Core and Periphery, North and South Europe? The Discursive Construction of European Identities in Poland During the Euro Crisis

by

Charlotte Galpin

Doctoral Researcher, Institute for German Studies
Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham, UK

Scholarship Holder, Studienstiftung des Abgeordnetenhauses von Berlin
Otto-Suhr Institute, Free University Berlin
cag936@bham.ac.uk

Paper presented at the conference the ECPR Graduate Student Conference, University of Innsbruck, Austria, 4th July 2014

DRAFT

Abstract
This paper outlines some of the empirical findings from the Poland case study of my thesis entitled ‘Euro Crisis…Identity Crisis? The Single Currency and the Discursive Construction of European Identities in Germany, Ireland and Poland’. It outlines a theoretical framework to the construction of crisis and identity using constructivist/discursive institutionalist conceptions of change and applies it to the Polish case study. It finds that the crisis is understood through the lens of existing discourses on Europe in Poland, creating a new North/South division but reinforcing the longer-standing core-periphery dynamic of Poland’s ‘return to Europe’ discourse of European identity. The presentation of this paper will include comparisons with the Irish case study, which also demonstrates a Core/Periphery dynamic and concern about sovereignty.
Introduction

‘Identities…become salient and are fought over in particular historical moments, especially in times of crisis…Ever since the end of the cold war…Europe has been facing identity crises’ (Risse, 2010:2).

In 2010, the economic turmoil in the Eurozone plunged the EU into its biggest ever crisis, a crisis not purely of economics, but also of politics, institutions, and trust (Haughton, 2012; Falkner, 2013). This paper examines the impact of the “Eurozone crisis” on the discursive construction of European identities in the European public sphere, using Poland as a case study. It forms one part of a wider PhD thesis which compares Germany, Ireland and Poland. It argues that the Eurozone crisis has not constituted a crisis of European identity, demonstrating instead that the development of European identities is path dependent. While there are some changes and new meanings given to the idea of ‘Europe’, particularly in Germany and Poland, the Eurozone crisis can primarily be used as a lens through which to view existing national discourses on Europe, rather than having acted a catalyst for dramatic discursive change.

This paper will present the theoretical framework for conceptualising identity change at a time of crisis followed by initial empirical findings about the crisis and European identity in Poland through an analysis of political speeches of Polish elites and reporting of the crisis in Polish newspapers. It will argue that crises are endogenised into existing identity discourses by national elites and the media. In Poland, the crisis is framed through the lens of existing discourses on European identity – the ‘return to Europe’ and oppositional ‘Polish sovereignty’ discourses and that the crisis presented a window of opportunity for pro-European Polish elites to confirm Poland’s role as an active and committed European country. In the process, however, new divisions between North and South and older dividing lines between Core and Periphery are reinforced. Firstly, this paper will outline the theoretical framework relating to identity and crisis. Secondly, it will highlight the main elements of European identity discourses in Poland and Poland’s experience of the crisis, along with the research methods used. Thirdly, it will outline the empirical findings in relation to the crisis in Poland.

Identity and the Construction of Crisis – A Theoretical Framework

The research combines a social constructivist approach to European identities with constructivist/discursive institutionalist conceptualisations of crises and ideational change in order to better understand the processes of change and continuity in identity discourses during a so-called ‘critical juncture’. It considers European identities to be constructed through communication in the public sphere (Schmidt, 2011a; Risse, 2010). These identities are inherently
multiple and context-dependent: there are multiple EUs, multiple Europes, and multiple understandings of what it means to be European (see also Waever, 2009:168), but they come in ‘national colours’ (Marcussen et al., 1999; see also Risse, 2010:85). Instead of European identity subsuming national identity, European identity is incorporated into the national identity to create a *Europeanised* nation-state identity. According to Marcussen et al., norms, values and identities in a new institution become internalised or embedded in a particular context if they ‘resonate with existing identity constructions embedded in national institutions and political cultures’ (1999:617). Part of the process of identity construction is the construction of the Other. The Other identifies who is considered a legitimate member of the community, and where the boundaries of Europe lie. An Other can be both ‘external’ and ‘internal’, so called ‘out-group[s] from within’ (Risse, 2010:53). Internal Others are ‘those that belong to the same political entity with the ingroup’ and the external Others as ‘those that form a separate political unit’ (Triandafyllidou, 1998:600). Following Triandafyllidou, then, an internal Other may constitute not just ethnic minorities and immigrant communities within the nation state, but also other EU member states (1998:601) or indeed groups of member states.

However, what happens to identity during a crisis is an under-theorised part of the literature on European identity and there is relatively little understanding of the discursive processes taking place. In particular, the existing literature on critical junctures assumes that crises are exogenous to identity and a particular social context. Defined as ‘perceived crisis situations occurring from complete policy failures, but also triggered by external events’, Marcussen et al. argue that a critical juncture can destabilise existing European and national identities if a critical juncture does not ‘resonate’ with the existing identity (1999:616). Given the path-dependence of discourses at a time of stability, the critical juncture may allow actors, such as the political elite and mass media, to introduce new ideas and reconstruct identities. However, a critical juncture will not necessarily lead to change. Following Marcussen et al., critical junctures are only critical junctures ‘in so far as they are perceived and constructed as such’, meaning that a crisis may actually reinforce rather than challenge identity depending on the social or political context (1999:630). Furthermore, whether or not significant change occurs depends on context and what Horak describes as ‘institutional legacies’, that is, norms and rules in place over a long period of time which are not entirely washed away in a period of crisis (2007:26). These existing ‘legacies’ may affect the extent to which a critical juncture can or will effect change.

