The populism of the Right in Poland (Self Defence and Kukiz’15)
(draft, please do not circulate)

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The aim of the paper is to present a pilot study of “populist profile” of the two Polish parties - the Self-Defence (most succesful populist party in the past) and the most recent populist agent and a winner of the recent electoral blitzkrieg – Kukiz'15. The conceptual frame used for that purpose consist of three elements: location of those parties, their appeal (message) and the a type of a linkage (Baar 2009). Autors make use of the mixed method scenario - where the original (quantitative) data derived from Barometr Wyborczy 2015 project (Voting Advice Application) is supplemented by secondary sources of qualitative nature (observation, QCA). In result paper delivers not only an illustration of the political populism, where the political outsiders achive political aims through manipulated communication generated in a public space and strongly embedded in the principle of democratic order that is: the will and the status of the people, but also enables to enrich the framework in order to capture the new features of this phenomenon that can be contrasted with the wider European context.

Introduction – the problematic “-ism”

During the last decade, the rise of populism and populist parties have inspired several works, trying to tackle this phenomenon either in terms of definition or effect, both in Western and Central-Eastern Europe. Most of this research resulted in valuable contributions, but regardless of that fact the basic question of a populism conceptualization remained open.

The academic debate on populism is stretched between populism understood more broadly, as an ideology and narrowly as (just) a political strategy that can be adopted by many parties (Canovan 1981, 1999; Di Tella, 1997; Mudde, 2000, 2004; Taguieff, 1998, Taggart, 2000). The common denominators of these two understandings are undoubtedly demophilia – “love for the people” declared by populists combined with a protest vote.

In spite of appearances, the love for the people is neither encompassing nor uncritical. On the contrary, it has an exclusive character. Populism assumes different shades, depending on how it is defined by the people. It may be identified with a uniform ethnic group or national, as in the right-wing populists, but it can also be identified with the groups, according to populists “handicapped” or injured. For example, the unemployed or rural residents – a target group for
agrarian populists. Declared an ardent love for the people, unwavering faith in their wisdom and moral instincts go hand in hand with the populists anti-elitist claim.

Importantly, fighting in the name of the sovereign – the people, the community and / or the electorate involves both “representation of the interests” of these entities, as well as their “protection” from the enemy – “significant others” – that could be an individual, ethnic or sexual minority groups and others that do not fit in the given definition of “the people”. But excluded from the people’s club are also social elites, including political establishment. Thus antiestablishment stance works as a force forming a community, defining the boundaries between the others and the community preferred by the populists. Politicians are presented as corrupt and incompetent elites that simply “must step down”. This kind of a symbolic figure in Poland of the ‘90s was Leszek Balcerowicz – a father of a neoliberal “shock therapy” of the Polish economy, more recently it is a whole group of the Civic Platform politicians whose unofficial talks were recorded in 2014 and later revealed by media.

This Manichean view of the world, the conviction of a permanent division of society into the people and the elite, is a common denominator of movements and populist parties around the world. In Western Europe populists stood in opposition to “liberal consensus” multicultural post-war order. On the other hand, in Central and Eastern Europe they opposed the consensus of the transition period (market reforms, Euro-Atlantic integration, the European rejection of national sovereignties).

As for the economy, populism is not so clear cut – it balances between the market economy and the welfare state solutions (in Poland populists promoted a variety of solutions from tax cuts upon demand the state intervention in order to reduce the debt of the indebted representatives of the “community”). As a result the core of the populist ideology “puts virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous ‘others’ who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity, and voice” (Albertazzi, McDonnell 2008: 3).

Another key common element of populism concerns the communication strategy. It consists of two important elements - message design, so the way, abovementioned populist content is communicated to the public and its anchor persons (those who communicate). When the message design is concerned - populist style of communication becomes an effective tool to attract mass audience. It is due to its main four features: simplification that explains the world as not complex but but rather dichotomous system based on the assumptions that ones opinion is
right or not, society is divided into “us” and "them", and therefore the principle behind the public/political actions is that "who is not with us is against us". It second feature is utopian assumption that ideal world is possible to create, the third feature is the use of common denominators “we, the people”, and in result “shortening the distance" with recepients of the populist message. The latter feature is influencing behavioural component of social attitudes – encouraging people to take action in order to face threats or challenges (Dutkiewicz, 2013).

