters; and above all are characterized by a comparatively smaller voter turnout.<sup>4</sup> Political parties treat European Parliamentary elections rather as tests of social moods and of their own mobilization capabilities than as meaningful battles for political positions. This analysis shows that, in the case of the populist parties in question, the factors that conditioned their results in the EP elections were secondary to the factors that appeared in the earlier general elections of 2001 and 2007.

## I. SRP and LPR – Political Parties and Their Identities

The LPR and Self Defence entered the Polish parliament at the same time in 2001; both lost their parliamentary status in the elections of 2007. The fates of these two groups seem to suggest a wide range of similarities. Indeed, what the two parties actually had in common were their populist natures and the same small potential for forming a coalition. Both parties were doomed to isolation in the Sejm from 2001 to 2005, and during their coalition with the PiS between 2006 and 2007 they were treated as second-rate partners. Yet it seems that the main similarities between the LPR and SRP end here; their differences become visible when we analyze the circumstances of each party’s emergence, their respective styles of political activism, and especially when we compare the political values at the source of their ideological identities.

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4 Cf. Karlheinz Reif/Hermann Schmitt, *Nine Second-Order National Elections. A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results*. In: *European Journal of Political Research*, 8 (1980), pp. 40-44.

## 1. Self Defense of the Republic of Poland

Self Defence was registered as a political party on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1999. As an agricultural trade union, however, it had already existed since 1992. This official status of a union was merely a cover; running regularly in elections from 1993 onwards, the group displayed predominant attributes of a political party.<sup>5</sup> The founder, and as yet the only leader of the trade union-turned-political party is Andrzej Lepper, a farmer from Zielonowo in the Pomerania (*Pomorze*) region of Poland. Gifted with unquestionable charisma, it is Lepper who has provided the SRP with its leadership character.

The success met by Lepper's party, first in the elections of 2001 and then four years later (see table 1), made some individuals entertain the idea that SRP could become a ruling party in the country.<sup>6</sup> This idea became even more justified as the party achieved somewhat better results in the elections of 2005. The antagonism between the PO and PiS, which had grown during the campaigning periods for the Sejm and the Presidency in 2005, made it impossible for these parties to form a previously intended coalition. This impossibility opened up the opportunity for SRP and the LPR to form a government coalition with PiS in May, 2006. During Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz's and (from 14.7.2006) Jarosław Kaczyński's respective terms as Prime Minister, SRP held three ministerial positions, with Andrzej Lepper functioning as both the Minister of Agriculture and a deputy-prime minister.<sup>7</sup>

A chronically tense situation in the coalition forced SRP to break away from it in September 2006; but after three weeks Lepper's party returned to the government. The tension, nevertheless, did not dissolve, and the coalition's breakdown came on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2007. Lepper requested his own dismissal and formally announced the end of the coalition two weeks later. After the early elections of 2007 SRP lost its parliamentary status, and from that time on we have observed a gradual disintegration of the party's structures.

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5 Cf. Mateusz Piskorski, *Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polski*. In: Krzysztof Kowalczyk/ Jerzy Sielski (eds.), *Polskie partie i ugrupowania parlamentarne*, Toruń 2005, p. 198.

6 Cf. Stefan Niesiołowski, *Żulia idzie po władzę*. In: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 31.1.2004, p. 10.

7 Cf. Wojciech Szacki, *Lepper z Giertychem już w rządzie*. In: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 6.5.2006, p. 1.

Table 1: Results of SRP in elections to the SEJM (lower house of parliament) in 2001, 2005, and 2007

Elections	Percentage of votes	Number of votes	Number of mandates
1993	2.78	383,97	0
1997	0.08	10,07	0
2001	10.20	1,327,624	53
2005	11.41	1,347,355	56
2007	1.53	247,34	0

Source: [http://www.pkw.gov.pl/pkw2/index.jsp?place=Menu01&news\\_cat\\_id=22&layout=1](http://www.pkw.gov.pl/pkw2/index.jsp?place=Menu01&news_cat_id=22&layout=1).

## 2. The League of Polish Families

The LPR came into being in early June 2001 as the result of combining certain smaller groups from a Catholic-national environment. Its emergence and success in the 2001 elections was greatly influenced by Radio Maryja, whose leader was the charismatic redeptorist Tadeusz Rydzyk.<sup>8</sup>

It was in the LPR where several well-known, eager-to-conflict, radical Catholic-national politicians found their place (Zygmunt Wrzodak, Gabriel Janowski, Adam Biela, Antoni Macierewicz, Ryszard Bender, and Jan Łopuszański).<sup>9</sup> As a compromise, the little-known politician Marek Kotlinowski was chosen as party leader.<sup>10</sup>

After the elections in 2001, however, it was Roman Giertych who played the leading role in the party. Giertych came from the small, nationalistic National Party (Stronictwo Narodowe), which saw itself as a continuation of the pre-World War II political party of the same name, whose head – Roman Dmowski – had been one of the best-known politicians of that time.<sup>11</sup>

The success of the LPR in the 2001 elections was even greater if we consider that none of the other groups in its earlier coalition made it into parliament that year – neither the Christian Democratic Solidarity Electoral Action (Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność – AWS) or the liberal Freedom Union (Unia Wolności – UW). The LPR achieved phenomenal results in the elections to the European Parliament in 2004, followed by the parliamentary elections in 2005, in which the party maintained its results on the same level as in the previous elections (see

8 Cf. Maciej Walaszczyk, *Liga antyliberalna*. In: *Nasz Dziennik*, 30 (2001), p. 2.

9 Cf. Ewa Milewicz, *LPR wczoraj i dziś*. In: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 21.1.2003, p. 9; *Liga Rodzin (Porozumienie organizacji patriotycznych i narodowych), Deklaracja założycielska*. In: *Polska Scena Polityczna*, 3 (2001), p. 6.

10 Cf. Wojciech Załuska, *Przeciwnicy Brukseli weszli*. In: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 24.9.2001, pp. 6–7.

11 Cf. Grzegorz Tokarz, *Ruch narodowy w Polsce w latach 1989–1997*, Wrocław 2002, pp. 35–36.

Table 2: Results of the LPR in elections to the Sejm (lower house of parliament) in the years 2001, 2005, and 2007

Elections	Percentage of votes	Number of votes	Number of mandates
To the Sejm 2001	7.87	1,025,148	38
To the Sejm 2005	7.97	940,76	34
To the Sejm 2007	1.30	209,17	0

Source: [http://www.pkw.gov.pl/pkw2/index.jsp?place=Menu01&news\\_cat\\_id=22&layout=1](http://www.pkw.gov.pl/pkw2/index.jsp?place=Menu01&news_cat_id=22&layout=1).

table 2). Entering into a government coalition with PiS and SRP, the LPR received two ministerial positions, one of which (the Ministry of National Education) belonged to Giertych who had also become deputy-prime minister.

