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EUROPEANNESS AMONG POLISH CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISTS

ABSTRACT The European discourse is not only a powerful idea at the structural societal level, it is also pragmatically used, re-produced and transformed through the everyday actions of people with specific biographies.¹ In this paper, I would like to address the question how Europeaness – i.e. relating to Europe and/or being European – develops during one's life course. I propose a qualitative sociological approach and the methodology of discourse research² and biographical analysis.³ The empirical cases to be discussed are social actors who perceive themselves to be civil society activists. As such, they are actively involved in the public arena, thereby contributing to the development of public and media discourses. They talk about Europe from the perspective of specific biographies that have to be reconstructed if we are to understand the genesis of their Europeaness. In analysing the biographies of civil society activists in post-socialist Poland, two ideal types could be reconstructed that apply to both the activity and the Europeaness: a) a pragmatic, skill and qualification-related type and b) an idealistic, empowerment and emancipation-related type. In order to discuss these two types, I shall first outline the methodology applied and the empirical material. I will then focus on the narratives, using the framework of biographical

¹ See I. Alber, *Zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement in Polen. Ein biographietheoretischer und diskursanalytischer Zugang*, Wiesbaden 2016; eadem, "Doing Civil Society in Post-socialist Poland. Triangulation of Biographical Analysis and Discourse Analysis", *Przegląd Socjologiczny*, vol. 65, no. 4 (2016), pp. 91-110; R. Miller et al., "Dimensions for the Expression of European Identity", in R. Miller, G. Day (eds.), *The Evolution of European Identities. Biographical Approaches*, New York 2012.

² See R. Keller, *Doing Discourse Research. An Introduction for Social Scientists*, transl. by B. Jenner, London 2013.

³ See G. Rosenthal, "Biographical Research", in C. Seale, G. Gobo, J.F. Gubrium (eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice*, London 2004.

and discourse analysis in the sociology of knowledge tradition. My conclusion summarises the biographical development of Europeanness of Polish civil society activists.

Key words: biographical research, discourse analysis, civic engagement, European mental space

Słowa kluczowe: badania biograficzne, analiza dyskursu, aktywność obywatelska, europejska przestrzeń mentalna

DIMENSIONS OF EUROPEANNESS

Europeanness and European identity have often been researched from a top-down, quantitative and comparative perspective focussing either on elite or on national populations that manifest a lack of commitment towards the institutions of the European Union.⁴ Research using qualitative methodologies and a bottom-up approach has shown the agency of social actors and the complex variety of Europeanness.⁵ Focussing on European narratives⁶ allows to take into consideration the perspective of national and transnational actors. The EuroIdentities project, for instance, used in-depth biographical-narrative interviews to approach five 'sensitised groups': the educationally mobile (e.g. Erasmus students), transnational workers, farmers, cultural contacts (e.g. classical music or Eurovision Song Contest) and civil society organisations.⁷ The dimensions of Europeanness identified by this empirical study in seven European countries and more than 200 biographical-narrative interviews range from transnational intimate relationships to standardisation and regulation, from inclusion/exclusion and

⁴ See H. Best, G. Lengyel, L. Verzhichelli (eds.), *The Europe of Elites. A Study into the Europeanness of Europe's Political and Economic Elites*, Oxford 2012; G. Delanty, C. Rumford, *Rethinking Europe. Social Theory and the Implications of Europeanization*, London 2005; E.O. Eriksen, J.E. Fossum (eds.), *Rethinking Democracy and the European Union*, London–New York 2012; R. Miller et al., "Dimensions for the Expression...", p. 1.

⁵ See *Przegląd Socjologiczny*, special issue, vol. 60, no. 1 (2011); *EuroIdentities – The Evolution of European Identity. Using Biographical Methods to Study the Development of European Identity*, at <https://www.unina.it/documents/11958/4393164/PrGFin_02_Euroidentities.pdf/24549b40-8455-46aa-9c32-3555b93d50f3>, 6 October 2015; W. Kaiser, R. McMahon, "Narrating European Integration. Transnational Actors and Stories", *National Identities*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2017), pp. 149-160, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2016.1274722>>.

