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A Model for Democratic Transition and European Integration?

Why Poland Matters

Aleks Szczerbiak

University of Sussex

A.A.Szczerbiak@sussex.ac.uk

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Abstract

Poland is the sixth largest country in the EU and plays an increasingly important role in European affairs. Looking at its history and legacy, Poland has witnessed some of the most momentous events of the last century and in recent years has seen vast changes in its social, economic and political systems. Understanding developments in Poland can teach us important lessons about the past, present and future of contemporary Europe. Opposition to communism, the Polish transition to democracy, how the country has dealt with its communist past and its changing relationship with the EU all provide fascinating insights into the democratisation and European integration processes. At the same time, high levels of societal religiosity in an apparently secularising Europe and the importance of the Catholic Church have provided a distinctive backdrop ensuring that these processes have often worked themselves out in unique ways.

A model for democratic transition and European integration?
Why Poland matters[1]

Aleks Szczerbiak
University of Sussex
A.A.Szczerbiak@sussex.ac.uk

One of the tasks of the country specialist who attempts to locate their case study within a broader comparative framework is to ask themselves the classic 'so what?' question: what is interesting about your case to someone who is not otherwise interested in your case?[2] In this paper, I discuss three areas where I think that we can draw broader insights from Polish contemporary political developments and that are of interest beyond the Polish case - where, in other words Poland matters - but also where the Polish experience is unique and which makes it difficult to draw broader conclusions and use the country as a 'model'. Firstly, Poland's experience of democratisation: its transition to democracy and how the country extracted itself from communist rule. Here I particularly explore the relationship between Poland's democratic transition, how the country has dealt with the legacy of its communist past and the quality of its post-communist democracy. Secondly, Poland's experience of European integration and its relationship with the EU as a candidate state, and subsequently, as the largest of the new members from the post-communist countries. Here I explore the tensions between support for European integration as a civilizational project on the one hand, and assertion of Polish national identity and interests, and concerns to maintain national and cultural distinctiveness, on the other. Thirdly, the very high levels of religiosity among Poles and the important role of the Catholic Church as an institution in contemporary Polish affairs. One of the jobs of the comparativist is to look for similarities and points where broader comparative or theoretical conclusions and analogies can be drawn, but it is also to look for differences and points of contrast and, by doing so, try to pinpoint what is distinctive and not replicable about the case. This third area is, arguably, one where the Polish case is distinctive, but that also interacts with the other two areas examined in ways that limits the extent to

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[1] This paper is based on my University of Sussex professorial lecture held on October 15th 2014.
[2] On the role of case studies in comparative politics, see: Arend Lijphart, 'Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method', *The American Political Science Review*, Vol 65 No 3, September 1971, pp682-693 (691-693).

which one can view Poland as some kind of 'model' and draw lessons from its experience. In this paper, when I discuss whether or not Poland provides us with a 'model' for democratic transition and European integration, I am considering this question in both the analytical sense - to draw broader comparative and theoretical lessons and conclusions - and from a more normative perspective: whether it is a positive example to, and possible source of emulation for, others?

Poland's transition to democracy and experience of dealing with the communist past

One way that we might be able to draw some broader normative and analytical lessons from the Polish case, and thus look upon it as a model, is to examine its democratic transition: the way that the country extracted itself from communist rule. 2014 marks the twenty fifth anniversary of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. In Poland, as in most of the rest of the bloc, this was a negotiated process of transition exemplified by the so-called 'round table' negotiations between representatives of the communist regime and democratic opposition, and the peaceful surrender of power by the latter.[3] Many so-called 'comparative transitologists', who are interested in and study processes of democratisation and regime change across the world, posit 'pacting' processes, such as the elite level bargain that occurred during the Polish round table negotiations, as the most normatively desirable model of how such processes of regime-change should proceed. This is because 'pacting' is a process of peaceful, non-violent consensual extraction from a non-democratic regime that provides something for everyone, particularly a 'soft landing' for representatives of the previous regime, giving them a strong stake - and, therefore, incentive not to undermine - the new democratic system.[4] In the Polish case, it can be argued, the elite pacting process ensured that democracy became embedded with no significant actors (including representatives of the former ruling elite) wanting a return to the *status quo ante* or opposing (broadly speaking) the liberal democratic model. Indeed, for many Poles the elite bargain that facilitated a peaceful

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[3] On the Polish transition to democracy see: George Sanford, ed. *Democratization in Poland, 1988–90: Polish Voices*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992; Wiktor Osiatyński, 'The Roundtable Talks in Poland', in John Elster, ed. *The Roundtable Talks and the Breakdown of Communism*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 21–68; Marjorie Castle, *Triggering Communism's Collapse: Perceptions and Power in Poland's Transition*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003; and Antoni Dudek, *Reglamentowana rewolucja: Rozkład dyktatury komunistycznej w Polsce 1988-90*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak Horyzont, 2014.

