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EUROPE



Quo vadis, Polonia?

Lessons from Brexit for a stronger Poland in Europe

Bartłomiej Staniszewski and William Prescott

KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

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About the authors

Bartłomiej Staniszewski

Bartek is the Head of Policy at Bright Blue and an Executive Director of Bright Blue Europe. He graduated with a BA in Philosophy and Theology from the University of Oxford in 2021 and with an MSt in Philosophical Theology in 2022. There, he sat on the editorial board of the Journal of the Oxford Graduate Theological Society. He has been featured, among others, in *the Spectator*, *the Telegraph*, *the Critic*, *City AM*, *the Guardian*, *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, Klub Jagielloński and on the BBC, GB News, TVP and Radio Poland. He is the author of numerous think-tank reports, including on political philosophy, populism, social policy and economic and employment policy. He is also an IPR Policy Fellow at the University of Bath, an Associate Fellow of the Centre for Family and Education and the Editor-in-Chief of Bright Blue's in-house magazine, Centre Write.

William Prescott

Dr William Prescott is the Head of Research at Bright Blue. He previously worked, among other roles, as a Senior Associate at Nurole and as a civil servant in the South Australian Education Department. He has been published in or appeared on, among others, *the Spectator*, BBC, *UnHerd*, *the Critic*, *the Conversation* and Times Radio. In 2020, Will finished a DPhil in history at the University of Oxford on the British Conservative Party and the role of the state between 1929 and 1940. Before this, he completed his undergraduate and master's degrees at the University of Adelaide, Australia.

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The cover image uses the painting *Porwanie Europy* by Guido Reni, currently in the collections of the National Gallery, London.

Executive summary

Euroscepticism has been a feature of Polish politics for years, but anti-EU sentiments in Poland have recently grown. As recently as May this year, just 58% of Poles expressed support for Poland remaining in the European Union: a significant decrease from only two years ago, when 72% of Poles supported Poland continuing its EU membership.

At the same time, Grzegorz Braun's radically anti-European, politically extreme Confederation of the Polish Crown (KKP) was recently polling at over 13% in some polls. Even Jarosław Kaczyński, since 2003 the leader of Law and Justice, Poland's largest opposition party, has recently begun talking about the conditions upon which Poland could leave the European Union.

All this is taking place only ten years after the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU, and many of the same arguments that have been used to argue for Brexit are now being rehearsed in Poland: whether that be those surrounding migration or sovereignty. And though Brexit has not come to the UK without a cost, that cost would be small fry compared to the potential consequences of Polexit for Poland.

Still, much as had happened in the UK in the run-up to Brexit, pro-European politicians in Poland too often fail to make a positive case for Europe, instead merely defending the status quo.

Consequently, examples of Poland losing its standing within Europe are aplenty. To name just one, despite being the sixth largest economy and the fifth most populous country in the EU, in a recent reshuffle of

the EU's diplomatic corps, of 33 newly appointed ambassadors, not a single one of them is Polish.

Anti-European narratives in Poland and their proponents can be divided, broadly, into two categories: moderate and radical. While moderate anti-Europeans want to re-affirm Polish sovereignty within the EU and, to that end, reverse inter-European integration, they also want Poland to remain in the EU. Radical anti-Europeanism's goal, on the other hand, is not merely to re-affirm Polish sovereignty, but for Poland to leave the EU altogether and to radically distance itself from Europe.

Underlying almost all this is an argument about sovereignty, yet this argument takes different forms. The report identifies six leading sources of anti-European sentiment in Poland.

1. **Democratic concerns.** In the words of a former Minister of Education, Przemysław Czarnek, "in the European Union we are dealing with an enormous democratic deficit, we are dealing with authoritarian rule which has nothing but disregard for the rule of law." Both moderate and radical anti-Europeans in Poland contend that the EU is an anti-democratic institution, or at least that it harms democracy in Poland, especially in the aftermath of Poland's judicial controversies.
2. **Migration.** In the aftermath of the 2015 European migrant crisis, both moderate and radical anti-Europeans in Poland contend that the EU promotes and forces Poland to adopt a harmful migration policy.
3. **Environmental policy.** Especially since the adoption of the European Green Deal in 2020, both moderate and radical anti-Europeans in Poland contend that the EU promotes and forces Poland to adopt a harmful environmental policy, unsuited for the Polish economy's unique energy mix.
4. **Cronyism.** Both moderate and radical anti-Europeans in Poland contend that the EU facilitates cronyism. This spans both the

EU's relationship with Prime Minister Donald Tusk — the political nemesis of Law and Justice in particular, but also of much of the Polish political right — and the EU's supposed favouritism towards Western European countries and decision-makers, and especially Germany and Germans.

5. **Left-wing social policy outlook.** Both moderate and radical anti-Europeans in Poland contend that the EU, and especially Western Europe, generally favour an excessively left-wing, progressive social policy outlook. Instead, Polish anti-Europeans would rather see a "Europe of Nations" based on Christian traditions and values.
6. **Failures to confront Russia.** While the critique that Europe has failed to adequately confront Russia is a source of anti-European sentiment among anti-Russian, moderate anti-Europeans, Russian influence is simultaneously a direct source of pro-Russian, radical anti-European sentiment in Poland.

The report then seeks to draw lessons for Poland from the development of anti-European and Eurosceptic narratives in the UK from the time it joined what was then the European Economic Community (EEC) in January 1973 until its departure in 2020, a period during which two referenda were held on the subject, and four Prime Ministers were brought down by it.

Unlike in Poland, the UK saw only three main sources of anti-European sentiment which, in the UK, took primarily only one form: Euroscepticism.