The problem with this literature, however, is that it conceptualises the crisis as an exogenous shock. However, we need to consider the manner in which crises are interpreted in political and
social contexts in order to understand prospects for identity change. Marcussen et al. argue that a crisis must be perceived a crisis, but this still does not tell us much about the processes of change – what change is possible, and how any change occurs. The particular interpretations of the crisis, and how these interpretations clash or resonate with existing identities, determine whether identity change is likely. The construction of crisis therefore becomes important; as Hay argues, crises are ‘constituted in and through narrative’ (1996:254). Risse maintains that crises and critical junctures ‘are not “objective” phenomena; they have to be perceived and constructed in such a way that they actually challenge social identities’ (2010:33). Indeed, Widmaier et al. argue that ‘wars or crises cannot be defined simply in terms of their material effects, but that agents’ intersubjective understandings must first give meaning to such material changes’ (2007:748).

Just as there are multiple and competing discourses on Europe and European identity, then, so are there multiple and competing understandings of the crisis. Social and political actors give meaning to crises and determine the way in which they are understood in the public sphere. Risse argues that critical junctures can create ‘windows of opportunity for elites to construct new narratives and to Europeanize national identities’ (2010:100) According to Schmidt, actors have ‘foreground discursive abilities’ which help them to renegotiate identities at a time of crisis, to ‘think outside the institutions in which they continue to act, critique, communicate, and deliberate about such institutions’ (2011b:56). However, this possibility of strategic action is limited by the discursive context in which they act. Following Hay, rival interpretations of the crisis ‘compete in terms of their ability to find resonance’ with people’s experiences in the particular social context (1996:255). Actors are constrained by their social, political and institutional contexts which affects the way the crisis is constructed (Widmaier et al., 2007:755). Leaders ‘evoke frames that resonate within the respective national cultures’ (Crespy and Schmidt, 2014:9). Although Widmaier et al. note that elite constructions of these crises can be rejected or contested by the wider public (2007:755), this nevertheless means that the prospects for dramatic change at a time of crisis are relatively limited, as Schmidt argues, ‘during the moment of crisis, the mechanisms of change are often understood as incremental, involving bricolage or layering of one new idea onto the other’ (2014:198). Examining the construction of the crisis is therefore vital to understanding processes of identity change.

The question is to what extent do the different understandings of the crisis influence identity construction? Here the politics of blaming (Ntampoudi, 2013) and the attribution of responsibility become important (Crespy and Schmidt, 2014:11). Just as crises have to clash with existing ideas to change institutionally embedded policy norms, then, so crises have to challenge
identities. The different constructions of the crisis have different implications for identity, as Widmaier et al. note, ‘crises are moments where elite and mass public agents attempt to persuade each other over “who they are” and “what they want”’ (2007:756). These ideas about the crisis are necessary for understanding how identities would be stabilised and potentially reconstructed. With regards to the 2008 financial crisis, Froud et al. argue that ‘as long as no story wins out, group identity, institutional affiliation, and crude calculations of interest become more important as the new polity is “turf wars” writ large’ (2012:50). Identity is therefore constructed through the competing crisis frames.

As mentioned above, Marcussen et al. describe a critical juncture as originating from ‘policy failure’ or ‘external events’. Hay argues that ‘crises are representations and hence ‘constructions’ of failure’ (Hay, 1996:255). Furthermore, Morin and Carta maintain that ‘for this ideational punctuated equilibrium model to be valid […] one must assume that crises are exogenous shocks rather than endogenous’ (Morin and Carta, 2014:124), meaning the crisis must be externalised. However, these ideas must be considered in greater detail to fully understand the identity dynamics at play. Firstly, the crisis must be seen at a European level for it to have an effect on European identities. That is, it must be a European crisis rather than a national crisis, or a European crisis as well as a national crisis. If the crisis is not perceived as being at the European level, the potential effect on Europe discourses is going to be minimal. The policy failure or ‘shock’ has to take place at the European level in order to disrupt European identity discourses; it has to be a question of relevance or salience for Europe.

However, a crisis taking place at the European level is not enough to assume change. A European crisis may reinforce or challenge existing discourses depending on the particular crisis construction. This can be understood with reference to the external and internal Othering practices. Triandafyllidou argues that outside groups only become salient ‘significant others’ during ‘periods of social, political or economic crisis’ (1998:603). They play a role in overcoming the crisis ‘because it unites the people in front of a common enemy, it reminds them of ‘who we are’ and emphasizes that ‘we are different and unique” and thereby acting as the ‘lever for the transition towards a new identity’ (1998:603). As Lieberman notes, Othering of an out-group at a time of crisis helps ‘to promote in-group cohesion’ and help ‘members of the in-group to view their fates as collectively pooled’ (2009:110). In his discussion on the development of taxation policy, Liebermann argues that the socially constructed perception of risk is important for determining social boundaries (2009:117). He finds that the ‘the stronger the collective identity
and the weaker the lines of internal division, the more likely it is that citizens will sacrifice as long as the benefits of that sacrifice can be credibly restricted to group members’ (2009:111).

The crisis itself may therefore play an Othering role. If the crisis is constructed as an external crisis presenting a threat to Europe, Europeans and European institutions it may be read and understood as a common European experience or question of ‘collective fate’, reinforcing existing identity discourses on Europe. Where the crisis creates internal divisions (such as if the EU or an EU member state can be blamed), a challenge to European identities may emerge. If blame is attributed to Greece, for example, it may result in its exclusion from the European community (see e.g. Ntampoudi, 2013:11-12; Crespy and Schmidt, 2014). However, following the resonance argument, crises are constructed in such a way that they resonate with the respective social and political contexts. Existing identities and ideas might determine these constructions and the attribution of blame. For the crisis to be understood as a common European crisis, therefore, it is likely that there is some sense of European identity already in existence. Lieberman notes that ‘feelings of collective identity are malleable and may be shaped by the precipitating crises that motivate initial calls to sacrifice, but preexisting boundary institutions are still likely to shape the interpretation of objective dangers as posing significant risks or not’ (2009:110). The interpretation of the crisis is therefore to a certain extent defined by existing boundaries – and the perception of the meaning of the crisis as posing a threat to the community is defined by those existing identities. The different constructions of the crisis and potential for identity change can therefore be summarised in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin of the crisis</th>
<th>Exogenous European crisis</th>
<th>Endogenous European crisis</th>
<th>Exogenous national crisis</th>
<th>Endogenous national crisis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is at risk?</td>
<td>Threat to existence of EU institutions/EU member states caused crisis</td>
<td>Threat to national institutions/interests caused crisis</td>
<td>Threat to national institutions/interests</td>
<td>National institutions caused crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible effect on identities</td>
<td>Identity reinforced</td>
<td>European identity change possible?</td>
<td>European identities unaffected National identities reinforced</td>
<td>European identities unaffected National identity change possible?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Poland, European Identity and the Euro Crisis