⁶ See the contributions in this issue and the special issue of *National Identities*, no. 19 (2017), p. 2. Cf. *ibid.*

⁷ See K. Kaźmierska, A. Piotrowski, K. Waniek, "Biographical Consequences of Working abroad in the Context of European Mental Space Construction", *Przegląd Socjologiczny*, vol. 60, no. 1 (2011), pp. 139-158; R. Miller et al., "Dimensions for the Expression...", pp. 4-5; F. Schütze et al., "Discoverers in European Mental Space. The Biographical Experiences of Participants in European Civil Society Organisations", in R. Miller, G. Day (eds.), *The Evolution...*

multiple social and biographical identities to collective action as well as to the public sphere and state-regulated institutions.⁸ As the authors explain, these are ‘conceptually distinct phenomena’ and several may be present in a single sentence.⁹ The concept used in the context of the Euroidentities project is that of a European mental space. The European mental space consists of the practices and attitudes of people who would not necessarily consider themselves Europeans, but who refer to Europe at a level transcending regional or national boundaries.¹⁰ When referring to Europe, the biographers as well as the researchers implicitly equate the general idea of Europe with the European Union. This can also be observed in the accounts by Polish civil society activists; however, the persons from my sample do not work in the field of transnational civil society organisations explicitly dealing with Europe.¹¹ They rather represent the entangled Polish and European discourse.

Polish history has always been intertwined with the question of Europe and Poland’s place in it. Europe has often been not only an intellectual idea, but also the real political framework, e.g. during the partition of Poland by European empires or during the Nazi and Soviet occupations. There has always been a pan-European and transnational dimension since many Polish people have lived abroad – e.g. in exile in France in the 19th century – forming the so-called *Polonia*. In relation to the links between Poland, Europe and civil society in recent years, the CSCE Helsinki Final Act of 1975 has had an important symbolic meaning. The pre-1989 Polish opposition used the concept of the ‘return to Europe’ in order to stress the Polish heritage and sense of belonging to the (Western) part of Europe. The debate about Poland joining the EU has been full of references to the relationship between Polish and European history while the European Union is closely interconnected with civil society activism through its role as one of the main givers of grants to Polish NGOs. But how can we analyse the Europeanness among Polish civil society activists and its development over one’s life course?

METHODOLOGY

My methodological framework is rooted in social constructivism.¹² It views agency and structure as an intertwined, ongoing process. This means that while Europeanness as a discursive construction offers a variety of patterns of interpretation and action, it is at the same time reproduced and shaped by social actions referring to it. The methods applied to analyse the construction processes are grounded in the Sociology of Knowledge

⁸ R. Miller et al., “Dimensions for the Expression...”, p. 8.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See *ibid.*; also F. Schütze et al., “Discoverers in European Mental Space...”; K. Kaźmierska, A. Piotrowski, K. Waniek, “Biographical Consequences...”

¹¹ See F. Schütze et al., “Discoverers in European Mental Space...”

¹² See P.L. Berger, T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Garden City, N.Y. 1967; also A. Schütz, T. Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-world*, Evanston, Ill. 1989.

Approach to Discourse¹³ and social constructivist biographical research.¹⁴ The data to be discussed stems from a broader, qualitative research project¹⁵ on civil society activism in Poland after 1989 that triangulates the data and the methods of discourse and biographical analysis.¹⁶ Applying Grounded Theory Methodology,¹⁷ I used theoretical sampling to collect discourse material and conduct biographical-narrative interviews.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

I understand discourses as *historically situated real social practices, not representing external objects, but constituting them. This implies looking at concrete data – oral and written texts, articles, books, discussions, institutions, disciplines – in order to analyze ‘bottom up’ how discourses are structured and how they are structuring knowledge domains and claims.*¹⁸

