Looking for a New Representation
The Case of Polish Farmers

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Paper presented at the ECPR 2004 JOINT SESSIONS OF WORKSHOPS,
UPPSALA, SWEDEN, APRIL 13-18 2004

Workshop 2 :

“The Political Representation of Social Interest in Central and Eastern Europe”

First draft – not for citation without author’s explicit consent

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Parties in stable democratic systems play a key role in defining political ideologies and facilitating the verbalisation and crystallisation of the goals and interests of various social groups. In systems in transition, the situation is different - social interests are not definitely constituted and their political representation is also weak. The case of Polish farmers seems to be interesting from some points of view. First of all, the PSL (Polish Peasant Party) used to be a traditional representation of agricultural interests in Poland. The Economic transition after 1989 changed the situation of Polish farmers. The goal of political and economic reforms was the membership into all Western organisations¹. Poland completed pro-market and democratic reforms simultaneously (JACKSON, 2003), what is a major difference between East European transitions and those in southern Europe and south America (LINZ and STEPAN 1996). Transitions divided more and more Polish society into “winners” and “losers” of reforms. In the opinion of farmers, this social group had to pay a high price of reforms and was in the group of losers. This is why this part of the population is a target of populist campaign of Self-Defence. Despite of the strength of the PSL on the political scene, the agricultural world often gives vent to its disappointment. Polish integration with the EU, a salient political issue, enjoyed only limited support from farmers and it became the main raison for the change in the vote.

The purpose of this paper is to present the case of Polish farmers and the connection between their interests and political parties. We will attempt at explaining how farmers try to be represented on the political level and how parties try to attract this social group. We will analyse why an important part of farmers decided to vote for a new party Samoobrona (Self-Defence) to the detriment of PSL (Polish Peasant Party), a historical peasant party. We will examine links between Self-Defence and Polish farmers.

This article is divided into three parts. First, I will investigate into the factors that shaped the situation of Polish agriculture under communism, the changes after 1989 and the opinions of Polish farmers on the impact of European integration on the state of Polish agriculture.

In the second part, I will discuss the role of the PSL (Polish Peasant Party) on the political scene, its programme and actions in governments.

¹ These organizations were the Council of Europe (COE), the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Western European Union (WEU).
In the last part, I will examine some factors of success of Samoobrona, like its strategy of direct actions, populist slogans and the personality of Andrzej Lepper.

In order to document this study, I use a variety of primary sources, like programs and official statements of leaders of the PSL, Samoobrona, European debates in Polish Parliament, information from Polish newspapers. The results of survey conducted by Institute of Public Affairs or study directed by François Bafoil are also very useful for this paper (BAFOIL, 2002).

1. AGRICULTURE IN POLAND

Despite some common elements of economic development, the situation of Polish agriculture is different from that in other Eastern countries. Reforms carried out after 1945 have shaped the agricultural world in Poland. The collapse of communism has changed the situation as well. The actual situation of Polish agriculture results from these two periods, but the impact of the future EU membership is also an important element.

1. Polish Country before 1989

First of all, the collectivisation of agriculture has been less successful in Poland than in some of the other European countries from the Soviet side. The post-war land reform resulted in a multiplication of small and uneconomic peasant holdings. Gomulka’s rejection of forced collectivisation was an essential component of his « Polish road to socialism ». As results, state farms (PGR) occupied only 20 % of arable agricultural land. As some observers show, this is a mark of incomplete state penetration and a sign of social power (LINZ end STEPAN, 1996). Private farms in Poland have always contradicted Communist ideology. In Party propaganda, the working class - in alliance with the working peasants - was given a « leading role in the country » (BARNETT, 1958). But individual farmers remained a strange class from an ideological point of view. It must be stressed that despite a strong satellite

2 www.psl.pl
3 www.samoobrona.pl
4 www.sejm.gov.pl
5 Principally Gazeta Wyborcza and Polityka, accessible www.wyborcza.pl and www.polityka.onet.pl
6 www.isp.com.pl
party ZSL, the Communist government has had great difficulty in winning the loyalty of the peasants.

