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## **EXTREMIST RIGHT IN POLAND**

**Paper by**

**Nikolay MARINOV**

**Director**

**François Bafail**

**CNRS – Sciences Po/CERI**

**Collège Universitaire de Sciences Po – Campus de Dijon**

Polish extreme right fractions experienced a relatively unexpected short-lived period of electoral success in the beginning of the 21st century. This gain of public opinion approval lies on a superimposition of processes that were set in motion in Polish society throughout the transition period. For six years between 2001 and 2007, parties like the overtly extremist League of Polish families (LPR) and the populist left-right swinger Self-Defense (Samoobrona – SO), attracted media attention with the unpredictability of their electoral performance and controversy of the stances they were advocating, until a brief period in government for the first when a series of scandals exhausted their popularity and ballot box support withdrew to such an extent that even a promising environment consisting of an economic crisis could not help the extreme right resurrect from the little glorifying existence in oblivion. A contributing factor for their recent demise is the ascension of the populist right-wing Law and Justice party that diverted the more moderate elements of the electoral base. As the Polish extreme right is widely considered in the current political arrangement as practically defunct, it is legitimate to explore the way in which its presence contributed in shaping the political debate in post-communist Poland.

The League of Polish families is a political party which traces its roots back to a neo-nazi racist movement founded in the early 1990s by the young Roman Giertych, he himself being a third generation of extreme right politician. The movement recruited members from the young skin-head groups in Poland who extolled the virtues of anti-Semitism and homophobia. In the beginning of the 2000s the LPR was founded by former important politicians who later radicalised their views. Throughout the subsequent years in Parliament the loose alliance that was LPR saw its solo player founders leaving the alliance, opening the way to leadership to the young and dynamic Roman Giertych and his base of matured skinheads. Their core of values consisted of attachment to the Catholic faith, preservation of Polish sovereignty, Europhobia, antiglobalisation. They gained further support because of the fact that one of the most popular Catholic radios – Marija – embraced them publicly and oriented its millions of listeners to vote for the LPR. The party obtained spectacular results. In the 2001 legislatures they won 7.87 % of the vote and 38 seats in the Lower Chamber.<sup>1</sup> In the 2002 local elections they won 14 % of the vote and inundated local councils throughout the country. Its biggest success were the 2004 European parliament elections

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<sup>1</sup> For election results see annexe below

where they obtained 15 % of national vote and sent 10 deputies to Strasbourg (Brussels). The swift of radio Marija from LPR to Law and Justice resulted in the transfer of votes to the former but their score a little bit below 1000000 votes permitted them to stay in Parliament and even participate in a coalition government with Law and Justice. The electoral map of the early 2000s shows that the fortresses of the LPR are the marginalized border and rural regions of the Subcarpathian and Podlaskie Voivodeships, closely attached to local community and traditional values. A common image of a LPR voter is a non-educated person (21 %)<sup>2</sup> between the age of 55-64 (16%). This led to the elaboration of an archetypal model of the LPR voter as an elderly religious lady. The majority of these voters chose the right zing successor of Solidarity AWS in 1997 but remained disappointed by the poor performance of the Buzek government. They are more concerned by nationalistic sentiments than economic problems, reflecting the minimal interest of LPR in the economy.

This lack of interest for the economic issues was compensated by the other significant actor on the extreme right wing sector – Self-Defence. Their political orientation is rather fluid as they possess elements of both right and left wing party but in general they are left in what concerns economy and right to the extent that they are passionate nationalists. Guided for more than twenty years by their charismatic leader Andrzej Lepper, the party had relative success in the same period as LPR. They trace back their origins to the early 1990s protestations of peasants against privatization of lands which resulted in numerous arrests of their members. The party defines itself as the protector of the poor and the oppressed against the merciless exploitation of capitalists, with their leader Lepper acquiring the aureole of a living martyr. Their populism dictated them a dubious and indecisive stance towards the EU. After a disastrous for Lepper presidential campaign in 2000, the leader managed to attract voters and in the 2001 legislative elections they gained more than 10 % of the vote and 53 seats in Parliament. In the 2002 locals they obtained 16 % of votes. Although the European parliament elections of 2004 led to disappointment, the 2005 legislative elections were an important success as the party increased its seats in the Sejm to 56 and finished third. The voting pattern of Samoobrona is more masculine than that of LPR (64 % men) and their elector is more educated and less religious. But the success of Samoobrona is best explained by the classical cleavage between centre and periphery as the party flourished in the rural areas and in the small