Demagogic message is used inside populist organizations (internal communication), but also to link with external environment – supporters and voters. Demagogy is populism’s necessary condition, although it should not be seen as a *sine qua non* one. Demagogy, is also a tool used more or less extensively by the entire political class – the ruling and opposition parties, from agrarian to those that based on a post-material set of values (Przyłęcki 2013). Importantly, this demagogic message is communicated by populist anchor persons – who usually are charismatic political outsiders.

Populist leaders do not exercise the “expert’s” power nor a formal one. Their power is rather assigned. According to Miroslaw Karwat, belief that a person has charisma comes from the fact that their competence surpasses other community members. Equally important is the sense of mission, which should have and should be communicated by a leader. So charisma is a product of one’s own personality and an output of communication (charismatic image creation) (Karwat 2014). But again, this particular type of leadership, although important part of populist communication strategy has been extensively used in the post-authoritarian societies by many politicians. The Polish case (again) offers a wide catalogue of examples, like a mysterious figure of Stanislaw Tyminski, who ignited the minds of voters and the media in the presidential elections of 1990, Lech Walesa who was known at the beginning of the ‘90s for demagogy combined with the charisma of the “people’s tribune”. A similar to Walesa’s type of populist charisma was presented by Andrzej Lepper in early 2000. Using psychological mechanisms of attribution, both tried to convince citizens that they are efficient and close to the struggle of an average citizen. More recently in Poland, Janusz Palikot, realized a scenario known as populism of entrepreneurs – when candidates who proved to be successful in other areas (e.g. management) enter politics in order to represent the people betrayed by the elites.

As indicated by M. Canovan populism itself is not anti-democratic (1999), understood as a strategy in the struggle for power – or, more broadly, as an ideology – can weaken democracy, but does not necessarily seek its overthrow. From the extreme left-wing or right-wing, populist
attitudes distinguishes consent for the operation within the political system, that is seen as an inefficient and has to be reformed. Therefore populist elements are perfect for the mainstream opposition, targeting a criticism or even negation of social reality. For the same reason, however, it loses clout when becomes a part of a previously criticized “establishment” ("self-limiting character of populism"). It is no different with the most known Polish populist parties – populist radical right League of Polish Families and populist Self-Defence in 2005-2007, whose status at the end of the term was metaphorically described as not more than a fate of “appetizers”.

As we see the understanding of 'populism' combines several approaches. Very few attempts have been made in classifying populist parties since the definition problems didn’t allow an operationalization of its specific features. The few studies adopting such an approach confirmed some of the theoretical presuppositions and offered new insights on the dynamic of populist parties’ development (Jagers and Walgrave, 2006; Deegan-Krause and Haughton, 2009). Apart from these studies, most of the other articles, dealing with this subject are analysing theoretically the features of populism without explicitly referring to the sources or presenting the data. This lack of methodological clarity may cause some misunderstanding of the basis of analysis and account for different interpretations. In spite of an academic efforts in a public debate the term itself is still frequently misused in political and media debates in order to label parties whose orientation is unclear or whose appeal to “the people” is just a part of a “catch-all” strategy.

A clear framework proposal in that regard has been made by Robert Barr (2009). In his article on populism he offers three distinctive criteria: the locus of the party (outsiders versus insiders), the type of linkage (plebiscitarian or clientelistic) and the type of appeal (anti-establishment) (Barr, 2009).

The locus, in Barr’s terms, indicates the position of the party in relation to the party system. He divides the existing actors into three groups: the insiders, the outsiders and the mavericks. The insiders are the parties that are already integrated in the party system and have a mainstream position, being either in office or the main opposition party (Kennedy, 1998). Only the two other categories of parties: outsiders and mavericks can be truly populist according to Barr’s definition.

The second aspect of the definition is the linkage between the leader and the electorate. This element has been underlined by many scholars, regarding the structure of populist parties or their level of institutionalization (Taggart, 2002; Gunther and Diamond, 2003). Barr suggests that a populist movement should have either a plebiscitarian or clientelistic linkage with the voters (Barr, 2009: 36).

The third aspect, evoked by Robert Barr is the type of appeal itself (Barr, 2009:31). This characteristic is correlated to the previous two because it is both connected with the party’s outsider position (criticizing all the representatives of the political elite) and the electoral linkage (putting the emphasis
on the direct link with the people and the personal popularity of the leader). The main criterion for classifying a party as populist stays the appeal based on a distinction between the elite and the people.