1. **Sovereignty.** Initially a minor concern of the British left in the 1975 Brexit referendum campaign, it emerged as the main concern of the British right in the run-up to the 2016 Brexit referendum. And although greater sovereignty remains a benefit in theory, in practice, many British businesses remain bound by EU rules, while successive British governments have used up much of their polit-

ical capital debating Brexit rather than making full use of the UK's theoretical sovereign freedoms.

2. **Economy.** While in the run-up to the 1975 vote, it was primarily the left which rallied against what was then the EEC for being a capitalist cabal, in the run-up to 2016 it was the right which increasingly portrayed Brussels as holding back UK economic growth through excessive regulation and fiscal contributions. Since Brexit, however, UK growth has not improved, but rather continues to flounder.
3. **Migration.** A non-issue in the run-up to the 1975 referendum, immigration was one of the major driving forces behind the 2016 Brexit vote. The issue was at the heart of the 'Leave' campaign, and arguably represents one of its greatest broken promises. Instead of falling, annual net migration hit a record 906,000 in the year ending June 2023, three years after Brexit had come into being.

Drawing on the UK's experience, the report identifies seven lessons for Poland.

1. **If Brexit was economically disadvantageous for the UK, Polexit would be economically disastrous for Poland.** While synthetic control analysis suggests that Brexit was a slight net negative for the UK economy, with the UK's GDP per capita up to 11% lower than it would have been had the UK remained in the EU, the same method suggests that Polexit would be an economic disaster for Poland. One 2024 study using that method suggests that Polish GDP per capita was 40% higher in 2024 than it would have been had Poland never joined the EU.
2. **Concerns around sovereignty, not economics, are enough for a country to leave the EU.** The people who voted for Brexit rarely did so for economic reasons. Polling from 2016 shows that the pro-Remain side comprehensively won the argument on the economy. Job prospects, the cost of living, economic security and in-

vestment by international companies were considered, on average, to turn out better if the UK remained in the EU than if it left. By far the strongest arguments for Brexit, on the other hand, were the "ability to control our own laws," "border controls" and "the immigration system."

3. **Populism and Euroscepticism go hand-in-hand.** It is the populist parties in Poland which have spearheaded Eurosceptic narratives in Poland. And it was a populist party which provided the political fuel for the 2016 Brexit referendum: UKIP. Yet Poland already sees a higher level of support for Eurosceptic, populist parties than the UK ever did in the run-up to Brexit: the combined polling share of KKP and Confederation in Poland has been consistently above 20% in all polls for several months now, something which UKIP had never achieved.
4. **The support of the Government is not needed in order to facilitate an exit from the EU.** Polish pro-Europeans must not rest easy in the assumption that, as long as the likely parties of government are against Polexit, Polexit will not happen. By teasing the remote prospect of Polexit, Jarosław Kaczyński is copying David Cameron's answer to UKIP in an attempt to win back voters from KKP and Confederation. The result could well also be a copy of what happened in the UK.
5. **Exiting the EU itself solves nothing.** Of the sources of Eurosceptic feeling in the UK in the run-up to Brexit, none of them have disappeared. On the contrary, many of them have worsened. The UK is, in practice, less sovereign; has likely suffered economically; and has only seen the annual number of immigrants arriving in the country increase since Brexit.
6. **The EU is neither intrinsically left- nor right-coded.** Where what was then the EEC used to be seen more negatively by the British left and more positively by the British right at the time of the 1975 referendum, this had changed by 2016. Pro-Europeans in

Poland should not give up on entire political blocs because they see them as inevitably anti-European.

7. **People do not become pro-EU when EU funds are spent on them.** In the UK, the regions which received the most EU funding voted in favour of Brexit. The same is true for Poland: there is no correlation in Poland between Euroscepticism and the level of EU funds invested where one lives.

Given the above, for Poland to remain in Europe, ordinary Poles must be persuaded that integration with Europe benefits Polish sovereignty and interests specifically, and the interests of their local voivodeship, town, village, neighbourhood and church or football club — rather than having some other, less localised benefits, whether that be environmental, economic or social. Poles must be led to believe, and it must be true, that their home is stronger in Europe — indeed, that their home is not the home they know unless it is in Europe. That Poland is stronger and more sovereign in Europe.

The report makes 11 recommendations to that end, distinguishing between tactical and policy recommendations.

I. **Tactical recommendations:** In order for Europe to be able to win over the sovereigntists in Poland, Europe must be presented to Poles as something that goes together with, not against, Polish sovereignty and identity.
   - **1:** Identify issues where moderate anti-Europeans will support deeper integration with the rest of Europe and build ad hoc policy coalitions around said issues.
   - **2:** Use the language of the sovereigntist right whenever possible when talking about Europe.
   - **3:** Emphasise Poland's existing decision-making achievements within the EU.

II. **Policy recommendations:** Changing the narrative around Europe in Poland will require policy change to come with it — otherwise, any such meaningful change will be effectively impossible.

- **4:** Lead on a coalition of European countries to deepen the EU's common market.
- **5:** Lead on the creation of an *Intermarium* coalition within the EU.
- **6:** Lead on the creation of an anti-foreign interference unit within the EU.
- **7:** Lead on the creation of an EU-level coalition of countries using shared regulatory assessments, procurement and technical requirements for nuclear energy development.
- **8:** Subsidise Polish citizens to sit on European standardisation committees.
- **9:** Allow small- and micro-sized Polish enterprises to access export vouchers covering translation, legal advice and certification abroad for the first 10,000 zł of such costs related to foreign contracts in the EU.
- **10:** Add an extra 30% of European stocks and shares to the tax-free allowance in OKI from 2027.
- **11:** Offer top Polish students subsidies to study at top EU universities on the condition that they return to Poland for a minimum of five years after the completion of their studies.

As we conclude, there are two sets of lessons that can be drawn from Brexit. For Eurosceptics, it demonstrates that you can leave the EU without any catastrophic consequences, and that the tide is turning against the EU. It shows that ordinary, hard-working, rooted people are against the EU and, if they unite, they will overcome opposition from the pro-EU establishment.