For the discourse analysis, I used NGO-leaflets and websites, information by state and juridical actors, and scientific literature and media. The civil society discourse is both powerful and unclear.¹⁹ It is intertwined with other discourses sharing these characteristics such as the European discourse and the democracy discourse. In the Polish case, the scientific discourse states that civil society was revived by East European oppositional movements like the Polish Solidarity (*Solidarność*).²⁰ Civil society (*społeczeństwo obywatelskie*) in this perspective was conceptualised as the self-organised society against the state.²¹ The goal of its activities was (the indefinite) democracy. After the round-table negotiations and the elections of June 1984, associations, foundations and NGOs (usually referred to as the empirical form of civil society) could register and work openly in Poland. The scientific discourse states that these organisations have positive functions for democratisation and that they are therefore needed in times

¹³ See R. Keller, “Entering Discourses: A New Agenda for Qualitative Research and Sociology of Knowledge”, *Qualitative Sociology Review*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2012), pp. 46-75; idem, *Doing Discourse Research...*

¹⁴ See G. Rosenthal, “Biographical Research”.

¹⁵ The project was my sociological PhD research and it received funding from the Dorothea Schlözer Programme of Georg-August University Göttingen (2009-2012).

¹⁶ See I. Alber, *Zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement in Polen...*; eadem, “Doing Civil Society...”, pp. 91-110.

¹⁷ See B.G. Glaser, A.L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research*, New Brunswick 2006.

¹⁸ R. Keller, “Entering Discourses...”, p. 53.

¹⁹ See I. Alber, *Zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement in Polen...*

²⁰ E.g. J.L. Cohen, A. Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, Cambridge, Mass. 1995, p. 15; A. Klein, *Der Diskurs der Zivilgesellschaft. Politische Kontexte und demokratietheoretische Bezüge der neueren Begriffsverwendung*, Opladen 2001, p. 19.

²¹ For critical remarks on this interpretation see, for instance, P.S. Załęski, *Self-governing Republic in the Thought of the Solidarity Movement in Poland. Why Solidarity Was Not a Civil Society*, Working Papers on the Solidarity Movement, 07/2013, at <<http://solidarnosc.collegium.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/WPSM-7.pdf>>, 27 October 2015.

of transition to democracy. Civil society organisations should criticise and control the state, they should incorporate interests and opinions of individual citizens in groups, and they should form an intermediary sphere between family, state and market, thus integrating individuals into society. Furthermore, civil society organisations should function as *schools of democracy* (Tocqueville), which is considered to be particularly important in times of democratisation.²² The description of Polish civil society shifted from euphoric observations in the early 1990s to claiming the ‘weakness of civil society’ in Poland.²³ The patterns of interpretation from the scientific discourse are also used by external democracy promoters, EU grant-givers and by Polish actors informing about civil society such as www.ngo.pl and thereby transferred to the stock of knowledge of civil society activists.²⁴ Although they are very creative and active in their civic engagement, they still refer to the weakness of civil society²⁵ (see the example of Krystyna Pietrzak below). With the biographical approach, other voices and narratives could be collected, which extends the interpretations of the scientific discourse.

BIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

The open research design did not initially focus on Europeanness or civil society. Indeed, the people participating in the biographical-narrative interviews were asked to tell me their whole life story.²⁶ Describing and perceiving themselves as civil society activists, in their narration of their life experiences, they referred to the civil society and

²² See J.L. Cohen, A. Arato, *Civil Society...*; J.J. Linz, A. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America, and Post-communist Europe*, Baltimore, Md. 1996; Z. Mansfeldová et al., “Civil Society in Transition. Civic Engagement and Nonprofit Organizations in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989”, in A. Zimmer, E. Priller (eds.), *Future of Civil Society. Making Central European Nonprofit Organizations Work*, Wiesbaden 2004, pp. 99-119; R.D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York 2000; I. Słodkowska, *Spółeczeństwo obywatelskie na tle historycznego przełomu. Polska 1980-1989*, Warszawa 2006.

