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Re-constructing Polish Identity Searching for a New Language

Olga Brzezińska, Beata Czajkowska
and David Skully



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Abstract

In this paper we examine the subjective perceptions of identity of Polish university students. We observe an unprecedented identity shift: from a unitary Polish identity to a nested identity where Polishness is embedded in a larger European identity. Respondents distance themselves from the traditional narrative casting Poland as a perpetual victim charged with a religious mission. The emerging reconstructed narrative views Poland in a comparative, mostly European, perspective. It combines personal elements of Polishness (language, landscape, food, celebrations) with universal values – freedom, equality, diversity, and protection of the rights of others. Thus being both Polish and European is grounded in a shared (diverse) culture and shared universal human values; it is not perceived in political terms or governance framework. This paper is a companion study to a comparative research project conducted in 2009 in Germany, Hungary and Poland which examines Polish university students' subjective perceptions of democratic order as spelled out in the RECON models. Rather than exploring our respondents' perceptions of political legitimacy, in this paper we focus on the analysis of the transformation of Polish collective identity.

Keywords

European Identity – Identity – Nationality – Poland – Political Science

Introduction

The observable, experiential reality of contemporary Poland is one of stability, prosperity, open borders, and unprecedented opportunities for individual advancement through education and employment. Poland of the last twenty years is a success story, a country that broke a seemingly perpetual vicious cycle of failures and losses to become an average European democracy. Poland is not without problems; while it excels economically, its social policies are outdated. Much remains to be done in the areas of diversity, inclusion, and equality; but these are problems of a robust consolidating democracy, not of one struggling to survive. Still, for all the success Poland experienced, the country is unsure of its identity. The principles of free-market liberalism are broadly accepted, allowing entrepreneurship to flourish. There is no nostalgia for a state-run economy, but a strong sentiment for an egalitarian society remains. Polish society is largely socially conservative: private and public ceremonies follow the Catholic order of rituals in holidays, marriage, baptism, and funerals (including state funerals). But the monolith of the Polish nation is fragmenting. The community of Poles is individualizing; secularization and awareness of the rights of “others” is increasing.

Polish public discourse, however, lags behind these social transformations; the existing conceptual language and interpretative paradigms necessary to decode and navigate contemporary social reality are increasingly anachronistic. The discourse of Polish identity, in education, media, public-political debates, continues to be framed through historical experience and the collective memory of suffering and sacrifice. Polish history of the last two centuries is interpreted as one of losses – of independence, territory, sovereignty, life – and tragedies inflicted by external aggressors. Acts of national martyrdom are remembered; uprisings (unsuccessful) in the defense of the nation against all odds are celebrated. The archetypical collective Poland is the nation for whom its sons and daughters are supposed to sacrifice themselves. In retelling the story of unity – single-minded nation, homogenous to a large extent – Poland’s multicultural past is forgotten.¹

Given historical vicissitudes of Poland, this is hardly surprising that the idea of a united nation served as a powerful tool to bind the people together in the absence of

* The authors wish to thank Prof. Hans-Jörg Trenz and Prof. Zdzisław Mach for their helpful comments and suggestions. This working paper is a by-product of a joint WP-5 & WP-8, three-country, comparative study of political subjectivity among university students in Germany, Hungary, and Poland. This study, *Models of Democracy in Collective Identity Constructions: A Q-sort Based Comparative Approach to Students in Germany, Hungary and Poland*, a forthcoming RECON report, applies Q-methodology to examine subjective perceptions of RECON models. The present working paper focuses on Polish and European identity among Polish university students; it is not directly concerned with their perceptions of the RECON models. For analysis of the RECON models please see the aforementioned, forthcoming RECON report.

¹ There is a voluminous literature on the question of Polish identity - a topic complicated by the changing borders of Poland and the fact that Poland as a state did not exist between 1795 and 1918. Thus the idea of Poland and Polishness developed largely in “exile” and was infused with Romanticism and messianism. The Second World War and the subsequent border changes and population movements resulted in a highly ethnically and religiously homogeneous Poland: until 1945 ethnic and religious diversity characterized Poland. Davies (1982) provides a masterful critical analysis of Polish national narratives, particularly as constructed by Polish historians. This effort is supplemented by Walicki (1994) and Brock et al. (2006), focusing on the long 19th century; Prizel (1998) and Snyder (2003) provide comparative perspectives focusing on the 20th century. Conflict over Polishness since 1989 is examined by Kubik (1994), Snyder (1998), Ekiert and Kubik (1999) and Zubrzycki (2001). Zubrzycki (2006) and Porter (2001) examine the church’s role in the discourse of Polishness.

functioning state. This dynamic yet not happy story resonated through subsequent generations because it corresponded with experience, the surrounding observable reality. In the extreme, the experience included wars, foreign occupations, ethnic cleansing, and shifting territories and boundaries; in the times of peace, Polish sovereignty might be at any time compromised by its neighbors.