Historical experience strongly defines Poland’s European policy and European identity, as Haughton emphasises, the past defines the political landscape in post-communist countries (2012:257). There are two main discourses on European identity in Poland – the ‘return to Europe’ discourse and the nationalist discourse on Polish sovereignty. Poland’s move towards EU membership took place within the so-called ‘return to Europe’ discourse following the fall of communism. EU accession saw Poland return to what it had always viewed as its cultural or spiritual home in Western Europe (Kundera, 1984). After the communist period, the country was left economically weak with underdeveloped democratic and governmental institutions (Góra and Mach, 2010:225). After 1989, the country aimed at a fast modernisation and wanted to ‘overcome its marginalization and ‘return to Europe’ – in other words, join the more dynamic part of Europe it has always wanted to belong to but never succeeded in attaining’ (Jedlicki, 1993:84). Not just focused on the economic imbalance with Western Europe, then, this idea related to a return to the perceived ‘cultural’ home of Poland in Western/Central Europe present in Poland over centuries. According to Jedlicki, it re-articulates a ‘perpetual’ return to Europe which has been part of the Polish discourse for a millennium. Here, the ‘east’ functions as an Other for Europeanised identities in Poland.

This idea of Europe reveals an ‘inferiority complex’ developed over the course of its history related to slower economic modernization and a perceived lack of modernity in relation to the ‘civilised’ Western Europe (Törnquist-Plewa, 2002:219). The insecurity of Poland’s position in Europe was also related to the experience of the three partitions as well as the years it spent excluded from Western Europe behind the Iron Curtain (Kundera, 1984). These ideas have dominated the Polish relationship with Europe, leaving it feeling like the ‘unwanted child’ (Törnquist-Plewa, 2002). Central to this is the notion that Poland lies on Europe’s periphery, which has resulted in a ‘lack in self-confidence as to the strength of the native culture’ (Törnquist-Plewa, 2002:229). This has been particularly palpable in the post-communist period, which Jedlicki argues, ‘deepened the civilizational gap in Europe’ (1993:84). During this time, Europe became ‘a symbol for prosperity, freedom, a dream and an unreachable goal’ (Törnquist-Plewa, 2002:235). European identity has therefore been closely linked to Polish identity particularly in the post-communist period – the stronger and more secure Poland’s position in Europe, the stronger Polish identity becomes.

However, there is another discourse which presents the EU as a threat to Polish sovereignty and the Polish nation. These are related in particular to the legacy of Poland’s
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communist experience (Sidorenko, 2008:100), as well as to a longer history of ‘victimization’ by foreign powers (Risse, 2010:77). According to Sidorenko, the populist nationalist discourse in the post-communist period is related to two conceptions of patriotism – a Romantic notion of national unity as a ‘spiritual entity’ (rather than as a political or communal one) (2008:106) and the notion that ‘sovereignty of the nation must come before the liberty of its citizens’ (2008:107). These ideas are related not just to the experience not just of the communist era but also of the partitions, when Poland was carved up between Prussia, Austria-Hungary and Russia for a period of 125 years. Finally sovereign after having finally ‘paid an enormous price for its freedom’ (Risse, 2010:79), this is an exclusive nationalist narrative which ‘connects Poland’s fate as a victim of European powers, namely Germany and Russia, and its heroic struggles for freedom, understood as independence and sovereignty’ (Risse, 2010:80). Europe therefore does not resonate with Polish identity here at all; instead, Europe represents a threat to the new, sovereign Polish nation which needs to be defended from new foreign powers. The following table outlines the elements of national discourses on Europe in Poland and the two other case studies, Germany and Ireland.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National discourses on Europe</th>
<th>What is Europe? Multiple Europes</th>
<th>Who are the Europeans? The Role of the Other</th>
<th>What is Europe for? The Construction of Interests</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Germany</strong></td>
<td>Post-war consensus – Europe of peace, democracy. Multilateralism</td>
<td>Nazi past, WW2 -&gt; Germany’s peaceful role</td>
<td>European Germany – German interests as European interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ireland</strong></td>
<td>Economy – Celtic Tiger Irish sovereignty – fulfilment of Irish nation through Europe</td>
<td>Britain – colonial past -&gt; EU secures independence from Britain</td>
<td>Primacy of Irish economy and Irish nation -&gt; EU as instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poland</strong></td>
<td>Return to Europe, post-communism, Poland’s rightful place in (Western)Europe, vs. Europe as foreign power, threat to Polish sovereignty</td>
<td>Russia and the ‘barbaric East’ – long history of Russian occupation Germany, Brussels -&gt; Polish sovereignty</td>
<td>Polish interests in Europe -&gt; Poland as protector of West – European/Polish interests Polish sovereignty Poland as poor member state</td>
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Poland’s experience of the crisis and its role as President of the Council of the EU in 2011 might lead us to expect a shift in these long-standing perceptions in Poland of being economically underdeveloped at the ‘margins’ of Europe or as the victim of foreign oppressors. In contrast to
Ireland and Germany, Poland is not a member of the Eurozone and has a very different experience of the crisis. In May 2009, Prime Minister Donald Tusk announced Poland was the ‘green island of growth’; in the red map of Europe. Indeed, Poland was the only country not to fall into recession after the economic crisis in 2008/2009. Despite the fact that Poland has not escaped an economic downtown entirely, it is worth asking what effect this relative economic success may have had on Polish discourses on Europe. As Kaczynski suggests, Poland was ‘no longer a poor irritating cousin everybody had to deal with; the message was of a new Poland with a solid economy, political responsibility and social stability’ (2011:23). Given long-standing economic differences between East and West Europe and the importance of this to Poland’s “return to Europe” discourse, we might ask whether Polish elites and the media consider it to have finally “returned”, whether it has overcome its long-standing ‘inferiority complex’ of being at the political and economic margins of Europe. For example, to what extent is Poland positioned within the core of the EU by its elites and media, rather than marginalised at the periphery?