For enthusiasts of the EU, it is a case study in regret. It goes to show how leaving the EU fixes nothing, but instead only deepens your problems, and that, after leaving, you will wish you had remained.

Both are right in some respects. In truth, Poland is stronger in Europe, but for a European Poland to survive and prosper, Europe must become a place where those ordinary, rooted people can see their home, with Poland at the heart and brain of it, and with other Europeans as their inalienable friends and neighbours.

Introduction

Euroscepticism has been a feature of Polish politics for years, but anti-EU sentiments in Poland have recently grown. In one poll from May 2026, 58% of Poles expressed support for Poland remaining in the European Union (EU).[1] This would be a significant decrease from only two years ago: a poll from May 2024 found that 72% of Poles supported continued EU membership.[2] What is more, at least in some polls, support for Poland leaving the EU had doubled in the same time span, from 12% to 24%.[3]

This has been accompanied by growing support for fervently anti-European political forces in Polish politics. Most notably, after over-performing in the 2025 presidential election — in April 2025, he was polling at 1%[4] yet won over 6% of the vote come May — Grzegorz Braun's radically anti-European, politically extreme Confederation of the Polish Crown (KKP)[5] was recently polling at over 13% in some polls.[6] Even Jarosław Kaczyński, since 2003 the leader of Law and

1 Maria Literacka, 'Ilu Polaków za polexitem? Jest najnowszy sondaż', Interia, 27 May 2026 <https://wydarzenia.interia.pl/kraj/news-ilu-polakow-za-polexitem-jest-najnowszy-sondaz,nId,23488267> [accessed 15 June 2026].
2 Jakub Mikulski, 'Sondaż: Czy Polska powinna opuścić Unię Europejską? Polexit popularny na wsi i wśród zwolenników Konfederacji', *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 May 2024 <https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art40418951-sondaz-czy-polska-powinna-opuscic-unie-europejska-polexit-popularny-na-wsi-i-wsrod-zwolennikow-konfederacji> [accessed 15 June 2026].
3 Mikulski, 'Sondaż: Czy Polska powinna opuścić Unię Europejską?'; Literacka, 'Ilu Polaków za polexitem?'.
4 Adam Zygiel, 'Mamy najnowszy sondaż. Trzaskowskiemu rośnie, Mentzen depcze Nawrockiemu po piętach', Wirtualna Polska, 8 April 2025 <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/mamy-najnowszy-sondaz-trzaskowskiemu-rosnie-mentzen-depcze-nawrockiemu-po-pietach-7143571653811136a> [accessed 15 June 2026].
5 *Konfederacja Korony Polskiej.*
6 Adam Brzozowski, 'Nowy sondaż nie spodoba się Morawieckiemu. Czy warto było odchodzić z PiS?', *Super Express*, 13 November 2026 <https://polityka.se.pl/wiadomosci/nowy-sondaz-nie-spodoba-sie-morawieckiemu-czy-warto-bylo-odchodzic-z-pis-aa-vcpK-pMvt-YyWp.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].

Justice (PiS),[7] Poland's largest opposition party, has recently begun talking about the conditions upon which Poland could leave the European Union[8] — a possibility which until recently had only been considered on the political fringes.

This, however, is not the first time a European country has entertained leaving the EU. Most notably, in 2016, the United Kingdom (UK) voted in favour of Brexit and finally left the Union in 2020. Many of the same arguments that have been used to argue for Brexit are now being rehearsed in Poland: especially arguments surrounding migration and sovereignty.

One example came recently, when Polish Eurosceptics attempted to block Poland's request for the disbursement of funds from preferential loans from the EU's Security Action for Europe (SAFE) programme. Their reasoning was coated in the language of sovereignty: most notably, President Karol Nawrocki (2025-ongoing) said that using funds from SAFE harms Polish "sovereignty, independence and economic and military security" on the grounds that it makes the Polish state indebted to Brussels and Brussels' decision-making.[9]

On the other hand, much as had happened in the UK in the run-up to Brexit, pro-European politicians in Poland too often fail to make a positive case for closer European co-operation, instead merely reacting to criticism and defending the status quo. In truth, closer European co-operation is complementary with — not antithetical to — a sovereigntist political philosophy. While Polish sovereigntists often focus on formal sovereignty — the legal freedom to make decisions independently — this is not always synonymous with effective sovereignty: the practical capacity of a state to protect its citizens, shape external developments and deliver national objectives. With strong

7 *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość.*
8 Adam Styczek, 'Jarosław Kaczyński o rokowaniach na temat wyjścia z UE. „Warto zastosować taką metodę"', TVN24, 29 October 2026 <https://tvn24.pl/polska/jaroslaw-kaczynski-w-krynicy-prezes-pis-o-metodach-na-zmiany-w-ue-w-tym-o-rokowaniach-ws-wyjscia-z-unii-st9311218> [accessed 22 November 2026].
9 Polska Agencja Prasowa, 'Karol Nawrocki w Szwajcarii apeluje o wspólne bezpieczeństwo. Wcześniej zawetował SAFE', Onet, 28 May 2026 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/karol-nawrocki-w-szwajcarii-apeluje-o-wspolne-bezpieczenstwo-wczesniej-zawetowal-safe/435752s> [accessed 15 June 2026].