²³ See M.M. Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-communist Europe*, Cambridge 2002.

²⁴ See I. Alber, “Creating Civil Society. Democracy Promotion in Transnational Contexts”, in R. Schatrkowsky, M. Reznik (eds.), *Society and Nation in Transnational Processes in Europe*, Cambridge 2015, pp. 281-299; J. Herbst, “Po co są organizacje?”, 6 May 2011, O Sektorze, at <<http://osektorze.ngo.pl/x/631719>>, 27 October 2015.

²⁵ From my social constructivist point of view the numbers usually used to state the weakness of civil society – in comparison to Western democratic countries – do not reflect all aspects of current civil society activism in Poland which is often spontaneous, creative and not necessarily like the long-term membership in a trade union (the ‘traditional civic engagement’ in Sweden or Germany). Furthermore, it is difficult to collect statistical data in a quickly changing social field. The NGO Klon/Jawor regularly publishes a report on civil society activism and NGO numbers in Poland. According to their data, at the end of 2016 there were 20.000 foundations and 106.000 associations in Poland. See “Liczba NGO w Polsce”, Fakty o NGO, at <<http://fakty.ngo.pl/liczba-ngo>>, 18 August 2017.

²⁶ See F. Schütze, “Biographieforschung und narratives Interview”, *Neue Praxis. Kritische Zeitschrift für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1983), pp. 283-293; G. Rosenthal, “Biographical Research”.

European discourse in different ways.²⁷ The European references made by the interviewees were analysed in the context of their overall life history – their biography. The biography in the sociological biographical research sense is a social construct integrating individual and collective patterns of meaning. Doing biography is a social ‘skill’ that is well-known and used in everyday practices as well as in various institutional frameworks such as education, psychiatry, law and prisons, human resources management etc.²⁸ The analytical separation of the narrated life story and the experienced life history are core concepts for reconstructing the biography. Biographical case reconstructions combine today’s perspective as expressed in the narration of one’s life with the experiences of the past.²⁹ In the social constructivist approach, there is no homology between narration and experience, but both are framed by discourses and provided with meaning in the (re)enactment of everyday actions. It is important to consider the discourses that have been powerful in the past in order to reconstruct their influence on specific biographical events.³⁰

During several field trips to Poland (2008-2011), I collected 45 hours of narratives by 13 people involved in NGOs, foundations or the informal sector. I focussed on individuals active in fields such as democracy promotion and human rights. They usually referred to Europe, the European Union or some kind of transnational perspective in their narration, but they did not work primarily in the field of transnational civil society organisations. The reconstructive, hermeneutic analysis of the material and triangulation³¹ at the level of patterns of interpretation lead to a theoretical generalisation.³² Two main ideal types of civic engagement could be reconstructed: the skills-and-qualifications-type and the empowerment-and-emancipation type. Both of them also involve a specific interpretation of Europeanness. The representatives of the skills-and-qualifications-type interpret civic engagement as a way of adapting well to the new job market. They focus on their skills and expertise in democracy, civil society and its management. Their perception of Europe, i.e. the European Union, as a funding source is primarily pragmatic. On the other hand, the representatives of the empowerment type attribute idealistic values such as solidarity, human rights or giving voice and power to minority groups to their engagement. Social integration through civic engagement could be reconstructed for the representatives of both types. On the level of their life history as well as on the level of their life story, civil society activists experienced a sense of belonging to a group, organisation or community. The experiences of

²⁷ See I. Alber, *Zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement in Polen...*

²⁸ See W. Fuchs-Heinritz, *Biographische Forschung. Eine Einführung in Praxis und Methoden*, Wiesbaden 2005; B. Roberts, *Biographical Research*, Buckingham 2002.

²⁹ See G. Rosenthal, “Biographical Research”.