For the generation of Poles coming of age after 1989 and during Poland's accession to the European Union, the heroic narrative of struggle for a free, independent, and democratic Poland that defined earlier generations no longer resonates. The canonical national narrative is confusing and largely irrelevant: it is not their narrative. In this paper we examine the subjective perceptions of identity of forty Polish university students whose personal narratives reveal their core values and beliefs. In focusing on the construction of their symbolic realities we observe an unprecedented identity shift; one from a unitary Polish identity to a nested identity where Polishness is embedded in a larger culturally-constructed European identity. This process is contentious and can be viewed as two related processes: the contestation [deconstruction] of outdated characteristics of Polish national identity and the introduction of new elements into the collective identification [re-construction / reconstitution].

We are hardly the first analysts to notice this contentious process. The contemporary struggle to claim ownership and control of "Polishness" emerged in the 1980s and exploded after 1989. This struggle, which is joined by several rival narratives, is central of public discourse in Poland. Zubrzycki, for example, in analyzing the Polish public discourse in the late 1990s notes:

The discursive reconstruction of 'Poland' is made especially difficult by discursive ambiguities making dialogue difficult - if not impossible - between different political factions. The opponents in the battle over the definition of 'Poland' are engaged in a battle of words in which there are no clear winners. [...T]he Church, with the advent of a legitimate state, can no longer offer a compelling narrative of the nation [...and] liberal intellectuals of the Center and the Left face the enormous challenge of promoting a civic vision of the nation in a place where national identity is generally defined in ethnic terms, and of rehabilitating a 'civic program' after fifty years of communist rhetoric...
Zubrzycki (2001: 632)

The civic versus ethnic divide is one of many cleavages in Polish discourse. There are others: Catholicism/clericalism versus secularism; Poland versus Europe (of secular Enlightenment); the nation versus individuals and individualism. These cleavages are shaping the construction of contemporary identity formed in the context of changing spheres of political and social life. As Mach posits, "Changes in the balance of power result in changes of symbolic identification and models of identity. (...) Identity may therefore be considered as the effect of two factors: the social relations of power and the symbolic image of the world" (2007: 55). Burszta goes further to say that "we are witnessing creation of identities always open to suggestion and ready to include all available material, from direct experience and through the media, as long as they can, for a given time, 'conditionally' create a coherent whole. These identities equally include and exclude material; hence they are in constant construction-deconstruction." (2010: 141-142)

The contribution of the present study to the literature is that it focuses on the process of contemporary identity reconstruction at the individual level. In contrast to this study, which focuses on similarities and consensus among respondents, our companion comparative study conducted in Germany, Hungary and Poland identifies distinct patterns of political subjectivities and their relation to the RECON models.² Whereas most studies concern public discourse and textual evidence, this study employs interviews about subjective responses.³ Second, the participants in our study are in their early- to mid-20s; they have little or no meaningful direct memory of pre-1989 Poland; and they are at the threshold of engagement in public life. This may provide a prospective view of the future direction of public discourse in Poland.

Data and Method

Our primary data source is a set of interviews conducted in May and June 2009. We interviewed 40 full-time Polish university students from two Polish universities⁴; 20 from each university, 10 male, 10 female, and selected from a wide range of disciplines. It is important to emphasize that the set of respondents is not a random sample. For the analytical method employed in our companion study a diverse set of respondents is sufficient. We refer readers to the methodology chapter of the companion study for a full description of Q-methodology; but a brief description of Q-methodology is necessary to place our interviews in context.

Q-methodology it is a qualitative-quantitative method employed to identify types of subjectivity within a group or population. The analysis starts with a set of statements selected to elicit subjective responses to a set of issues. Our focus is on attitudes towards RECON models and to European and Polish identity.⁵ Our analysis included 70 statements, such as: "Our country deserves compensation for the abuses of the past" and "I am proud to be European." (see Annex 1). Each statement is written on a card. Participants were asked to sort these 70 statements by arranging the cards in format shown in figure 1. The column on the far right labeled +5 allows two statements to be ranked as most important, the column on the far left labeled -5, allows two statements to be ranked as least important; the middle column marked zero indicates complete indifference. What importance means is determined by the individual respondent: it is subjective. Cards placed in the left-most columns are usually statements to which respondents have a strong negative reaction.

Respondents' subjective rankings of the statements provide a data set amendable to quantitative analysis. The objective of the quantitative side of the analysis is to identify distinct subsets of individual respondents based on their subjective rankings of statements. The qualitative side of the analysis is based on semi-structured interviews with respondents. Immediately following the sorting of statements, with the sorted statements in front of them, respondents are asked about their sorts. The interviews focus on the statements placed in the far left and far right columns (-5, -4,

² See Brzezińska et al. (eds), *Models of Democracy in Collective Identity Constructions: A Q-sort Based Comparative Approach to Students in Germany, Hungary and Poland*, RECON report, 2011, (forthcoming)

³ For a study analyzing subjective responses about Poland see Galbraith (2004).

⁴ Jagiellonian University in Kraków and Maria Curie Skłodowska University in Lublin.

