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The Specifity of Electoral Volatility in European Parliament Elections

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between the parties within a system. Each of these perspectives is connected with changes of electoral support for individual parties in time, but the results are aggregated differently. From the broadest perspective, systemic volatility measures changes in electoral support for all the subjects in a party system; a slightly narrower one adds up the support for particular families or blocks of political parties, and the narrowest one refers to single parties only. The last group of definitions of electoral volatility involves the description of the phenomenon with regard of its determinants. Many researchers make terminological effort trying to describe electoral volatility with the use of its sources, which are usually constituted as a study hypothesis or the result of conducted empirical analyses.

Thus, a change in political party support is the basic unit of analysis of electoral volatility. It is important both from the theoretical and the practical points of view. Political parties are the main representatives of citizens on the political scene. One of the fundamental functions of political parties (apart from the state/public and organizational ones) is the social function [Herbut 1997: 68 and the following], which to a greater or lesser degree connects a political party with the social structure. Entering the parliament depends on obtaining the required number of votes in an election, and this is connected with the development and implementation of an election strategy oriented at obtaining the votes. "This strategy is a specific commodity introduced to the election market, the programmes presented to mass electorate, which usually becomes the point of reference for an individual voting decision ... typically based on a specific concept defining the ideological and policy identity of the party" [Ibidem: 69]. So the election result is a consequence of interactions between voters and the political party. The studies on electoral volatility reflect the changes of these relations in time and at various levels.

Analyses of electoral volatility usually refer to national elections. Although European Parliament (EP) elections have long been an integral element of Europe's electoral landscape, they actually have a lower social importance than the national ones. It is explained by the fact that the political system of the European Union (EU) does not clearly position the electoral scene as the most important element of representative democracy [Wojtasik 2012: 282]. Although in the social consciousness the mechanism of appointing representation in the process of EP elections is perceived as similar to that observed e.g. in parliamentary elections, these elections (contrary to those at the national level) do not result in ultimate structuring of the political competition space. The internal organization of that space is ultimately ensured by national governments, delegating their representatives to European institutions. The social perception of EP elections, attributing them less importance than general national elections, is connected with regarding them as second-order elections.

Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt [1980] use this term to refer to elections which – despite being influenced by national politics of particular countries – actually have no significant impact on the national politics. Schmitt [2005: 650 and the following] points out a few characteristics of EP elections which make them second-order elections: (a) *lower level of political participation*, which probably results from not very intensive voting activation processes and low politicization of European elections; (b) *reflecting the national political situation in electing supranational representatives* – voters often treat European elections as an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with national politics; (c) *different voting motivations* – because European elections are socially perceived to have a lower rank and as a consequence to have a weak impact on national politics, voters more rarely decide on strategic voting and follow their natural preferences instead, which may mean greater support for small parties or those with weaker national competition strength. Robert Wiszniowski [2008: 9] makes the thesis that the "location" of EP in the European political space is not clear for many member states' citizens. It leads to general "disorientation" among voters, resulting in the trivialization of European elections and treating them as less important than national ones. The second order gives EP elections a specific character which generates features significantly affecting electoral volatility. Largely they function at the level of the state electing its European representation, because despite the supranational character of decisions taken by the EP, voting behaviours in European elections are moderated by the national context. Further in the article will be presented the features of EP elections which generate electoral volatility at different levels of analysis.

The first significant factor is clearly **weaker activation mechanisms applied at the national level** in EP election campaigns, which are bound to translate into citizens' irregular voting patterns at the systemic level. It results from two things. The first is the weaker and less intensive positioning of election campaigns in the media, which is the main policy of communication with the electorate. Currently, the role of the media is no longer only to provide information. It is an active participant of the socio-political reality, in which it creates its own messages, actually becoming a message in itself [McLuhan 1964 /2005/: 7]. Along with the growing speed of information and the development of new information technologies which give the media opportunities to influence the society, election campaigns and transferring current election information in the media have become an integral element of each pre-election period. The role of the media in electoral campaigns is focused on two directions of activity. Firstly, candidate images are crystallized and campaign topics are presented through mass media. The media is the most important carrier of – on the one hand – pre-election information advertising, oriented at providing voters with the basic information concerning