European allies and partners, Poland is both richer and stronger. In the words of a former Polish Foreign Affairs Minister (2023), Szymon Szynkowski vel Sęk, "paradoxically, the lack of a sufficiently active dialogue [with the rest of Europe] had allowed for an increasingly deep and forceful interference with our [Polish] sovereignty."[10]

Indeed, thus far, failures to engage constructively with the rest of Europe have only weakened Poland's position in the world. This has happened even despite Poland having a nominally pro-European Government at the time of writing. For example, despite being the sixth largest economy and the fifth most populous country in the EU, in a recent reshuffle of the EU's diplomatic corps, of 33 newly appointed ambassadors, not a single one of them is Polish; indeed, two Polish ambassadors lost their posts.[11] The result is that Poland's diplomatic standing and prestige were significantly weakened, harming Poland's ability to influence its own fate on the international stage.

The failure extends even to Polish control over its own policy environment. As of 2023, only about 5% of the EU's civil service was Polish, despite Poland constituting 8.3% of the EU's total population: a 66% mismatch. For the European Commission specifically, only 4.9% of those it employed were Polish. For comparison, Romania, which joined the EU three years later than Poland and has a population half the size of Poland's, provides 4.8% of the European Commission's employees[12] — almost exactly the same number. Consequently, when EU policy is designed and executed, Polish interests are under-represented and under-considered.

It is clear that a new, more compelling vision of Poland in Europe is needed before the narrative of Poland in Europe is lost to the anti-

10 Adam Szymczyk, 'Nawet bez ani jednej złotówki z unijnych funduszy Polsce opłaca się być w UE', Klub Jagielloński, 28 October 2026 <https://klubjagiellonski.pl/2026/10/28/nawet-bez-ani-jednej-zlotowki-z-unijnych-funduszy-polsce-oplaca-sie-byc-w-ue/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
11 Marek Magierowski, 'Dyplomatołki z KO, czyli unijny blamaż', Wirtualna Polska, 7 June 2026 <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/dyplomatolki-z-ko-czyli-unijny-blamaz-opinia-7293663456217568a> [accessed 15 June 2026].
12 Małgorzata Grzegorczyk and Leszek Biały, 'Za mało Polaków pracuje w unijnych urzędach i międzynarodowych organizacjach. Brakuje systemowego wsparcia państwa', XYZ, 21 August 2025 <https://xyz.pl/za-malo-polakow-pracuje-w-unijnych-urzedach-i-miedzynarodowych-organizacjach-brakuje-systemowego-wsparcia-panstwa/> [accessed 22 November 2026].

Europeans: a vision of a Poland which is richer, safer and more sovereign; a Poland with powerful allies and prosperous partners; a Poland with a real power to represent and further its interests abroad; a vision of a Poland stronger together in Europe.

The focus of this research

This report examines the sources of anti-Europeanism in Poland before comparing the situation Poland finds itself in regarding a potential Polexit to the situation that the United Kingdom faced in the run-up to and since Brexit. Drawing seven lessons from Brexit, the report finally provides 11 tactical and policy recommendations for promoting a positive vision of Poland in Europe, countering anti-European narratives in Poland and enabling deeper Polish integration with the rest of Europe without fuelling further anti-European sentiment.

Given this is a political report, we focus on anti-European narratives in Polish politics, as opposed to in Polish society more broadly. While anti-Europeanism in Polish society can and often does influence Polish politics, this is not always the case — in particular, historical grievances and cultural likes and dislikes strongly influence the Polish public's perceptions of individual European countries, and so, by extension, Europe as a whole. Those, however, play a relatively limited role in determining Poland's political relations with European countries, at least as compared to economic and political grievances and opportunities for collaboration.

The research questions we explore are:

1. Learning from Brexit, what are the potential consequences of Poland further distancing itself from the rest of Europe?
2. What should a positive vision of closer Polish co-operation with Europe look like?
3. How can the lessons of Brexit be used to successfully counter anti-European narratives in Poland?

4. What practical steps would enable Poland to engage more closely with Europe?

The report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter one**, 'Methodology,' describes the research methods employed, as well as outlining the definitions used in this report.
- **Chapter two**, 'Anti-European narratives in Poland,' explains and provides a typology of anti-European narratives in Poland today.
- **Chapter three**, 'Learning lessons from Brexit,' looks at anti-European narratives in the United Kingdom in the run-up to Brexit before drawing seven lessons from Brexit for Poland.
- **Chapter four**, 'Recommendations for a stronger Poland in Europe,' outlines a vision of Poland in Europe and suggests 11 concrete recommendations for Polish commentators and policymakers to abate anti-European narratives in Poland and effectively draw Poland closer to Europe without fuelling further anti-European sentiment.

CHAPTER ONE

Methodology

As stated in the introduction, the aim of this report is to provide a suite of tactical and policy recommendations for promoting a positive vision of Poland in Europe and countering anti-European narratives in Poland. This chapter explains in detail the methods used to achieve this and the key definitions employed throughout the report.

1.1 Methods

We employed three research methods in this project:

- **Literature review.** This included a range of academic articles and books, government and other think-tank reports and news articles from across Poland, the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe.
- **Data analysis.** This included analysis of several academic and polling datasets, most notably those produced by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS),[13] Eurobarometer and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES). Where data analysis is presented, the sources of the data are described in the text. Various methods of data analysis are used, including polynomial regression and lead–lag correlation analysis. Again, where data analysis is presented, the exact method is described in the text.
- **Informal interviews.** We informally consulted with a range of Polish, British and European think-tank, academic and political ex-

13 *Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej.*

perts through the course of the project. Their ideas have shaped or influenced some of the arguments in this report.

1.2 Definitions

We now describe the key definitions relevant to the report.

European Union. This refers to the political entity which has been known as the 'European Union' since the 1993 Maastricht Treaty, but also the 'European Economic Community' (EEC) between 1958 and 1993. Where the European Union is referred to here explicitly and only in the context of time before the Maastricht Treaty, it is referred to as the EEC, but where a term applies to both the European Union before and after the Treaty, we merely use 'European Union' or EEC/EU to refer to both. Where a distinction needs to be drawn between the European Union between 1958 and today on the one hand, and between 1993 and today on the other, this is made clear in the text. Moreover, the European Union is generally abbreviated in this report as the 'EU.'