³⁰ See eadem, “A Plea for a More Interpretive, More Empirical, and More Historical Sociology”, in D. Kalekin-Fishman, A.B. Denis (eds.), *The Shape of Sociology for the 21st Century. Tradition and Renewal*, London–Thousand Oaks, Calif. 2012.

³¹ See N.K. Denzin, *The Research Act. A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*, New York 1978.

³² Cf. B.G. Glaser, A.L. Strauss, *The Discovery of...*

social integration are evaluated positively by the actors in their biographical narrative.³³ The question to be discussed in what follows is: How are the discourse about Europe and biographical narratives interlinked?

PRAGMATIC EUROPEANNESS

In order to illustrate pragmatic Europeanness, I would like to introduce the case of Wojtek Wejda,³⁴ an activist from Silesia who represents the skills-and-qualifications type. In his life story, he presents his civic engagement as a special skill that, as an expert on civil society, democracy and the EU, he has gained through special training. Analysing his experienced life history, we learn that Wojtek Wejda was born in 1962 as the second child into an average Polish family. It is important for his family history that his ancestors, living in the same town in Silesia for more than three generations, experienced many regime and border changes. The family seems to have adapted well to changing historical circumstances. Wojtek was socialised in the People's Republic of Poland. The whole family accepted the political system and Wojtek too made a career under it becoming a secondary school teacher in the 1980s. Only after civil society organisations had been legalised in 1989 did he get involved with the Solidarity trade union in his school. Some other teachers had formed a local Solidarity group and Wojtek was asked to join them. After a few months, he became a local leader. First, he attended training courses by external democracy promoters, mainly from the United States, before going on to organise and lead them himself. From his work for the teachers' trade union, he gradually evolved into one of the leaders of a democracy-promotion NGO in Warsaw. He gave democracy-education courses and training sessions not only in Poland, but also in Ukraine and Belarus. In the 2000s, he also got involved with the European Union accession process.³⁵ In his biographical-narrative interview, he talks about his relation to the EU and the discourse about Europe.

Wojtek Wejda: *somehow there were in the media digressions about the membership of Poland in the European Union well and the teachers announced to us too, that, one talks about that Union but we do not know anything about it we don't know how to teach about it so teach us how to do it. And then me and my colleague, we created such a programme how to teach about the European Union and the integration of Poland with the European Union [...] We never ever told anyone, we were informing but never said on which side to be.*³⁶

We can see from the way Wojtek presents his engagement that he has a very functional attitude to the EU. It is something you have to know about and can teach about.

³³ See I. Alber, *Zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement in Polen...*; R.D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone...*

³⁴ The name and some personal details were changed for reasons of anonymity.

³⁵ See I. Alber, "Creating Civil Society..."; eadem, *Zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement in Polen...*

³⁶ Interview with Wojtek Wejda, conducted by Ina Alber-Armenat, 2009, transcript p. 10. The Polish text was translated as literally as possible into English paying attention to the structure of the text as produced by Wojtek himself rather than grammar rules.

Being an EU expert can be perceived as a way of adapting to the historical circumstance. The EU is highly popular and information about it is needed. But he sees himself as someone who is only informing others and not taking sides. Here, Wojtek refers to a pattern of acting that he was socialised into in his family. Adapting to changing historical circumstances also means that you should not be too much pro or con in order not to suddenly find yourself on the wrong side. Providing information as a skilled expert about the EU, however, is a positive way of using this new political framework. It helps him to further his career and to create a demand for his knowledge, i.e. to get paid for sharing that knowledge. Wojtek Wejda refers to the European discourse on the level of information and as part of his expert career. For a civil society activist in Poland, the EU is the framework to deal with and he responds to the demand for knowledge about it. Other civil society actors also take this approach. There are even civil society organisations that specialise in giving advice to other third sector organisations on how to apply for EU grants.³⁷ His Europeaness relates to a pragmatic use of the framework and this can be explained by his biographical background. The second type of empowerment-and-emancipation, in contrast, relates to an idealistic Europeaness.