CEE countries in general experienced a very sharp downturn from 2007 onwards, much earlier in the crisis than the rest of the continent (Jacoby, 2014:53). The global crisis precipitated a ‘more severe reversal of pre-crisis output trends than any other region of the world economy’ (Connolly, 2012:64), and in so doing demonstrating the ‘high degree of eastern dependence on western fortunes’ (Epstein and Jacoby, 2014:1-2). Nevertheless, despite a number of economic problems such as increasing unemployment and high public debt, Poland was in a relatively good position to weather the crisis. Poland ‘enjoyed the status of having been the most successful economy after the outbreak of the financial crisis, not only in Central and Eastern Europe’ (Rae, 2013:411). In 2009, when all other EU member states fell into recession, Poland’s economy grew by 1.6 percent (Kaczyński, 2011:24) – a significant slowing down of the economy, but growth nonetheless. In his now famous ‘green island’ speech, Prime Minister Tusk then of course seized upon this statistic. By 2010, the Polish economy ‘continued to grow at a high speed of 3.9 percent compared with the EU average of 2.1 percent’ (Kaczyński, 2011:24). Poland was therefore insulated from the worst of the crisis and experienced living standards ‘more in line with the Western European average’ (Rae, 2013:411-412). Given its relative success during the economic crisis, then, we might predict that the so-called ‘inferiority complex’ has eased and there is a greater sense of security of Poland’s place in Europe and its progress in ‘catching up’ with Western Europe. The empirical sections will show that, contrary to these expectations, the
crisis is endogenised and interpreted according to existing Polish identity discourses, especially the ‘return to Europe’ discourse.

Methods

This paper presents initial, preliminary empirical findings from the Polish case study of my broader PhD project which looks at the effect of the Euro crisis on European identities in Germany, Ireland and Poland. The paper draws on data from the two most widely-read broadsheets, representing both the conservative and liberal-leaning sections of the press, and the most widely read tabloid newspaper in Poland: Gazeta Wyborcza (GW); Rzeczpospolita (RZ) and Fakt. In addition to this, political speeches during these time periods by heads of government and high-level government ministers as well as the main opposition leaders were analysed. In order to limit the volume of data inevitable with a study involving three cases and different levels of discourse it was necessary to select specific points in time at which to conduct my analysis. The snapshots in time involve key moments during the crisis when EU policies would have been particularly salient in the public sphere. The first time period is the end April - early May 2010, the period spanning the Eurozone meeting on 7th May at which leaders agreed to the first Greek bailout as well as other economic coordination plans to help the Euro. The second is the end of November- December 2011, the period beginning with Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski’s Berlin speech and spanning the European Council summit on 8th/9th December which saw the agreement of the ‘fiscal compact’ between twenty-six EU member states. A frame analysis of the texts was conducted in order to identify the discursive elements which constitute discourses on the Eurozone crisis. A frame can be defined as ‘an interpretive scheme used to make sense of the “world out there”’ (Risse and Van de Steeg, 2003:5), helping to ‘render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action’ (Benford and Snow, 2000:614). Frame analysis serves to identify the various meanings and interpretations of the crisis and highlight the effect these interpretations might have on understandings of Europe.

Framing of the crisis

From Greek Crisis to European Crisis – The Threat of Poland’s Marginalisation in Europe

Between 2010 and 2011 there was a noticeable shift in the perception of the crisis in Poland, something which was less clear in Germany and Ireland. The framing of the crisis shifted from
being a crisis on the margins of Europe, when it was primarily viewed as a (self-inflicted) Greek debt crisis, to a crisis about Poland’s marginalisation in Europe, when it was a framed as a broad European institutional crisis. How did it become an ‘external’ crisis located in Greece, where Poland is positioned within the (Northern) European core, to a crisis about Poland on the margins, touching on question about its identity and place in Europe? This section will argue that in 2010 in particular, the framing of the crisis as a Greek or Southern European ‘external’ crisis places Poland within the virtuous ‘Northern European’ core that has been identified in the German case study. By 2011, however, it had primarily become a broader European crisis that became an identity issue for Poland as the country faced political marginalisation as a non-Eurozone member state during its EU presidency, bringing Poland’s place in the EU core into question. This reinforced existing discourses on European identity in Poland, in particular the polarisation between the “return to Europe” and the nationalist sovereignty discourse. Altogether, therefore, findings show that the crisis touches on fundamental questions about Poland in Europe and the best way to ensure the country’s strength and security.

Greek and Southern European Crisis – Poland in the Northern European Core

The first framing of the crisis in Poland is the crisis as a Greek or Southern European crisis. This was particularly the case in 2010 when the focus was on the Greek sovereign debt crisis and EU bailout, but was also present in 2011 when Poland agreed to contribute to the European Stability Mechanism (ESM). This frame endogenises the crisis within the EU and leads to a re-drawing of the boundaries of Europe through the creation of a ‘Northern European’ community of ‘good Europeans’ who act with economic discipline. This is also an important frame in the German case study, which I have discussed elsewhere (Galpin, 2014). In Poland, this frame reflects, on the one hand, a self-perception of Poland as part of the ‘virtuous North’, where the crisis is viewed as a self-inflicted crisis by the Greeks who have ‘lived beyond their means’, engaged in corrupt and economically irresponsible behaviour. On the other hand, particularly in 2011, there is a perception of economic marginalisation in Europe. Despite Poland’s relatively successful weathering of the crisis, there is still awareness that Poland is one of the poorer EU member states and more deserving of aid than the ‘rich’ Greeks. Outrage is expressed particularly in the tabloid press that a poor country such as a Poland is expected to subsidise the Greek ‘life of luxury’.