⁵ The present paper focuses exclusively on perceptions of Polish and European identity; perceptions of the RECON models are analyzed in the companion RECON report (supra, note 2).

+4, +5). Respondents explain why these statements are positively and negatively important to them. The interview elicits the subjective narrative behind the respondent's sorting. Information from the interviews provides a check on the whether the distinct subsets identified in the quantitative analysis are internally consistent. Thus, the Q-methodology is an iterative interpretive processes combining both qualitative and quantitative information

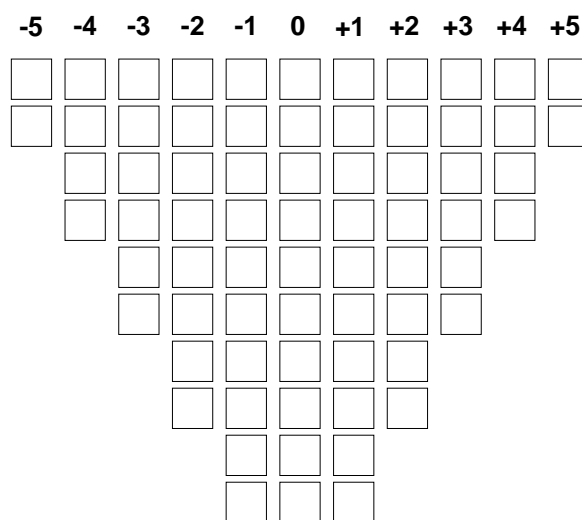


Figure 1: The Q-sort Template

Analysis

In the present analysis we draw primarily on the interviews, but we also draw on the quantitative information collected. We use the scores (-5, -4 , etc.) assigned to particular statements by respondents and the answers to background information questions each respondent answered before engaging in the statement sorting and interview.

From the interview material we explore how respondents construct their Polish and European identities. First, we illustrate how respondents distance themselves from perception of Poland as a perpetual victim of history and from tradition defined in terms of religion. Second, we demonstrate how they view Poland in a comparative, mostly European, perspective. Finally, we show how this new identity is emerging, an identity that combines familiar local elements of Polishness (language, landscape, food, family celebrations) with the universal values they advocate – freedom, equality, diversity, protection of the rights of others. We note that respondents interpret belonging to the national and the European communities in terms of a shared culture and shared universal human values not in political or social frameworks. The respondents' knowledge about formal institutions of power is rather limited. Their opinions about the use of force and the military illustrate lack of concern about security. At the same time, they embrace – if not fully understand – civic values. In the interviews they argue for 'normalcy' rather than for symbols and pathos.

Break with the past/departure from the grand narrative

The views shared by respondents show a distance growing between identification with historical memory (the past) and experiential reality (the present). Respondents expressed annoyance with dwelling on the past:

[It is] our national trait to become a martyr of Europe, to build our identity on suffering and to be a savior of the world [...] other countries did the same, had their Spring of Nations; they moved on, we still have not. Does past help us understand the future? I don't think so. I think the social reality is dynamic, nations change, identities change, values are becoming homogeneous in some way. [...] Twenty years ago nobody would have thought about being in the same community with the Germans; now we are and who knows what is going to be in twenty years.

(Mmfil)

Respondents were breaking away from the perception of Poland as a perpetual victim of history. One noted that although political circumstances and geographical location were not favorable for Poland, the politics of victimhood, “the Polish trait of complaining,” is leading nowhere:

Every country suffered, but if you want to build, you have to look into the future not into the past. It does not mean forgetting the past but to ask for a compensation for the past deeds – no, I am sorry, no. When a conflict ends, it is time to turn a new leaf.

(Jmkulm)

Not dwelling on the past was a common reaction underlined by impatience about not moving on:

Let's focus on looking into the future not on opening old wounds. Moreover, I see a trend among the politicians, in the society in general [...] to mitigate conflicts for which our grandparents might have been responsible.

(Jmchem1)

Another important common thread in respondents' narratives is the ability to view Poland in perspective. This is a significant departure from the perception of Poland as unique, occupying special place in Europe and requiring special treatment or compensation for its historic deeds:

For me the argument that our country suffered a lot is senseless. Every country suffered. [...] We suffered, but we also caused suffering (Jkmat);

If everyone wanted to drag into the present all wrongs they experienced, they would not get far.

(Jminm)

History, in general, not a unique Polish history, becomes a point of departure for what it can offer:

It is very important to remember about some historic events rather than push them out of the consciousness because it may be more convenient. It is more comfortable not to remember that human rights were violated, that millions of people died. These are facts that should be remembered to avoid repeating the same mistakes.