The three aspects, developed by R. Barr are quite useful because they offer a clear distinction between populist and traditional parties mobilizing a type of populist discourse only on a specific moment (usually while in opposition and during elections), but having a clear ideological profile. When applied to the Polish political context, it leaves aside several parties frequently recognised as populist ones (Cholova and Kasprowicz 2010: 10). Those matching Baar’s criteria are: the Self-Defence (SO) and the newly established Kukiz’15. To justify this, a short introduction to the Polish party politics is needed.

**Populist parties as an outcome of political crises (2001, 2015).**

The year 1989, marked by the historical circumstances of the round table talks and beginning of democratic transition, is seen as a “starting point” for the unprecedented party mobilization and was systematized and explained by a Polish sociologist Mirosława Grabowska in her thesis on the existence and functioning of a post-communist division in Poland. The split was driven by the conflict between different attitudes to the communist past and translated itself into the model of electoral behavior that lasted more than a decade. In the meantime populism seem to be an inevitable element of the Polish politics.

The parliamentary elections of 2001 in Poland revealed the structural change of party politics and of electoral behavior. At the eve of a new election the public opinion polls showed also highest level of disillusionment with the political elites, state institutions, and the parliament and courts (CBOS). The bipolar political competition between the post-communists and pro-democratic forces that shaped Polish politics since 1989 was about to end.

The governing coalition of the Electoral Action „Solidarność“ (AWS) - the last and only successful joint-venture of the right wing parties and its junior partner – the Freedom Union (UW) were defeated and marginalised. The Left Democratic Alliance (SLD), a party of communist origin returned to power. With its ally, the Labour Union (UP), it won 5.3 million votes (41% of the electorate), which was its best result since 1989. Although the post-communist social-democratic party formed the government, what shortly become obvious - that was its swansong.

New entities – the Civic Platform (PO) with 12.7% and the populist Self-Defence party (10.2%)

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1Paradoxically, the new political set-up was mostly the result of a new electoral law adopted by the AWS to avoid total defeat, predicted in the polls to come in early 2002 (CBOS 60/2001).
came second and third respectively. Another three parties which also entered the parliament were: the Law and Justice party – PiS (9.5%), the populist radical-right League of Polish Families - LPR (7.9%) and the agrarian PSL (8.9%) (National Electoral Commission).

In 2001 the alternative course was offered by the AWS off-shoots, newly-established parties of a growing importance, the Law and Justice Party (PiS) and the Civic Platform (PO) as well as populist and radical right representatives (the Self-Defence and the League of Polish Families – LPR). Except for PO, the other parties offered radical ‘law and order’ programs combined with a conservative or nationalist vision of the role of individuals, although, paradoxically, the right’s milieus retained a leftist economic stance. These conservative welfare ‘visions of the future’ were well received within the society, and helped to marginalize the social-democrats. The post-communist divisions were replaced by a new axis of political conflicts. It was accompanied by the new system of party financing that resulted in increased state subsidies to the parties and institutionalization of the new entities.

Compared to the status quo before 2001, the new regulations have excluded the possibility of political parties acquiring funds from individuals or organizations without legal status. The unclear links between politics and business of the ‘90s, with cases of campaign expenditure coming from just one (perhaps unknown) source, and untraceable flows of cash to parties was one of the most criticized elements of the political system during its early stage of development. The new law also narrowed the number of individuals entitled to sponsor a political party “by excluding individuals who do not have a registered address in Poland (except for Polish citizens living abroad) and foreign residents” (Chmaj, Walecki, Zbieranek 2005: 61).

The leader of a populist campaign who got substantial media attention in 2000 was Andrzej Lepper, a former communist activist and unionist, who in 1993, started the Self-Defence party (Samoobrona). In terms of political message, the party combined left-wing populism with a religious conservative world view targeting the group of ‘transformation losers’, mostly the farmers and inhabitants of rural areas.

The political crisis of the 2015 that enabled Kukiz’15 getting to power had less dramatic scenario but again produced a completely new political set-up, in which, the populist agent plays an important role. At the end of the second term in power (2007-2011; 2011-2015), the Civic Platform and the agrarian PSL noted the radical change in public opinion support (CBOS 2015). Knowing that the situation of two terms in power was an unprecedented in Poland, one should not
be surprised with the signs of the public fatigue with the PO-PSL. This was worsened first by Donald Tusk, the popular leader and the PM who accepted nomination for the post of the President of Council of Europe and left the party and by a major scandal linked to the PO-PSL government. In 2014, ‘Wprost’ weekly magazine published illegally-recorded conversations of politicians, businessmen, lobbyists and other public figures (most of them were cabinet members) frankly discussing business and politics in two upmarket restaurants in Warsaw.