the election (voting procedures, seat distribution, also its institutional importance), and on the other hand, political advertising encouraging to support particular candidates in the election. Secondly, the media is often the means of conveying various public service campaigns. It is used to provide information on European structures or the competencies of particular EU institutions, as well as to conduct campaigns oriented at the electoral activation of citizens (e.g. e-Europa, Your Europe). Activities taken not only in the pre-campaign period, whose aim is to activate the citizens for elections and make them want to participate in the upcoming election, may considerably affect the level of (first of all systemic) electoral volatility. They are oriented at activating specific target groups which – as shown by pre-campaign analyses – do not manifest any significant interest in elections, and probably without the pro-turnout activities would not exercise their right to vote. Provisional activities stimulating citizens to be active in the election may fully accomplish their goal in one election but will upset the stability of citizens' active participation in the next one. Another issue is the strategies used by candidates contesting in European elections, different to those applied in national campaigns. The difference is mainly connected with their lower intensity. Julia Lodge [1982; 1986; 1990; 1996], describing the tactics of political parties in European election campaigns, observes that these elections are "disappointing" in that parties do not apply themselves to campaign activities and more often rely on social opinions, evaluations developed at the national level in the pre-election period.

The second factor generating electoral volatility in EP elections is **movements promoting Euroscepticism**, often activated in the campaign period, which may result in discouraging voters from participating in elections of supranational representatives. The advancing process of extending the European community has also caused the activation of negative assessments and attitudes to the integration process. Tamás Boros and Zoltán Vasali [2013: 11] point out the following most important motives moderating discussions on Euroscepticism: (1) *the conflict between national identity and international cooperation* – Eurosceptics claim that European integration processes lead to autonomous states having to renounce their previous accomplishments in the process of strengthening their positions in favour of other states which will draw particular benefits from those positions; (2) *the image of "punishing Europe"*, which in order to achieve a quick and effective improvement in the macroeconomic sphere imposes a number of sanctions and austerity measures, perceived by Eurosceptics as "Brussels dictatorship"; (3) *the character and quality of democracy in the EU*. Currently available tools do not always allow EU subjects to protect democratic political institutions in member states or to cope with the lack of such institutions. It often results from the lack of common democratic standards, consistently adopted in all member states. This may translate into difficulties in maintaining the political structure of

a whole group of member states; (4) *failure to meet expectations connected e.g. with the plans of EU structures' expansion to the Eastern Europe*. In literature of the subject we can find a number of typologies which show the multidimensionality and different faces of Euroscepticism. Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak [2001] differentiate between the "hard" Euroscepticism – negating the very idea of the EU and demanding the rejection of all existing projects proposed by its bodies, and the "soft" one – largely having a situational character, only referring to certain areas of activity of EU structures not accepted by the individuals who express this approach (e.g. joining the Euro zone). Tamás Boros and Zoltán Vasali [2013: 10] identify (a) *socially-based Euroscepticism* – connected with the characteristics of particular social groups which seek the causes of difficulties their members face (e.g. impoverishment) in EU structures; (b) *Euroscepticism based on prejudice* – for example prejudice to immigrants, other races or other nations; (c) *rational Euroscepticism* – based on reliable information on EU structures, extensive historical and political knowledge, the ability to find the advantages and disadvantages of politics done at the European level, and predicting the consequences of supranational projects; (d) *normative Euroscepticism* – a specific kind of Euroscepticism, initiated in the central structures of the EU, openly criticizing national policies of member states which do not comply with the values promoted by the central authorities of the EU (e.g. towards national minorities). The character of Euroscepticism greatly depends on the cultural and ideological context of a given state, which defines the proportions of its particular kinds. Thus it can be saturated with the elements of rationality, aggressiveness or ideology to different degrees. Depending on the context, various neologisms are also used, reflecting the message and form of the movement: "Euro-indifference" [Delmotte 2007], "Europhobia" [Rozenberg 2007]; "Eurocynicism" [Krouwel, Abst 2007], "Eurorealism" [Neumayer 2007]. But irrespective of the nature of Euroscepticism, the movements that demand this approach are oriented at more or less intensive criticism of EU institutions, which actually initiates processes boycotting election participation. The different strength and scope of Eurosceptic activities during electoral campaigns will influence the irregularity of voting behaviours and intensify systemic electoral volatility.

The third factor in the analysis will be the voting strategies applied. In voting in EP elections a clear tendency is emerging to depart from strategic voting, which means that **voters more and more often turn to small parties**. The lack of direct effects of the elections in domestic politics causes citizens to activate the model of voting according to their sincere and first preference [Markowski 2008: 31-32]. In national elections, strategic voting is more often activated, which must meet two conditions – the citizen does not choose between entities on the basis of their direct "first" preferences and their decision

results from the internal belief that they are likely to change the result of the election [Wiszniowski 2008: 212]. Motivations outlined this way are determined by the will to change the result of the election and the expectation that it is possible. They also mean that in order to maintain the perspective of influencing the final solution of the election, the voter will give up on their real party preferences. In this context, European elections give a citizen the opportunity to express their authentic preferences. Believing in the autonomy of elections of supranational representatives as compared to national ones, as well as the lack of direct impact of EP election results on national politics, they are stimulated to activate "voting as the heart tells them". Such voting, based on permanent ideological and policy attachment to a particular party, generates the stability of voting behaviour in time and leads to lower party electoral volatility.