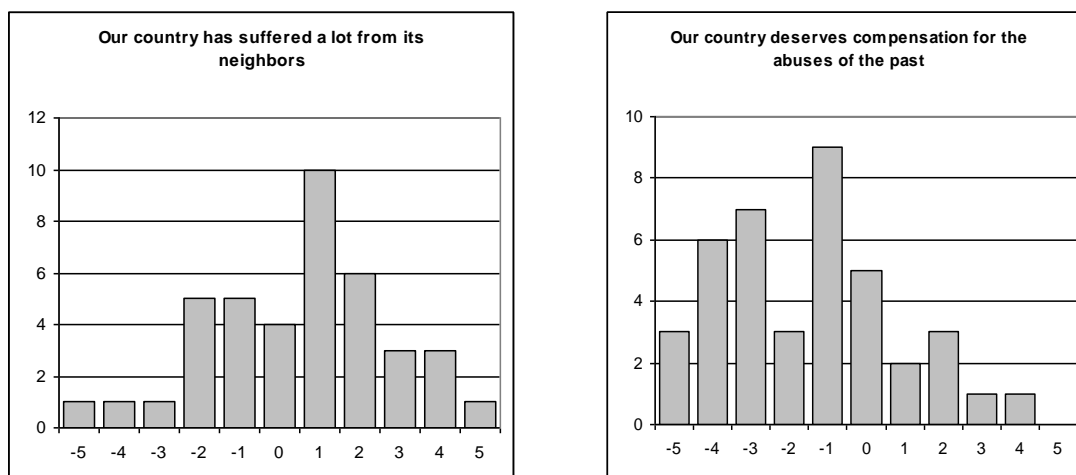
(Jksoc)

The demands for historical justice were questioned on the grounds of passed time and the unfairness of collective responsibility:

It is difficult to demand, for example, from the contemporary Germans to pay for what their grandparents, and not all parents and grandparents, did 60 years ago.

(Mmpol)

Instead, there was a demand for the protection of universal human values but “not only and not necessarily because of the memory of atrocities committed throughout European history” (Mmpol) but because these are values in themselves.



Figures 2 and 3: Distribution of Q-sort ranks

Figures 2 and 3 show the distribution of Q-sort ranks assigned by respondents to statements: “Our country suffered a lot from its neighbors” and “Our country deserves compensation for the abuses of the past.” Most respondents remain indifferent to the question about national suffering, while the majority opposes compensation for past abuses. The issues either do not matter to them or evoke negative connotations about dwelling on past suffering rather than moving on.

Searching for new Polish identity/ies

The respondents do not distance themselves from Poland. They easily and readily identify themselves as Polish and have positive associations with their place of birth, childhood, family, and native language. The portrait of Polishness they draw is intimate, private, and local:

It is my little motherland in a grand European motherland

(Jmche),

I have family here, I would miss them if I left, but I am not attached to this place. Somehow, it would be easy to move, live somewhere else.

(Jkfmed)

Their understanding of Polishness is stripped of pathos or grand narratives. While agreeing that Poland is their home, when asked about being proud of being Polish, many respondents show serious reservations because they associated pride with a nationalist rhetoric they oppose:

I don't think that being Polish makes me proud. It does not mean I am ashamed if it, but what difference does it make which country you are from? It should not be a source of privileges or categorizations.

(Jkfmcd)

Being Polish is who they are but their cultural references are not exclusively Polish – they see themselves also as Europeans and some as global citizens:

First it is a place where I was born, the country where I was born. Europe comes next as a culture, Western culture. Then comes the world.

(Mminf)

The respondents are at ease sharing identities (Polish and European); it is not a source of tension for them:

Being Polish and European is not contradictory

(Jkmed);

Pride of ones' national identity does not exclude the pride of being European – the recognition of being Polish should be present in the European identity.

(Mmfil)

They are Polish because they were born here; they are European because the European culture makes Europe familiar, known and secure:

I live in this part of the world, I identify with the culture this part of the world represents [...] I feel European. For example, when I travel to France or to Italy, I do not feel a stranger there. I am not exactly on my turf but near-by

(Mmfil)

Poland being part of Europe, a member of the European Union is a given for the students. This is their reality; one that that does not bring much reflection. Some showed no support for further integration of the EU:

We should not move toward full unification. Each state should preserve its uniqueness [...] I support the union but the union of nations, the union of cultures

(Jkmed);

Each country has its own history, own culture that should not be restricted by some directives from above

(Jkepi);

The time to think about one and only Europe has not come yet. Not in our lifetime; maybe our grandchildren will be ready for it. For now there should be diversity of identities, emphasized by separate passports

(Jmche)

Others perceive integration as a logical outcome:

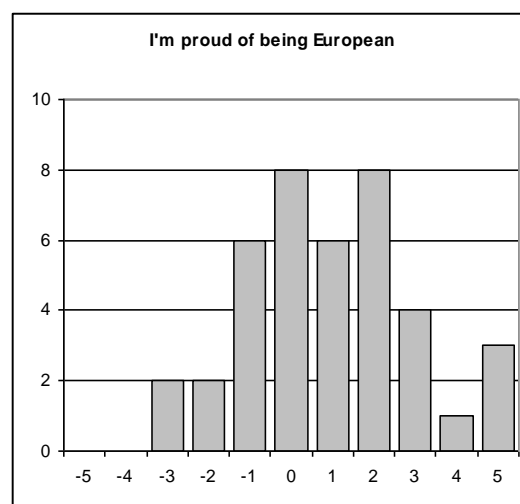
Honestly speaking there is no alternative to integration [...] Unless Europe unites into a one real country, we will be marginalized.