After losing in the following parliamentary elections, on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2007 Roman Giertych resigned from his post as chairman of the LPR; the result was a weakening of the party, which consequently suffered a crisis in terms of its leadership. Ultimately, after a futile two-years search for a suitable candidate, the little-known Witold Balażak became the party's leader in October 2009.<sup>12</sup> Still, Giertych is considered the man behind the party. The structures within the LPR rapidly disintegrated after the elections in 2007. As the last elections to the European Parliament have clearly shown, the party is currently unable to organize effective campaigns on a national scale.

### 3. Do the SRP and LPR have ideologies?

It is a debatable issue whether, at its source, populism possesses any coherent system of ideas which could be called an “ideology”<sup>13</sup> or whether it is rather a certain style of action, means of political discourse, or a strategy used by different ideologies.<sup>14</sup> In any case, it is a phenomenon characterized by a defined set of properties, one that may be called a “syndrome”. The identity of a populist

12 Giertych resigned from all party functions in the LPR. See *Polska Scena Polityczna*, 20 (2007), p. 10.

13 The following authors consider populism an ideology. See for example: Mark N. Hagopian, *Ideas and Ideologies of Modern Politics*, New York 1985, p. 198. Jasper de Raadt/David Hollanders/Andre Krouwel, *Varieties of Populism. An Analysis of the programmatic character of six European Parties*, Paper presented at the Dutch-Flemish Politicolgenetemaal, 27–28 May 2004, Antwerp, Belgium.

14 See Paul Taggart, *Populism*, Buckingham/Philadelphia 2000, p. 1–9; Hans-George Betz, *Rechtspopulismus in Westeuropa. Aktuelle Entwicklungen und politische Bedeutung*. In: *Osterreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, 3 (2002), pp. 251–265; Michael Minkenberg, *The Radical Right in Postsocialist Central and Eastern Europe: Comparative Observations and Interpretations*. In: *East European Politics and Societies*, 16 (2002), pp. 335–363.

party is built on opposition to “others” through their exclusion. The people (the nation) are perceived as “we” – an internally homogeneous collective, separated not only from a “they” – elites (vertical exclusion), but also from all “other” individuals and collectives (horizontal exclusion). For populist parties politics is an expression of the general will of the people. Populism is additionally characterized by a unique organizational structure, based on such things as charismatic leadership and a particular way of conducting political discourse (for instance, through highly-emotionalized speeches and by inspiring fear among the audiences). Populist parties may make references to a wide variety of ideologies that, as a bonus, give them authority and justify their identities – but such references are optional. What most starkly differentiated SRP and the LPR, were, in fact, their attitudes towards ideology. This observation allows us to differentiate two types of Polish populism, represented respectively by Self Defence and the League of Polish Families.

SRP was a formation that was basically not ideological;<sup>15</sup> it built its identity more on social myths than on political ideas. It was characterized by a lack of a stable position regarding most of the issues it dealt with as well as a lack of fixed principles on which those issues were founded. In consequence, the party’s political program, along with content expressed by SRP politicians, was extremely disordered and inconsistent. To some degree this was a result of the “leadership” nature of the party itself, and so SRP’s position was articulated predominantly by Andrzej Lepper.

Connected to this was Lepper’s characteristic ornamentation of political subject matter and the obvious absurdity of his statements. His speeches, especially the earlier ones, can be described as having great emotional weight and minimal meaningful content. They showed weakness, or even a lack of intellectual background. Andrzej Lepper consequently became not only the person who expressed his party’s position, but also a spontaneous creator of that position.<sup>16</sup> SRP’s “program” was based on a collection of postulates which not only failed to create a coherent whole but were often self-contradictory. However, it was this self-contradiction that actually allowed for a flexible adjustment of the party’s position to the political situation.<sup>17</sup>

The reason why some researchers attributed leftist characteristics to SRP was because it had the nature of a radical protest party, whose rhetoric was based primarily on social and economic postulates; the party itself aspired to the role of a “defender of the oppressed”. These postulates were aimed at attracting a partic-

15 We understand the ideology in the traditional vein as: “a coherent set of ideas that shape people’s thinking and actions”, see Terence Ball/Richard Dagger, *Political Ideologies and the Democratic Ideal*, New York 2004, p. 2.

16 See Andrzej Lepper, *Każdy kij ma dwa końce. Nowa droga dla Polski*, Warszawa 2001; Andrzej Lepper, *Lista Leppera*, Warszawa 2002; Andrzej Lepper, *Czas barbarzyńców*, Warszawa 2005.

17 Cf. Andrzej Lepper, *Wywiad z [...] przewodniczącym Samoobrony Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, *Przegląd Europejski*, no. 1, 2003, p. 117.

ular electorate and did not grow out of a definitive ideological structure which could be identified with either socialism or social democracy.

The same was true for issues of world view, including SRP's approach toward the country, religion, or the idea of the nation. What made Lepper's party truly different from the LPR, in this sense, was the fact that SRP was, in its own way, religiously indifferent – a factor that may have also caused some to assign it leftist characteristics (although Lepper described himself as a faithful Catholic and often made references to the words of the Pope). On the other hand, SRP showed some elements usually associated with radical right parties, such as xenophobia (especially towards Germans) and a kind of “social conservatism”. Yet these traits do not form a coherent system that would allow us to classify Lepper's party as a right-wing formation.

At a later time, especially when SRP became anchored as a parliamentary group, its leaders made an attempt at an ideological description of the party. Interestingly, they tried to do this on the basis of the socio-liberal category of the “Third Way”, by referring to reformist concepts of social democracy.<sup>18</sup> Yet SRP's interpretation of the “Third Way” had little to do with Blairism, or even with the “Third Way” concept itself. The party's references to the “Third Way” rather aimed at creating an effective party image rather instead of being an attempt at self-description based on a leftist identity.

Things looked quite different within the LPR. The party had gained its ideological identity from two sources: the national-democratic environment (to which the Giertychs belonged)<sup>19</sup> and the Catholic-national environment (that of Radio Maryja). All in all, this made for a rather coherent system of values based on a principle-driven approach to questions concerning the state, the nation, and religion. The LPR treated these issues in a traditional way: the state was the only accepted political organization of the nation; the nation was seen as an ethnic community; religion (Catholic) was the main ingredient in the cultural identity of the nation. From these values there emerged, among other things, a definitively negative standpoint towards European integration. Until the time of the referendum for accession to the EU in 2003, “Euro-scepticism” was the discerning mark of the LPR.<sup>20</sup>

The League – in contrast to SRP – was not strictly an “anti-establishment” party. Although such attitudes did show up within the party's ranks, they were still overshadowed by the one fundamental trait of the LPR – nationalism. The

18 Cf. Trzecia Droga Samoobrony RP, [www.samoobrona.org.pl](http://www.samoobrona.org.pl) (22.12.2005); Dominik Uhlig, Manifest ideowy Samoobrony: Nowy Lepper. In: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 22.12.2005, p. 7.

