

# Polarized Poland: The Identity Crisis Goes International

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*The nationwide protests that have rocked Poland over the past couple of months have been completely misrepresented in the international media, even among outlets that are editorially sympathetic to one side or the other.*

*The outside understanding is that this is a stereotypical struggle between the government and the opposition, represented in this case by the right and left wings, respectively. This is factually true on the surface of things, and that misleadingly makes Poland's problems seem like nothing out of the ordinary when placed in a global perspective. Those that proceed from the superficial starting point of assessing the Polish protests as just another incident of the aforementioned dichotomies so common all across the world nowadays are completely missing the point.*

*Whether Poles themselves are consciously aware of it or not, their country is experiencing one of its greatest-ever identity crises, the resolution of which will determine Poland's future trajectory for decades to come, although to the US' ultimate strategic benefit in either case.*

## **PiS Makes History**

Prior to diving into the identity-specific aspects of Poland's present troubles, it should first be reminded that the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) was the first since 1989 to win a parliamentary majority, and it also controls the country's presidency and premiership. Whether one supports PiS' platform or not, it's a fact that no party has ever been more democratically popular in Poland's post-Cold War history than they have at this current moment. It's also worthy to mention that Polish voters were well aware in advance that voting for PiS would essentially be signaling their support for the party's leader, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, and that he would become the most powerful, albeit unelected, person in the country if his party won, as it historically did by a huge margin. That being said, for better or for worse, PiS represents the aspirations of the majority of the Polish people, and this fact needs to be understood before moving further with the analysis.

## **Poland's Number One Issue: The EU**

Kaczynski, the "Gray Cardinal" that's really running Poland nowadays, has a vision for Poland that's dramatically at odds with that of the now-oppositionist Civic Platform (PO), of whom Donald Tusk is the most notable former representative. PiS is known to represent what are popularly labeled "Eurosceptics", but which the author less scurrilously terms "EuroCautionaries", while PO is gung-ho about full-scale EU-"integration". Both parties, it must be said, are anti-Russian and pro-American, with PiS being the more radical of the two.

Therefore, the apple of discord between them comes down to their relationship with the EU, seeing as how the aforementioned positions vis-à-vis Russia and the US are agreed to in principle but differ only in intensity. Although something similar can be said of their stances towards Brussels, it will soon be revealed that the divide between them on this pressing issue is not only much more pronounced, but given the distrustful inter-Union atmosphere that's presently prevailing, has the ability to impact much more significantly on continental geopolitics than their similarly aligned attitudes towards Russia and the US.

### **Consolidating EuroCautionary Control**

Not only that, but the issue of PiS and PO's largely differing and equally radical positions concerning the EU is the only one of the aforementioned three which most strongly affects Poland's domestic and international situation, thus making it a magnet for civic activism and voter turnout. As was witnessed during the latest elections, the Polish people overwhelmingly support the national vision articulated by PiS, so much so that they handed them an historically unprecedented governing majority. In accordance with their popular mandate, PiS sought to consolidate its position over the country and expand its reach to the point of being able to irreversibly transform it into the type of state that it and its supporters envision. For these reasons, they initiated the controversial judicial and media reforms, an obvious power grab over the existing establishment, albeit one which they assumed the majority of the population would support. Concerning the judiciary, PiS proposed that the most contentious cases in the country be decided by a 13/15 supermajority in the Constitutional Court (whereas before it had been 9/15), whereas for the media, they stipulated that senior figures in publicly financed radio and television stations were to be appointed or fired by the Treasury Minister from now on.

### **The Long Haul**

The reason that these moves have elicited such an outcry is that the opposition knows that they essentially give PiS a carte blanche to reshape Polish society as they see fit. It's highly unlikely that the Constitutional Court would ever reach the 13/15 supermajority that would be needed to reverse whatever highly contentious actions PiS puts into place, such as the media reform legislation. This particular power grab for the nation's publicly funded information platforms is predicated on granting PiS the means to further institutionalize its vision into the mindset of average Poles, clearly indicating that it has a long-term plan for the country's future. Recalling that PiS' major political difference with PO comes down to its EuroCautionary ideology, it can logically be inferred that the new ruling authorities want to precondition more of the masses into accepting that Warsaw will become relatively more sovereign from the centralized decision making that's being dictated by Brussels. PiS doesn't want to abandon the EU project by any measure, but what it wants to do is employ Poland's economic and demographic potential (mixed with its geostrategic position) as leverage in modifying the existing balance of power within the EU.