[4] See, for example: Guillermo O'Donnell and Phillipe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986; Terry Lynn Karl, 'Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America', *Comparative Politics*, Vol 23 No 1, October 1990, pp1-21; Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe C. Schmitter, 'Modes of transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe', *International Social Science Journal*, Vol 128, 1991, pp269-284; John Higley, Judith Kulberg and Jan Pakulski, 'The Persistence of Post-communist elites' in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds, *Democracy After Communism*, Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University, 2002, pp33-47; John Higley and Michael Burton, *Elite Foundations of Liberal Democracy*, Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006. Cf: Terry Lynn Karl, 'Petroleum and Political Pacts', *Latin American Research Review*, Vol 22 No 1, 1987, pp63-94; Frances Hagopian, 'Democracy by Undemocratic Means? Elites, Political Pacts, and Regime Transition in Brazil', *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol 23 No 2, July1990, pp147-170; and Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*, 1991, New York: Cambridge University Press.

transfer of power is the 'foundational myth' of the current, post-communist Polish state;[5] highlighted by the fact that a series of similar round table negotiation processes followed and accompanied the process of regime change in most of the other states of communist Eastern Europe throughout the rest of 1989.[6]

However, there are reasons why we need to be careful about viewing the Polish process of regime change, and particularly the round table negotiations, in this way: as a model of successful democratic transition. One of these reasons is, I would argue, the way that transitional justice and the question of how to deal with legacy of the country's communist past have been recurring issues in post-communist Polish politics.[7] One of the reasons why the 'transitology' literature posits elite-level 'pacting' as a model for 'exiting' the previous non-democratic regime is because it offers something for everyone, specifically it gives the old outgoing elites, a 'stake' in the new democratic system. Poland appeared to very much conform to this principle: the idea of trying to ensure that old elites felt comfortable with the new settlement was very much the approach of the early post-communist governments, exemplified by the so-called 'thick line' policy of the first non-communist prime minister since the country was incorporated into the Soviet bloc at the end of the 1940s, Tadeusz Mazowiecki.[8]

Nonetheless, the fact is that the question of how to deal with the communist past did recur, most strikingly over the issue of so-called lustration, the vetting of individuals for their links with the communist security services, and public access to the extant files of these services. This culminated in a lustration act and law establishing the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: IPN), a body to oversee and facilitate access to these archives, being passed at the end of the 1990s. However, even then the debate

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[5] See, for example: Bronisław Wildstein, 'Okrągly stół jako akt założycielski', *Do Rzeczy*, 23 March 2014.

[6] See: John Elster, ed. *The Roundtable Talks and the Breakdown of Communism*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996

[7] See: Aleks Szczerbiak, *Explaining patterns of lustration and communist security service file access in post-1989 Poland*, Sussex European Institute Working Paper No 133, March 2014, Brighton: Sussex European Institute; and Aleks Szczerbiak, 'Explaining late lustration programs: lessons from the Polish case', in Lavinia Stan and Nadya Nedelsky, *Post-Communist Transitional Justice: Lessons from Twenty-Five Years of Experience*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, forthcoming

[8] In August 1989, in his inaugural policy speech as prime minister Mr Mazowiecki announced that a 'thick line' would be drawn between the past and present. See: Tadeusz Mazowiecki, 'Przeszłość odkreślamy grubą linią: Przemówienie Tadeusza Mazowieckiego w Sejmie,' Gazeta Wyborcza, 25 August 1989. Although he was actually seeking to distance his government from the damage done to the national economy by the previous regime, the 'thick line' was often cited as a metaphor epitomising the lenient approach to the communist regime adopted by his administration.

continued to rumble on so that an even more radical lustration and file access law was passed in 2006-7. This issue also had the capacity to flare up very dramatically in public debate as it did, for example, in 2008 following the publication of a book by two Institute of National Remembrance historians claiming to show compelling circumstantial evidence that Lech Wałęsa, the legendary former Solidarity trade union leader and Poland's first freely elected post-communist President, was a communist security service informer codenamed 'Bolek' in the early 1970s;[9] an allegation that Mr Wałęsa and his supporters denied strenuously.[10]