2. Changes after 1989

The change in the socio-economic system, which started in 1989, meant a qualitative change for Polish agriculture, which was exposed to free market economy rules. The transition was particularly hard on farming areas. Peasants wanted to be the winners of this new situation, but in the eyes of the rest of society, they were not efficient and were an under-developed part of society making more difficult Poland’s entry into the European Union (KOCIK, 2001). During negotiations for the admission, Polish agriculture was shown as the main obstacle to European integration.

In 1991, Poland signed the European Agreement on its association with the Communities. International deregulation led to greater competition, which led to dramatically lower real income in agriculture, when combined with high inflation rates. There was no effective protection of agriculture from the competition of strongly subsidised food products from the European Union (PRAZUCH, 2003). These goods were sold on the Polish market at prices usually lower than their local equivalents (JAKUBOWSKI, 1999). Since 1995, Poland has had a negative trade balance with other EU partners (LASTAWSKI, 1999). For a majority of Polish peasants, the EU has been the source of their difficulties since 1989 (BAFOIL, 2002). However, there are many causes for this situation. Some structural problems persist and after 1989, few reforms were suggested for this sector. According to different statistics, there are 16 to 23 % farmers in Poland. A significant portion of Poland's working population is involved in this sector, which generates only 6 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Poland's agrarian structure severely hampers its development. According to an agricultural census carried out in June 1996, there are over 2 million farms in Poland, each averaging 7.9 hectares (ha), less than half that of the EU average of 16.5 ha. Moreover, 55 percent of the farms are less than 5 ha, producing food exclusively or mainly for the owners' consumption. There are only 300,000 farms, sized between 10 and 20 ha, which have a serious chance of

7 Source: the Central Statistical Office (GUS)
developing, the report estimates. Polish farms are not only small; they are fragmented. They usually comprise several plots that are often not adjacent to each other. This makes the use of machines in field work difficult. As some specialists show, in the case of Polish agriculture, « the system changes, the structure remains » (REY, 1996). The peasant population does not provide sufficient income to ensure a proper standard of living. The situation is becoming serious in areas where we can observe the return of people who used to work in towns, and who were left behind in the transition to a market economy. In regions where state farms were predominant, poverty and unemployment are omnipresent. In the farmers’ opinion, they are the losers of the new economic situation (RAGARU and HALAMSKA 2001). For some of them, the seventies were a Golden Age, because they had money to buy a tractor (CZERNICKA, 2002)

Reports published by the European Commission pointed out the low profitability of Polish agriculture. The relative backwardness of the country may be the major barrier for a harmonious integration of Poland into the European Union (Commission European, 1998).

It is important to stress that the sector of agriculture is very important for politicians. As Marie-Claude Maurel shows, farmers are not only an important part of the rural population (56.1 %)\(^8\), but also a significant social force that is politically structured (1994). Traditionally, the PSL represented the interest of the agricultural world. In the nineties, the problem of agriculture was discussed in the perspective of the Polish entry into the EU. On the one hand, it was obvious that agriculture had to be reformed, but in the other hand, admission to the EU was expected to be the solution for all the difficulties in the Polish country.

In 1999, after road blockades had been organised by farmers’ unions, the Ministry of Agriculture announced the preparation of a long-term strategy of assistance to the country. The government took actions in the meat market, where demand had drastically fallen, primarily as a result of a decline in Poland's trade with crisis-stricken Russia. Because of farmers’ protests, the problem of agriculture became again an important subject for the Polish government. The Pact for Agriculture and Rural Areas improving the income of the rural population, enhancing the competitiveness of agriculture and improving living conditions in rural

\(^8\) According to another source: 31.8 per cent (Notre Europe)
areas was prepared. President Aleksander Kwaśniewski convened a special Agricultural Forum to debate ways to increase earnings, create new jobs and improve educational standards in rural areas.