### **"Orbanization" Expands**

For the most part, this is a larger-scale continuation of what Viktor Orban has been endeavoring to achieve, except that Poland actually has the means to make a difference in the EU via its considerably more impressive 'blackmail' factors. For all of its leader's rhetoric, Hungary isn't in a position to enact concessions from Brussels on any issue other than the "refugee"/migrant one, which in any case is due less to the country's overall political leverage and more to its happenstance geography along the 'new arrivals' most

commonly traversed access routes. What PiS' unparalleled victory has demonstrated is that EuroCautionary ideology has gained popular appeal and electoral acceptance in a much larger and more politically significant state than Hungary, signifying that the movement might finally be able to enact tangible changes in EU-wide policy for the first time since its inception.

From the vantage point of the stereotypical Brussels bureaucrat, "Orbanism" is a subversive ideology that's proven to be much more geographically inclusive than its detractors had initially thought. Early critics naively assumed that the blending of EuroCautionary policies under a centralizing leadership (panned as an "illiberal democracy") was specific to Hungary due to the country's historic and cultural peculiarities, but Poland's elections proved that such a conception was totally wrong. As Slovakia gears up for parliamentary elections on 5 March, the unspoken fear is that incumbent Prime Minister Robert Fico's EuroCautionary Smer-SD party will smash the polls and represent the next frontier for "Orbanism", thus creating a contiguous bloc of reform-minded states smack dab in the heart of EU. Altogether, this grouping would be able to assert considerable influence and pressure on Brussels, thus raising the prospect that their shared vision for Europe could become a partial reality, at least in the central part of the continent.

### **The Other Option**

Resurrecting the historic Polish-Hungarian friendship in the present geopolitical environment would be a major step forward in achieving Kaczynski's vision, but it's not the only path that Poland has recently pursued. PO, which had previously run the country for the past 8 years, worked hard to streamline the state's subservient position to Brussels-based bureaucracy, believing that Poland's future rested in being a 'loyal' 'European' state. One of the main reasons that now-opposition PO is protesting against the current government is because they want to defend the achievements that they made during their prior tenure, knowing how badly and quickly PiS wants to reverse them. Don't forget that PiS does not want to destroy the EU, but rather, that it and other EuroCautionary "Orbanist" parties sincerely believe that the organization's existing framework excruciatingly hinders its general effectiveness and engenders a plethora of unnecessary problems. Their policy is to reform the EU from within, and this undoubtedly presents an existential threat to the establishment pro-EU parties like PO, which don't see much wrong with the present arrangement and would prefer for it to remain largely intact. For a variety of reasons, this attitude is not shared by the majority of the electorate in Hungary, Poland, and perhaps soon, in Slovakia and elsewhere in the region.

### **Control The Information, Control The Identity**

Being aware of the dramatically separate visions that PiS and PO have for Poland's relationship with the EU, one can more easily come to grips with why the government's media reforms are so important in terms of the larger picture. Both sides know how influential of a role the media plays in shaping national identity, and up until PiS' recent victory, the state information organs had been used to promote a radical pro-EU agenda. It clearly didn't succeed as well as the ruling PO authorities would have hoped for it to, hence their stunning loss in the latest elections, but that doesn't erase the fact that such instruments can be critically effective if applied in the proper way. What PiS wants to do is usurp total control over these bodies and install likeminded ideological adherents who would reverse the pro-EU broadcasting on these platforms and work towards promoting EuroCautionary ideals.

PO and its establishment EU allies know that this represents the death knell of their mission in Poland, and it's for this reason why they're so fiercely protesting against it. The Soros Foundation also agrees, which is why it's been so actively involved in organizing some of the protests as well. The reason that so many people have turned out into the streets is because there's still a significant minority of the populace that firmly believes that the present EU-Polish relationship should be retained without adjustments. They're under the purposefully misguided impression supported by PO, its establishment EU allies including Germany (which many Poles still resent), and the Soros Foundation that PiS wants to take Poland completely out of the EU, which isn't the case at all, but makes for a convenient fear mongering campaign that facilitates street action. Without control over the government's media platforms, PO and their ilk believe that they won't stand any foreseeable chance for a comeback and that they'd all thus be forced to accept PiS' EuroCautionary policies and leadership over the international "Orbanist" movement, as Kaczynski would then have the economic and demographic resources to affect much more change in the EU than Orban and Hungary themselves could ever conceivably carry out.