IDEALISTIC EUROPEANNESS

The aforementioned symbol of the 'return to Europe' is no longer predominant in Poland. However, the idea of Europe is still interconnected with other idealistic concepts such as feminism, globalisation or human rights in general – as was the Helsinki Final Act. I would like to illustrate this using the case of Krystyna Pietrzak,³⁸ a human rights activist from a major city in Poland. She studied history during the socialist period, adapted well to the system and initially worked as a high school teacher. However, after the transformations in 1989, she started to do her PhD and finally became a university teacher in her home town. Her family came from the Eastern regions of pre-war Poland that are now in Belarus and had been forced to move westwards in 1945/46. Her biography is shaped by the feeling of being uprooted and not belonging anywhere. In her presentation, however, Krystyna does not refer to this as a negative experience, but mentions her multicultural background and the positive things she learned from her grandparents, who came from such a multi-ethnic and multi-religious part of Poland. In her biographical data, I could reconstruct that whenever there was a crisis in her life such as being left by her husband or having a very sick child, she relied on her intellectual activities and contacts. There she felt she belonged to a community and experienced solidarity. She overcame her crisis and when she finally found a job in which she felt comfortable, she used these positive experiences to

³⁷ See Polskie Stowarzyszenie Ekspertów i Asesorów Funduszy Unii Europejskiej, at <<http://www.ekspertue.pl/>>, 27 October 2015.

³⁸ The name and some personal details were changed for reasons of anonymity.

work for other outsiders and members of minorities. Her civil society activism is part of her biographical work to overcome a life crisis. Through her engagement, Krystyna experiences empowerment. Relating to the discourse of emancipation against social inequality and the discourse of empowering excluded or marginalised groups, her activities focus mainly on such topics as women's and LGBT rights, but also on multiculturalism, which can be explained by her family background. She organises many demonstrations in her home town together with other activists. This solidarity and shared work is important to her.³⁹ When I asked her to tell me more about her civic engagement, she said:

Krystyna Pietrzak: *I am a citizen, when people ask me who I am I say that I am a citizen. I awfully like that [...]. In Communist times there was ZOMO and all these para-police forces chasing people in the streets. They could search and lock me away I couldn't participate in political life, and now I can legally and I do it, and I awfully like it. And for example every year I organise with some friends and acquaintances a demonstration in my home town sometimes more than once a year and I go to the municipal office [...] and I really cannot believe it but I just go there as a private person and I tell them that on this day and that time I want to organise a public gathering and I ask to notify the police and municipal security forces. And then I cannot believe it that these police and security forces protect me, this means so much to me, even more than the fact that I have my passport at home in my drawer, that is just awfully great. Yet people in Poland especially sociologists complain about a lack of civil society but I show them that you can do it and if you want a civil society you have to get out on the street and show that you are present. And I do that both on the street and in my courses at university. I want people to see that what I teach about democracy and Europe in my classes is also linked to my engagement in the streets. And I have the feeling that if I show them this is not just a subject at the university but that there is a relation to an actual demonstration in their town and their teacher taking part in it that this is not just theory.*⁴⁰

This quotation from the interview with Krystyna shows several aspects of her Europeanness. There is an interconnection between democracy, Europe and civil society activism, which she expresses in relation to the former communist times and the restrictions on political life. A predominant pattern of interpretation in the Polish discourse about democracy and Europe is the freedom to travel, which Krystyna interprets as not as important as being able to organise demonstrations. Her idealistic references to Europe, democracy and civil society stress her engagement and Europeanness as something you have to fight for. She also refers to the scientific discourse about civil society

³⁹ See C. Quesel, *Soziale Emanzipation. Kollektivismus und Demokratie im Umbruch von der ständischen zur bürgerlichen Gesellschaft in Deutschland*, Frankfurt am Main–New York 1994; G. Craig, M. Mayo, "Community Participation and Empowerment. The Human Face of Structural Adjustment or Tools for Democratic Transition?", in *idem* (eds.), *Community Empowerment. A Reader in Participation and Development*, London 1995.