In May 2010, there is a clear perception that the crisis will impact on the whole of Europe and Poland together (Markiewicz, 2012:21). This sentiment is evident in the media reports of the
crisis which emphasise the negative consequence for the Greek crisis in the Eurozone for the Polish economy. However, the causes of the crisis are ‘external’, located on the ‘margins’ of Europe. This leads to the Othering of Greece and ‘southern Europe’ in a similar way to that seen in Germany, where Poland positions itself within a core Northern European community. Firstly, the crisis is experienced as a common European experience where Poland suffers alongside the Eurozone. This means that Poland experiences the crisis along with the rest of ‘Northern’ Europe against a common threat. Despite being outside the Eurozone and not in recession, the złoty is vulnerable to market confidence and dropped in value in the wake of the Greek crisis. It seems the crisis is, for this reason, experienced jointly with the Eurozone and experienced as a common crisis, particularly in GW. For example Poland is positioned alongside the Eurozone in appeals for action to save the Euro. There is a sense of common experience of a threat to the Polish and Eurozone economies:

“Please God, save the euro”: it seemed that there will not be any help for the euro and the złoty. On Thursday the European Central Bank did not decide to protect the value of the euro. Its price fell further […] There was the hope that the European currency would not be left to its fate (‘Maciej Samcik, GW, 8th May 2010, p. 15).

There is a threat to the Polish economy, with the Polish currency, the złoty, weakening alongside the Euro, with the understanding that the crisis has been caused solely by the crisis in Greece:

The depreciation of the złoty is an effect of the collapse of Greece’s finances. Foreign investors are afraid that the financial crisis will spread to other weaker Eurozone countries, e.g. Spain and Portugal. Countries not in the Euro but tied economically to the Eurozone might also suffer. Investors are therefore liquidating their investments in the European currency, bonds and shares not just in countries directly afflicted by the crisis, that is, Greece, Spain and Portugal, but also, for example, right here in Poland (‘Złoty zjeżdża po równi pochyłej przez… Grecję’, GW, Tomasz Prusek, 6th May 2010, p.23).

‘Poles think that since we don’t have the euro, we won’t pay for the Greeks’ problems. Yet our currency is already strongly associated with the European one and when that is in trouble, the złoty will weaken fast’ (‘Euroland: ekskluzywny klub bez wykidał’ RZ, Paweł Jabłoński, 6th May 2010).

Whereas there is a sense of common experience with the Eurozone, the blame for Poland and
the Eurozone’s problems is placed squarely with the Greeks, which excludes them discursively from Europe and creates a common threat for northern Europe. GW talks of the ‘Greek disease’ where the country needs an IMF/EU bailout ‘without which the indebted country will go bankrupt’, maintaining that it is ‘the careless effect of successive Greek governments which falsified financial statistics’ (‘Grecka Choroba’, Bartosz T. Wieliński, GW, 6th May 2010, p.1). Another article argues that Europe has been ‘taken hostage by Greece’ but maintains that ‘regardless of the harsh rhetoric, especially from Germany’s side which looks unsympathetically at the Greeks living beyond their means at Europe’s expense as it cuts its own social programmes, alternatives for the aid package were less digestible than the package itself’ (‘Grecki poker czy domino?’ GW, Andrzej Lubowski, 10th May 2010, p.28). The EU therefore had little choice but to pay for a Greek bailout given the potentially catastrophic consequences for the Eurozone if Greece were to default on its debts. This framing of the crisis excludes Greece from the European community, which has been forced to take responsibility for the rescue of Greece. This frame also reflects Poland’s inclusion in the Northern European community as identified in the German case, which relates to ordoliberal values of fiscal discipline, economic responsibility and competitiveness. Given the direction of the Polish economy, Poland has been considered a ‘Northern European’ member state and supporter of German austerity policy (Łada, 2013:6-7). The German case study argues that European solidarity is transformed into a solidarity based not on the economic redistribution from rich to poor but into solidarity ‘with conditions’ – where financial aid is provided in exchange for compliance with EU rules on budgetary discipline, the implementation of austerity measures and structural reforms. This solidarity is based on an ‘ordoliberal ethic’ – where ordoliberal values become the values of the European community. In the Polish case, this ‘thin’, ordoliberal solidarity is evident particularly in the Greek/Southern European frame which positions Poland and other CEE member states alongside Germany as part of the Northern European core, something which was also reflected in the German case. Highlighting Poland’s economic success during the crisis, GW describes Poland as the new ‘tiger of the EU’ which, as the only member state to avoid recession, ‘maintains the position of the EU’s model student’ (‘Polska tygrysem Unii’, Bielecki, Tomasz, GW, 6th May 2010, p. 23). Here Poland is clearly placed within the EU core of ‘virtuous, good Europeans’ who achieve economic success. In response to Poland’s contribution to the bailout programme in 2011, Fakt maintains that it is the Poles who are working hard and earning money while the southern Europeans spend it:

Poles earn the money and the Italians and Greeks spend it! […] What happens with the 45 billion zl that Poland is paying to the IMF in order to save Eurozone
countries? “It goes to paying pensions, the salary of civil servants. In Italy there is no credible plan for fighting the crisis, it is just a plan for a comfortable life on other people's money,” says economist Prof. Krzysztof Rybiński (44). And maybe Italy, Greece and Portugal can cut their social privileges to such a level as in our country? And thanks to this save their chronic budgets? But you see, citizens in these countries will never agree on this. Better to take money from Poland…’

However, this framing incorporates not just Poland, but also other CEE member states into the Northern European core, which goes some way to overcome the perceived east/west division in the EU. For example, the above article in GW differentiates between struggling economies in central/eastern Europe and the ‘chaos’ in Greece:

There are countries which accept austerity calmly – amongst them Latvia, but the Greeks are not Latvians. Nationwide strikes are paralysing the country. Teachers, doctors and ambulance staff are striking, airlines are cancelling flights on internal routes, and communists are appearing at the Acropolis with slogans such as. “People of Europe, rise up!” (“Grecki poker czy domino?” Andrzej Lubowski, GW, 10th May 2010, p.28).