3. Polish agriculture on the road to the EU

During negotiations for membership, the problem of Polish agriculture was largely discussed. The main issues were production quotas, the purchase of land in Poland by foreign farmers and the involvement of Polish farmers in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Negotiations for membership had become more vexatious, the task of passing new laws in compliance with the conditions set by the EU more difficult, and the debate over the costs and benefits of membership more prominent (SLOMCZYNSKI and SHABAD, 2002). Due to complex historical, ideological and emotional reasons, one issue occupied the central place in the Polish debate on European integration. It was the question of the right of foreign individuals and companies to purchase land in Poland (JASIEWICZ and JASIEWICZ-BETKIEWICZ, 2002). According to surveys carried out by the Institute of Public Affairs (KOLARSKA-BOBINSKA, 2002) 87 per cent of Polish farmers in 1999 and 84 per cent in 2002 were anxious that foreigners would buy out land. As a result, two transitional arrangements were requested: a 12-year transitional period for agricultural and forest land, not applying to self-employed farmers from the EU who have been leasing land for 3 or 7 years (depending on regions) and a 5-year transitional period for second homes, not applying to citizens from the EU who have resided in Poland for at least 4 years. Another issue raising strong emotions in Polish villages was the question of agricultural subsidies. The EU suggested to set those subsidies at 25 per cent of the level granted to farmers from the EU Member States, and then gradually raise them to 100 per cent until 2013 (PIENKOS, 2004).

As some surveys show, a pessimistic view of future developments is prevalent and the approach of « relying on the State » is still quite strong among the rural population (KOLARSKA-BOBINSKA, 2002). In Polish case occupational status has played a significant role in structuring general political values and opinions about the EU. Farmers and inhabitants of rural areas expect their economic situation to deteriorate and many farm holdings to go to bankrupt. They predict both greater difficulties in finding outlets for agricultural products and the imposition of
production quotas. Negative attitudes towards integration are predominant. Both farmers and rural residents are anxious about the accession of Poland into the EU. They fear that many farms will go bankrupt, that they will have difficulties selling agricultural products whereas at the same time production quotas will be centrally imposed. Anxieties concerning the changes of political (limitation of sovereignty) or cultural nature (weakened patriotism among Poles) are not considered to be significant. They expect their economic situation to deteriorate and many farm holdings to go to bankrupt. They predict both greater difficulties in finding outlets for agricultural products and the imposition of production quotas.

According to a research conducted by ISP\(^9\), supporters of integration are least frequently found among farmers and people employed on farms. There are two groups where declarations of rejection (27 and 36\% respectively) are more frequent than support for the referendum (24 and 29 \% respectively). If the results of the referendum on membership are analysed, it can be seen that only 50 per cent of the rural population took part in this vote (69 per cent of city-dwellers in towns of 200,000 people). 81 per cent of city-dwellers voted «yes» and only 52 per cent of people living in the country. Parties representing rural issues were less favourable to integration (CICHOWSKI, 2000).

The situation of Polish agriculture can be consider like a very serious political, economic and social problem. Transformations in this sector are necessary, but farmers, thanks to their numerous power and political representation, blocked any changes.

2. PSL – TRADITIONNAL SPOKESMAN OF THE AGRICULTURAL WORLD

Until the election in 2001, the PSL was the only class-based party in Poland and the main spokesman for Polish farmers. In this section, I will examine the history of this party, its program and its participation in governments.

1. History of the PSL

The Polish Peasant Party (in Polish: Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL) is the most ancient party in Central Europe, it is also a direct organisational successor to the ZSL (the United Peasant Party (Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe)) which was the satellite of the communist party (SZCZERBIAK, 1999). Successor parties initially suffered dramatic declines in states where opposition movements had had a chance to become organised before the collapse, but they subsequently re-emerged as structurally strong, politically clever, and much more programmatically flexible than observers had expected.