There are of course other ways to disseminate an ideology throughout a state than using publicly financed internal media platforms like the ones that PiS wants to control, but considering that the ruling government has also implemented a judicial reform that all but nullifies the possibility that it will ever be found to be in breach of the constitution, it's predicted that they'll take other "illiberal" sovereignty-supporting measures as well. It's not known whether this would ever extend into a Polonized version of Russia's NGO legislation, but realistically speaking, Warsaw could easily call upon the phantom of Russophobia to justify such measures, even if they're actually in fact aimed against Brussels or Berlin. They wouldn't, however, target US-controlled NGOs because Washington is actually a firm proponent of the present Polish government, notwithstanding that it went through the face-saving motion of voicing 'concern' about recent developments in the country. This will be discussed soon enough, but to conclude the point being made, the most stable lever of influence that pro-EU advocates can employ in desperately trying to stave off their growing irrelevancy in Poland is to retain control over the state's publicly financed media platforms, applying agitprop and false "dictatorship" fear mongering in order to enact sub-Color Revolutionary pressure in blackmailing the EuroCautionary government.

### **Impassioned Poles**

Prior to looking at the US' strategic interests in this situation, it's relevant to offer some words about why Poles are so overly impassioned about this issue in the first place. As was initially mentioned, the cusp of the crisis comes down to Poland's identity, whether as a Brussels-dominated "European" state (PO) or a semi-sovereign traditionally "Polish" one (PiS). The EU elites' unofficial ideology is Cultural Marxism, which to briefly summarize as per its relevancy to the research, essentially holds that traditional identities are unnecessary obstacles to 'integration' and should be steamrolled over in place of an amorphous 'compromise' identity that culls the most blasé elements from each of its constituencies.

As can be imagined, this attitude is interpreted as a major threat to a country that's 98% ethnically and religiously homogenous and has a rigidly defined historical narrative, but the EU wasn't forthcoming in its true intentions and instead obscured them through the distracting and much more appealing veneer of economic growth and unrestricted freedom of interstate movement. Poles were ultra-receptive to these ideas because they had been preconditioned by their diaspora community into believing that the communist period stifled their development. They not only wanted to enjoy the expected benefits of what they

believed would be no-strings-attached externally funded development for their homeland, but they also wanted the ability to freely work in stronger nearby economies, either with the intent of permanently living there or saving money to send back as remittances and/or reinvest in starting a Polish business one day. Because the EU's promises perfectly correlated with the ambitions and expectations that most of the Polish population held dear after 1989, many people either overlooked or didn't even notice the socio-political agenda that the Cultural Marxist EU elite were pushing on their country.

In fact, large segments of the population had their culturally embedded suspicions soothed into submission by the EU's tantalizing dreams of foreign money and hassle-free movement, with the West and its NGO network wildly succeeding in convincing many Poles that post-modern "Europeanization" is much more preferable (and trendy) than traditional "Polonization". This explains the popularity of PO and the existence of many pro-EU Poles, which it must be underscored are largely concentrated among the youth and young adult demographics. These individuals sincerely took on the identity of "Europeans", while the rest of the country remained "Poles", or at the very least, insincerely adapted select aspects of "Europeanization" while still retaining certain elements of "Polishness" that would later return to the forefront of their identity. The Great Recession that began in 2008 dispelled many of the false dreams that the EU had promised to the Poles, and certain variables came together to create a situation where "Polishness" became fashionable again, both in the cultural and political (PiS) sense. From that point onwards, an acute self-awareness spread over Polish society, whereby people began to notice there were two types of Poles - those who embraced European norms and those who preserved their traditional Polish identity. No matter which side of the aisle one fell, each group had a deeply rooted conception of what their identity was and the trajectory that they envisioned their country should proceed along.

At this moment it's timely to touch upon Poles' hyper-sensitivity towards any issues whatsoever dealing with their identity, especially when it's perceived that (and/or manufactured to seem like) their said identity is under threat by some external force. Owing to their subjective and nationalist-inspired historical narrative, just about all Poles are extremely touchy when it comes to their self-conception and that of their country, indicating a centuries-rooted inferiority complex. No matter how the individual chooses to identify, they are mostly incapable of holding such beliefs in moderation and typically go to obsessive extremes in their manifestation. When the majority of society implicitly agrees on a said precept of their collective identity (e.g. nationalist anti-communism during the 1980s), then the entire country musters its combined energy to promote that given ideal, but when there's a deep and externally influenced rift over what this should be (e.g. Europeanization vs. Polonization, especially in the identity-confusing post-Cold War years), that's when serious cracks begin to emerge in the country's superficial cohesiveness and historically outward-directed tensions begin to redirect themselves towards domestic targets. The main factor in this, it should be repeated, is Poles' centuries-established inferiority complex in obsessing over their identities, and this unique cultural trait is the driving factor in the present political crisis.