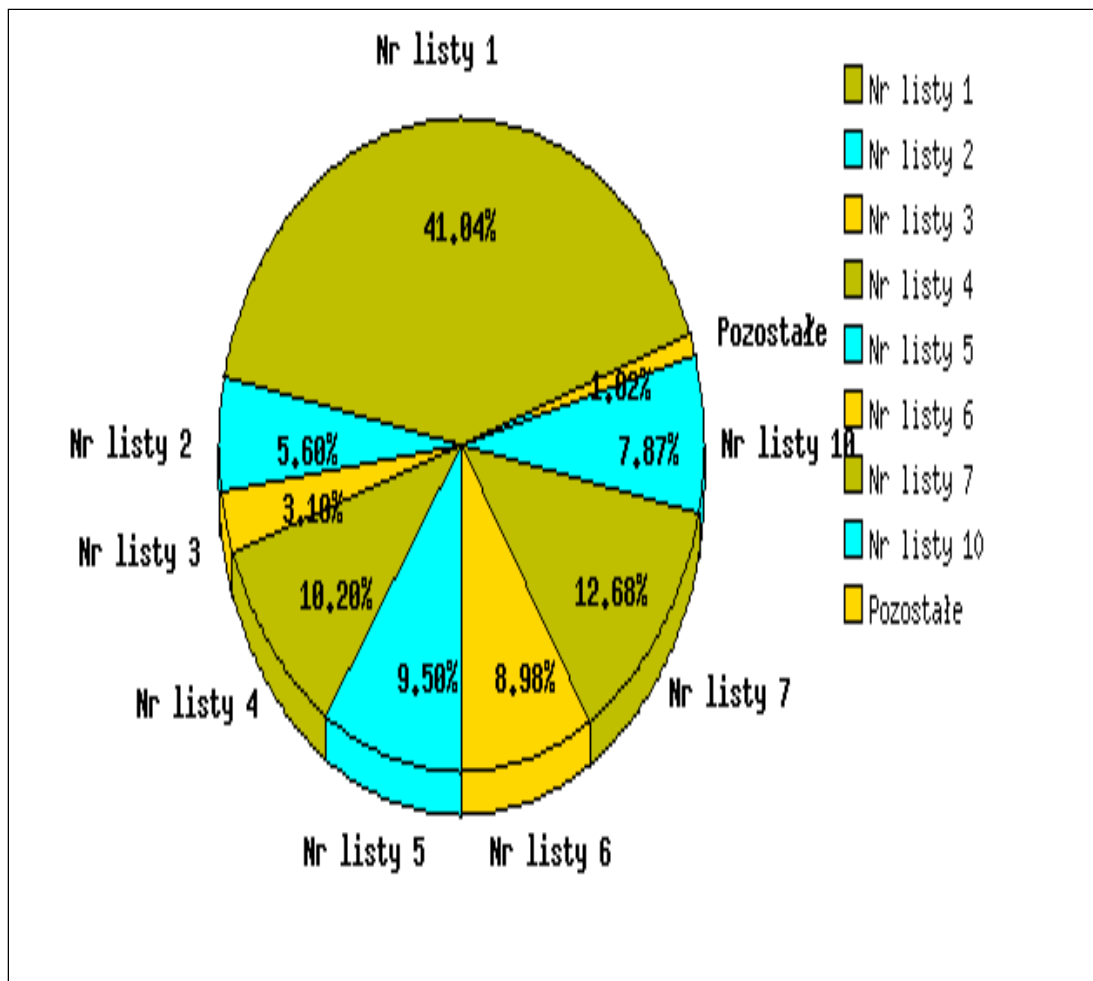
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<sup>2</sup> Data is from 2001 elections

villages, especially in the regions of Lublin and West Pomerania with little support in the industrialized area. Their success reflected the growing resentment with the troublesome transition, the disillusionment with capitalist rules in the economy and the loss of social benefits available in the communist period.

As a reflection of a present common opinion, right wing extremism should not be ignored from the political discussion because it canalizes certain frustrations through socially accepted demonstrations on the political stage. Although their presence inundated media and political discussion with bitter racism, brutal anti-Semitism and abject nostalgia to communist past, they should not be neglected as completely nefarious. Throughout the transition period they contributed to the expression of cons of European integration, making the social debate richer and giving more legitimacy to the landslide victory of the Yes campaign during the referendum. LPR also played a decisive role in the adoption of the lustration in law that extended the power of the Memory Institute whose mission is to prevent power from the presence of former Bolsheviks. Despite their success, recent development indicates little hope for future comeback of extremism in Poland. Successful institution building, tough time with right-wing extremism in government, openness to the world and economic growth are not the promising circumstances that would allow extremism to thrive.