19 Cf. Jarosław Tomasiewicz, *Ugrupowania neoendekkie w III Rzeczypospolitej*, Toruń 2003, p. 123.

20 Cf. Wojciech Żaluszka, *To jest partia ojca Rydzyka*. In: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 275 (2001), p. 5; *Karta Praw Polaków, Liga Polskich Rodzin*, Warszawa, 2001; *Aby Polska Polska była, Wybrane tezy programowe Ligi Polskich Rodzin dotyczące integracji z Unią Europejską*, druk ulotny, printed leaflet, 2001.

party's anti-establishment slogans (especially between 2001 and 2005) were due to the conviction that the Polish elites were conducting "anti-Polish" politics, especially in terms of integration with the EU. In the first period of the LPR's existence, when a major role was played by politicians connected with Radio Maryja, the party displayed radical Catholicism, and among other things on this basis it spread on convictions of the cultural gap between Poland and Western Europe. The populism of the LPR was inextricably linked to the essential "fundamentalism" of the national ideology the party expressed, which often took on a xenophobic dimension.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4. Populism

Populist parties in Central and Eastern European countries show certain traits which visibly differentiate them from populist groups in Western Europe. In the case of the latter, populism is associated (mainly, but not only) with the category of radical right-wing parties. It appears that varying historical, cultural, and economic conditions make up the basis for these differences. What truly draws one's attention in the case of the Western European populist parties is their anti-immigration standpoint.<sup>22</sup> In Poland, as in the majority of Central and Eastern European countries, the "problem" of immigration remains insignificant.

The following two factors were primarily responsible for the uniqueness of Polish populism and, at the same time, caused the development of its two currents:

- the historical and religious specificity of Poland which - on the one hand - makes the issue of the nation's sovereignty a very sensitive one and - on the other hand - leads to accepting the Catholic religion as the fundamental element constituting the national identity of the Polish people. These elements were decisive in establishing the specificity of the LPR's populism.
- a very large percentage of peasants (including farmers) in the Polish population and, consequently, the enormous electoral significance of a traditionalist, politically uneducated, and economically weak electorate. These elements were decisive in establishing the specificity of SRP.

Cas Mudde, in one of his earlier publications, distinguishes three categories of populism in post-Communist countries: agrarian, economic, and political. While he acknowledges the first two categories as signs of anachronistic vestiges in the socioeconomic structures of Central European societies (i.e. strong farming groups or the industrial proletariat), the third type of populism (political) is an

21 Cf. Liga Polskich Rodzin, *Odezwa do Narodu Polskiego*. In: *Polska Scena Polityczna*, 16 (2001), pp. 4-5.

22 Cf. Cas Mudde, *The Single-Issue Party Thesis: Right Parties and the Immigration Issue*. In: *West European Politics*, 22 (1999), p. 185.

entirely contemporary “product” – which is why political parties of this type exist in both Eastern and Western Europe. Mudde defines the concept of political populism as “a political style that builds upon a rigid dichotomy of ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite.’”<sup>23</sup>

It seems that whereas the character of SRP has shown all the signs of agrarian populism, the populism of the LPR goes beyond the typological framework proposed by Mudde. The LPR does not fit precisely into any of the categories described above.<sup>24</sup> What is more, SRP, in addition to its agrarian character, visibly displays characteristics of political populism (anti-establishment by nature).

The LPR, while remaining close to Western European movements of a “right populist” nature, grew out of a peculiar national ground. In this sense, the League’s populism was not only a reaction to the changes associated with the challenges of globalization. Above all, it was a means of defending an anachronistic, historical vision of a state and nation “threatened” by the processes of modernization (such as the laicization of society, secularization of the state and the weakening of the state’s power to the advantage of other ruling bodies in both domestic and international policy).

The main problem that has emerged with analyses of Polish populism after 2001 concerns the difficulty in defining it in terms of ideological criteria on the left-right axis. Whereas categorizing the LPR as a right-wing populist party does not cause any doubt or surprise, attempts at definitively labeling the SRP as left or right populist is problematic. The eclectic identity of the party, as indicated above, justifies considering SRP a left-wing party by some political scientists,<sup>25</sup> and a right-wing party by others.<sup>26</sup> It seems that although Self Defense veers more in the direction of leftist parties, the most appropriate proposition would be to resign from categorizing the party in terms of ideology<sup>27</sup> and to accept that

23 Ibid., p. 37.

24 It is worth noting that Mudde’s analysis was published in 2000, before the emergence of the LPR.

25 See for example: Andrzej Antoszewski, *Partie Polityczne Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej*, Poznań/Wrocław 2005, p. 180–181; Kai-Olaf Lang, *Populismus in Ostmitteleuropa. Manifestationsformen Besonderheiten und Chancen Strukturę*. In: Rudolf von Thadden/Anna Hofmann (eds.), *Populismus in Europa – Krise der Demokratie?*, Göttingen 2005, p. 142–143.

26 See for example: Jason C. Sharman, *Agrarian Politics in Eastern Europe in the Shadow of EU Accession*. In: *European Union Politics*, 4 (2003), p. 463; Michael Minkenberg, *The Radical Right in Postsocialist Central and Eastern Europe: Comparative Observations and Interpretations*. In: *East European Politics and Society*, 16 (2003), p. 351; Michaela Gruen/Katharine Stankiewicz, *Sposoby gry radykalnej w Polsce – Liga Polskich Rodzin i Samoobrona oraz ich otoczenie polityczne*. In: Michael Minkenberg/Dagmar Sucker/Agnieszka Wenninger, *Prawicowy radykalizm i ksenofobia w Polsce i w Niemczech*, Bonn 2006, p. 164.

27 Cas Mudde points out the difficulty in locating SRP on the left-right axis – for this reason he suggests acknowledging it as simply a “social populist party”. However, the author (p. 30) – in contradiction to this – defines social populism as a phenomenon which “combine[s] socialism and populism as [its] core ideological features.” Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 48, 52, 280.

SRP is a basically non-ideological formation. SRP identity was firstly formed by its populist character, which became primarily manifest by criticism of the Establishment, and not so much in an ideological package of political values. The situation was different for the LPR, which was a populist party with a distinctively ideological core and right-wing character from its inception. The difference between the two parties, therefore, was not primarily in ideological variations but in the fact that whereas the LPR had an ideology, SRP did not. What they had in common, in fact, was the plane of populism. As mentioned above, it makes no difference whether the form of populism adopted by a given party has ideological or non-ideological sources; various populist parties share certain common traits, especially in the dimension of vertical and horizontal exclusion.