There is a clear distinction made between the culture and behaviour of the Latvians, as part of CEE, and the Greeks. The Latvians, also hit hard by the crisis, are seen to have borne the consequences of the crisis quietly and honourably. The Greeks, on the other hand, have risen up and brought the country to a standstill. Other articles present the willingness of the eastern member states to conform to EU rules in contrast to Greece or southern Europe:

Slovakian prime minister said openly that he does not intend to write the Greeks a blank cheque. “I don’t trust the Greeks,” he said [...] Today, however, the Slovenes have already suggested that it would be good to develop a procedure for removing countries from the Eurozone that are not able to meet the criteria required (‘Grecy szukają oszczędności’, RZ, 7th May 2010, Danuta Walewska).

‘Because unofficially Greece is managing to be a typical example of the degeneration of the modern social state. [...] But the violent protests did not develop from hunger, a threat to health or life. No, the Greeks were protesting because they had to lose some of their privileges. They were protesting because they are simply dependent on prosperity. They are dependent on higher salaries
year by year [...]. The belief, so widespread in many countries in Europe, that wealth does not result from real work, but should be provided by the state, the Union, anybody. And if they do not provide it, then it is necessary to threaten and blackmail them. With this approach no aid will be enough (‘Krach państwa socjalnego’, Lisicki, Paweł, RZ, 8th May 2010).

One RZ article, written jointly with a German economist, even explicitly refers to the difference between what the authors describe as ‘clan’ solidarity and solidarity based on individual responsibility – Durkheim’s difference between ‘mechanical’ and ‘organic’ solidarity. As they argue, ‘the introduction of Eurobonds as they are understood would be followed by a return to ‘clan solidarity’, a model operating in primitive societies’ (‘Euroobligacje: powrót społeczeństwa plemiennego’, Radwan, Arkadiusz, Schäfer, Hans-Bernd, RZ, 2nd December 2011). The prospect of mutualising debt through such measures as Eurobonds therefore amounts to an infringement of European principles of individual responsibility and economic discipline. They go on to argue that this ‘solidarity’, where by ‘an alliance between politicians and the financial lobby is formed’ constitutes an ‘alliance threatening the principles of Roman law which once helped to build a prosperous Europe’ (‘Euroobligacje: powrót społeczeństwa plemiennego’, Radwan, Arkadiusz, Schäfer, Hans-Bernd, RZ, 2nd December 2011). European values and European solidarity then should be based not on the sharing of debt but on economic discipline and responsibility.

By 2011, when Poland agreed to participate in the bailout programmes with the Fiscal Compact, an unwillingness to contribute financially to the bailout programme is clear, particularly in Fakt. On the one hand, this can be read as an expression of this solidarity, where ‘being a good European’ means respecting the ‘European’ values of economic discipline and individual responsibility. On the other hand, the understanding that Poland is still a poor EU country is evident in the media reports, which reflects the both the conceptualisation of the ‘good, hardworking and responsible European’ and the continued perception of Poland’s economic marginalisation in Europe. There is a strong sense of injustice in the notion that a richer country such as Greece would have to be ‘bailed out’ by a poorer country like Poland that has tried so hard to develop a sound and modern economy – the difference perhaps between the deserving and the undeserving poor. This is particularly evident in Fakt which expresses its opposition to Poland’s contribution to the European Stability Mechanism as agreed in December 2011. Over a number of days, the headlines dealt with the question of the so-called ‘luxury lifestyle’ enjoyed in Greece and Italy:
“And we have to pay for their luxury? Polish workers have to slave away for a measly 1400 złoty. But we have to save Greece’s privileges, where the minimum wage is 2.5 times higher. A pensioner north of the Vistula, living on minimum benefits of a measly 730 złoty has to lend money to Italians who receive a state pension of at least 2600 zł every month! The countries with citizens much richer than us will be saved using the reserves of our national bank. And taking advantage of privileges that we, Poles, can only dream of! Is this supposed to be that ideal European justice? (‘I my mamy płacić na ich luksusy?’ Fakt, 13th December 2011, p. 1). 

In particular, the articles compare the average earnings and social welfare payments received by Poles, Greeks, Italians, Portuguese and the Irish, and concluding that there is little justification for the expectation that Poland contribute to the bailout mechanism. There is a perception that the European ‘ideal’ of justice has been broken or side-lined during the course of the crisis. This corresponds to the findings of the German case, which argues that the crisis did not necessarily weaken European identity in Germany; rather the crisis was to some extent perceived as a betrayal of the values of the European community.
“For unemployed Italians: 4000 zł. 2000 zł for a Greek pension. Spanish pensioner: 2500 zł. For the Greek women on child support: 4400 zł. 700 zł for a child in Ireland. For the poor Portuguese: 2500 zł. Poles, this is what you will have to pay extortion money for!” (‘Za to zapłacisz Polaku haracz’, Fakt, 14th December, p. 4),

Nevertheless, in spite of this, in this frame there is some concern about the implications of the crisis for Poland’s position in Europe. RZ also goes as far to consider the question of whether ‘bankrupt countries’ can be excluded from the EU. This article argues that while there is no legal provision for a country to exit the single currency, there is a possibility to exclude a country from the Union, which would simultaneously remove it from the Euro (‘Czy można wykluczyć bankruta z Unii’ RZ, 7th May 2010 Marek Domagalski). However, this article also expresses some concern about the implications of the debate about an actual exclusion of Greece from the Euro or European Union for Poland’s position in Europe. It is here that we get the first inclination of Polish insecurity in the crisis which becomes much clearer as the crisis progresses into 2011. This article highlights the reservations held about Greece even at the time of its accession to the EU, which, it says, was motivated by political factors: ‘it was about strengthening democracy, trade with the West. That’s why our people are sceptical, if it is a question of excluding Greece (or any other country) from the EU, and also from the Eurozone’ (‘Czy można wykluczyć bankruta z Unii’ RZ, 7th May 2010 Marek Domagalski). The implication here is that if Greece can be excluded from the EU, so can any member state, especially those who were admitted for primarily political rather than economic reasons such as Poland. By 2011, this concern about marginalisation in Europe becomes much more evident, and it consequently becomes a question of Poland’s European identity, its place in Europe and its national sovereignty. It is this fear of
marginalisation which creates a window of opportunity for the pro-European actors in Poland to call for further European integration.