The recurrence of concerns about transitional justice in post-communist Poland suggests that there may be problems with 'forgiving and forgetting' as a model for new democracies in terms of being a means of dealing effectively with the past and old regime elites. It also raises some important questions about the democratisation process and the state of democracy in Poland. In terms of the latter, transitional justice - and questions of lustration and communist security service file access, specifically - became entwined with other post-communist democratisation discourses on issues such as: the public's right to information about the backgrounds of its representatives, officials and authority figures; and the need to tackle corruption. At the root of this was a wider unease about the perceived failures of the democratisation process in post-communist Poland more generally, with lustration and file access posited as a project designed to implement democratic renewal and enhance and improve the quality of the democracy that was emerging in the country.[11]

In other words, continued calls for lustration and file access resonated with a symbolic and institutional sense that something about the democratic transition was incomplete. The fact that Poland embarked upon late lustration and file access programmes could, therefore, be seen as an expression of this perceived need to deepen the democratisation process by expanding the scope of transparency measures. Calls for broadening the scope of lustration thus often came to be regarded as a key element of far-reaching moral and political renewal that many felt was required in post-communist Poland. Specifically, the notion that political

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[9] See: Sławomir Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk, *SB a Lech Wałęsa. Przyczynek do biografii*, Warsaw: IPN, 2008.
[10] See, for example: Andrzej Friszke, 'Zniszczyć Wałęsę', 21 June 2008 at http://wyborcza.pl/20209020,764898,5334929.html (Accessed 23 June 2008).
[11] See, for example: Cynthia Horne, 'Late lustration programmes in Romania and Poland: supporting or undermining democratic transitions', *Democratization*, Vol 16 No 2, April 2009, pp344-376.

(and economic) life in the post-1989 period was manipulated by old elites and networks linked to the former (but still influential) communist-era security services, prompted many Poles to question the virtues of the so-called 'thick line' approach towards transitional justice. Underpinning all of this were concerns about the unsatisfactory nature of the elite bargain that led to the collapse of Polish communism - and which meant that transitional justice was delayed - which is, as noted above, for many part of the 'foundational myth' of the new democratic Polish state.

So there were clearly aspects of the Polish experience that one could draw upon in terms of Poland serving as a 'model' for democratisation. However, there was a real question mark about whether an elite pacting process was really the most desirable process of regime change given that it involved what many saw as an insufficient reckoning with the past, and thereby contributed to a feeling among many Poles that nothing had really changed.

Poland's relationship with the EU

Another area where we might be able to draw lessons from the Polish case is the country's approach to European integration and its relationship with the EU, as a candidate and subsequently as the largest of the post-communist new member states. Indeed, in recent years many commentators, particularly those supportive of the European integration process, have viewed Poland as a 'model' European state and polity. EU membership was the main foreign policy goal of all post-1989 Polish governments in the 1990s and early 2000s and Poland was in the vanguard of the post-communist states wanting to integrate into Western international structures, sometimes dubbed 'returning to Europe'. In recent years, this sense of Poland as a 'model European' was particularly evident since the current centrist Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska: PO)-led government took office in 2007 and made a conscious effort to locate Poland within the so-called European mainstream by putting the country at the forefront of the European integration project; in other words, trying to make Poland the 'new heart of Europe', as I have put it elsewhere.[12] For many commentators, the appointment of

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[12] See: Aleks Szczerbiak, *Poland Within the European Union: New Awkward Partner or New Heart of Europe*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2012.

Polish prime minister Donald Tusk as the new President of the EU Council in August 2014 was the crowning achievement of Poland's 'model' European status. Proponents of this school of thought also drew attention to the continuing high levels of popular support for EU membership in Poland at a time when the European project was often seen to be in crisis and rejected by European publics. In 2003, Poles overwhelmingly voted Yes to join the EU by a three-to-one margin[13] and since then, support for EU membership has, if anything, increased so that Poland is actually one of the most Europhile countries in terms of public opinion. For example, the CBOS polling agency, which has been tracking Polish public attitudes towards European integration since the country submitted its EU membership application in 1994, found that since accession around 80-90% of Poles were in favour of Polish EU membership with only 5-10% against.[14]