As already stated, the vertical dimension involves setting a (variously interpreted) collective of people or a nation (“us”) against a ruling elite (“them”). What, according to the LPR, defined “the people”, was Polish national identity, so for them “us” was the Polish nation. For SRP, “us” consisted of all weak, poor, and unemployed workers, especially farmers. On the other hand, in the vertical dimension populists separate themselves from all people, nationalities, organizations, processes or institutions that they perceive as “alien” or “other”. Any joining of “others” to the people or the nation is put into question, as those “others” may pose a threat to the good or unity of the nation. Thus, the LPR and SRP both protested against globalization, the EU, foreign capital, and the media (among other things), and SRP especially stood against liberals and capitalists. Although both levels of exclusion are clearly visible with both the LPR and SRP, it should be stressed that Self Defence embodied vertical exclusion to a higher degree (through anti-elitism), while the League of Polish Families more strongly embodied the horizontal one (through nationalism).

## **II. On the Way to the Top**

Variables conditioning the rise and success of populist parties are of a multifaceted nature and are very complex. In the literature of political science we may find various approaches to explaining this success; often these approaches emphasize different elements, such as the importance of socioeconomic or institutional variables. The most widely disseminated and comprehensive one of these approaches that explore the success of populist parties is an analysis of demand and supply on the micro and macro scales. This approach includes various levels of analysis, showing at the same time the connections and dependencies between them. In this model, many determinants of the studied phenomenon are considered, including the processes occurring within social structures, the specificity and dynamics of a party system, institutional conditions (such as the electoral system), characteristics of voters of a given party, as well as the

organization and strategies of political parties.<sup>28</sup> Considering that the causes of the success of populist parties are very complex, this article aims to discuss only those aspects which are the most essential for, and apply specifically to, SRP and the LPR.

### 1. The Socio-Political Climate

The socio-economic and political changes occurring in Poland during the period of political transition were key factors for the rise of populist parties. Social groups which objectively or subjectively lost something as a result of the regime change began to show signs of disappointment, disorientation, uncertainty, fear, and frustration. The negative moods generated, in terms of demand, society's vulnerability to populist slogans; in terms of supply, on the other hand, they constituted arguments on whose basis the populist parties could build their criticism of the status quo. A peculiar climate was formed, in which the attractiveness of what the populists had to offer steadily grew – and with it grew the willingness of the people to vote for these parties.<sup>29</sup>

The atmosphere of social dissatisfaction in Poland at the beginning of the twenty-first century was largely influenced by the high level of political instability existing on the Polish political scene since the early 1990s; it was also caused by a lack of desired socio-economic reforms and of professional, responsible politics. Society's dissatisfaction with the AWS-Freedom Union government coalition was accompanied by the actual economic situation in the country, which had been getting worse since the end of the 1990s. Among other things, Poland's gross nation product (GNP) was falling, while unemployment was increasing at a rapid rate (see Table 3).

All of this had an indubitable effect on increasing feelings of social insecurity and resulted in a more pessimistic appraisal of the country's economic situation in the first years of the new millennium.<sup>30</sup> Extremely negative appraisals of the political elites also added to the atmosphere of dissatisfaction; they were seen as irresponsible and corrupt. In effect, this created fertile ground for parties that criticized and protested against the existing situation.

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28 See Frank Decker, *Der neue Rechtspopulismus*, Opladen 2004; Jens Rydgren, *The populist challenge: political protest and ethno-nationalist mobilization in France*, New York/Oxford 2004; Pippa Norris, *Radical Right. Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market*, Cambridge 2005.

29 Cf. Hans-George Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*, London 1994, pp. 24–33.

30 From 1999 onwards, the number of people describing the country's economic situation as "bad" continued to rise – between 1999 and 2001 it rose by 20 per cent, reaching a peak at 75 per cent in 2002. See: *Nastroje społeczne w kwietniu*, Komunikat z Badań CBOS, Warszawa, April 2005, p. 2.

Table 3: The Dynamics of the GNP (fixed prices, previous year = 100) and unemployment rate in the years 1995–2006

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Growth of GNP (in percentage)	4.4	4.1	4.3	1.2	1.4	3.9	5.3	3.6
Unemployment rate (in percentage)	10.0	13.0	16.1	18.3	19.9	19.6	19.0	17.6

Source: Quarterly National Accounts, 2009, vol. 4, OECD, Paris 2009, p. 11; Rocznik Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland) 2002, Warszawa 2002, p. 733; Rocznik Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2007, Warsaw 2007, p. 875.

Between 2001 and 2005, numerous corruption scandals were revealed, implicating certain politicians from the then-ruling Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). Thus, in spite of a minimally improving economic situation (see Table 1), the social mood just before the 2005 elections was very unfavorable to the political elites. During the entire period in which the populists were successful (2001–2005), and especially in 2005, public opinion polls indicated a very high degree of social dissatisfaction with the country's political situation and increasing distrust of politicians.<sup>31</sup>

Another very “hot” issue in Polish politics at the turn of the century was that of accession to the EU. Up to 1998, this issue had not been significant. However, the process of finalizing accession negotiations, as well as the imminence of the accession date, made the issue a weighty one in political discourse. In such an atmosphere, a camp of Eurosceptics emerged, whose main representatives were the LPR and SRP. Public opinion polls indicated that between 1998 and 2001 the percentage of Poles opposing European integration also rose (from just under 20 per cent to over 30 per cent).<sup>32</sup>

The boom which the Eurosceptical populist parties experienced decreased slightly in 2005, as the number of opponents to European integration dimin-

31 Until 1999, the level of the people's dissatisfaction with the country's political situation (people describing the political situation as “bad”) had been stable at 30 per cent. It rose to 50 per cent in 2000. In 2000–2001 it increased periodically to 65 per cent, while in 2005 it reached its highest level, peaking at over 70 per cent. At the same time, the number of people perceiving the existing political situation as “good” was at a level of 20 per cent in 1998, dropping to less than 10 per cent in 2000, then to below 5 per cent in 2005. See: *Nastroje społeczne w kwietniu*, Komunikat Badań CBOS, Warszawa, April 2005, pp. 4–5.

32 See *Ocena skutków przystąpienia Polski do UE po trzech latach członkostwa*, Komunikat z badań CBOS, Warszawa, April 2007, p. 2.

ished by a few percentage points and the number of its proponents rose.<sup>33</sup> Despite all of this, the significance of the Eurosceptical electorate could still be discerned. Furthermore, the one-year membership of Poland in the EU still failed to provide a basis for a clear comparison of gains and losses, which in turn made it impossible to verify the populists' gloomy predictions regarding the consequences of Poland's membership in the EU.

## 2. The Structure of the Polish Party System and Models of Political Competition

Prior to the parliamentary elections of 2001, the Polish political scene underwent essential structural changes that were favorable to the emergence of new political parties. The Solidarity Electoral Action – AWS – and its block of rightist parties, created in 1996, disintegrated in 2000. With this, the stable alliance of four dominant political groups, composed of two party blocks based on the right-wing, post-Solidarity AWS coalition and the liberal Freedom Union (on the one hand) and the post-Communist SLD and Polish People's Party – PSL (on the other) also broke down.