**European Crisis – Poland’s Marginalisation in Europe**

*The crisis is not just in our banks, it is also in our hearts*’ (Tusk, 14th December 2011, Strasbourg).

By 2011, the political implications of the Euro crisis for Poland became much clearer, particularly after Poland assumed the rotating EU Presidency in July of that year. By this time, the crisis became an identity issue for Poland, when it was framed as a broader European institutional crisis where the future of the EU, and Poland’s place within it, was at stake. The crisis presented a window of opportunity for Polish elites to call for further European integration, positioning Poland as an active, committed European country and presenting European and Polish interests in separable. This was not uncontroversial and the Polish sovereignty discourse frames the debate from the opposition. However, this framing of the crisis by Polish government elites, that is, Civic Platform leaders, and the pro-European parts of the media, especially GW but also RZ and Fakt first and foremost reflects the ‘return to Europe’ discourse. Like in Ireland and Germany this framing of the crisis reflects the original motivations for Poland’s membership of the EU – ‘returning to Europe’ after decades, and even centuries, of marginalisation at the European periphery.

The crisis is commonly understood at the end of 2011 to be, like in Germany, a common European crisis, one which is more than just an economic crisis but one which affects the nature and political make-up of Europe, future of Europe as a whole. This framing exogenises the crisis to create a kind of ‘external Other’ for Europe, thus promoting a sense of shared European experience in the face of a common threat. As Tusk states in his expose to the Sejm at the inauguration of his second term in office that the changes taking place in Europe ‘also make for a dramatic, disturbing political landscape, a new political landscape in Europe. Europe is changing before our eyes, and the direction of these changes is far from certain’ (Tusk, 18th November 2011). This idea was reinforced by Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski at the end of November 2011. He presents the crisis, similarly to German leaders, as a European crisis which threatens the very existence of the EU, stating that ‘we are standing on the edge of a precipice’ (Sikorski, 2011). He opens his speech by presenting a story of ‘European disintegration’ in which the end of the Dinar zone in the former Yugoslavia signalled the end of the federation. The reference to the wars that followed serve as a reminder of Europe’s own past and the imperative of keeping the EU together. Reminiscent of Merkel’s call in May 2010 that ‘if the Euro fails,
then Europe fails’, Sikorski reminds listeners that, more than acting as a means of exchange, money ‘symbolises unity – or disunity’. The Euro therefore symbolises European integration and constitutes an identity symbol for Europe.

The break up would be a crisis of apocalyptic proportions beyond our financial system. Once the logic of ‘each man for himself’ takes hold, can we really trust everyone to act communitarian and resist the temptation to settle scores in other areas, such as trade? […] If we are not willing to risk a partial dismantling of the EU, then the choice becomes as stark as can be in the lives of federations: deeper integration, or collapse (Sikorski, 2011).

In his speech in Strasbourg to close the Polish Presidency of the EU, Prime Minister Tusk labels the crisis the ‘most serious crisis to have afflicted our continent in the history of the united Europe’, warning that Europe is at a crossroads (Tusk, 14th December 2011, Strasbourg). Furthermore, he emphasises that the crisis was not the fault of the EU institutions or the European integration project more broadly, but warns that ‘the crisis is feeding and growing fat on the threat of the Union falling apart’. He emphasises the importance of European unity, of Europe’s sense of community, arguing that ‘if we are hearing opinions in Europe today about how we need to reconsider the bases and the foundations of the Union, this is very clearly a symptom that the crisis exists not just in our banks, but also in our hearts’. As in Germany, therefore, the political leaders in Poland emphasise the importance of protecting European unification for the purposes of legitimising European action.

These speeches were held outside Poland, so they were directed at a European audience. Nevertheless, this frame is also frequently found in the Polish media during this time. This frame constructs an exogenous threat to the European institutions and in doing so reinforces European identity discourse, particularly by presenting the threat of war. For example, GW writes on the day of the summit that ‘today the fate of Europe will be decided’ (Walka o rewizję traktatów. O co chodzi w szczycie UE? Tomasz Bielecki, Ireneusz Sudak, GW, 9th December 2011). Rather than it just being an economic and banking crisis, a collapse of the Euro would mean ‘a step towards the break-up of the European Union’, resulting in populist parties who ‘can treat us to a return to the situation before the Second World War – that is, nation-states, protectionism etc. And what then? It remains to say, what minister Rostowski and Chancellor Merkel said – war’ (Fakt, 29th November 2011, p. 2). Europe’s violent past is evoked to warn against the break-up of the EU as a whole. The crisis posed the threat of a break-up of Europe,
which would mean ‘its decline or renationalisation, relying on each country concentrating only on its own fate’ (interview with Polish political scientist Aleksander Smolar) (Fakt, 28th November 2011, p. 2-3). Indeed, former Finance Minister Jacek Rostowski warned the European Parliament in Strasbourg in September 2011 that the crisis was ‘making wars in Europe imaginable again’ (http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=132086). Quoted in GW, then President of European Parliament (and former Prime Minister) Jerzy Buzek cites Rousseau in recalling historical instances of the fall of empire: ‘if Sparta and Rome perished, what state can expect hope to endure forever?’. GW notes that he was trying to ‘make the audience aware that the European Union can also fall if Europeans do not come to its rescue’ (‘Przewodniczący Buzek się żegna’, Tomasz Bielecki, GW, 16th Dec 2011 p. 10). The threat of war therefore serves as an external Other to consolidate European identity and joint European action to ‘save’ the continent.