However, this idea of Poland as a 'model European', in terms of both (political and cultural) elite and public attitudes, masks the fact that there has actually been an extremely sharp debate within Poland about EU policy and approaches to European integration. In other words, there was always, and still remains, an underlying tension between a view - and many Europhiles' (self)-image - of Poland as the 'new Heart of Europe' and a certain awkwardness about the country's relationship with the EU; in other words, the idea of Poland as a UK-style 'new awkward partner'.[15] This sense of 'awkwardness' about Poland's relationship with the EU was particularly striking during the 2005-7 period, when the right-wing Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość: PiS) party led by Jarosław Kaczyński, who was prime minister between 2006-7, was in government and his twin brother Lech was President of Poland, from 2005 until he died tragically in an April 2010 air crash in Smolensk in Western Russia while travelling to commemorate the massacre of Polish officers killed by the Soviet NKVD in 1940. The Law and Justice-led governments comprised parties that were very critical of, and sometimes openly hostile towards, the EU and the European integration project, and willing to adopt an extremely assertive approach to defend what they perceived to be Poland's national interests. More generally, they were prepared to stand outside the dominant West European social liberal consensus; or, at least, the consensus that dominated the West European cultural and media establishment. Arguably, this period of 'awkwardness' in terms

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[13] See: Aleks Szczerbiak, 'History trumps government unpopularity: the June 2003 Polish EU accession referendum', *West European Politics*, Vol 27 No 4, September 2004, pp671-690.
[14] See, for example: CBOS, *10 lat czlonkostwa Polski w Unii Europejskiej,* CBOS: Warsaw, April 2014.
[15] See: *Poland Within the European Union*.

of Poland's relationship with the EU was just an episode, and the subsequent Civic Platform-led government represented a return to the normality of Poland as a 'model' European; a 'second return to Europe' as some commentators put it.[16] However, this ignores the fact that this 'awkwardness' was driven by the key tension at the heart of Poland's relationship with the EU which stems from the dissonance between Poland's size (both geographically and demographically) and its concomitant aspirations to be a major EU player – and, particularly, to play a regional leadership role - on the one hand, and its economic and (arguably linked) geo-political clout and capacity to deliver on this ambitious prospectus, on the other.[17] This tension is, I would argue, a fundamental one that did not go away following the election of the Civic Platform administration, has asserted itself on a number of occasions, and retains the capacity to do so. The Civic Platform-led government tried to finesse this tension by developing close relations with the large EU member states; in particular, by maintaining a close alliance with Germany. However, it is far from certain that this 'mainstreaming' strategy really was that successful. For example, given the largely symbolic and technical nature of the EU Council presidency job, Mr Tusk's appointment was, some critics argued, a greater success for him personally than for Poland as a country in terms of its efforts to influence and shape EU policy and priorities.[18]

Looking at the level of Polish public attitudes, it is also worth pausing for a moment to examine and un-pick *why* it is that Poles are so overwhelmingly pro-EU and supportive of European integration. Can we draw any broader lessons from this? Moreover, how long might this strong support for European integration continue? When Poles voted overwhelmingly to join the EU in 2003 there were basically two drivers of support for accession and they remain the two most important reasons explaining why there are continued high levels of support for Polish membership of the Union. Firstly, popular support for EU membership was rooted, in part at least, in the idea of accession to the Union as a 'civilisational choice': a symbolic re-uniting with a West that Poles had always considered

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[16] See, for example: Paweł Swieboda, *Poland's second return to Europe*, European Council for Foreign Relations Foreign Policy Brief, London: ECFR, 2007.

[17] For more on this see, for example: Piotr Semka, 'Powrót narodowcyh egoizmów', *Rzeczpospolita*, 13 March 2003; and Jacek Pawlicki, 'Między mocarstwem a wasalem', 19 August 2008 at http://www.archiwum.wyborcza.pl/Archiwum/1,0,5161062,20080819RP-DGW,MIEDZY_MOCARSTWEM_A_WASALEM,.html (Accessed 20 August 2008).

[18] See, for example: Łukasz Warzecha, 'Dla siebie, a nie dla Polski', 1 September 2014 at http://www.rp.pl/artykul/9157,1137303-Dla-siebie--a-nie-dla-Polski.html?referer=redpol (Accessed: 2 September 2014); Cf: Konrad Niklewicz, 'W imieniu Europy', 2 September 2014 at http://www.rp.pl/artykul/1137607.html (Accessed 2 September 2014).