On the political scene, especially to its right, there was now a vast, unoccupied space. At this time, in addition to the LPR, other groups materialized from the breakdown within the AWS; the most important ones included the liberal Civic Platform (PO), the conservative Law and Justice (PiS), and the Solidarity Electoral Action of the Right (AWSP). The numerous new groups began to rival with each other on the right wing. The radically populist Self Defence proved to be a strong competitor for the agrarian PSL, both groups fighting for the peasant electorate. In contrast to the elections of 1997, the political competition in 2001 had a tri-polar character. The main political forces were the post-Solidarity Right (PO, PiS), the post-Communist SLD and PSL, as well as SRP and the LPR – groups which completely negated the achievements of the Third Polish Republic government, in terms of both domestic and foreign politics.<sup>34</sup>

The political order of 2001, which had been favorable to parties located on the periphery of the party system, underwent certain transformations before the following parliamentary elections in 2005. The first breakdown of the SLD since 1989 weakened and split even further the left side of the Polish political scene.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the creation of a ruling coalition between PiS and the PO – which had

33 The percentage of opponents to European integration in 2005 was 25–26 per cent, while the percentage of proponents increased from just under 60 per cent in 2001 to over 70 per cent in 2005. At the same time, the number of undecided people decreased by over 15 per cent. See: *ibid.*

34 Cf. Andrzej Antoszewski, *Wzorce rywalizacji politycznej we współczesnych demokracjach europejskich*, Wrocław 2004, pp. 177–178.

35 In March of 2004 some deputies, led by Marek Borowski, left the SLD and created a separate leftist group called the Social Democracy of Poland (SdPL).

been a work-in-progress for some time before the 2005 elections as an alternative to the compromised Left – was put in question. Since they seemed to lack a rival, both parties turned against each other in the final phase of the political campaigns. Because both groups appealed to rightist values and had emerged from the post-Solidarity camp, their confrontation was based chiefly on issues of economics (the “solidaristic and social” option versus the “liberal” one) and concerned the state’s role in the life of society. Competing for a disappointed leftist electorate, PiS displayed itself as a more social party. On the other hand, the party radicalized its attitude toward the issue of values, thus giving a nod to Radio Maryja.<sup>36</sup> Yet despite the fact that Father Rydzyk’s broadcasting station essentially supported PiS, it still showed a “neutral” favoritism for the LPR. It is worth emphasizing that the members of parliament most trusted by Father Rydzyk all ran as representatives of the LPR for the elections.

The resulting situation, with two large parties confronting each other, did nothing to benefit small parties operating on the peripheries of the parliamentary scene. In spite of this, both groups (SRP and LPR) managed to maintain the support they had received in the previous parliamentary elections, which in 2006 gave them the opportunity to create a coalition with PiS and thus to enter the very center of the political scene.

### 3. The Position of SRP and the LPR as Peripheral Parties

The majority of leaders of political groups that emerged at the start of the new millennium had already been politically active within the Post-Solidarity movement, a counterweight against the Post-Communist camp. The LPR and Self Defence were the only groups which had not emerged either from Solidarity or from Post-Communist traditions.<sup>37</sup> This allowed the two parties, in the 2001 and 2005 elections, to express their disapproval of both the leftist and rightist ruling elites; they presented themselves as the only groups not “soiled” by power, as defenders of the national interest and of common citizens.

In 2001, with the help of Radio Maryja and Catholic magazines, the LPR ran a campaign under the slogan of defending the national-Catholic interests of the Polish people.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the dominant theme of the LPR’s campaign was objection against Poland’s accession to the EU. SRP, meanwhile, presented itself

36 Cf. Radosław Markowski, *The Polish Elections of 2005: Pure Chaos or a Restructuring of the Party System?* In: *West European Politics*, 29 (2006), pp. 814–832.

37 Cf. Andrzej Antoszewski, *Wzorce rywalizacji politycznej we współczesnych demokracjach europejskich*, Wrocław 2004, p. 178.

38 The LPR demanded, among other things, the defense of Polish property, development of domestic agriculture, defense of the country’s sovereignty, and more care for Polish families and the homeless. Aleksandra Moroska, *Prawicowy Populizm a Euro sceptycyzm. Na przykładzie Listy Pima Fortuyna w Holandii i Ligi Polskich Rodzin w Polsce*, dissertation in print.

mainly as a defender of the interests of all working people, the weak, and the needy. Lepper appealed to farmers by presenting himself as their advocate.

In 2005 both the LPR and SRP described themselves as the only possible alternative to the post-Communists and liberals, to the Round Table order, and as political forces worthy of the people's trust. At the same time they positioned themselves against the "caste of the untouchables" – the political elites which had governed Poland up to that time.<sup>39</sup> Despite these similarities between the parties, we should stress that it was the LPR that made fighting against corruption and bad government its priority. It demanded the resolution of political scandals and of privatization. SRP's campaign, meanwhile, was based mostly on socioeconomic issues. Lepper painted his vision of a Poland as pro-social, pro-societal, anti-liberal, and a defender of the poor and unemployed.

The populist strategy of both parties, based on vertical and horizontal exclusion, turned out to be very effective, as shown by the election results of 2001 and 2005.

Both SRP and the LPR attracted voters who had somehow "lost" in the process of political transformation, largely those for whom it was difficult to adapt to rapidly-occurring socioeconomic changes, and those who were claim-oriented. Both parties' electorates were dominated by older individuals, having a vocational or merely elementary level of education, living in villages or small towns. The LPR was especially supported by highly religious voters, as well as those tied to traditional forms of cultural orientation.<sup>40</sup> SRP found its greatest support in environments that made up its natural electorate – among farmers. The unemployed, workers, retired individuals, and pensioners could also be found among its electorate. It must be emphasized, moreover, that the electorates of both SRP and the LPR were characterized by Eurosceptical attitudes.

#### 4. The European Elections of 2004 – The Triumph of the LPR

The elections to the European parliament in 2004 confirmed both parties' strong positions in the political arena. It was a great surprise that LPR's election result in 2004 (15.92 per cent) was almost twice as high as that of three years earlier; consequently, the LPR found itself in second place, following the Civic Platform (24.10 per cent). Self Defence increased its level of support only slightly if compared to the parliamentary elections of 2001, earning 10.78 per cent of votes.

It seems that the success of both parties in the elections to the European Parliament was the result of a "wave effect" of populist success with both

39 The League called itself "The Hope of Poland", while SRP used the slogan "They have all ruled already", see: *ibid.* pp. 326–336.