Although none of these recordings uncovered illegal activities, the tapes shed light on the close ties between business and politics, and the lack of independence of the National Bank, which is supposed to be an autonomous body. They also revealed criticism of the government and foreign alliances formed by cabinet ministers (with the US notably singled out). The evident arrogance of the political elites and lack of effective spin-management, pushed the coalition out of public favour just a few months before the elections.

An issue that was to surface later was the constitutional tribunal crisis, which began in 2015 when PO appointed five constitutional tribunal judges. The change included the replacement of judges whose terms would not expire until after the oncoming election (that PO was predicted to lose).

As a result of presidential and general elections the PO-PSL coalition was move out of power (got respectively 24% and 5% of votes). The agrarian party, to that date a king-maker and a party of the highest Sartorians relevancy level passed the threshold by a whisker and lost most of its rural electorate. Along with the PO (drawn in internal quarrels) and another party the newcomer - .Nowoczesna (liberal party started by businessman R. Petru) struggle to become an effective opposition against the radical conservatives of the Law and Justice. The balanced bipolar competition between PO and PiS started in 2001 has ended.

The major force on the political scene become Law and Justice party, that after 8 years in opposition started to pursue its radical vision of change of political regime and replacement of political elites. The party, after gaining 37.5% of votes (18% of all eligible votes) got parliamentary majority necessary to form the cabinet (with Beata Szydło as PM). The PiS policies have been endorsed by the newly elected President (Andrzej Duda), the former party member.

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2 After the Law and Justice party won the parliamentary election in 2015, it made its own appointments to the court, arguing that the previous appointments of the five judges by PO were unconstitutional. The new government used it as the main argument to reorganise the Tribunal and to reduce its independence (Sejm 2015). The new regulations could in practice, easily paralyse the Tribunal and, in the light of the changes in the Constitution scheduled by the PiS, become an issue in domestic and foreign affairs. As a result, the PiS government has been accused of undermining democracy.
The Law and Justice party plan of the constitutional change in Poland would not be possible without the wider support of other parliamentary forces. Therefore, the Kukiz’15 – a newcomer on the political stage and the third largest party in Sejm gained unexpected relevancy. Although in the first months after election its stance towards the cabinet was ambivalent (Kukiz’15 voted against the Szydło’s government, four MPs left the party and become an unaligned in order to openly support the government) in many areas the parliamentary activity of the party proved compliance with the PiS vision of the state and society.

A summary of the electoral results of the most relevant parties and partners in governing coalitions since 1993 is presented in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1. The electoral results (parliamentary elections, Sejm) and governing coalitions/parties since 1993 (marked in grey). Populist parties marked in red.

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<tr>
<td>Election Action Solidarity (AWS)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
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<td>Freedom Union(UW - Unia Wolności)</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civic Platform(PO - Platforma Obywatelska)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12.68%</td>
<td>24.14%</td>
<td>41.51%</td>
<td>39.18%</td>
<td>24.09%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Polish Peasant Party(PSL - Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe)</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>6.96%</td>
<td>8.91%</td>
<td>8.36%</td>
<td>5.13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Left Democratic Alliance(SLD - Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej)/United Left</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>41.04%</td>
<td>11.31%</td>
<td>13.15%</td>
<td>8.24%</td>
<td>7.55%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Law and Justice(PiS - Prawo i Sprawiedliwość)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9.50%</td>
<td>26.99%</td>
<td>32.11%</td>
<td>29.89%</td>
<td>37.58%</td>
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<tr>
<td>League of Polish Families(LPR - Liga Polskich Rodzin)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7.87%</td>
<td>7.97%</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-defence(Samoobrona)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10.20%</td>
<td>11.41%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palikots Movement/Your Turn(Ruch Palikota/Twój Ruch)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10.02%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kukis 15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.61%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others:</td>
<td>16%</td>
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Source: National Electoral Commission

[1] The Leftist and Democrat coalition in 2007 included: the Left Democratic Alliance, the Democratic Party, the Social democracy of Poland and the Workers Union. The coalition entered parliament, but was dissolved in 2008.
[2] The United Left coalition in 2015 included: the Left Democratic Alliance, the Your Turn party, the Polish Socialists, Party, the Workers Union, and the Green Party.