(Jmche)

In our background information questionnaire we posed the question of Polish and/or European identity directly. All but six of the 40 respondents perceived themselves in the near future to be either Polish and European or European and Polish.⁶ Only three maintained an exclusive Polish identity, just two claimed an exclusively European identity and one did not know.

Table 1: Identity perception

Q: In the near future I perceive myself as:	Responses
Polish	3.0
Polish and European	23.5
European and Polish	10.5
European	2.0
I don't know	1.0



Figures 4 and 5: Q-sort ranks

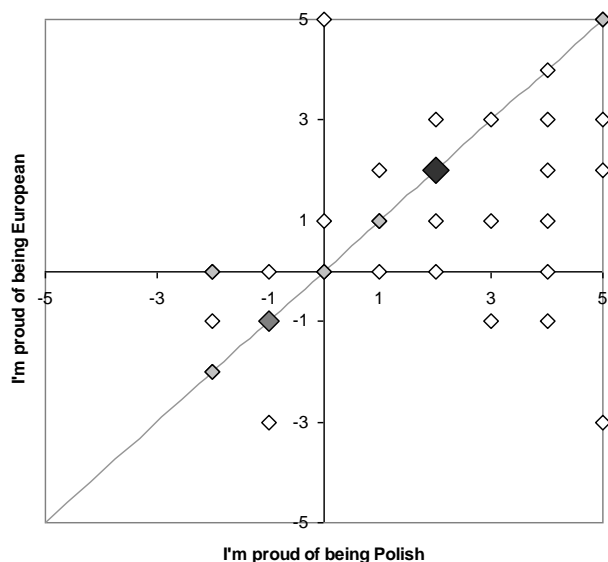
From the interviews we learned that embracing European identity was not difficult. Europe and the Europe Union have positive associations for the vast majority of respondents. Besides the tangible benefits from Poland’s EU membership, respondents feel that they belong to a larger European cultural community. The interviews reveal respondents confronting how to define their Polish identity. While they do not question their identity as Poles, they are searching for a conceptual language to express this transformed Polishness. Rather than proposing a new concept of Polishness, respondents question the “grand narrative”. They do not use national memory as interpretative paradigm; their focus is on the intimate, private narratives that make up their (personal) Polish identity.

Figures 4 and 5 plot the Q-sort ranks respondents gave to the statements: “I’m proud of being Polish” and “I’m proud of being European.” The distribution of responses for both questions is positive.

Figure 6 plots individual responses to these two statements in one graph. “I’m proud of being Polish” is plotted on the horizontal axis and “I’m proud of being European” is plotted on the vertical axis. The diamond shaped markers indicate individual responses to these two questions. Some individuals gave identical responses, thus

⁶ One respondent checked both dual-identity options. We split this response, thus the half responses reported in the table.

markers representing two responses are shaded light grey; the two enlarged diamond markers indicate three (medium grey) and five (dark grey) responses, respectively. The diagonal line represents identical rankings for the two statements; 18 of the 40 responses lie on the diagonal. Markers above the diagonal line indicate respondents who rank pride in being European higher than pride in being Polish (8 of 40); markers below line reveal a higher rank on pride in being Polish (14 of 40). The most extreme response was from a respondent with strong eurosceptical views: (+5, -3). The most



common response was (+2,+2) – the large dark grey diamond – indicating moderate positive pride in being Polish and in being European.

Figure 6: Graph of the Q-sort ranks

What is notable in this figure is the positive correlation between the two answers. We know from respondent interviews that some respondents view being proud of one's identity, be it Polish or European, as or can be viewed as chauvinism. These respondents give negative ranks to both statements; these are the responses in the lower-left quadrant of the figure. The majority of respondents are in the upper-right quadrant, indicating positive ranks for both statements: they rank as important pride in being Polish and in being European. Finally there are three responses in the lower-right quadrant: these responses rank pride in being Polish positively and pride in being European negatively. These are the only cases that reveal a subjective sense of opposition between being Polish and being European. Note that there are no responses in the upper-left quadrant, which would reveal positive European pride and negative Polish pride.

Attitudes toward the EU and Europeanization

A substantialist notion of Polish national identity no longer seems viable and has been gradually withering under the influence of a strong orientation towards Europe. The effects of radical changes brought about by advancing integration with the European Union and the efforts of European institutions to foster travel, work and education are widely recognized and readily utilized by youth. The entry of a European layer to collective identification of young Poles with its vision of a better future and potential

benefits of EU accession marks a decisive break with the myth of a monolithic Polish nation, ethnically homogenous, united in Catholicism and distrustful of the other.

One cannot question the impact of European integration on the way young people construct and express their self-identification. Contrary to once popular expectation that European identity might undermine national identities, our respondents quite clearly point to being Polish as their primary source of definition, but at the same time they eagerly embrace Europeanness as yet another layer of their collective identification:

Whenever I travel and meet strangers, I present it as a virtue that I am Polish. [...] But I feel European and I believe that all the nations (in Europe) have something in common.