40 Results of PBS exit-poll, 2005. See: Markowski, *The Polish Elections of 2005*, pp. 829–832.

national and local elections.<sup>41</sup> The defining trait of the European Parliamentary elections, confirmed by the election in 2004, was the dominance of national issues over European ones in the campaigns. Even the discussion concerning the Constitutional Treaty, which was supposed to be signed on the weekend following the elections, was reflected in the campaigns only to a minimum degree. The political and economic situation, together with the general mood of the society (none of which had really improved since 2001)<sup>42</sup> mobilized much of the support for SRP and the LPR. Moreover, since the beginning of 2004 the percentage of those opposing European integration had been growing again; in mid-2004 it reached 30 per cent.<sup>43</sup> This made it possible for the parties to continue their populist, anti-European course in politics. This approach was exploited especially by the LPR which, in contrast to SRP, remained unchangeable in its hard, Eurosceptical position; it was the only political party that tried to take full advantage of the European issue in its campaign for the European Parliament.

The significant difference in the growth of support for the groups under analysis may be linked to a record low in voter turnout (20.87 per cent). In effect, it seems that the religious electorate of the League was more disciplined and motivated than that of the SRP.<sup>44</sup> Studies have shown that those that went to the ballot boxes were, for the most part, potential supporters of the League of Polish Families. In contrast, supporters of Self Defence went to cast their vote much more rarely.

### III. The Fall

In July 2007, following the crisis in the government coalition, SRP and the LPR were no longer co-leading political parties. Defeated in the parliamentary elections in October that year, they also lost their parliamentary status. For politicians in both parties this seemed like exile from paradise: they lost everything that they had worked so hard to gain for six years, and which they had maintained in the wake of the elections of 2005. It can be said that their brief history came full-circle: they were back at the starting point, again becoming radical groups on the periphery of the political scene. This situation was illustrated, in

41 In elections at the regional level in 2002 LPR earned 14.29 per cent, and SRP 15.98 per cent on the national scale See <http://wybory2002.pkw.gov.pl>.

42 See *Nastroje społeczne w kwietniu*, Komunikat z Badań CBOS, Warszawa, April 2005, pp. 4–5.

43 This was accompanied by a simultaneous drop in the number of European integration supporters and undecideds. See *Ocena skutków przystąpienia Polski do UE po trzech latach członkostwa*, Komunikat z Badań CBOS, Warszawa, April 2007, p. 2.

44 See *Głosujący i niegłosujący o swych decyzjach w wyborach do Parlamentu Europejskiego – analiza powyborcza*, Komunikat z Badań CBOS, Warszawa, July 2004, pp. 2–3.

some way, by the changes in the LPR's logo. On 8 July 2006, during the party congress, the decision was made to resign from the symbol that had been used up to that time: an eagle with a cross on its breast. Roman Giertych, the party leader, justified the change this way: "We are changing the sign because Poland is changing. From a radical party born out of opposition against injustice, it is now becoming a responsible government force. We are changing ourselves in order to change Poland."<sup>45</sup> On 20 December 2009, as a political party now outside the parliament, the LPR decided to return to its old emblem,<sup>46</sup> thus returning to its source.

The causes of the defeat of the Polish populists were as complex as the causes of their success. To some degree these causes were mirror images of each other, in the sense that the defeat was caused by the expiration of conditions and circumstances that had allowed the LPR to both enter the parliament in 2001 and to achieve the status of a ruling party in 2005.

The party's attempt at returning to the game by running in the 2009 elections to the European Parliament was a complete failure and only confirmed their status as "defeated". The elections to the EP were a veritable "Waterloo" for SRP and the LPR – a last, futile effort in a situation when they were lacking both armies and ammunition. These elections were second-order to the uphill battle the parties had fought in 2007. Thus it seems that the circumstances of the 2009 elections should be discussed separately, emphasizing at the same time that the main causes of that defeat were secondary to the causes of the defeat in the 2007 parliamentary elections.

## 1. The Socio-Political Climate

As previously stated, the 2007 elections occurred in a social climate being totally different from the previous two elections (2001 and 2005). We can say that the weather radically worsened for the populists. As explained above, both parties (especially SRP) had been building their success on social dissatisfaction. Unemployment levels, being one of the primary causes of society's frustration and fear – especially with reference to groups of the lowest economic status – dynamically decreased in 2007, as was noted in the election year (see table 4).

In such a climate, the general level of optimism in society rose,<sup>47</sup> while groups discarded and threatened with exclusion from society became much smaller.

45 Kongres LPR w Warszawie. In: *Polska Scena Polityczna*, 13 (2006), p. 4.

46 Cf. Liga Polskich Rodzin wraca do godła z Orłem w koronie i krzyżem, [www.lpr.pl](http://www.lpr.pl) (20.12.2009).

47 While in September 2005 (prior to elections) only 24 per cent of respondents judged the situation in Poland as moving in the right direction, in October 2007 (prior to elections) 32 per cent made this positive judgment. See *Nastroje społeczne w listopadzie*, Komunikat z badań CBOS, November 2005, p. 1; *Nastroje społeczne w październiku*, Komunikat z Badań CBOS, Warszawa, November 2007, p. 1–3.

Table 4: Unemployment rate in Poland in the years 2004–2007

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007			
Growth of GNP (in percentage)	5.3	3.6	6.3	6.8			
Unemployment rate (in percentage)	19.0	17.6	14.8	1 <sup>st</sup> Q 2007	2 <sup>nd</sup> Q 2007	3 <sup>rd</sup> Q 2007	4 <sup>th</sup> Q 2007
				14.3	12.3	11.6	11.2

Source: Quarterly National Accounts, 2009, vol. 4, OECD, Paris 2009, p. 11; Rocznik Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2008, Warsaw 2008, p. 242.

SRP and the LPR lost the ability to base their politics on social unhappiness. Although the government under Jarosław Kaczyński tried to take credit for the improving economic situation,<sup>48</sup> any attempts made by SRP and the LPR to discount Kaczyński's government in their own interest were practically useless, as these parties had no influence on the government's actions in the field of economics. In spite of the improving economic situation, after one year of the government coalition's existence only 1 per cent of Poles judged the coalition to be "decidedly good", and only 22 per cent declared it was "rather good".<sup>49</sup> It seems that PiS managed to place the blame for an unstable government on its smaller coalition fellows and thus convinced the Polish people that it could govern better without its bothersome colleagues. This idea was supported by ratings of SRP and the LPR, which were falling despite the fact that PiS's ratings remained stable.<sup>50</sup>

Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 brought certain essential implications for the populist parties. In contrast to the 2005 elections, during which the advantages of EU accession were still obscured, by the 2007 elections it had become very clear that Poland had gained much by its accession, with Polish farmers constituting the greatest beneficiaries. This may explain the surprisingly large percentage (14 per cent) of the SRP electorate voting for the PO in 2007. In 2007 and 2009, moreover, the Poles' support for EU membership reached a record high level of 75–80 per cent. We may assume that because SRP and the LPR were still perceived as Eurosceptical, they lost considerable power in influ-