But because of the characteristics of European elections, an alternative hypothesis is also possible: if European elections are treated as an opportunity to reflect national politics, they will be **more susceptible to changes of public mood** understood as a combination of emotions in the society generated by the socio-political situation. These emotions are negative when subjective expectations of the actions of decision-making entities in the country are not met and central actions receive poor assessment from the society. The mood may be manifested in various ways: it will be visible in lower trust in party subjects in public opinion polls, and in the extreme form they may even generate strikes and protests. EP elections – due to the attributed second order – are also a field where public dissatisfaction with the authorities is expressed. Hence they will also be susceptible to emotions intensified in the society by the national level representatives. In practice it means that the currently governing national parties usually have poorer results in EP elections than in the country. It is a consequence of voters' strategic behaviour: using the opportunity to really punish the authorities for unacceptable directions of activity, they resign from supporting the winners of national elections. The sensitivity of EP elections will generate a higher level of party electoral volatility, because it will be a function of changing public mood depending on the activities of parties currently taken at the national level.

The crystallization of dissatisfaction with the rulers occurs within the framework of retrospective voting, which indicates direct relations between the voter's perception of economic issues and assigning the responsibility for their condition to the current government. The first assumptions of this model were outlined by Valdimer O. Key [1966], who expressed the belief in his book that when approaching the ballot boxes, voters have their reflections concerning the quality of life within the latest inter-election period well thought out. If this assessment is positive, they are inclined to vote for the entity that has been ruling as a result of distribution of votes in the previous election. If, however, they

have sensed the lowering of life quality, they will vote for another subject. This process is referred to as electoral reward and punishment or as a mechanism of democratic control of rulers [Cwalina, Falkowski 2006: 70]. Gregory B. Markus [1988] identifies *pocketbook voting* and *sociotropic voting* within retrospective voting. The mechanism is similar here. Voters attribute responsibility to the rulers – on the one hand for their individual financial situation, and on the other hand, for managing the national economy. Then they evaluate their financial situation since the latest election (in the microeconomic perspective) or the condition of the national economy in general (in the macroeconomic perspective). They punish or reward each of the rulers of the last term of office.

The accuracy of retrospective voting in its pure classic perspective is however only surface in the context of relations between the national and international economy. It is so because the politics of the EU plays an important role in national economic strategies, as it shapes and determines the directions of national economy. In particular, the creation of the Euro zone undeniably increases the significance of European structures for national politics. The taking of economic decisions is becoming a more and more multilevel process, which must involve the cooperation of national, international and transnational subjects. This tendency can be expressed with the question by Mark A. Kayser [2007] – *How domestic is domestic politics?,* which emphasizes the greater and greater permeability of European economies and the lower and lower autonomy of the national ones. Because of the growing popularity of national economies in the European space and their mutual permeation, more and more researchers concentrate on the importance of economic voting in the international context.

However, these studies do not provide absolutely unambiguous results, On the one hand, a number of works point out a significant relation between these variables. For example, Timothy Hellwig [2008] proved on the basis of studies he had conducted that taking into account the globalization processes in the electoral reflections lowered the importance of economic voting in France and Great Britain. In extensive research carried out in the countries of the South Europe (Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal) Marina Costa Lobo and Michael S. Lewis-Beck [2012] made the hypothesis that if voters can see the dependence of national economic policy on the European one, they are less likely to blame the government for poor development of the country. This conjecture was statistically confirmed. The weakening of the tendency to economic voting when noticing the impact of international processes on the domestic economy is partially explained by research conducted in the year 2001 in 15 European countries [Christensen 2003]. It proved that nearly half of the respondents share the opinion that national governments are unable to control globalization processes. Such a belief directly exempts national governments from the responsibility for the state's poor

economic condition, seeking external reasons for it in a subject difficult to define and processes difficult to perceive. The significance attributed to domestic issues in the mass media, especially emphasizing economic factors, is also worth mentioning. It turns out that the poor economic condition of the country is usually attributed by citizens to the fact that the country belongs to EU structures. But if the economic standing of the country is good, they explain it with good decisions of domestic political elites [e.g. Adam 2012; Liebert, Trenz 2010]. Robert Wiszniowski [2008: 230] shows that the situation is actually even more complicated. It results from the fact that domestic matters are basically completely controlled by national party elites, and European matters are far beyond their influence. Making use of this, the media (the less restricted ones) "composes" the European contents, and often resorts to criticizing the activities of domestic governments under the "disguise" of European matters.