(Jkchem)

This respondent recognizes the benefits of the membership in the European Union and places them in a broader than personal perspective. Although there are unquestionable advantages for them on an individual level, in terms of border-free travel, educational opportunities and access to labor market, accession is viewed as strengthening Poland's position in the international arena, an asset that is much appreciated:

Poland used to be perceived as a far-away, backward country and now it has changed. We can present and discuss our issues on a (European) forum.

(Jkchem)

The interviews and individual rankings reveal varying degrees of skepticism about the European Union. Only a few respondents would qualify as true Euro-skeptics; most respondents are not politically engaged and are indifferent or skeptical of government generally, and this includes the European Union. However, when asked whether Poland benefited from EU membership or if EU membership for Poland is something good or bad, the responses are overwhelmingly positive (See Table 2).

Table 2: Assessment of Poland's EU membership

Q: Did Poland benefit from EU membership?	Responses
Yes	38
No	2
Q: Poland's membership in the EU is something:	Responses
Good	35
Neither good nor bad	4
Bad	1
Don't know	0

The generally expressed satisfaction with EU membership by our respondents is corroborated by public opinion surveys from CBOS (Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej, or Public Opinion Research Centre). Since accession in 2004, support has grown steadily and remains at a high level. Currently, 86 per cent of Polish society supports EU membership, with only 9 per cent opposed; among subgroups, the

greatest support is among respondents with higher education (93 per cent) and 18-24 years of age (92 per cent).⁷

Catholicism and Tradition

The Catholic Church historically played a significant role in upholding Polish national identity and was, mostly, an ally for the democratic opposition before 1989. Although constitutionally, the church and the state remain separate, the church in the last two decades received significant concessions from the state on religious instructions in schools, placement of religious symbols in public spaces and the return of property, among others. The Catholic teachings on family, public morality and definition of rights and wrongs were for a long time considered as part of the fabric making Polish-Catholic- national identity. It was a tradition that lingered without much opposition or question. Even if people did not follow Catholic teaching in their private lives, they tended to accept it, on the surface, the Church's presence in public life.

Thus, it was a surprise of the study to find critical reflections on religion – (or more specifically on public proselytizing and usurpation of tradition by collective religion) and demands to define 'tradition' outside of the religious bounds:

I am all for cultivating traditions and caring for our roots, however, I do not want to be forced to cultivate my religious traditions. I either identify with something or not. It is an individual choice of every person. I have a choice and would like the state to give me a choice to cultivate my religious traditions, my roots. [...] Whatever I choose, it is only and exclusively my own decision

(Jkepi)

Although the respondents showed uneasiness about religion, they freely identified Christianity as a common European heritage. A likely explanation of this apparent contradiction may be that the students did not reject Christian values in the abstract but reacted to the specific type of Polish conservative Catholicism, presence of the Church in public life and clericalism:

Tradition, in general, may be cultivated. It is worth caring for such traditions as one's language or one's cuisine. These are nice things. However, I equate this Polish approach to religion with the view of so called 'mohair berets' [very conservative movement within the Polish Catholic Church]. If someone does not believe what they believe, those are seen as inferior. This breeds hatred. Values like these and disrespect for someone who believes in other religions should not be cultivated.

(Jmfizkomp)

In general using religion to build a value system can lead to some...I don't know...to some fanaticism. We have examples of this in the world. This is not a good common denominator.

(Jmpiel)

⁷ *Six years of EU Membership*. Research Report, CBOS, April 2010, available at: <http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K_056_10.PDF>.

Respondents appear to want religion to limit itself to the private sphere. Even the ones who considered Catholicism important in their lives, were not comfortable with politicization of religion and polarization of views on religion:

I sometimes feel offended when someone sneers at values I consider important: for example, the fact that I go to confession. [...] I often do not agree with the priests but, at the same time, I think that to mock them just because they are priests is offensive.

(Jmhist)

This is a search for values, for something to believe in but not necessarily in the form of an organization or institution. Also, respondents appear to value their individual freedom to choose what they believe in and how they want to express their faith, beyond the confines of the official discourse of the Church.

Diversity/universal rights

The issues of universal values, human rights and cultural diversity constitute essential elements in identity narratives our respondents unfolded. Often times they would point to them as the most obvious markers of what they perceive as the basis for the functioning of modern society. They do not seem to feel threatened by groups different from them in terms of ethnicity, faith or sexual identity; on the contrary, they believe that such variety contributes to the wealth of a society. Our respondents display openness to multicultural society and view cultural diversity positively:

I think diversity breeds good ideas and I would emphasize advantages here. It might, however, be problematic, as with differences things might not develop the way we would wish them to. But I also think that thanks to it life is more interesting

(Jkchem)