'The outsiders' - protest movements behind the origin of populist parties.

The political crises described above opened the way to those, called by Baar as political outsiders – the Self-Defence and Kukiz’15.

The Self-Defence party’s origins go back to 1991, when Andrzej Lepper, the founder and
leader of the party, took the lead in a hunger-strike of the farmers who could not pay back their bank loans. Those farmers were soon joined by other agrarian-based interest groups and turned into one of the biggest protest movements in Poland. The apogee coincided with protests in July 1992, when supporters of the Self-Defense from different regions of the country participated in the so called march on Warsaw (Foryś 2011, Kącki 2013). After a series of strikes, Lepper formalized his political activity by establishing both a trade union and a political party (1992). In 2000 Self-Defence again organized a series of protests (a campaign of blocking major roads), which won them substantial media attention. Lepper won only 3.5% of votes in the presidential elections (PKW), but the time of populism in Polish politics was yet to come (Kącki 2013). Until 2001 the party had not passed the threshold. That fact reinforced Self-Defence anti-establishment electoral campaign (with slogans: “They have governed for too long!”) and continuation of the anti-establishment action while being in the Parliament (corruption accusations towards the mainstream party leaders, blocking the podium etc.).

Scandals around the party and the leader started already in the ’90s, when Lepper was accused of and found guilty on several charges: corruption, slander, disturbing peace, and sexual harassment. He himself with other top ranked Self-Defence activists became known for the clear clientelistic approach to democracy, which became a subject to criminal prosecution (buying votes, bribing candidates). Nevertheless, the party grew in support and became highly successful in the 2001 parliamentary elections, gaining 10.2% of the vote and, officially in opposition, becoming a silent supporter of the SLD social-democratic minority cabinet.

Andrzej Lepper continued his anti-establishment position while in parliament making corruption accusations against the mainstream party leaders, blocking the podium etc. In the 2005 elections the Self-Defence party won 56 seats in the Sejm and three Senate seats (National Electoral Commission), while in the presidential election, Lepper finished third in the first round of voting (his strongest position ever).

The party became junior coalition partner to PiS in 2006, but was also the reason for the premature dissolution of the cabinet. It lost both its seats and public funding in 2007 when it did not pass the threshold. Since then, and after the Lepper’s suicide in 2011, the Self-Defence party has operated on the political margins.

* The Kukiz’15 movement is a relatively new political movement, started by Pawel Kukiz (former singer, actor, and local activist) in 2013 as the Polish Indignados (Platforma Oburzonych)
soon entered the party politics, first as an electoral committee (EP elections 2014), and later, as a wide parliamentary coalition of populist and radical right forces (National Movement, RN).

His political involvement started in 2005, when he engaged in the electoral campaign of the Civic Platform (PO) and supported its leaders i.e. Donald Tusk in the presidential run. Five years later he was one of the organizers of the Independence March – the biggest event of the populist radical right circles in Poland, that annually takes place on the 11th November (Independence Day) in Warsaw. Before, he was known from his ultra-conservative world view and as an activist fighting against the abuse of power by the public administration against citizens (zmieleni.pl) and actively engaged in the projects dedicated to preservation of the Polish military cemeteries abroad.

As a opponent of party politics he refused to start a political party, but relied on conglomerate of a various interest groups with clear anti-establishment attitudes. The kick off event – was the Plaforma Oburzonych congress that gathered around 100 organizations (associations, trade unions) that represented those disappointed with the PO-PSL government. The event took place in the symbolic venue – the Gdańsk shipyard (where the Solidarity trade union was started) and gathered media attention. Several of the groups that signed up the Platforma Agreement supported Kukiz’15 in a year time.

In 2014, before the general election the leader appeared to be the dark horse of the presidential race, winning 20% of votes the end up third. In May 2015, just before the second round of elections Kukiz was winning in the rankings of trust in public figures with the result of 58% (CBOS) and kept building his political capital with local level activists (splinters from the mainstream parties and popular local politicians), and caught media and public attention with a combination of a radical anti-establishment rhetoric, the promotion of conservative solutions like a strong executive (the presidential system), along with the tools of direct democracy and more proportional electoral system.