⁴⁰ Interview with Krystyna Pietrzak, conducted by Ina Alber-Armenat, 2010, transcript p. 22. The Polish text was translated as literally as possible into English paying attention to the structure of the text as produced by Krystyna herself rather than grammar rules.

and the proclaimed 'weakness of civil society'.⁴¹ Krystyna's narrative, however, does not reflect the patterns of interpretation usually found in the scientific discourse about the integration with the European Union. Scientific interpretations of Poland's wish to become a member of the EU tend to be dominated by the assumption that its population yearned for democracy, an effective free market economy, prosperity, peace and security.⁴² In fact, however, in the case of idealistic Europeanness among Polish civil society activists, the stress is laid on political participation and the possibilities for engagement. And Krystyna is not the only such idealistic case.

She is an active member of Political Critique ('Krytyka Polityczna'), Poland's largest left-wing circle of intellectuals and activists. They have been among the main civil society actors in Poland over the last decade. Political Critique was founded in 2002 as a network and organisation for the 'engaged Polish intelligentsia'. It started with a journal called *Krytyka Polityczna* which saw itself as maintaining the Polish tradition of underground and oppositional publications dedicated to controversial ideas, culture, arts and politics. They produce their own magazines, have their own publishing house and translate the works of philosophers and thinkers into Polish; foreign intellectuals such as Slavoj Žižek, Judith Butler, Zygmunt Bauman or Bruno Latour are particularly popular.⁴³ The origins of Political Critique are connected with the European discourse. When the government of Poland displayed reservations about the preamble to the European Constitution, some Political Critique members together with other intellectuals published in 2003 an *Open Letter to the European Public Opinion by members of Polish civil society* in major European newspapers. They wrote: [...] *We want a different Europe. We want a Europe which upholds common values – such as liberty, equality and solidarity – but feels no need to name their sources, because it does not wish to alienate or exclude anyone. We want a Europe which is politically strong, efficiently managed, and decisive in its strife for unity – because this is the only way we can counter one-sided economic globalization.*⁴⁴

These words represent the idealistic version of Europeanness based on common values. However, it sharply separates the opinions of these members of Polish civil society from the thinking of the traditional Polish intelligentsia which, before the 19th century, perceived the role of Poland as an outpost of Roman Catholic Christianity. Poland was

⁴¹ See M.M. Howard, *The Weakness of...*

⁴² See S. Klunkert, "Europabilder in Mittel- und Osteuropa. Vom Wunschbild zum Abbild der europapolitischen Realität", in eadem, B. Lippert, H. Schneider (eds.), *Europabilder in Mittel- und Osteuropa. Neue Herausforderungen für die politische Bildung*, Bonn 1996; J. Holzer, "Polen in Europa: Zentrum oder Peripherie?", in S. Klunkert, B. Lippert, H. Schneider, *Europabilder...*

⁴³ See "What is Political Critique? Co to jest Krytyka Polityczna? Что такое Политическая Критика?", Krytyka Polityczna, 2011, at <<http://politicalcritique.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/what-is-political-critique.pdf>>, 27 October 2015; and "Krótki kurs historii Krytyki Politycznej", Krytyka Polityczna, 2012, at <<http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/Aktualnosci/KrotkikurshistoriiKrytykiPolitycznej/menuid-48.html>>, 27 October 2015.

⁴⁴ See *Open Letter to the European Public Opinion, by members of Polish civil society*, Krytyka Polityczna, 2003, at <<http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/English/Open-Letter-to-the-European-Public-Opinion-by-members-of-Polish-civil-society/menu-id-113.html>>, 17 October 2015.

regarded as the 'antimurale christianitatis'. The Eastern border of Europe was identical with the border of Poland. Also today, Poland's EU membership is legitimated by reference to the common Christian heritage.⁴⁵ The Open Letter refers to this concept and distances itself from it. By referring to other than Christian, non-exclusive values, the authors make a contribution to the public discourse not only on Europe, but on politics in general. The letter promotes the ideas of an alternative global society which is not based on capitalism and the free market economy, but on human solidarity and the idea of European integration.