The former pro-Communist peasant party went through traumatic upheavals, but in May 1990 it became linked to other peasant groups and adopted its pre-1947 name - (PSL) (LUKOWSKI and ZAWADZKI, 2001). This new PSL was a merger of three traditions - ZSL, PSL Mikolajczyk and PSL Solidarnosc (BAFOIL, 1997).

The advent of democracy in 1989 was accompanied by the creation of a great number of political parties. Political parties, though unshaped and untested, rapidly became the vehicles for democratic government in societies where social cleavages were relatively unformed. It should be stressed that communism left a culture of distrust towards state policies. It is clear that the situation of the PSL was privileged. The peasant party had a clearly defined electorate and party policy which focused on issues specifically affecting farmers and rural communities. This party built strong links to society and it also had a stable electorate. Traditionally, this organisation had many members. Membership in the communist party had exceeded 3 million in 1980. Another 500,000 belonged to the ZSL satellite party (TARAS, 1995). It can be stressed that under communism, the number of members of the communist party to be found among Polish farmers (552,000) was higher than the number of ZSL members (470,000) (STAROSTA, 1993). After the collapse of communism, the party with the highest number of members - approximately 250,000-300,000 - was the PSL (end of 1997), with its electorate and organisational basis located mainly in rural areas (HIRATA, 2000). At the same time, the SdRP had 60,000 members (GORZELAK, 1998). Thanks to the structure it has inherited, the PSL is established all over Poland with 4,986 councillors and independent political structures in all 16 provinces and in 90 per cent of municipalities.

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10 [www.psl.pl](http://www.psl.pl)
TAB.1 Results of PSL in general election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>8.67</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>15.40</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>7.31</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
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</table>

After 1989, the PSL managed to gain seats in each Parliament and in 1993-1997 and in 2001-2003 this party was a junior partner in the ruling coalition. PSL sympathy correlates most with a village or small-town background and to a lesser extent with low levels of education. The existence and the perpetuation of clientelistic relations are the results of strength of this party on the local level.

2. Program of the PSL

The PSL favours a model of small family farming households and subsidised agriculture. The PSL promised to maintain agriculture in its current state rather than force modernisation, which would have further harmed rural areas economically, at least in the short run (JACKSON and other, 2003). The PSL opted for privatisation, fewer privileges for foreign capital, active governmental intervention (ZUKROWSKA, 1995). The members of this party used to demand that the government should pay compensation to farmers who have lost crops to natural disasters. They oppose the presence of Western supermarkets in Poland, which, according to PSL members, are destroying small domestic traders. The PSL tried to represent the best interest of small peasants, as well as big food producers (RAGARU and HALAMSKA, 2001). This situation produced many conflicts like the one of 1998, when Roman Jagielinski, the defender of big holdings, had to quit the PSL. It should be stressed that the PSL wanted to keep the status quo of Polish country and the social gains.

Little attention has been paid to the issues of Poland’s integration, in the PSL programme (ZALEWSKI, 2004). In the program of the PSL, adopted by the 7th Congress of Polish People’s Party in March 2000, it can be read that “the integration
with the European Union may offer Poland perspectives of a wide development provided that it is a strategic integration serving national interests ».