themselves to be part of culturally and spiritually.[19] This notion of joining the EU as a civilizational choice was exemplified by a powerful campaign advert produced by the Polish government during the 2003 EU accession referendum campaign. This advert portrayed the signing of the EU accession treaty as the culmination of the chain of events stretching back to the election of Pope John Paul II in 1978, continuing with his famous 1979 return visit to Poland, the August 1980 Gdańsk shipyard strikes and formation of the Solidarity trade union, and then on to the 'semi-free' elections held in May-June 1989 that followed the round table negotiations and precipitated the collapse of communism in Poland, culminating in the signing of the 2003 Athens treaty that concluded the EU accession negotiations. This casting of EU accession as a civilizational choice made it difficult for Polish Eurosceptics to construct a really convincing alternative historical narrative because European integration appeared to go with the grain, and be an inescapable part of the logic, of the country's recent history and represent the culmination of the process of post-communist democratisation. It also constructed a powerful narrative in which 'Polish-ness' and 'European-ness' were seen as complementary identities and 'natural partners'. However, framing the country's accession to the EU in this way also meant that Poland could only be seen as a 'model' in cases where such integration into European structures appears (or can be presented as) an obvious and natural historical-civilizational choice; unlike in the UK, for example, where is perfectly possible to construct an equally (if not more) plausible (indeed, highly attractive) historical narrative that does include integration into the EU.

The second reason for continuing high levels of Polish support for the EU, alongside this rather abstract idea of European integration as a historical and civilizational choice, was the fact that the Union realised the modest expectations that Poles had of what it would actually deliver in concrete terms. Polish expectations of the immediate benefits of EU accession were actually quite modest and realistic (some would say pessimistic). The one thing that they did want and expect the EU to deliver on - and which it did (or at least some of its member states did) - was free movement of labour and access to Western labour markets; in other words, the opportunity to travel and work abroad.[20] This was notably manifested in mass Polish

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[19] This factor was evident, to a greater or lesser extent, among most of the post-communist states that joined the EU at this time, captured, as noted above, in the slogan 'returning to Europe'.

[20] See, for example: Aleks Szczerbiak, *Why do Poles love the EU and what do they love about it?: Polish attitudes towards European integration during the first three years of EU membership*, Sussex European Institute Working Paper No 98, Brighton: Sussex European Institute, November 2007; and *Poland Within the European Union*, pp109-138.

migration to the UK, one of the few EU states that did not introduce a transition period which the EU accession treaties allowed (of up to seven years) and gave relatively un-restricted access to its national labour market to workers from the post-communist states of central and Eastern Europe who, like Poland, joined the EU in 2004.

However, looking into the longer-term, there are problems with the fact that these two factors were the main drivers of high levels of public support for Polish EU membership. Firstly, in terms of public perceptions of the concrete benefits that EU membership brings to Poland, this meant that Polish Europhilia was highly contingent and could possibly come under strain as these benefits start to wear thin. This is particularly likely to be the case if the older EU member states ever cease to deliver Polish access to Western labour markets. In fact, in recent years West European governments have come under increased pressure to curb un-restricted access of East Europeans and others to their labour markets and welfare systems.[21] For sure, since Poland's accession to the EU, Poles also started to perceive other concrete benefits from EU membership, notably: access to EU regional funding, of which Poland is now the largest net recipient. However, this is also highly contingent and the 2014-20 EU budget round is probably the last one in which Poland will benefit so substantially. Perhaps even more importantly, the main apparent benefit of, or 'success' associated with, EU membership - the opportunity to be able to travel and work abroad, and thus secure access to West European labour markets - and concomitant mass emigration that is associated with it, is, arguably, perceived increasingly as a sign of weakness and 'failure' within Poland itself. In other words, the main concrete benefit from European integration is less obvious, particularly to the younger post-accession generation of Poles, and could become even less so in the future. Many of the post-enlargement generation either increasingly take this benefit of EU membership for granted or are frustrated by what they see as an invidious choice between: moving to take jobs abroad that fall well short of their abilities and aspirations on the one hand, or remaining in a country which they feel offers them few prospects for the future on the other.[22]

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[21] See, for example: Roxana Barbulescu, 'EU freedom of movement is coming under increasing pressure in the UK and other European states', July 4 2013 at http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2014/02/20/eu-freedom-of-movement-is-coming-under-increasing-pressure-in-the-uk-and-other-european-states/ (Accessed 10 October 2014).
[22] See, for example: Fundacja Energia dla Europy, *#2miliardy: Sposób na bezrobocie*. Fundacja Energia dla Europy: Warsaw, 2013.