Europe. For the purposes of this report, 'Europe' here does not indicate exactly the same area and interests as the geographical Europe, which is normally held to be bounded to the east by the Ural and Caucasus mountain ranges. Rather, it refers to a set of nation-states occupying most of the geographical Europe, but sharing a common culture, set of values, history and political interests. In that, it does not include Russia, the political interests and values of which are significantly different from those of other countries of the geographic Europe. And although their values and interests are more closely aligned with the rest of Europe than Russia's are, countries which lie on the geographical fringes of Europe — namely Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Kazakhstan — are also excluded from this report's analysis for the sake of focus and brevity.

Eurosceptic. 'Euroscepticism' here refers to opposition to the EU, in whatever form. The term is inevitably slightly ambiguous in some

cases — for example, it can be ambiguous whether it is Eurosceptic to want to reduce the powers of the EU, but with the explicit intention to preserve the EU in the long term. Where the use of the term in this report is ambiguous, this is flagged in the text.

Anti-European. 'Anti-European' and 'anti-Europeanism' in this report refer to opposition to Europe, in whatever form. This can include European culture, institutions, values or individual European countries or peoples. It is therefore deliberately a very broad term.

Worth noting is that, as per this report's definitions, Euroscepticism is a form of anti-Europeanism, as it is a form of opposition to a European institution, but anti-Europeanism is much broader than just Euroscepticism. This means that any Eurosceptic is also an anti-European, the way we use the term in this report, but not every anti-European is a Eurosceptic. Conversely, being pro-European does not have to involve support for the EU or for further integration with the EU, but can merely refer to support for European culture, values, individual European countries or peoples or institutions other than the EU.

In Poland especially, the distinction between Europe as a set of countries with a shared history and culture and the EU as a political entity is strong, and attempts to draw the two together — for example, by advocating for Eurofederalism, namely a single federation spanning all EU countries — are unpopular.[14] With that said, the most popular and pertinent form of anti-Europeanism in both Polish and British politics, especially for the purposes of this report, is indeed Euroscepticism.

Brexit. This refers to the United Kingdom's formal exit from the EU, which was voted through in a referendum on the 23rd of June 2016 and came to fruition on the 31st of January 2020.

14 Przemysław Biskup, 'Polish Society and European Integration in 2003–2024', in *20 Years of Poland in the European Union*, ed. by Przemysław Biskup (Warsaw: Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2024), p. 25 <https://www.pism.pl/webroot/upload/files/Raport/Report%20PISM%2020%20years%20in%20EU%20..pdf> [accessed 21 November 2026].

Polexit. This refers in this report to a potential formal exit of Poland from the EU, analogous to how the United Kingdom left the EU through Brexit. In that, it does not correspond with some other, less strict uses of the term, such as "legal," "financial," "climate" or "identity" Polexit,[15] all of which imply some level of separation from the EU without a formal separation analogous to Brexit — effectively, without activating Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, to which all EU member states are signatories. Where a level of separation from the EU other than Polexit is discussed, it is simply referred to as such.

European Commission. The European Commission designs and executes the EU's laws and budget. It consists of one Commissioner for every EU member state, meaning there are 27 such Commissioners at the time of writing. Its aim is to represent the interests of the EU as a whole, as opposed to each Commissioner representing the interests of their individual member state, though in practice Commissioners often do both.

European Parliament. The European Parliament can vote to amend or reject EU legislation and budget. It consists of 720 parliamentarians (MEPs) elected from all EU countries, broadly in proportion to population size, though no country can have fewer than six MEPs, and no country can have more than 96.

Council of the European Union. Also known as the 'Council of Ministers,' the Council of the EU represents the national governments of each EU member state and is composed of ministers nominated by each of said governments. Like the European Parliament, it can vote to amend or reject EU legislation and budget.

European Council. The European Council has as its statutory purpose to "provide the [EU] with the necessary impetus for its development."[16] It should not be confused with the aforementioned Council of

15 See Joanna Fomina and Małgorzata Kopka-Piątek, *Polexit w polskiej debacie publicznej* (Warsaw: Instytut Spraw Publicznych, 2021) <https://www.isp.org.pl/pl/publikacje/polexit-w-polskiej-debacie-publicznej> [accessed 21 November 2026].
16 European Union, 'Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union: Article 15', *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 115, 9 May 2008 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12008M015> [accessed 22 November 2026].

the European Union nor the Council of Europe — a non-EU institution, established in 1949. Composed of the heads of state or government, or their representatives, from all EU member states, the European Council in practice serves as a high-level body for determining the EU's strategic direction.

With the help of the research methods and using the definitions outlined in this chapter, we now move on to provide an overview of anti-European narratives in Poland today (chapter two) before drawing comparisons between Poland and the United Kingdom in the context of Brexit and the prospect of Polexit (chapter three). We then propose 11 recommendations to counter anti-European narratives in Poland and build a stronger Poland in Europe (chapter four).



CHAPTER TWO

Anti-European narratives in Poland

Having discussed our methodology and defined the key terms used throughout the report, this chapter now explains the motivations for anti-Europeanism generally before distinguishing between moderate and radical Polish anti-Europeans and providing an overview of the leading sources of anti-Europeanism in Poland: concerns surrounding democracy, migration, environmental policy, cronyism and left-wing social policy, as well as the threat of Russia.

2.1 Why be anti-European?

The overarching argument for all kinds of opposition to international frameworks, such as 'Europe' or 'the EU,' is the argument for the benefits of diversity: pigeonholing fails to appreciate and take advantage of the real differences which exist between countries. Different countries have different needs and circumstances which demand different approaches. International frameworks, in turn, bind countries to a common, pre-agreed and uniform approach, or at least treat them as such.