The attitude of the Peasant Party towards integration was one of the aspects which distinguished it in the governing coalition. Pawlak, the former Prime Minister, criticised the pro-European views of other politicians in Parliament. He said to Minister Bartoszewski (in charge of Foreign Policy), that he described himself more as a spokesman for the EU and NATO than as a Polish minister. The PSL firmly criticised the excessive submission to the wishes of the West (STADTMULLER, 1997). PSL's Janusz Dobrosz stated that his party supported Poland's Euro-Atlantic aspirations but warned that Poland might become a second-category member. The Member of Parliament stressed that “if negotiations result in unfavourable solutions, we'll support the nation rather than its elite. For our diplomatic efforts to be effective, it's necessary that the world's opinion of the Polish state, people, their culture and history should be favourable”. During the congress of the PSL, the delegates also criticised the SLD's disloyalty. In speeches by various activists, mutual accusations of subservience to the SLD and the party's communist past were frequently made. Despite this critics, the PSL continued to form the coalition with the SLD and it took part in accession negotiations. Despite a strong opposition to European integration in the country, the PSL supported Polish integration to the EU before the referendum of June 2003. The impact of this decision was very important. The Polish elite have expressed a much greater belief in the ideas of Europe that the public has (FAWN, 2003). As a result, among agricultural electorate, individuals' attitudes toward the EU were not consistent with the position of their favourite party and disappointed voters showed their discontent to the PSL political elite.

3. Participation of the PSL in governments


In 1993-1997, the PSL frequently blocked indispensable reforms such as the restructuring of agriculture. This party managed to have a post of Prime Minister (Waldemar Pawlak). The PSL's position on European integration was also obscure and has remained so; it is commonly known that the PSL is demanding far-reaching
restrictions on the sale of land to foreigners, the adjustment of Poland's agricultural policy to EU standards and the like.

After the success of the left wing in the general election in the fall of 2001, SLD-UP and PSL representatives signed a formal coalition agreement. The PSL was the only realistic partner for SLD-UP. It’s important to stress that a large group of prominent PSL leaders was against an alliance with SLD-UP. The reason for their stance was the fear that the PSL, as a junior partner, might be totally dominated and lose its influence in the country, for the benefit of Samoobrona which might freely articulate the interests of the rural community, as it remains outside the government. During negotiations, the SLD-UP had agreed to most of the PSL demands. This reportedly concerned the demand not to introduce indirect taxes, which were against the interests of food producers, the allocation of profits from privatisation to economic growth purposes rather than to the fight against the budget deficit, and cancellation of the plans to privatise banks such as PKO BP, Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego and Bank Gospodarki Żywnościowej. These last two banks are regarded as PSL's financial base. Because of the actions of Samoobrona, the PSL had to change its attitude (NALEWAJKO, 2003). In 2002, during a parliamentary debate on foreign policy, PSL leaders changed their tune: “We hope that Member States will change their attitude towards Poland and that they will appreciate our concessions and their gains. If the results of negotiations are unfavourable, we will be with people, not with the elite”. The fear of the PSL to be outstripped by Samoobrona has been the main characteristic of the strategy of this party for the past few years.

In March 2003, Prime Minister Leszek Miller decided to rule out the Polish Peasants' Party (PSL) from the coalition, after the PSL's parliamentary refusal made it impossible to pass an important bill proposed by the government. “It is impossible to be in the government and oppose it at the same time” Miller said in justifying his decision to run the risk of a minority government. “As Prime Minister, I do not accept this and cannot tolerate it anymore. I am not and will not be anybody's hostage.” Kalinowski also issued a special statement to the press. The PSL's leader wrote that the SLD's termination of the coalition was a “bad sign for Poland,” while the PSL itself would persevere with the application of its guidelines in parliament and beyond. Other party members said that the PSL could no longer agree to a “vassal” position and that the dissolution of the coalition was the only way to save face with the party's own electorate. It is no secret that in its own environment, the
PSL has been preoccupied with opposing the growing influence of the radical Self-Defence Movement of Andrzej Lepper. Many believe that after leaving the coalition, the PSL wanted to find this task easier to carry out. Criticism of the government's policy was no longer constrained by the PSL's presence in the coalition. The PSL found itself identifying with some of Lepper’s views and in March 2003 was expelled from the coalition on several controversial legislative issues. The concern over land sales was indeed serious; in April 2003 Poland approved a law regulating future land sales and requiring that buyers of agricultural land be qualified farmers (PIENKOS, 2004).