### **A Family Feud Taken Too Far**

Returning to the present, Poles are once more overreacting about their identity, albeit this time mostly against one another as opposed to some tangible foreign 'adversary'. The 2015 elections dealt a crushing defeat to PO and all that it stands for, yet the unsportsmanlike losers didn't want to accept what had happened and instead sought to spoil the country's

stability for everyone. Undoubtedly, they were likely given advance assurances by their EU establishment partners that they'd enjoy full support in their forthcoming campaign, reassured by the fact that their former party leader Donald Tusk is now President of the European Council. What should have otherwise been a solely civil affair quickly grew to international proportions as Brussels threw its weight behind the protesters and international NGOs also volunteered their services. PiS, on the other hand, sought the public approval of Orban, the man who has now become their ideological "role model/predecessor", having been able to rhetorically stand up to Brussels during the interim period between Lech Kaczynski's 2005-2010 PiS Presidency and his brother Jaroslaw's "Gray Cardinal" leadership over the present one. Had it not been for these two diverging international factors - PO running to Brussels and PiS seeking out Orban in response - then it's unlikely that the Polish protests would have garnered much attention.

### **The Quota Catalyst**

The Poles' general penchant for drama and stereotypical overreaction about anything concerning their identity politics, especially when it's suspected that there may be a foreign element at play (in this case, perceived Brussels- and Berlin-imposed "Europeanization" and Hungarian-influenced "Orbanization-Polonization"), turned an otherwise unremarkable domestic spat into a continental-wide scandal. The entire episode unwittingly increased the polarization between the Integrationist and EuroCautionary camps, already sky-high over the EU's proposed plan to enforce mandatory refugee/economic migrant quotas for each of the member states. In fact, it can be convincingly argued that PiS performed so well during the October elections precisely because of its opposition to this policy, which came to occupy untold heights in the Polish consciousness due to the country's almost completely homogenous nature. The mandatory relocation of unknown numbers of civilizationally dissimilar individuals to Polish soil was enough to turn on-the-fence "Europeans" into firm proponents of PiS' "Polonization", hence the trouncing that PO later received.

PiS has been very successful in convincing the electorate that only they are capable of safeguarding Polish identity as it is traditionally understood in socio-cultural terms, standing in start opposition to the European-emulating PO. Seeing how many refugees and economic migrants EU-leader Germany has openly welcomed, voters were undoubtedly fearful that PO would have followed a similar policy. This sentiment is so strong that even PiS supporters who might feel uncomfortable with their party's judicial and media power grabs are still largely standing by the newly elected government's side, having concluded that it's better to sacrifice a few 'democratic principles' than to sell out the entire country's identity (as they perceive it) in accepting potentially tens of thousands of North African and Middle Eastern refugees and economic migrants. It can conclusively be observed that even though the elections are over, the refugee/economic migrant issue still hangs heavily over the heads of many Poles, which to emphasize the underlying theme once more, is because this relates to the identity obsession that Polish people uniquely embody.

### **The American Agenda**

What's happening in Poland isn't inconsequential to American strategists, and they actually have a preferred outcome in mind that would most assuredly promote their unipolar objectives. Truth being said, the US wins in either case, no matter whether the "Europeanized" PO and its supporters topple the government (which is unlikely) or blackmail it into concessions, or if PiS succeeds in its "Orbanization-Polonization" vision. To explain how each of these scenarios benefits the US, it's necessary to call to mind how both parties

are favorable to the US and against Russia, albeit to differing intensities. If PO were to usurp power somehow, then it wouldn't affect American strategic objectives in any shape or manner, and so long as the EU as a whole remains firmly in the US' grasp, then Washington has nothing to worry about. However, in the event that Russia and/or China were to make significant inroads in continental geopolitics via their multipolar infrastructure projects (Balkan Stream, Nord Stream II, and the Balkan Silk Road) and diplomacy (the Normandy Four framework excluding the US, air space coordination over Syria, etc.), then the US would be scrambling for a backup plan to maintain its unipolarity there.