48 Cf. Krzysztof Katka, Kaczyński albo śmierć. In: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27.8.2007, p. 6.

49 See *Opinie o koalicji PiS-Samoobrona-LPR*, Komunikat z Badań CBOS, Warszawa, April 2007, p. 1.

50 See *Preferencje partyjne we wrześniu*, Komunikat z Badań CBOS, Warszawa, September 2007, p. 2.

encing the electorate; what is more, they showed themselves to be completely untrustworthy in the eyes of much of their electorate from 2005.<sup>51</sup>

## 2. The Status of SRP and the LPR as Government Parties

We can risk stating that the defeat of SRP and the LPR had been inscribed into their success. Their entrance into the center of the political scene (into the government) meant that they lost the primary plain on which they had constructed their identity – vertical and horizontal exclusion. Under the new circumstances both parties tried to change things such as their ideological principles (LPR) and their image (Self Defense). LPR wanted to move closer in the direction of Catholic-conservative positions, discarding certain radical points from its program (such as its xenophobic Euroscepticism). Furthermore, its participation in the government forced the LPR to conduct *de facto* pro-European politics. The party could no longer mobilize its electorate on the basis of nationalism and Euroscepticism. What became more important for SRP, once Lepper had entered the political arena as a deputy-prime minister, was the fact that it had lost the possibility of criticizing the political establishment. The politicians of Self Defence also tried to change their party's image, moving away from the label of “political brawlers”.

Nevertheless, in the case of both parties, such image conversion met with great disbelief. As both parties disposed of their radical criticism of the existing status quo, they lost a key element of their identities which they could not replace. Both Giertych (as “the good European”) and Lepper (as “the statesman”) became rather caricatures of themselves than credible government politicians.

## 3. Structures of the Polish Party System and Models of Political Competition

The electoral campaign of 2007 was dominated by a bipolar competition between PiS and the Civic Platform (PO). The main axis of the division that both parties were creating already became visible in the 2005 elections. This became even more obvious two years later, overshadowing any other political divisions. PiS tried to convince people that the battle was being fought between two visions: a “solidarity Poland” as envisioned by PiS, and a “liberal Poland” as imagined by the PO. In turn, the PO tried to convince voters that the conflict

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51 Cf. Radosław Markowski, The 2007 Polish Parliamentary Election: Some Structuring, Still a Lot of Chaos. In: West European Politics, 31 (2008), pp. 1064–65.

concerned different visions of conducting politics: the conflict and lack of trust inherent in PiS versus the love and cooperation within the PO.<sup>52</sup>

The 2007 elections to some degree took on the form of a referendum: voters were either for the PO or for PiS. In this atmosphere attempts made at reviving divisions based on criticism of the establishment (SRP) or on nationalism (LPR) failed to find susceptible social ground. It can be said that a situation arose in the 2007 elections in which the two giants (PiS and the PO), while fighting each other, crushed the remainder of the political groups. The victims of this struggle were not only SRP and the LPR, but also the SLD.<sup>53</sup>

The above given variables were decisive for essential changes in the attitudes of the electorate. Just after creating its government coalition with SRP and the LPR, PiS took actions directed toward reduce the role of its allies; in the long run its aim was to take over their electorate. This process, known as “eating appetizers”, ended with questionable success. Indeed, PiS was able to eliminate both parties, but it grabbed only a part of their electorate – not even half of the LPR’s electorate from 2005 and only a quarter of Self Defence’s electorate. Interestingly enough, the PO also managed to break off a small part of the electorate of the populists in the 2005 elections – 8.6 per cent from the LPR and 14 per cent from Self Defence.<sup>54</sup>

#### 4. The European Elections of 2009 – The Straw that Broke the Camel’s Back

The Elections to the European Parliament in 2009 proved to be the “the straw that broke the camel’s back” for the Polish populist groups. After the 2007 elections, SRP, as a political party outside the parliament, suffered complete disintegration. Political and ethical scandals, along with quarrels among its former leaders, brought the party to the verge of political nonexistence.<sup>55</sup> Standing on top of the ruins of his political party, Lepper tried to take advantage of the Euroelections as a means of returning to politics. Yet SRP was left without financial resources; its populist slogans, that once again referred to criticism of the establishment,<sup>56</sup> failed to sound credible, coming from a former vice-Marshall of the Sejm and vice-prime minister.

52 Cf. Aleks Szczerbiak, *The Birth of a Bipolar Party System or a Referendum on a Polarizing Government? The October 2007 Polish Parliamentary Election*. In: *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 24 (2008), p. 421.

53 Cf. Gavin Rae, *Two Rights Make a Wrong? The Remaking of Polish Politics After the 2007 Parliamentary Elections*. In: *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, 16 (2008), p. 77.

54 Cf. Markowski, *The 2007 Polish Parliamentary Election*, p. 1060.

55 Cf. Aneta Kołakowska, *Kontratak Leppera i Łyżwińskiego*, In: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 21.5.2008, p. 8.

56 Cf. Andrzej Lepper, *Drodzy Rodacy!*, [www.samoobrona.org.pl](http://www.samoobrona.org.pl). (5.6.2009).

Although one of the polls commissioned by the newspaper “Rzeczpospolita” in early June indicated a growth of support for SRP,<sup>57</sup> ultimately the party earned a mere 1.46 per cent of votes (see table 5), which did not result in any mandates.

LPR activists did not even run in the elections to the EP under their own party’s name; the LPR had become a party with divisions. The main part of the party, loyal to Roman Giertych, strengthened the Polish branch of Libertas, a Europe-wide movement founded by the Irish millionaire Declan Ganley. Another group of activists in conflict with Giertych joined former vice-Marshall Janusz Dobrosz to form the Social Movement Forward Poland (Ruch Społeczny Naprzód Polsko) in October 2008. Dobrosz ran in the elections in a coalition with the small and insignificant “Piast” Party (Stronnictwo Piast). Their results in the elections to the EP (0.02 per cent) perfectly reflected their political weakness.

The fact that the Polish branch of Libertas was dominated by LPR politicians was a kind of paradox, considering that Ganley himself did not want to be labeled a “Eurosceptic”.<sup>58</sup> The starkly Eurosceptical position of the Polish politicians in Libertas contradicted Ganley’s seemingly pro-European declarations. The contradiction was not resolved by placing several pro-European politicians on the election slate of the Polish Libertas.<sup>59</sup> Such a strategy only deepened the illegibility of the formation’s profile; the strategy was dubious in the eyes of both the pro-European and Eurosceptical electorate. It made the party vulnerable to attacks by other Eurosceptical circles and from PiS.<sup>60</sup> There was a widespread opinion that the only reason for Ganley’s decision to hand over the Libertas signboard to politicians of the LPR was the fact that the League held a dominant place in Public Television: the head of Polish Television (TVP) was Piotr Farfał, a former LPR politician and close associate of Roman Giertych.<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, however, neither the extraordinary friendliness to Libertas, shown by Polish Public Television, nor the fact that Declan Ganley managed to pull the legend of “Solidarity” – former Polish President Lech Wałęsa<sup>62</sup> – into his campaign for election, brought the anticipated results. Libertas received a mere 1.14 per cent of voters’ support.