As clarify by Baar: “An outsider is someone who gains political prominence not through or in association with an established, competitive party, but as a political independent or in association with new or newly competitive parties” (Ibid, 33). In our two cases the status of clear outsiders comes from the fact, that both parties entered the political spectrum literary from the outside of party politics, not just as a newly established parties but as a political by-products of mass protest movements (in early 90s and 2000s) that were started against the political milieu and passed the treshold of representation in the times of political crises.
Populist appeal generated in the public domain.

What Baar understands as populist appeal (message) is an rhetorical appeal that constructs a view of society where ‘the people’ (commoners) are pitted against the power elite (Ibid, 32). In his view, a variety of political actors use anti-establishment appeals, but populists are particularly known for doing so, therefore populist appeal is a nescessary but not only feature of populist party.

Confirmation of the Self-Defence populist nature can be found in the party official documents and electoral manifestoes where they claimed to be “the only one in Poland speaking in the name of all the people” (cited in: Wysocka 2007). The Self-Defence party had a clear message to represent us not them; the party presented itself at the elections in 2005 with the banner “They have already ruled, so now is the time for them to leave”. It presented clear anti-elitism. Based on the historical resentments of the pre WWII period – the poor are repressed by the rich owners (the elites). Self-defense, critically assessing the effects of the transformation paid special attention to the widening scope of social exclusion, including a growing number of social groups. Party proclaimed that only the implementation of its comprehensive program of socio-economic change can fix this problem. Lepper appealed to the poorest, the exploited, and those deceived and abused by the elites i.e. lodgers of municipal flats, poor people (peasants) facing the owners of the financial assets (elites). Furthermore, in party papers one can read about the “need to defend the poor and unemployed, honest and enterprising, but disadvantaged by the economic system” (Samoobrona Electoral Manifesto).

The leader appealed to the “poorest, robbed, deceived and abused by the elites who should be given back everything that was taken”. Lepper addressed his ideas also to: the unemployed, scorned and brave. In his writings the foreground is taken by the description of: “dramatic situation of the poorest, dodgy affairs, briberies, political and economical deceits, disdain for the farmers and wealth of the presidential officials.” In his opinion the state is deeply divided into a wealthy minority and poor majority. Theme often exposed in the program of the Self-Defence was the demand to strengthen state institutions, which should play a leading role in the regulation of a number of processes, and guaranteeing the rights of citizens, especially in the economic and social spheres. Such a role, according to party could be successfully played only by the national state. It should preserve the independence not only to structures and supranational organisms, but also in relation to international financial institutions and global corporations. He
also referred to anti-European sentiments; in 2002 in the Parliament he announced that his party would defend Polish producers’ interests. “The EU is not giving us equal chances, we won’t kneel, we won’t crawl according to what the EU wants”.

Lepper organized anti-state actions in the 1990s and was accused a few times of organizing blockades, breaking original regulations and refusing police orders. He explained that the aim of those actions was to draw the attention of the government and the Polish society to the dramatic situation of the agriculture (Lepper 2000). While being out of Parliament (before 2001 and after 2007) the leader intensified his direct links with the public. Especially during the electoral campaign – he announced the strategy of “being close to the people”, which could be illustrated by frequent meetings with the farmers during local feasts and open markets. On the other hand, while he was at the peak of his popularity, electoral meetings took place rarely (Kasprowicz&Cholova 2008).

* The current populist party wants to be seen as „non-ideological representative of a people” (Kukiz'15 website). However, the political goals of Kukiz’15 has been presented in the "Strategy for Change” - electoral manifesto published before the general elections in 2015. It was a combination of conservative and populist priorities, offering solutions to the issues that were (in a public eye) a result of the former government’s mismanagement.

The leitmotiv of the whole campaign and the manifesto was „taking the power back to the people from the hands of party clans” (Kukiz 2015), an introduction of single-seat constituencies (JOW) as a solution to the political stagnation as well as introduction of a presidential system and national referendum (with no threshold). The solution that was designed by Kukiz’15 to simplify the judicial procedures was Justice of the peace (nominated by the voters). The important element of the campaign was a claim to abolish the state funding for the political parties and decentralization of public administration.

The introduction of single-member constituencies was presented as a way of “healing the relationship between politicians-citizens”. The new solution was supposed to ensure the personal responsibility of the MPs to the citizens, allow the exchange of elites, who in the programme of Kukiz’15 were called as "passive but faithful" to the party leader. Leader Kukiz’15 attacked not only parties as the main political institutions but also targeted the mainstream media, which were asssued of being biased and politically dependend. He treated them as an inherent part of the system that needs to change. Declared war on "foreign media", proclaiming the need to combat
monopolies and foreign capital in the media market.