The more ambitious the framework, the tighter the constraints: while a free-trade agreement, for example, only binds a country's hands in respect of the level of tariffs and duties it can levy on the other signatories of the agreement, an agreement spanning more

policy areas, and requiring pre-agreement and uniformity on a greater number of issues, binds a country's hands in respect of all of them.

The EU is just one such framework. It binds the hands of all its members in respect of every topic which is currently determined in EU law, consequently eliminating any diversity in members' legislative approaches to said topics, even if said countries were to have diverse needs and circumstances. This is also why Euroscepticism is the primary form of anti-Europeanism in Polish and British politics.

However, as noted in section 1.2, anti-Europeanism can go beyond opposition to the EU. Although Euroscepticism is the main form of anti-Europeanism in Poland, there are also other reasons — besides the EU — why Poles might wish to distance themselves from Europe. Sources of both Euroscepticism as well as of broader anti-European sentiments in Poland are explored later in this chapter, and both are clearly marked as such.

Why be pro-European?

Conversely, the overarching argument for any kind of international framework is that there is often more to gain from international consensus than there is from maintaining the flexibility to adapt to individual needs and circumstances; particularly if said needs and circumstances are similar between the members of the international framework anyway.

Deepening an international framework increases the positive economies of scale — such as specialisation, collective bargaining power, the ability to collude effectively, the spreading out of risks, increased creditworthiness and access to new markets, factors of production and infrastructure — resulting from the framework. In short, when different countries share a common goal, it is easier to achieve it by working together than separately. And European countries share many goals.

What is more, the more ambitious the framework, the more there is to gain. The EU then, following this reasoning, should be exceptionally beneficial. Not only is it quite a broad-spanning framework, with 27

members and possibly increasing, it goes exceptionally deep. It now contains provisions beyond trade and competition policy — the area which was the focus of the EEC[17] — and stretches to include, today, migration, the environment, monetary policy, democracy, education, culture, social policy, energy, transport, human rights, employment, consumer protection, healthcare, science and more.[18]

2.2 Types of anti-European narrative in Poland

Anti-European narratives in Poland and their proponents can be divided, broadly, into two categories: moderate — sometimes also referred to as "Eurorealist," especially when in connection to Euro-scepticism,[19] though in this report used to refer to moderate anti-Europeanism in general — and radical.

Moderate anti-Europeans

At least since the downfall of the League of Polish Families (LPR)[20] in 2007[21] and until recent years, the Eurorealist position was the only significant type of anti-European narrative in Poland. Moderate anti-Europeans believe in a reversal of inter-European integration involving Poland yet want Poland to remain in the EU.

Their political home was and largely remains the Law and Justice (PiS) party, and their aim is to reassert Polish sovereignty in Poland's interactions with the rest of Europe. They claim to support the "original" vision of the EU, where close economic bonds are maintained while decision-making largely reverts to individual EU member

17 European Parliament, 'The Treaty of Rome' <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/in-the-past/the-parliament-and-the-treaties/treaty-of-rome> [accessed 22 November 2026].
18 European Union, 'Consolidated Versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union', *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 326, 26 October 2012 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:C2012/326/01> [accessed 22 November 2026].
19 Aleksandra Polak, Christopher A. Hartwell and Katarzyna W. Sidło, 'Physically Present but Spiritually Distant: The View of the European Union in Poland', *Comparative Southeast European Studies* (2023), p. 301 <https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/soeu-2022-0054/html> [accessed 21 November 2026].
20 *Liga Polskich Rodzin.*
21 Bartłomiej Staniszewski and others, *The right road: The future of the European centre-right* (London: Bright Blue, 2025), p. 187 <https://www.brightblue.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Right-road.pdf> [accessed 21 November 2026].

states.[22] This vision is sometimes referred to as the "Europe of Nations."[23] This remains true even as PiS has recently signalled moving away from Poland remaining in the EU, with the party's leader since 2003, Jarosław Kaczyński, suggesting that he would wish to begin discussing the conditions under which Poland could leave the European Union.[24]

Although Eurorealists have their allies in the EU — their vision is shared, among others, by parties member of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) and Patriots for Europe (PfE) political groups in the European Parliament — unless the rest of the EU followed the moderate anti-Europeans' vision (though this is not an impossibility), Poland would become increasingly isolated within the EU, potentially even leading to a scenario where Poland is an EU member in name only, or even where Poland is forced out of the EU by the EU's other members.[25] In the words of the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk (2007-14; 2023-ongoing), "in such a scenario we would formally remain members of the EU, but while the core of Europe will be proceeding as before, we will find ourselves excluded. Even if this is not confirmed by any official decree."

Radical anti-Europeans

The second, radical type of anti-Europeanism in Poland has re-emerged in recent years after having disappeared around the year 2007 once the most immediate negative aftereffects of Poland's economic shock therapy instituted by Leszek Balcerowicz, Poland's Minister of Finance between 1989 and 1991 (and again between 1997 and 2000), wore off.[26] It now takes a different form: while before 2007, its most prominent vehicles were the aforementioned LPR and the Self-

22 Fomina and Kopka-Piątek, *Polexit w polskiej debacie publicznej*, p. 15.
23 Polak, Hartwell and Sidło, 'Physically Present but Spiritually Distant', p. 312.
24 'Kaczyński mówił o negocjacjach w sprawie wyjścia Polski z UE. Kalisz ostrzega przed skutkami', *Super Express*, 29 October 2026 <https://polityka.se.pl/wiadomosci/kaczynski-mowil-o-negocjacjach-w-sprawie-wyjscia-polski-z-ue-kalisz-ostrzega-przed-skutkami-aa-itYa-CXoo-JBsS.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
25 Fomina and Kopka-Piątek, *Polexit w polskiej debacie publicznej*, p. 5.
26 Staniszewski and others, *The right road*, p. 165.