They recognize that cultural diversity has always constituted the reality of European constellation but in the past it has led to violence and sanguinary conflicts. Bearing that in mind, the memory of past atrocities obliges European nations to focus on “bonds built on universal values” (Jkgeog). Our respondents underscore that respect for and inclusion of various groups, be it ethnic, religious or sexual minorities, is a basis for peaceful coexistence. The right of diverse groups to participate in public life is widely recognized as long as mutual respect is granted. There is a belief that diversity would contribute to development of tolerance in the Polish society:

I like the idea of such a multicultural mix that existed in the times of the Second Polish Republic. [...] The inflow of other groups would teach Poles tolerance. Due to the fact that Poland is so homogenous in terms of religion and nationality, we are not very tolerant towards others

(Jkgeog)

Awareness of the significance of human rights protection is increasingly ubiquitous in the public sphere. Universal values are recognized as “freedom of speech, equality of men and women, right to decide, sovereignty” (Jkmatem). We observe univocal acceptance and support for the protection of human rights.

I wanted to stress that individual freedom and the right of choice should be protected. [...] I have always thought that the borderline for all action is the rights and dignity of

other individuals. I do not like that we, Poles, are sometimes perceived as a homogenous group... I believe that everyone has the right to decide what they want to be

(Jkekon)

Our respondents indicate that such rights and values are embedded in the Polish constitution, but they would very much welcome their recognition in everyday practice. At the same time, they believe the European Union should make further efforts on an international scale to ensure their protection.

Security and Pacifism

Respondents who are not concerned with the past and do not feel the burden of history live in the present. A sense of external threat that for generations accompanied Polish experience and had impact on building national cohesion, is visibly absent. Respondents who have strong sense of security do not envision any military or cultural threats that could bring instability or danger to Poland or the EU. The majority of respondents do not consider use of force as a solution to achieve political goals. While only a few declare themselves as pacifists, most are suspicious about the use of force:

There is always some other solution. The use of force is a last resort but lately even this has not worked out. [...] use of force will not solve the roots of the problem. If a country is defeated by force, it will cause a reaction. The country will raise its sons for fighters who will, sooner or later, stand up

(Jminf);

Force is never a right argument

(Mkptra)

Consequently, they view armies as unnecessary:

Investing in armies is not effective. Nowadays power is not a military one, but economic and financial

(Jksto)

Too much money is spent to support armies" (Mmpol); "Really, I do not know why we would need a strong Polish army. In general, I oppose wars, well... bigger wars. I think there is no need for Europe to have a strong army...I hope there would be no any conflicts in the future. There are wars but this does not mean we must have a strong army. It is unnecessary

(Jkind)

One respondent appeared not to understand that the primary function of an army is defense:

Do we need [the army]? It may be useful. I oppose the use of force to solve problems, but think that the military as an institution could exist. But not because we will use it to fight

(Mkmat)

Another viewed the military as picturesque, useful for national ceremonies. Although Polish troops are deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, this was not mentioned by any of

the respondents. To them war is part of historic narrative that no longer reflects the contemporary Polish and European reality:

We do not need force. History showed that it does not lead to anything good

(Mkmat)

Conclusion

This paper analyzes interviews with Polish university students conducted as part of a Q-methodology study of political subjectivities. The interviews are stimulated and structured on the individual student's strong positive or negative reactions to a set of statements on topics ranging from national and European identity to transnational democracy (see annex 1). Their explanations of why they had strong reactions to certain statements provide evidence of subjectively constructed categories and boundaries. In this paper we focus on their constructions of Polish and European identity.

The respondents critically questioned many of the myths, stereotypes and images embedded in the discourse on Polish national identity. The students we interviewed were not revolutionaries or radicals. Rather, we observed a group of young people trying to understand the country where they were born and to find their place in Poland, Europe, and the world. The people in our study represent a generation that views Poland in a broader context. Their personal memory goes back only as far as the inception of free post-1989 Poland. Thus the collective historical memory of the Polish nation seems to them distant and un-relatable; the canonical narrative does not resonate for them, nor is it helpful for understanding the present. Consequently, they reject the pathos of martyrdom, the trap of Polish uniqueness, and the belief in Poland's special place in history that has long characterized Polish national identity.

The students were aware of a difference between them and the previous generations. One of the respondents bluntly stated: *Poland is such a backwater...especially the older generation. It is pretty clear that they are from a different system, some different reality* (Jmchem1).

As any observer of Polish political and social scene knows, the two realities are competing. From the study we learned how these competing realities are shaping identities at individual level but not when and how they could shift a paradigm of collective Polish identity.

The post-1989 generation is initiating a discussion about a different Poland – a country they can relate to, a country more open, more diverse and inclusive, and one willing to take itself less seriously. The students we interviewed value their Polishness but define it individually, through personal and local experiences. At the same time, they embrace the idea of Europeaness pragmatically: they make full use of all Europe has to offer, in terms of intercultural exchange and encounters, educational and professional prospects and an overall, more rewarding life experience. Whether the process of Europeanization involves only the European Union or is influenced by the agendas and activities of other European institutions

(e.g. OSCE, the Council of Europe),⁸ it has impact on everyday lives of the citizens of Europe.