The statements by Kukiz’15 included rhetoric of outrage at the system, the party elite and the media. Party candidates used narrative "we are citizens." After the elections, the leader of Kukiz’15 announced that the group was successful in spite of the resistance of the political elite and the media – and the winners were the citizens, not the state (institutions).

In the economic sphere, unlike its predecessor (Self-Defence), the Kukiz’15 took a clear liberal stance, proposing i.e. elimination of personal income tax and liquidation of few others, passing a bill deregulating economic activity and liberalizing food market (but with privileges for the Polish farmers).

The third important element of the manifesto was Poland’s internal security and national defence. In that regard Kukiz’15 opted for the introduction of territorial defense system as a support system for professional operational troops, building an international coalition to prevent the European Climate and Energy Package.

The growing importance of the European refugee crisis and fact that the topic become an element of a pre-electoral media debate forced Kukiz’15 to take a stance. Ambivalent position towards refugees soon turned into negative one and became one of the central points of the populist message. By May 2016, the party was the only one that called for the national referendum regarding the refugee imposed by the EU.

The ideological position of the party derived from the Barometr Wyborczy VAA project (based on an expert interviews – Delphi method) contrasted with other mainstream actors as well as Kukiz’s stance towards the four topics is presented in the graphs below.

[Graph 1 and 2 about here]

The important differences between the two parties occurred on level of communication channelling. As noted, a decade ago, "S" was based on the mobilization of the electorate by means of direct communication, the organization of protests or marches, which embodied the idea of “war aganist elites” and were led by the outsider of political system. In the case of Kukiz’15 mobilization of the electorate took place mainly through quasi-direct channel of communication - Internet. In 2014 and 2015 in Poland one could observed a general shift in electoral campaigns towards using online tools and social media. Kukiz’15 Facebook, Youtube and Twitter profiles were used on unprecedentedly large scale. Facebook profile was Kukiz’15 leader biggest advantage in the
presidential campaign, the main channel through which the musician communicated with his constituents. The solution that initially was forced by the limited financial resources passed the test and earned him popularity. The presidential campaign has successful also thanks to the official Twitter account: "@prezydentKukiz." In the parliamentary campaign Twitter account was coordinated with the two official parties of traffic on Facebook: "Kukiz’15" and "Members of Kukiz’15." These profiles have become very popular due to their message design, which included comments made by the followers (often sharp in style and character of expression) and "interacted” with the electorate. Those profiles as well as candidates lists were opened for Internet users and gained its popularity due to intense exchanges of comments between the users themselves.

Internet users radicalized the political message of Kukiz’15 - its style and language and made the slogan of giving the power back to citizens even more credible. On the one hand, the party could not be held responsible for the radical content of its own channels but did not hesitate to exploit it in the course campaign. That strategy made the whole communication easy for politicians to manipulate, to be radicalised and framed in a particular way, it also, in our opinion established new type of plebiscitarian linkage mentioned by Baar in his work.

Summary (draft):

The main reasons behind the success of populist forces in Polish party politics that have been underlined by academics is the socioeconomic challenges of post-communism and the inability of existing elites to successfully develop strong leadership (Shields 2012: 361). In other words, in the last 25 years, populists in Poland have benefited from inadequate economic reforms and the effects of global crises, as well as from the weaknesses of the country’s political elites. As indicated in the course of these paper another element that also should be taken into account is social/protest movement origin of a given party, and its outsiders status in the mainstream politics.

When assessing the way new populists organize own structures and how they design formal links with the mainstream and society, it appears that their modus operandi here is to keep balancing in a grey zone between spheres of what is known as “political” and “social”. In result, the Kukiz’15 success strategy in the parliaments equals avoidance of consensual actions like becoming partners in coalition, refusal to turning into the officially registered political party. Populist strategists also seek to strengthen the role of the vertical links between public authorities and
representative voters, for example, by reference to direct democracy. Therefore populists they propose to strengthen the tools like referendums, plebiscites or e-voting. The latter – interned based tools of participation become a winning formula to gain the attention and activate the youngest part of the Polish electorate.
Graph 1 Ideological position of the Kukiz’15 before elections 2015 (Source: Barometr Wyborczy)

Graph 2 Kukiz’15 stance towards: law and order, tradition, UE, deregulation (Source: Barometr Wyborczy)