57 Cf. Kuba Matys, Lepper odżywa w eurokampanii. In: *Rzeczpospolita*, 3.6.2009, p. 4.

58 Ganley claimed that he is a Euroenthusiast acting against the undemocratic Treaty of Lisbon. Olivia Kelly, Libertas unveils Euro poll billboard campaign. In: *The Irish Times*, 8.4.2009, pp. 8, 10.

59 Cf. Piotr Kowalczyk, Były senator PO jedynka Libertasu. In: *Rzeczpospolita*, 1.5.2009, p. 5.

60 Cf. Marek Jurek, Chcemy przebudzić odpowiedzialność za przyszłość kraju. In: *Nasz Dziennik*, 13.5.2009, p. 4.

61 Cf. Małgorzata Subotic, Giertych ma dość czekania. In: *Rzeczpospolita*, 23–24.5.2009, p. 8.

62 Cf. Wojciech Wybranowski, Wałęsa na kongresie Libertasu. In: *Rzeczpospolita*, 2–3.5.2009, p. 4; Eliza Olczyk, Wałęsa znów u Ganleya. In: *Rzeczpospolita*, 14.5.2009, p. 8.

Table 5: Results achieved by Polish populist groups in the 2009 elections to the European Parliament

Slate number	Group name	Percentage of votes
3	Self Defence	1.6
5	Libertas*	1.4
12	Forward Poland – Piast*	0.2

\* Groups created by LPR activists.

Source: The State Election Committee (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza), [www.pkw.gov.pl](http://www.pkw.gov.pl).

Besides the basic causes of the populists' defeat, which already became visible during the parliamentary elections of 2007, some additional causes made themselves known in the elections to the EP in 2009:

- financial weakness, resulting from the groups' status outside the parliament (they did not receive budget grants);
- competition from PiS, which effectively took control of the position of a "defender of the Polish national interest". After it had lost power in 2007, PiS clearly moved into the position of an "unhappy" entity in respect of European issues and heightened its populist rhetoric.

Two additional factors were also of essential significance for Libertas and "Forward Poland":

- A lack of support from the Catholic-national Radio Maryja, which not only failed to support the formations established by LPR politicians but actually fought against them (especially Libertas.)<sup>63</sup> The populist electorate to a large degree supported PiS, in line with Father Rydzyk's open persuasions.
- Contradictions in the election campaigns, which were most evident in the case of Libertas.

#### IV. Conclusions

It seems that the story of the two Polish populist parties – SRP and the LPR – has come to an end. Their return to big (parliamentary) politics in the future can not be ruled out, but it is very improbable. The significance of these two formations on the Polish political stage is mainly due to the fact that, like no other parties in Poland, these groups showed features that allowed for defining them as populist parties. As mentioned before, populist traits have been attributed to various par-

63 Cf. Jan Maria Jackowski, Gdański sfinks i karły moralne. In: *Nasz Dziennik*, 16–17.5.2009, p. 4.

ties in the past (PSL, KPN), and without a doubt they will continue to be ascribed to other groups existing now or in the future (it is worth noting that the populist label has been increasingly attached to PiS).

However, if we accept that a populist party, by definition, must make use of both vertical and horizontal exclusion, then as yet only SRP and the LPR can be truly defined as populist parties.

Both parties are populist independently of the fact that there are many significant differences between them. The fundamental difference lies in Self Defence's lack of a coherent ideological basis; its identity was based primarily on vertical exclusion, with some features of horizontal exclusion. The LPR, in turn, clearly showed characteristics of a radical right party with a developed ideological structure; it bore the characteristics of horizontal exclusion to a greater degree than those of vertical exclusion.

The conclusions stemming from the present analysis of the causes of the Polish populist parties' success and defeat can be summarized as follows: SRP and the LPR achieved great success in 2001, thanks to particular circumstances in which socioeconomic and political conditions were favorable for them. These circumstances included, above all, a worsening situation on the job market and the consequent negative mood of society. In such conditions, SRP and LPR were able to take full advantage of their status as opposition parties not yet involved in the complexities of governing. They managed to gain a great deal of political capital through harsh criticism of the establishment and by appealing to nationalist and xenophobic sentiments in the debate on Poland's accession to the EU.

The parties owed the maintenance of their positions on the political stage (after the elections of 2005) to a still-unfavorable social climate, which largely resulted from a wave of corruption scandals revealed when the SLD-PSL coalition was in power. At this stage, there were still no benefits visible from Poland's membership in the EU, which made it difficult for voters to objectively evaluate SRP and LPR's Eurosceptical attitudes.

The situation changed at the time of the 2007 elections, definitely to the disadvantage of the populist parties. Economic revival, together with a rapidly falling unemployment rate, ameliorated the social mood. SRP and LPR's entrance into the government coalition ended their status as parties of the Opposition, a status that is essential for populists. Thus, from 2005 to 2007 the parties found themselves having to legitimize the politics of the establishment of which they were now a part. Additionally, Poland's membership in the European Union now began to bring palpable and concrete benefits, especially for the electorate of SRP (farmers). This factor turned out to be equally unfortunate for the LPR, as Eurosceptical attitudes in Polish society decreased drastically.

As we look at the two main variables that condition a "populist climate" in Poland, it can be concluded that populist parties work best when the country's situation is at its worst (when the economy is bad or the people's trust in the elites is low), and only when the parties are in the Opposition. When populist

parties come into the center of the political scene and at the same time the socioeconomic situation in the country is improving, this mixture of circumstances becomes fatal to the parties themselves (see Fig. 1). Frankly speaking, the worse the conditions in the country, the better the conditions for populists. It is vital for them not to have to take responsibility for governing, as otherwise they lose their credibility and reveal the absurdity of their earlier postulates.

Thus, a paradox starts to occur: populist parties can remain true to themselves when they voice their politics, but not when they execute it. This can be a basis for the more general claim that populist parties are meant to be, first and foremost, political parties of the opposition; once this status is lost, they lose the ability to criticize the establishment and its politics.

Fig. 1: The socioeconomic situation and placement along the Center-Periphery axis as factors conditioning the 'political climate' for populist parties

The socioeconomic situation			
<i>Favorable</i>	Bad	Limited	
<i>Unfavorable</i>	Limited	Optimal	
	<i>Center</i>	<i>Peripheries</i>	The party position along the Center-Periphery axis