Young Poles are beginning to ground their narratives on their understanding of common European experience – peace, prosperity, secularism, and a positive view of the future. Europeanization is reshaping their identities in “a manner which relativizes (without necessarily supplanting) national identities” (Harmsen and Wilson 2000: 17). The emerging identity is not well defined; the students can articulate better who they are not than who they are or who they aspire to be. Most of all, they are willing to start a dialogue with the Polish past and the European future, a dialogue that is necessary for the development of modern society.

In the reality of Polish politics, this dialogue often turns into verbal combat: this is to be expected when the canon of national identity is publicly questioned. Increasingly the opinion-makers and politicians (of the left and center) are willing to break with history. As the new Polish president, Bronisław Komorowski, said during the 2010 election campaign: “History moved to the past”. It is important to work together, to cooperate above the trenches of the past. We do not need to feel affection, but have to show respect for each other to work together for the benefit of contemporary Poland.” We conclude that with the new generation of citizens, the Polish transformation is, at last, entering second-generation reforms, the reforms of the symbolic sphere.

⁸ On the EU-isation process, see: Hay 2002; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003. For a discussion of Europeanization in a broader institutional context see: Cowles et al. 2001; Vink 2003; Mair 2004.

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Annex 1

Q-set Statements:

- 1) National constitution is the main source of rights and laws.
- 2) Only member states should have the right to collect taxes from their citizens.
- 3) Democracy can only be sustained in the confines of the nation-state.
- 4) We need a strong national army.
- 5) The power of the EU should be limited.
- 6) National borders should be controlled by individual member states.
- 7) Our national flag should be more prominently displayed than the European one.
- 8) My home is my country.
- 9) Further enlargement may endanger economic stability of our country. .
- 10) The EU helps solving environmental problems.
- 11) Our (*Hungarian/German/Polish*) politicians should do their best to represent national interests on the EU level.
- 12) EU facilitates travelling.
- 13) EU strengthens our role in global affairs.
- 14) EU facilitates/advances democratic development in our country.
- 15) EU gives us opportunity to work and study in different countries.
- 16) I'm proud of being (*Hungarian/German/Polish*).
- 17) The EU provides opportunity to protect citizens against their own administration.
- 18) Europe should have one common army.
- 19) Europe shares a common heritage (Christianity, Roman Law, democracy) and memory.
- 20) Common European culture is derived from diverse national sources.
- 21) The EU should create common welfare policy (common regulations, common distribution of social benefits).
- 22) Our taxes should be split between national and the EU administration.
- 23) Euro should become a common currency of Europe.
- 24) EU should have a constitution.
- 25) We should have only EU passport.
- 26) I'm proud of being European.
- 27) Foreign policy should be made at the EU level.
- 28) EU should speak with one voice in foreign policy.

- 29) The EU institutions can be trusted to protect and represent our interests.
- 30) It is important not to fall behind the progressive Europe.
- 31) I am a global citizen
- 32) The EU is involved in fighting global poverty.
- 33) Remembrance of atrocities in European history makes us obliged to protect values related to the idea of humankind.
- 34) It is important to preserve the common global cultural heritage.
- 35) The EU should contribute to the financial efforts to solve global economic crises.
- 36) The EU should take part in peace-making on a global scale.
- 37) Individual freedom and choice should be protected.
- 38) Cultural groups have the right to be different as long as they do not infringe on rights and freedoms of others.
- 39) Global collective decision-making should be fostered.
- 40) The whole world is my home.
- 41) We are all responsible for shaping global institutions.
- 42) The EU should respect, protect, spend more money and fight for universal human rights on the global scale.
- 43) Democracy means first of all participation and deliberation of free individuals in common issues.
- 44) The EU should contribute financially to limit the negative consequences of environmental pollution.
- 45) Further enlargement of the EU should be subject to sustainability.
- 46) Europe is a state of mind (and not a geographic term).
- 47) Our country forms a bridge between Eastern and Western parts of Europe.
- 48) We should care more about our basic values, especially the religious ones.
- 49) Our country has suffered a lot from its neighbors.
- 50) Eastern and Western parts of Europe share the same values.
- 51) You can only trust family members and close friends.
- 52) Politicians act mainly according to their own interests.
- 53) Citizens are alienated because state and local administration do not serve their interests.
- 54) The past helps to understand the future.
- 55) Democratic procedure work best at a local or regional level.
- 56) Democracy introduces order into the world.

- 57) Democracy is expensive.
- 58) Democracy is inefficient.
- 59) We need strong leaders.
- 60) Free speech should not violate the feelings of anyone.
- 61) Some minorities demand too many rights.
- 62) Women and men are equal.
- 63) Women should care more about family and home.
- 64) Certain groups have too much power and control.
- 65) Our country deserves compensation for the abuses of the past.
- 66) Some countries in the EU are second-class.
- 67) (*Country name*) is treated as second class in the EU.
- 68) We are the slaves of Europe.
- 69) Diversity causes problems.
- 70) Certain political goals can only be achieved by force.

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