At the same time, the idea of Europe as a 'civilisational choice', which posited the notion of Polish-ness and European-ness as complementary, has either become something that is (once again) taken for granted or has been negated by a feeling among many Poles that there is actually an increasing sense of cultural distinctiveness about Poland compared with Western Europe. This is particularly the case in terms of many Poles moral-cultural and civilizational values which are felt more-and-more to be rather distant from the social liberal-left values that increasingly dominate the West European cultural and media establishment. In other words, it not as obvious as it once was - and, arguably, becoming less so - that the 'civilizational choices' that are being made in other parts of the continent are the same ones that Poles want to make. Rather than being complementary, as posited originally by proponents of the idea of European integration as a 'civilisational choice', notions of what comprises Polish-ness and European-ness may actually start to increasingly clash. I will discuss this further when I look at the importance of religiosity and the role of the Catholic Church as an institution in shaping the Poland's contemporary politics.

This is obviously the case among the more socially and culturally conservative elements of Polish society; especially older, less well educated Poles who live in rural areas and make up the core of this ideological trend in Polish society. But it also resonates and ties in with broader trends and perceptions, particularly among the younger, post-enlargement generation. Arguably, many of the latter increasingly see the EU as the embodiment of both a stifling bureaucracy and political and cultural oppression, rather than symbolising the civilisation progress and socio-economic modernisation and solidarity that Poles were promised at the time of accession. A good indication of this sentiment among this younger generation was the high share of the vote for the economically libertarian but socially conservative and radically Eurosceptic Congress of the New Right (Kongres Nowej Prawicy: KPN) party led by Janusz Korwin-Mikke, a veteran eccentric of the Polish political scene. Mr Korwin-Mikke's party actually won the largest share of the vote among young voters in the May 2014 European Parliament in Poland.[23]

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[23] See: Aleks Szczerbiak, *Making sense of Poland's Congress of the New Right*, Polish Politics Blog, June 11 2014 at http://polishpoliticsblog.wordpress.com/2014/06/11/making-sense-of-polands-congress-of-the-new-right/ (Accessed: 11 June 2014).

The importance of the Catholic Church

The third thing that I would like to examine is the importance of the Catholic Church in contemporary Poland: both in terms of very high levels of religiosity among Poles (as measured by regular Church attendance) and the key role that the Church has played as an institution in contemporary Polish politics. This is a phenomenon that is critical to our understanding of the other two processes that I have discussed above, democratisation and the country's relationship with the EU, having played a key role in how they worked themselves out in Poland. At the same time, it also (arguably) highlights Poland's uniqueness, particularly in the context of an apparently increasingly secular Europe, and questions the extent to which the country can be seen as a 'model' for either normative emulation or from whom comparative analytical lessons can be drawn.

The Church played a pivotal mediating role in helping to broker the round table negotiations that, as we saw, were so critical in the process of democratic transition in Poland. Before that, it provided organisational and moral support to the Polish Solidarity movement and the democratic opposition, with Pope John Paul II playing a particularly notable role.[24] As a massive public expression of non-violent societal moral de-legitimation of the communist regime, Solidarity was, itself, often seen as a 'model' of how democratic opposition movements should organise themselves when taking on and confronting non-democratic regimes. Moreover, Solidarity is very difficult to grasp - indeed, probably makes no sense - without understanding the role of the Catholic Church and high levels of religiosity in Polish society.[25] It was this that made Solidarity a *sui generis* kind of social movement and quintessentially Polish phenomenon representing a very particular - indeed, arguably unique - constellation of political and social forces. It was the very public displays of religiosity - in the form of open-air masses and prayers, large numbers publicly practising the sacrament of penance, and numerous images and pictures of Pope John Paul II, the Virgin Mary and other Catholic religious symbols and icons - by the shipyard workers during the August 1980 strikes that led to the formation of the Solidarity, that was one of the reasons why elements of

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[24] See, for example: George Weigel, *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992
[25] See, for example: Maryjane Osa, 'Creating Solidarity: The Religious Foundations of the Polish Social Movement', *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol 11 No 2, Spring 1997, 339-365.

the Western secular left (even those who were not communist fellow-travellers) often felt confused and uneasy about how to respond to the movement.

The Catholic Church also made an important contribution to Polish debates on European integration but in a particularly interesting, complex and somewhat ambiguous (some would say contradictory) way. On the one hand, the Church (hierarchy, priests and laity) played a key role in supporting of Poland's integration into the EU; notably in (arguably) helping to secure a Yes vote for EU accession in the June 2003 referendum. The most striking example of this was John Paul II's dramatic intervention in the EU accession referendum debate when he coined the slogan 'From the Union of Lublin (which united Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the Sixteenth Century creating one of the largest states in Europe) to the European Union', thereby re-inforcing the message that Polish EU membership represented a civilisational choice of historic proportions.[26] On the other hand, Poland was distinctive (and possibly unique) in seeing the emergence of a religiously-inspired Eurosceptic movement - the organisational network and media conglomerate surrounding the Catholic nationalist broadcaster Radio Maryja - as part of a more general Eurosceptic critique that associated the EU with Western secularism and social liberalism.[27] This was striking given that, in Western Europe, politically organised Catholicism had traditionally manifested itself in Christian Democratic parties that were associated strongly with support for the European integration project.[28]