Defence of the Republic of Poland (SRP),[27] parties generally supported by older, poorer and more poorly educated voters,[28] radical anti-Europeans in Poland today take quite a different shape.

Since 2025, their most unambiguous political vehicle has been the Confederation of the Polish Crown (KKP), led by Grzegorz Braun since the organisation was founded in 2019. Braun achieved a surprisingly strong result in the first round of the 2025 presidential election: in April 2025, Braun was polling at only 1%, yet won over 6% of the vote come the election in May. This was only possible because he split from the right-wing Confederation[29] party to run in the presidential election against the Confederation's candidate, the right-wing libertarian Sławomir Mentzen.

KKP's position on the EU is overtly and extremely Eurosceptic. For example, in 2025, Braun wiped his shoes on and burnt an EU flag as a political stunt.[30]

Indeed, radical anti-Europeanism's goal is not merely a re-affirmation of Polish sovereignty within the EU, but Poland leaving the EU altogether, as well as a radical reappraisal of Poland's relationship with Europe.

Contemporary radical anti-Europeanism in Poland can be traced back to at least 2019, when Confederation — which at the time included KKP within its structure — published a report entitled *Polexit: a safe emergency exit*, authored by the National Movement's[31] deputy leaders.[32] Since then, both of Confederation's co-leaders —

27 *Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej*.
28 Aleksandra Moroska and Krzysztof Zuba, 'Two Faces of Polish Populism: The Causes of the Success and Fall of Self Defence and the League of Polish Families', *Totalitarismus und Demokratie*, 7 (2010), 123–47 (p. 138) <https://hait.tu-dresden.de/media/zeitschrift/TD_07_01_Moroska.pdf> [accessed 22 November 2026]; indeed, PiS entering coalition with LPR and SRP in 2006 likely contributed to the party's shift in a more anti-European direction since.
29 *Konfederacja*, the full name of which is currently *Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość*.
30 Aleksandra Czurczak, 'Najpierw zerwał potem podpalił. Skandal z udziałem Brauna', Interia, 6 May 2025 <https://wydarzenia.interia.pl/kraj/news-najpierw-zerwal-potem-podpalil-skandal-z-udzialem-brauna,nId,21399387> [accessed 22 November 2026].
31 At the time, the National Movement was one of the three constituent parts of Confederation. Since then, KKP has split from Confederation, leaving Confederation composed of 'the National Movement,' led by Krzysztof Bosak, and 'a New Hope,' led by Sławomir Mentzen.
32 Cezary Trosiak, 'Uwarunkowania członkostwa Polski w Unii Europejskiej. Czy realny jest polexit?', *Przegląd Politologiczny*, 30.4 (2025), p. 75 <https://doi.org/10.14746/pp.2025.30.4.5> [accessed 21 November 2026].

Krzysztof Bosak and Mentzen — have regularly emphasised the costs of Poland's membership of the EU.[33] This was also new at the time: Confederation's criticisms were levelled not at the EU itself, as was common among PiS, but at Poland being part of the Union.

Though Confederation's leaders often equivocate over the party's position on the EU,[34] the party is as close as possible to the radical anti-European position without embracing an explicit Polexit manifesto commitment, and for all intents and purposes is an example of a radical anti-European party.

Much like KKP, Confederation too has been doing increasingly well in polls in recent years: while in January 2024 it still scored as low as 5% in one national poll,[35] it now regularly polls even above 14%.[36]

The radical anti-European position is also generally more sceptical of the cultural and historical underpinnings of Europe than the Eurorealists'. Bosak, for example, regularly uses the adjective "European" as a deliberate slur to indicate a lack of civilisation or decorum.[37] Braun, on the other hand, goes even further, and has explicitly voiced support for Iran in its recent conflict with NATO despite 29 of NATO's 32 member states being European.[38] Rafał Ziemkiewicz,

33 See, for example, Krzysztof Bosak (@krzysztofbosak), post on X, 16 March 2026 <https://x.com/krzysztofbosak/status/2033537351339671568> [accessed 22 November 2026]; Krzysztof Bosak (@krzysztofbosak), post on X, 6 December 2025 <https://x.com/krzysztofbosak/status/1997421166558872023> [accessed 22 November 2026]; Krzysztof Bosak (@krzysztofbosak), post on X, 19 March 2024 <https://x.com/krzysztofbosak/status/1770156074512896249> [accessed 22 November 2026]; Krzysztof Bosak (@krzysztofbosak), post on X, 2 September 2026 <https://x.com/krzysztofbosak/status/2095140208735821828> [accessed 22 November 2026]; Krzysztof Bosak (@krzysztofbosak), post on X, 5 September 2026 <https://x.com/krzysztofbosak/status/2096225420274266244> [accessed 22 November 2026]; 'Sławomir Mentzen: Unia Europejska zmierza ku stagnacji', Videoparlament <https://videoparlament.pl/video/121933-slawomir-mentzen-unia-europejska-zmierza-ku-stagna> [accessed 22 November 2026].

34 Justyna Dobrosz-Oracz, 'Mówili: „Unia to dzieło szatana". Konfederacja chowa najbardziej radykalne hasła', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27 June 2023 <https://wyborcza.pl/7,82983,29915249,mowili-unia-to-dzielo-szatana-co-ukrywa-konfederacja.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].

35 'Sondaż IBRIS dla Onetu. Zastanawiające przepływy elektoratów', Onet, 10 January 2024 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/nowy-sondaz-partyjny-trzecia-droge-uchronil-efekt-brauna/v5dpm1w> [accessed 22 November 2026].