At the time the Open Letter was published in 2003, Political Critique consisted of only a few former oppositional activists and young intellectuals who wanted to establish a new left-wing discourse in Poland that differed from the former state socialism. Today, they are an influential civil society actor. Besides their headquarters in Warsaw, they also have local clubs in major Polish cities. Krystyna Pietrzak is an active member of the club in her home town and organises public lectures, discussions and workshops that relate to the idealistic vision of Europe. For Krystyna, the connection to the intellectual network and their idealistic patterns of interpretation enables her to link her biographical motto of empowerment through intellectual work with a community based on common values. Her Europeanness, however, is only one aspect of the biographical meaning her civic engagement has for her. The same applies to Wojtek, who does not see himself primarily as part of European civil society.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, both cases show the interplay of biographical experience and narration within the discursive framework of Europe/the EU.

CONCLUSION

The civil society discourse and European discourse are intertwined on different levels. Civil society activists enter these discourses and use, reproduce and transform the patterns of interpretation in their everyday actions in various ways. The experiences we have during our life course influence and shape the way in which we approach discourses. Schütze and Schröder-Wildhagen analyse⁴⁷ the biographies of civil society organisation workers (CSO workers) who dedicated their work to reconciliation and building bridges in Europe as well as protecting nature and the environment. The authors also argue that their biographical experiences have prepared and predisposed these people to their current activities. However, working directly for transnational organisations dealing with intercultural exchange, for instance, opens up a different perspective on Europe and the European mental space as something these people very actively seek to create and shape by their actions.⁴⁸ The two cases representing two ideal types of

⁴⁵ See S. Klunkert, "Europabilder in Mittel- und Osteuropa..."

⁴⁶ See F. Schütze et al., "Discoverers..."

⁴⁷ See *ibid.*

⁴⁸ See *ibid.*

civic engagement and Europeanness discussed in this paper show the interplay of discourse and biography within another sample. Polish civil society activists dealing with human rights or democracy do not see the European mental space as the main goal of their actions. Their activities serve as a continuation of their biographically established patterns of acting and interpreting. The representative of the skills-and-qualifications type, Wojtek Wejda, experiences the EU as the framework to use in order to sell his knowledge on the information market. He does not pick sides for or against the EU, but reactively uses the opportunities it offers. Nevertheless, he reproduces and transforms the discourse about Europe and the EU by his actions and thereby expresses his pragmatic Europeanness.

The representative of the empowerment-and-emancipation type, Krystyna Pietrzak, on the other hand refers to the idealistic concept of Europe in close connection with other values such as democracy or solidarity. Her civic engagement for empowerment of minorities and for citizens' participation in political life is not funded by the EU, but relies on the solidarity of other activists in her home town. Nonetheless, she is part of Political Critique, a network of engaged Polish intellectuals that also espouses an idealistic vision of Europe. This idealistic Europeanness is closely linked to intellectual concepts and discourses.

But, of course, these distinctions are only analytical ones. When it comes to everyday actions of civil society activists in Poland and Europe, the two concepts are almost always interconnected. Qualified experts in the field of civil society may be pragmatic, but they also share ideals, values and visions that make sense of their actions. And even idealistic visions need funding and actions can only be taken thanks to the pragmatic use of money, which often comes from the European Union.

With the rapidly changing political framework and discourse about Europe and the Union in Poland since 2015, when the national-conservative party PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość; 'Law and Justice') won the overall majority and started pursuing an anti-European course, Europeanness among Polish civil society activists is challenged as well. Further research could show how the entanglement between discourses and biographies develops during this period of political challenge for Europeanness.

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