What explains these complex and contradictory attitudes towards European integration and how are they - and, more broadly, the role played by the Catholic Church in Poland - likely to develop in the future? At the heart of the Polish Catholic Church's schizophrenia on the European issue was uncertainty as to whether certain processes and phenomena that were increasingly evident in Western Europe, and about which the Church felt deeply uneasy, were

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[26] See: Mikołaj Lizut, 'Od Unii Lubelskiej do Unii Europejskiej', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 20 May 2003; Jacek Moskwa, 'Europa potrzebuje Polski, Polska potrzebuje Europy', *Rzeczpospolita*, 20 May 2003; and Adam Szostkiewicz, Adam, 'Papież i kuglarze', *Polityka*, 31 May 2003.

[27] See, for example: Krzysztof Zuba, *Polski eurosceptycyzm i eurorealizm*. Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego. 2006, pp254-261.

[28] The apparent lack of a successful Christian Democratic party in Poland is another paradox that I have explored in collaborative work with my former Sussex colleague, Tim Bale. See: Tim Bale and Aleks Szczerbiak, 'Why Is There No Christian Democracy in Poland - and Why Should We Care?' *Party Politics*, Vol 14 No 4, July 2008, pp479-500.

linked to the European integration process or not.[29] These included processes such as secularisation, consumerism, individualism, the sexual revolution, changing attitudes towards individual morality, the rights and place in society of sexual minorities and the implications this has for traditional models and notions of the family; together with the threat to what John Paul II termed the 'culture of life' posed by the increasing availability and acceptability of artificial contraception, in vitro fertilisation, abortion and euthanasia. These processes were felt to be endemic to Western societies and to pose a formidable threat to the future of European civilisation. In other words, the key to how Polish Catholic Church's attitude towards European integration will develop in the future depends on the extent to which the EU as an organisation is, on the one hand, felt to be contributing to and strengthening these negative (in the eyes of the Church, at least) processes through its institutions and policies, or whether, on the other hand, the European integration project and these other civilizational processes are perceived to be developing on separate tracks. If the former is felt to be the case, this is likely to lead to greater hostility towards and suspicion of the European integration process on the part of the Polish Catholic Church, if it is the latter then there is likely to be greater openness towards the European project.

It is an open question, of course, what role the Polish Catholic Church will play in the future and whether the country will buck the trend of secularism that has swept across much of the continent (and which many feared European integration would accelerate) and maintain high levels of religiosity, with the Church remaining a key political actor as a continuing feature of 'Polish exceptionalism'. In that sense, Poland matters as a fascinating laboratory to test whether secularisation is an inevitable trend in Europe or if religion can continue to remain a powerful force of attraction in at least one modern European state. Clearly the role of the Church in Poland is now much more contested than it was in the past,[30] and there is evidence of some 'privatisation' of religious practices in Poland with: a steady, continuous decline in Church attendance during the last two decades,[31] and Polish religiosity being, arguably, more reflexive and culturally-rooted than spiritually deep. There is also plenty of evidence pointing towards a dissonance between Church teachings and the attitudes and behaviour of the

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[29] See: *Polski eurosceptycyzm i eurorealizm*, pp249-250.

[30] See, for example: Sabrina P. Ramet, 'The Catholic Church in Post-Communist Poland: Polarization, Privatization, and Decline in Influence' in Sabrina P. Ramet, ed. *Religion and Politics in Post-Socialist Central and Southeastern Europe: Challenges since 1989*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2014, pp25-52.

[31] See: Janusz Czapiński and Tomasz Panek, eds, *Diagnoza Społeczna 2013: Warunki i jakość życia Polaków.* Warsaw: Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej. 2013, p255.

faithful on issues such as sexual morality, birth control and in vitro fertilisation, with an increase in the West European phenomenon of what might be termed 'cafeteria Catholicism', with (nominal) Catholics picking and choosing the bits of Church teaching that they like.[32] On the other hand, Polish Church attendance remains relatively high, with around 40% of the population attending at least once a week,[33] and attitudes towards the Church are still something that can be a source of political mobilisation.[34] Moreover, the fact that many Poles remain 'culturally' Catholic, with Catholicism remaining strongly bound up with a sense of Polish-ness, is significant, together with the fact that, even if they are not always faithful to the Catholic Church's teaching, Poles are relatively socially and culturally conservative compared with other Europeans. Indeed there are actually some counter-trends away from 'cafeteria Catholicism' in Poland, notably changes in attitudes towards abortion, against which opposition hardened considerably since the early 1990s when public opinion was more evenly divided on the issue.[35]

(How) Does Poland matter?