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EP elections are a permanent element not only of the European political space but also of national political spaces of each member state. Thus, voting behaviours in a supranational election are to a considerable extent moderated by domestic factors. It is within the framework of the national structure that key activation processes are initiated, playing an important role in the electoral activation of citizens. They may be intentional – e.g. connected with pro-turnout campaigns, spreading information on EU structures and EP elections. They may also result from the specific nature of the state – its political culture and freedom of the media or approval for the activity of formal and informal movements promoting or negating the membership of the state in the EU. These factors may significantly affect the level of electoral volatility both at the systemic and the party level. It seems, then, that although the European political space may be isolated from the methodological point of view, it is not really independent. It is subject to clear influences of national spaces, which shape it among others through moderating the voting behaviours of their citizens in supranational elections.

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EQUAL OR NOT? ON THE MATERIAL ASPECT OF EQUALITY OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS IN POLAND

Abstract:

This article focuses on the issue of equality of elections, in the context of the 2014 European Parliament election in Poland. Most often the definition of principles of elections' equality comes down to emphasizing its two aspects: the formal one and the material one. The first of them refers to guaranteeing each person with the active voting right the same number of votes. The material aspect of the equality principle is connected with striving to guarantee the same "voting power" to the election participants. Most briefly, it means that a given number of people elect as many representatives as another group with the same numerical strength.

The main aim of this article is focus on the material aspect of implementing the principle of equality in EP elections. In the article will be emphasized three issues decisive for the specific features of the electoral system (electoral districts, election threshold and electoral formula), at the same time influencing the range of implementation of the material equality of elections. General findings will be confronted with empirical data, which will allow to formulate conclusions about the degree to which the European Parliament election conducted in Poland on 25th May 2014 met the principle of material equality.

Key words:

equality of elections, the European Parliament, electoral system

Introduction

Equality is a positive value in democratic regimes. When it is emphasized, the aim is to show that the members of a certain community are treated in the same way regarding their freedoms, rights and responsibilities. So equal

treatment of everybody, regardless of sociodemographic differences between people, is the goal to which the rulers should strive in political systems considered to meet the requirements of democracy.

The essence of equality discussed on the political ground comes down to the fact that the preferences of one citizen are no more significant than the preferences of another one [Dahl, Lindblom 1953: 41]. Hence, the attempts to create an institutional system which will guarantee each citizen an identical opportunity to participate in taking political decisions and controlling the decisions taken by the authorities are completely understandable. Taking into consideration the fact that the contemporary democracy is predominantly representative, the institution of elections is of key importance, especially regarding the way they are organized and conducted. After all, they are the basic form of citizens' participation in taking decisions on who will exercise the authority and as a consequence, whose and what kind of political programme will be chosen for implementation by particular public authority bodies[1] [Wojtasik 2012: 54-77; Wojtasik 2013: 25-38].

Elections are organized at various levels. The highest systemic and social significance is attributed to elections organized at the national level [Wojtasik 2011: 209]. By means of such elections, the citizens of a given country decide about the personal composition of the parliament (or at least one of the chambers in the case of bi-cameral parliaments). In many countries, it is becoming more and more popular to leave the issue of appointing the head of the country to the direct decision of the sovereign. Besides, political practice confirms that in different countries the institution of general elections is used as a way of creating still other national authorities (e.g. the election of the Prime Minister in Israel), which in turn proves the endemic character of many systemic solutions.

The processes of decentralization of power have led to the development of different forms of territorial self-government and/or territorial autonomy [Domagała, Iwanek 2013: 15-29; Domagała, Iwanek 2014: 29-41]. As a consequence, the citizens of certain selfgovernmental communities or autonomic regions also participate – apart from national elections – in elections at the local and regional level.

Finally, it should be noted that internationally – since the 19th century, all the way through the 20th century up to now – interrelation of countries, concerning different areas of their existence, has been more and more obvious. One of its expressions in Europe is integration processes, with their institutional manifestation of the European Union, already including almost thirty states. The formation of supranational European structures resulted in the creation of

[1] Significant differences in the execution of the elections' function are particularly observed in the case of European Parliament elections [Hix 2010: 123; Wojtasik 2012: 300], although the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty leads to the reconsideration of some conclusions.