Because of a difficult situation in opinion polls (5 percent of voters support PSL in March 2004) Kalinowski's position in the party was in danger, as several radical activists who objected to the coalition with the SLD/UP may now question the party leadership. The result of the Congress of the PSL is that the leader of the party was changed (from March 2004, the PSL is led by Janusz Wojciechowski) and debate on future coalitions was started, because the lost of parliamentary representation is possible.

3. SAMOBRONA – A NEW SELF-DEFENCE OF AGRICULTURAL WORLD

In this part, I will analyse the phenomena of Samoobrona, the origins of its social power and possible results. The main question this part poses is whether Self-Defence can take the place of the PSL and become a political representation of agricultural world or if it will be transformed into a all catch party.

1. Emergence of Self-Defence

The first actions of Samoobrona were organised in 1991 in order to defence indebted small farmers. The Farmers’ Trade Union « Self-Defence » was founded in 1992 and transformed into a party in 1999 (KUBIAK, 2003). Samoobrona is a movement which primarily represented the category of heavily indebted farmers, who were the most important immediate victims of the new economic situation. The protests organised by Self-Defence were also aimed against other peasants’ organisations recognised as part of the state network of rural movements and Post
Communist organisations. The populist ideology of Self-Defence was both anti-Communist and anti-Solidarnosc (KOCIK, 1996).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1997</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2004</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General election</td>
<td>Presidential</td>
<td>General election</td>
<td>Local election</td>
<td>Opinion poll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 %</td>
<td>3.05 %</td>
<td>53 seats</td>
<td>16 %</td>
<td>24 %</td>
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The analysis of Self-Defence’s results in elections is important to understand the success of this party. Lepper’s organisation, which had taken only one per cent of the vote and no seats in 1997, increased its votes to over ten per cent in 2001 and won 53 seats. This was rather surprising, as only six per cent of respondents said that they had voted for Samoobrona in surveys. In the local election in 2002, this party was able to increase its votes from ten to 16 per cent. Results of surveys conducted in 2004 show that Samoobrona might win over potential SLD-UP voters disillusioned with the coalition’s policies (McMANUS, CZUBINSKA, 2003). Last surveys show that if the parliamentary elections were held in March, Samoobrona would win the highest number of parliamentary seats: 24 percent of the electorate would support this party (the Pentor Institute). Samoobrona has been systematically gaining support. From February, its support grew by 6 percentage points. The party led by Andrzej Lepper recorded an increase in support for the fourth month in a row, compared with last October when 13% of voters supported the party.

According to works of some specialists, Samoobrona is not only backed by a big majority of its own voters, but also by voters from the PSL, ROP, AWS, SLD, which this party managed to attract, and by a very large number of non-voters. One fifth of the traditional PSL voters had voted Samoobrona in 2001 (KUBIAK, 2003). As SLD is faced with a very serious problems in SLD, Lepper tries to attract its voters. Geographically, in the beginning, support for Samoobrona was particularly strong in the region of Koszalin. Sympathy for Samoobrona correlates with opposition against privatisation and foreign capital. Nostalgia for the pre-1989 regime is also an important element. That is an anti-democratic profile. For some
observers, Samoobrona sympathisers’ opposition to EU entry is primarily pragmatic, and does not reflect cultural fears or xenophobic nationalism. It does not seem to reflect fears for Polish agriculture as much as fears for families’ standards of living.

2. The strategy of Samoobrona

It should be stressed that despite criticisms from a vast majority of politicians and observers for the lack of any real programme, Samoobrona is gaining new followers through the rhetoric of total negation. « We weren't in charge, we're not responsible for the crisis, » say Lepper and his activists. The non-participation of this party to the government gives to leaders this image of new people in politics. It is known that in Eastern Europe voters are very disappointed with the political situation and they vote against the elite. This « protest vote » (VAN DER BRUG and other, 2000) can partly explain the success of Lepper. The strategy of this party is to attract voters from losers of the new economic situation. Other parties used to classify Samoobrona like a marginal party, but it wants to create this image of organisation out of the system. But the Lepper takes care over this image with spoiled identity trying to change this marginality into a positive source.