So Poland matters, the question is *how* does it matter? Does it provide us with a model for understanding the democratisation and European integration processes both analytically and normatively? Or is the situation so complex and problematic when one looks beneath the surface, and there are simply too many unique elements that make it difficult to draw meaningful lessons and comparisons from the Polish case? Ostensibly, we can indeed find elements of Poland's experience of democratisation and European integration that could serve as a model, both analytically, as something from which we can draw comparative lessons, and in normative terms. The way that the country extracted itself from communist rule means that Poland is often seen as a model of a peaceful democratic transition process that has ensured that democracy is embedded, with no significant actors, including representatives of the former ruling elite, wanting a return to the *status quo ante* or opposing the new liberal democratic order. From the perspective of supporters of European integration,

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[32] See: Janusz Mariański, *Katoliczyzm polski. Czagłość i zmiana. Studium socjologiczne*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2011; and CBOS, *Religijność a zasady moralne*. Warsaw: CBOS. February 2014, pp12-16.
[33] See: *Diagnoza Społeczna 2013*, p255.
[34] See, for example: Krzysztof Jasiewicz, '"The Past Is Never Dead": Identity, Class, and Voting Behavior in Contemporary Poland, *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol 23 No 4, November 2009, pp491-508.
[35] See, for example: CBOS, *Opinie o prawie aborcyjnym*, CBOS: Warsaw, 2012.

Poland can also be seen a 'model' European both in terms of: its political (and cultural) elites who have located themselves within the European mainstream, and the high levels of popular support for EU membership, rooted (in part at least) in the idea of European integration as a 'civilisational choice' in which notions of European-ness and Polish-ness are seen as complementary.

However, while the round table negotiations may be seen as a model of successful transition, the nature of the Polish elite bargain, which meant that transitional justice was delayed, contributed to a feeling among many Poles that nothing had really changed. This highlights the risks associated with attempting to dis-enfranchise society from the process of regime change. Indeed, the recurrence of concerns about transitional justice, particularly the issues of lustration and access to communist security service files, suggest that there are problems with 'forgiving and forgetting' as a model for new democracies in terms of dealing with old regime elites, that may be indicative of a wider unease and concerns about the quality of the post-communist democracy that is emerging in Poland. Moreover, the idea of Poland as a 'model European' conflicts with an 'awkwardness' that there is in Poland's relationship with the EU which is driven by an ill-fit between the country's size and aspirations, on the one hand, and its economic and geo-political clout on the other. Such 'awkwardness' has asserted itself on a number of occasions and has the capacity to do so again. This paradox is also potentially evident when one looks at public attitudes towards the EU, with Polish Europhilia being highly contingent. The main benefits from European integration are now less obvious to a younger, post-accession generation (and likely to become even less so) and some of these benefits - such as the ability to access West European labour markets and concomitant mass emigration - are perceived increasingly as signs of weakness and failure rather than success. The civilisational choice which posited the idea of Polish-nesss and European-ness as complementary identities is not as obvious as it once was and, again, arguably becoming increasingly less so. Finally, the Catholic Church and high (and apparently relatively enduring) levels of societal religiosity are something that is unique to Poland and made all of these processes work themselves out differently, playing a key role in the democratisation process and in debates on European integration; although whether this will continue to be a feature of 'Polish exceptionalism' in the future remains an open question. In other words, the

role of the Catholic Church highlights the fact that there is also a uniqueness in the way that these processes have worked themselves out in Poland.

So the answer to the question 'Does Poland provide a model for democratic transition and European integration (in the analytical and normative sense)?' is, to quote a Polish Archbishop when asked whether the Catholic Church supported Polish accession to the EU: 'Yes but, with an emphasis on the but'.[36] And it is the 'but' as much as the 'Yes' that makes the Polish case interesting and important to understand if we want to make sense of contemporary Europe. Ironically, it is precisely this uniqueness that means we can draw insights from and learn about other cases by looking at the Polish one.

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[36] See: 'Nie zamykać polskich katolików pod kloszem, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 15 April 2002.

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