However, while the threat presented to the future of the EU is also found in the German case, this framing of the crisis in Poland also reflects and reinforces the ‘return to Europe’ discourse, where membership of the EU was touted as a means for Poland to return to its rightful place in Western/Central Europe. The crisis was understood to pose a significant threat of marginalisation at the periphery of Europe. This was likely reinforced by Poland’s experience as President of the EU during this time, when, as a non-Eurozone member, it found itself excluded from core decision-making processes in the EU. Given the salience of the Euro crisis, decision-making was centred on the Eurozone, and separate Euro summits started to be held exclusively for Eurozone member states. At a time when Poland was supposed to be at the helm of the EU, the country was shut out of summits that constituted ‘a forum at the highest political level where deals were negotiated on the future of the common currency’ (Lauenroth and von Ondarza, 2014:60). Given Poland’s position outside of the Eurozone, this new institution realised ‘most Polish fears of being excluded from an inner core’ (Lauenroth and von Ondarza, 2014:61). As Copsey and Pomorska argued before the crisis, Poland’s overall influence in the EU is low, with an ‘asymmetry of power’ between Poland and the core member states (Copsey and Pomorska, 2010:321). The Euro crisis reinforced this reality and Poland has continued to find itself marginalised in EU policy-making. This is particularly evident in Tusk’s speech to the Sejm in November 2011. He argues that in the current debate about the EU:

‘we do not have, in my opinion, a political dilemma of whether to be at the centre of Europe, or to be at its periphery […] The real dilemma for Poland is how to be at the centre of Europe, how to be a real, major player on the European stage,
and not, as a result of the crisis, to find ourselves at the margins, at the periphery, or outside the European Union [...] Today we often hear about the concert of powers in Europe that is difficult to accept. Today at the European table, or as some witty politician said, at this political meal, either you are at the table, or you are on the menu. Poland has to be at the table’ (Tusk 18th November 2011).

As in Germany, the prospect of a multi-speed EU is of particular concern in Poland, albeit for different reasons. In Germany, multi-speed EU threatens the unity of Europe and the project of European integration. In Poland, it represents the risk of political marginalisation, both of which represent the original motivations for EU membership. Sikorski insists that Europe ‘maintain coherence between the Euro area and the EU as a whole. Community institutions must remain central. As the Presidency, we are guardians of our unity. And the unity must not be hypothetical. In this case: it’s not enough to say that countries may participate once they join the Euro zone’ (Sikorski, 2011). In advance of the European Council summit, Sikorski is arguing in favour of a new EU treaty, exercised through the existing EU, which includes all member states and not exclusively the Eurozone in order to avoid the risk of marginalisation from decision-making processes in the new EU.

The crisis therefore becomes a question about Polish identity and the country’s place in Europe. Markiewicz argues the Polish government is primarily concerned with national interest in its European policy during this time (Markiewicz, 2012:11). However, the risk of marginalisation at Europe’s periphery goes far beyond a simple question of national interest. Rather, it touches the heart of Polish identity. As Gebert argues, the division of the EU into two-speeds, Eurozone and non-Eurozone, would involve ‘relegating Poland to where its absolute economic size and Eurozone non-membership […] suggest it should be: the European periphery’ (Gebert, 2012:6). The fear of marginalisation through two-speed Europe is expressed strongly in the press. In GW it is noted that ‘countries of the first speed, that is, the Eurozone, will be able to marginalise the rest in decision-making, as well as in the distribution of funds from the EU budget. And this will be very dangerous for us’ (‘Unia Według Polski’ Tomasz Bielecki, GW 2nd December 2011). Mikołaj Dowgielewicz, Minister for European and Economic Affairs warns that

Often in Poland we do not realise the horror of the situation which is prevailing in the Eurozone […] at the summit Europe’s fate was hanging in the balance, because it could lead to the revision of the EU treaties, and even to the division of Europe into several groups of countries – the better ones, which will adopt
new rules on budgetary discipline, and those who will be at the tail end of the EU. It is not known whether Poland would meet the criteria which a new treaty could impose’ (cited in ‘Walka o rewizję traktatów. O co chodzi w szczycie UE?’ Tomasz Bielecki, Ireneusz Sudak, GW, 9th December 2011).

There is also explicit expression of the desire to be in the European ‘core’, that is, in the ‘first speed’ of the EU: ‘Has Chancellor Angela Merkel pledged that the treaty change pushed through by her will not result in the marginalisation of Poland? The Community is preparing for treaty change which will create two groups of states. Poland wants to be in the better one’ (‘Nowy traktat podzieli Unię? Anna Słojevska, RZ, 2nd December 2011). Support for the EU is therefore intrinsically tied to Polishness and Poland’s rightful place in the European core. These findings suggest that, while Poland has joined the European Union and in theory secured its place in “Western” Europe, it has not necessarily “returned”. It still finds itself marginalised in EU policy-making and continues suffer from lack of influence in Europe. The Euro crisis has therefore reinforced Polish concern at being marginalised at the European periphery and instigated a battle for the European core.

Conclusion

Crises are not external events, exogenous to local identities and interests. Rather, they are socially constructed and framed by political and social actors who construct them in such a way that they resonate with the local populations. The Euro crisis is therefore viewed through the lens of existing national discourses on Europe. The Polish case study demonstrates that the Euro crisis presented a window of opportunity for Poland’s pro-European elite to argue for further European integration, beginning a battle over Poland’s place in the core of Europe. The Greek crisis simultaneously placed Poland within the core of northern European, economically responsible member states at the same time as reminding Poles that they are still a poor country deserving of being a recipient of European solidarity, rather than giving it. By 2011, the crisis became an issue of Poland’s place in Europe. Whereas it was often framed as a European crisis experienced with the rest of Europe, it also served to reinforce the ‘return to Europe’ discourse which reflects the fear of marginalisation at Europe’s periphery. Further analysis of the Polish data looks at how framing of the crisis policies often reflects the nationalist Polish sovereignty discourse. Overall, the crisis is constructed in terms of Poland’s existing identity discourses but has the consequence of highlighting dividing lines between North and South, and Core and Periphery.
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