Samoobrona contests the legacy of the past 15 years—the entire post-communist period. For this party agriculture should be revived. Samoobrona introduced the idea of so-called « payable prices » for agricultural commodities into political discourse. The state should guarantee profit for every farmer in Poland (KOCIK, 1996). According to Samoobrona leader’s opinions, the foreign policy pursued for the past 15 years aimed at “transforming Poland into a market for production surpluses of the West” and destroying Polish industry and agriculture.

Special attention should be paid to the impact of Polish integration into the EU. As it was shown in the second part, the attitude of the PSL in the favour of accession disappointed farmers who voted for a “new” party in the political arena. Ironically, the analyse of Lepper’s views on this European issue shows that his attitude changed and after a long period of anti-European campaign (the European Union was compared to a big kolkhoz administrated by Brussels), he presented his party as “eurorealiste”. Lepper did not want to accept the conditions of membership of: “Today we are saying “no” to the Union, but this does not apply to the idea of our country's membership in the EU, but to the terms on which we are supposed to join
the Union”. Poland should join the EU organisations on a partner-like and equal basis. He claimed that Poland should reach the economic level of Western European countries before launching the integration process. According to Lepper, Poland should concentrate on rebuilding good relations with the East, because today the EU is doing big business with Russia.

After Copenhagen and before Athens (signature of treaty), Samoobrona submitted the idea of renegotiating the Polish agreements with the EU in order to change production quotas, not only in agriculture, but for example in steel production and fishing. This could result in a rise in unemployment and an expansion of the poverty and misery zone.

Lepper used to repeat that Poles support integration, because of a lack of information in the society about the real costs of Polish entry into the EU. His argument focused on the charge that Polish farmers would pay a heavy price for accession and that hundreds of thousands of them would be forced out of business, as their land would be purchased by foreigners. As some observers stress, this view, underscored by the well-publicised confrontational tactics Lepper and his followers adopted, in and outside parliament, had its effects (PIENKOS, 2004).

After 2001, parliamentary debates became much more radical, because of the presence of Samoobrona deputies. “All politicians steal” is repeated very often by activists. Lepper accused several leading politicians from the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and the Civic Platform (PO) of accepting bribes and contacts with the criminal underworld. He was especially critical of former Deputy Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz, who is now president of the National Bank of Poland (NBP). Lepper called him “the ultimate scoundrel”. According to Lepper’s opinions, politicians are weak, unable to led independent policy. They were educated at foreign universities and they serve foreign governments.

The rhetoric of Samoobrona contains a lot of antielite elements. Andrzej Lepper was deputy Sejm speaker for little over a month. After his statements about politicians, the SLD submitted a motion to dismiss Lepper. The leader of Samoobrona took advantage of the debate that preceded his dismissal to deliver a statement in which he accused the politicians who have governed Poland since 1989 of bringing the country to the brink of economic disaster. “After all, it was you, wearing suit and tie and Dior and Chanel cologne, who pampered one another for 12 years,” he said. “And you've pampered one another so effectively that today we're
dealing with a complete crisis in heavy industry, agriculture, small and medium-sized businesses, retail and services”. Socialism and capitalism were a disappointment to the Poles. “We choose the concept of the third way,” cries Lepper. Farms and shops are going down? Lepper has the anti-capitalist dogma of the harmfulness of banks and the stock exchange. A gap in the budget? Eradicate the bureaucrats and the corrupt politicians. All this smothered in the class gravy called struggling with the international plutocracy and its Polish slaves, to defend the suffering and the oppressed.

For the past months, Lepper has been trying to become an ambassador of social needs and anger. The good results in opinion polls are a sign of the extension of his potential electorate and his rhetoric should encompass a wider range of different issues. In fact, the problem of indebted farmers is absent.