Annexe 1 : 2001 Parliamentary elections results



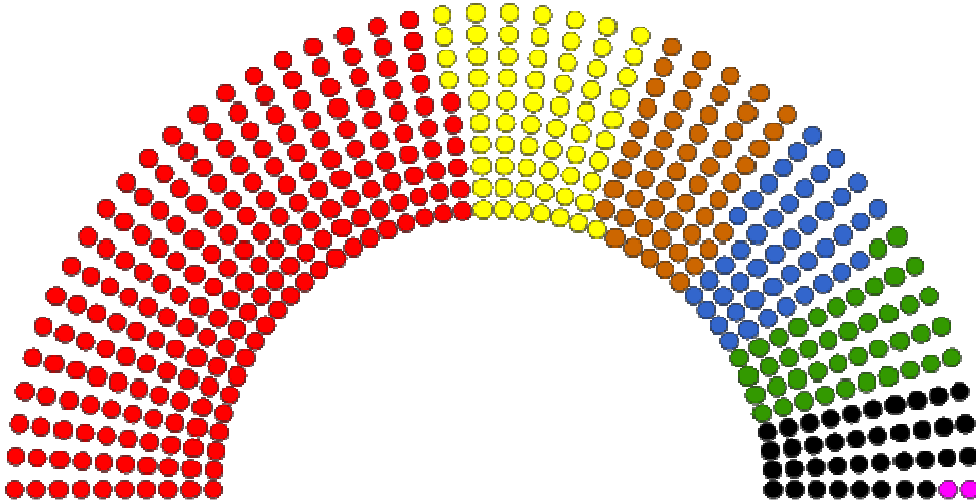
- Liste No 1 Alliance of the Democratic Left
- Liste No 2 Electoral Alliance Solidarity
- Liste No 3 Freedom Union
- Liste No 4 **Self-defense (Samoobrona)**
- Liste No 5 Law and Justice PiS
- Liste No 6 Polish peasant's party
- Liste No 7 Civic platforme
- Liste No 10 **League of Polish families LPR**

Distribution of seats in the Sejm after the 2001 Parliamentary elections

Samoobrona – in brown

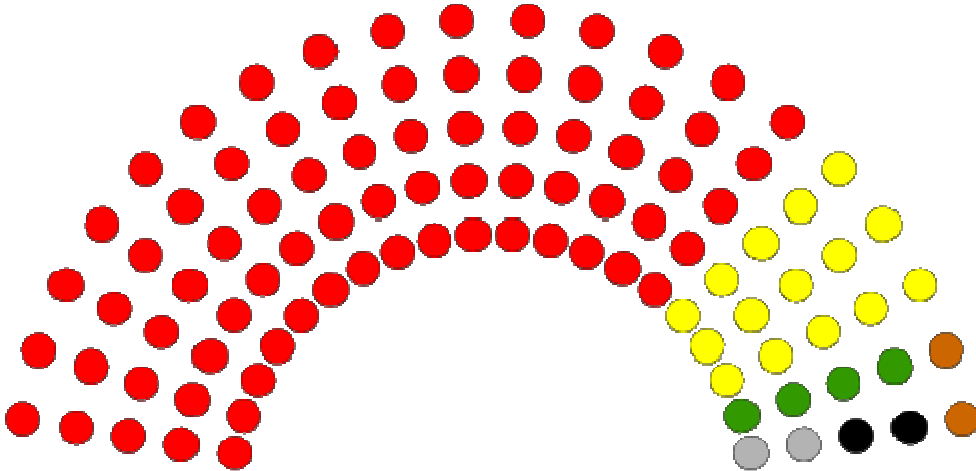
LPR – in black

PiS – in blue



Distribution of seats in the Senate after the 2001 Parliamentary elections

Samoobrona – in brown  
 LPR – in black



Annexe 2 : Results of the 2004 European Parliament elections

| Party | Number of votes | % | Seats in the European Parliament |
|-------|-----------------|---|----------------------------------|
|-------|-----------------|---|----------------------------------|

|   |           |       |    |
|---|-----------|-------|----|
| Platforma Obywatelska (PO)                                  | 1 467 775 | 24,1  | 15 |
| <b>Liga Polskich Rodzin (LPR)</b>                           | 969 689   | 15,22 | 10 |
| Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS)                                | 771 858   | 12,67 | 7  |
| <b>Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej<br/>(Samoobrona)</b> | 656 782   | 10,78 | 6  |
| Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej Unia Pracy<br>(SLD-UP)         | 569 311   | 9,35  | 5  |
| Unia Wolności (UW)  | 446 549   | 7,33  | 4  |
| Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (PSL)                            | 386 340   | 6,34  | 4  |
| Socjaldemokracja Polska (SdPI)                              | 324 707   | 5,33  | 3  |
| others  | 506 520   | 8,3   | -  |
| total   | 6 091 531 | -     | 54 |