This possible course of events helps explain why PiS and Kaczynski's "Polonization" are so strategically attractive to the US. First off, [faux-Resistance ideologies such as "Orbanism"](#) misleadingly give off the impression of being anti-establishment with their loud pro-sovereignty rhetoric and limited actions, despite hypocritically supporting their given countries' EU and NATO memberships. Structurally speaking, their existence and wild popularity helps to divert legitimate resistance to both of these institutions by presenting what is conventionally perceived as a form of "in-system opposition" that never structurally threatens the US' unipolar status quo. If anything, it allows the US to stay ahead of the curve by hijacking the trajectory of emerging political trends and manipulating them in the direction where they can best be used to serve unipolarity, if not outright becoming future vanguards on its behalf.

On the geopolitical front, the US is already supporting the nascent creation of the [Intermarum](#) "cordon sanitaire" between Russia and a potentially one day pragmatic Germany and France, and expanding Poland's Neo-Commonwealth into contiguous contact with Hungary's St. Stephen's Space via the shared satellite state of Slovakia would be a major win for the American "[Lead From Behind](#)" strategy. PiS is diehard pro-American, so it would use the leadership position that it would undoubtedly exert over the new geopolitical construction to invite as much of a strategic (e.g. "missile defense") and physical US military presence as possible in order to maximize the collective anti-Russian capability of the new bloc. A self-confident and "Polish" identity-espousing Warsaw would essentially be anti-Russian in its core vision (barring some unforeseen and majorly radical change of events), so it would naturally gravitate towards actualizing the Intermarum 'containment' strategy that the US is pushing it towards. Without the seemingly pressing domestic imperatives most fully embodied by PiS' overall vision, Poland is not as likely to move so rapidly in fulfilling its role as the geopolitical junction point linking together the [Viking Bloc](#), St. Stephen's Space, and the [Black Sea Bloc](#), and without the frontline 'glue' that Poland provides through its Neo-Commonwealth, the overall strategy would be much less cohesive and effective (such as under a "Europeanized" PO leadership).

## **Concluding Thoughts**

The core of Poland's political conflict is over which trajectory the country and its people should ultimately continue along. The "Europeanized" PO opposition party and its foreign state (i.e. German) and non-state (Soros) supporters want to protect the institutionalized advances that Donald Tusk had made during his 8-year premiership, even going as far as provoking dangerous sub-Color Revolution destabilizations to do so (and possibly even launching an all-out one in the near future). On the other hand, the "Polonized" PiS ruling party wants to "Orbanize" its power and then use its concentrated leadership apparatus to push forward its EuroCautionary reforms within the EU. No matter who comes out on top in this struggle (with PiS having a very high likelihood of remaining in power), it's useful to remember that the US still wins in some way or another since neither party advocates a

rejection of Euro-Atlanticism.

Both of the feuding sides are overdramatically impassionate about their respective positions due to the deep-seated inferiority complex prevalent in Polish society, whereby the population is hyper-sensitive to any sorts of issues even remotely perceived as affecting their identity, whether it be as “Europeanized” or “Polonized” Poles. This feeling is heightened even further by the suspicions that each side’s supporters level against the other, namely that PO is a pro-EU German-controlled front and that PiS has been disproportionately influenced by Hungary’s “illiberal democratic” ideology of “Orbanization”. What in any other context would have remained a ‘family affair’ inside of Polish society has exploded as a major issue in the EU’s continental affairs, driven to this point because of PO’s unsportsmanlike behavior after being trounced at the latest polls and its solicitation of outside support in trying to usurp power.

At the present moment, it doesn’t seem likely that PO will succeed in its goals to overthrow the government or blackmail it to the point of submission, but at the same time, it has regularly ended up bringing thousands of people to the street all across the country, demonstrating that there’s definitely a groundswell of domestic support for its anti-government agitation. Comparatively, however, PiS did manage to win an unprecedented election that handed it full control of all levels of government, from the parliament to the presidency to the premiership, with Jaroslaw Kaczynski finally reaching the position where he can control the entire state by proxy. The controversial judicial and media reform actions were undertaken precisely as a form of institutionalizing PiS’ power over all members of society, and it’s for the existential threat that this poses to PO’s “Europeanization” ideology that it and its supporters have commenced their destabilization program.

The protests likely won’t end anytime soon, but nor will they reach an uncontrollable level unless there’s a serious forthcoming scandal or violent (false-flag?) provocation, meaning that anti-government street action might become the ‘new normal’ in Poland just as it’s been in Spain, Portugal, and Greece for the past couple of years. Either way, the US isn’t too concerned about what happens in Poland right now, since at the rate that everything’s going, it’ll be the ultimate strategic winner no matter what.

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