The charisma of leader is an important component of populist parties (WATERLOT, 2003). Lepper has come a long way\(^{11}\) - from the position of a local chief with simplistic opinions, hurling insults and organising riots in towns and on roads, to that of the leader of a political party that today ranks second in public opinion polls. Thanks to a “spin doctor” appointed for the 2001 election, Lepper managed to present himself as “the most credible radical defender of the interests of economic transition losers”. The structure of the party and operating mode of the party both show that obedience to Lepper is complete. Andrzej Lepper and his methods used to gain publicity are notorious. *The Economist* published the picture of Lepper in «a Hitlerian pose» (the 29\(^{\text{th}}\) June 2002). Polish magazines also made comparisons with Hitler and Mussolini (*Wprost* the 22nd May 2002). For many politicians Lepper is not a respectable person. Lepper's career proves also the incapacity of the Polish justice system.

3. Self-Defence – a representation of agricultural interests?

As it was shown, Samoobrona started its career in defending small farmers, but in reality this trade union was very strong among big farmers (vide the size of exploitations of Samoobrona’s leaders who managed to entry to Polish Parliament).

\(^{11}\) Until 1980, Andrzej Lepper was a member of the communist party. After graduating from an agricultural school, he worked as a private farmer. In 1991 he led a hunger strike of farmers who were unable to pay off their loans.
This peasant organisation was able to attract the vote of those dissatisfied with the reforms, mostly poorly educated, older dwellers of rural areas and small towns (JASIEWICZ, 2002). After 2001, Lepper tried to enlarge his electorate in denouncing crisis in heavy industry, agriculture, small and medium-sized businesses, retail and services. He wanted to represent also owner-managers of a small firm or storekeepers. For example, he prevented a legal eviction of an illegal bazaar in the centre of the city. Thanks to youth organisation, Samoobrona tries to attract young people as well (PEISER, 2003). In consequence this organisation becomes more and more all catch party.

Lepper expresses the feelings of the lower middle class whose experience of capitalism has been a flop. Lepper's people are largely those who tripped up on loans they could not repay. Those who wanted to move on from the market stall to a shop, but were crushed by the supermarkets. Lepper's supporters are the would-be, frustrated members of a middle class that never emerged in Poland's incomplete capitalism. Ironically, Lepper's radical movement enjoys the support of many Poles who could form the bedrock of social stability and conservatism. People who were counting on the free market, but today stand on the platform from which the colourfully glinting train of capitalism has pulled out. This category includes moderately affluent farmers: crippled with debts, small businesses losing the battle for survival in the free market, office workers unable of adjust to a computerised world that prefers young people, the recent workers' aristocracy from traditional industrial sectors now threatened by massive layoffs. The political elite before Lepper couldn't find a common language with those rejected by capitalism, even the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), which is not a sufficiently radical critic of a hopeless reality for these people. There are the people who find everything terrifying - the EU, capitalism, Balcerowicz - who are convinced by Lepper's populism and its simple explanations.

CONCLUSION

Polish farmers were very critical about Polish negotiations with the European Union concerning agricultural issues. They shared the opinion that Poland should refuse to join the EU, because Polish farmers will be not treated on the same basis as
farmers from EU Members States. Polish countryside was disappointed because not only the results of negotiations was not satisfying, but also its party, the PSL was involved in these discussions and in the campaign before referendum on accession this party supported Polish integration to the EU.

In the past, linkages between the PSL and Polish countryside seemed to be established. Low trust in other political parties (PRIDHAM, 2000) did not concern this historical organisation. The problem of Polish accession to the EU shown that the PSL was unable to take account the importance of this issue for rural residents and farmers. The support of the PSL for European integration was in conflict with farmers’ expectations. The result of this situation was that farmers lend their backing to Self-Defence which knew how come up to their expectations. In order to gain the power, the strategy of Lepper’s party is to attract every kind of electorate.

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