36 See, for example, Adam Brzozowski, 'Gdyby wybory odbyły się teraz, partia Tuska wygra, ale straci władzę. Nie ma też dobrej wróżby dla PiS', *Super Express*, 23 September 2026 <https://polityka.se.pl/wiadomosci/gdyby-wybory-odbyly-sie-teraz-partia-tuska-wygra-ale-straci-wladze-nie-ma-tez-dobrej-wrozby-dla-pis-aa-DVDk-KUPi-cyFt.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].

37 See, for example, Krzysztof Bosak (@krzysztofbosak), post on X, 8 September 2026 <https://x.com/krzysztofbosak/status/2097394631218442487> [accessed 22 November 2026]; Krzysztof Bosak (@krzysztofbosak), post on X, 7 September 2026 <https://x.com/krzysztofbosak/status/2096865783271870777> [accessed 22 November 2026].

38 Bartłomiej Staniszewski, 'Polish Lessons for the British Right', *Critic*, 23 February 2026 <https://thecritic.co.uk/polish-lessons-for-the-british-right/> [accessed 22 November 2026].

one of the most sophisticated defenders of the radical anti-European position, has called for Poland to be a third power between "Moscow" and "Berlin" — with the latter representing the EU — which would seem to imply that Poland should not even aspire to a non-EU exclusively inter-European agreement, and has no more in common with the European countries constituting the EU than it does with Russia.[39]

Worth noting is that, although radical and moderate anti-Europeanism differ in their goal — whether or not Poland should leave the EU — they do not necessarily differ in their rhetoric. Indeed, despite also frequently celebrating Poland's membership of the EU,[40] in 2018 the Eurorealist then-President, Andrzej Duda (2015-25), declared the EU an "imaginary community, out of which we get little" — a community being imaginary might seem to preclude it being something one can be an enduring member of.[41] Another example includes Marek Suski, a Law and Justice Head of Cabinet between 2017 and 2019, who compared the EU's presence in Poland to the German-Soviet occupation of Poland over the course of the Second World War and suggested that the EU's goal might be to change Poland into a German *land* — again, language which would seem to preclude EU membership being of any benefit to Poland, despite the intention to remain within the EU being explicit in Law and Justice's programme.[42]

BOX 2.1

Euroscepticism in Polish popular opinion

While Eurosceptic politicians have clearly risen in prominence in Poland in recent years, as explained above in the context of the rise of

39 Robert Kuraszkiewicz, 'Nie twórzmy iluzji kolejnej sarmackiej arkadii. Polemika z Rafałem Ziemkiewiczem', Nowa Konfederacja, 2022 <https://nowakonfederacja.pl/nie-tworzmy-iluzji-kolejnej-sarmackiej-arkadii-polemika-z-rafalem-ziemkiewiczem/> [accessed 21 November 2026].
40 See, for example, Andrzej Duda, 'Prezydent dla Faktu: Wszyscy mamy powód do świętowania', Prezydent.pl, 30 April 2019 <https://www.prezydent.pl/kancelaria/archiwum/andrzej-duda/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/artykuly-prasowe/prezydent-fakt-ue-15-lat,6534> [accessed 22 November 2026].
41 Fomina and Kopka-Piątek, *Polexit w polskiej debacie publicznej*, p. 13.
42 Fomina and Kopka-Piątek, *Polexit w polskiej debacie publicznej*, p. 14.

support for KKP and Confederation, the picture is more muddled when it comes to popular opinion.

Many pollsters would suggest that support for the EU among Poles has fallen markedly in the last few years. A poll was conducted in November 2025 by the French polling company Cluster17 under the "Eurobazooka" brand, which suggested that only 69% of Poles support EU membership and 25% oppose it.[43] Two months later, in January 2026, the Polish pollster OGB conducted a poll which likewise suggested that 25% of Poles support Polexit, and 67% are in favour of Poland remaining in the EU.[44] And, later that same year, in May, another Polish pollster, United Surveys–IBRiS, suggested that 24% of Poles are supportive of and 58% are against Polexit.[45]

All of the above would compare unfavourably with polls from years prior. For example, in 2024, yet another Polish pollster, Opinia24, found that 72% of Poles supported Poland remaining in the EU and 12% were opposed to it.[46] Of the above, however, OGB has been the only one to hold a comparable study in two separate years — in 2019, they found that 87% of Poles were opposed to and 7% would support Polexit.[47] All in all, this would suggest that support for the EU in Poland has steadily declined over the last seven years.

On the other hand, the Polish state-sponsored pollster, CBOS, found in February 2026 that 82% of the Polish public supports Poland remaining in the EU and only 14% are in support of Polexit. This would in fact represent a two-year high, with support for the EU in Poland being at its strongest since April 2023, when CBOS found 85% of Poles opposed to Polexit and 10% in favour of it; though still some-

43 'Polacy bliżej wyjścia z Unii Europejskiej? Wyniki międzynarodowego sondażu', TOK FM, 5 December 2025 <https://www.tokfm.pl/polityka/polacy-blizej-wyjscia-z-unii-europejskiej-wyniki-miedzynarodowego-sondazu> [accessed 22 November 2026].
44 Krzysztof Figlarz, 'Poparcie dla polexitu wyszło z marginesu. Już niemal połowa elektoratu PiS i Konfederacji chce wyjścia Polski z UE', XYZ, 4 February 2026 <https://xyz.pl/poparcie-dla-polexitu-wyszlo-z-marginesu-juz-niemal-polowa-elektoratu-pis-i-konfederacji-chce-wyjscia-polski-z-ue/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
45 Literacka, 'Ilu Polaków za polexitem?'.
46 Mikulski, 'Sondaż: Czy Polska powinna opuścić Unię Europejską?'.
47 Figlarz, 'Poparcie dla polexitu wyszło z marginesu'.

way off the peak of June 2022, when 92% of Poles were in favour of Poland remaining in the EU and only 5% opposed.[48]

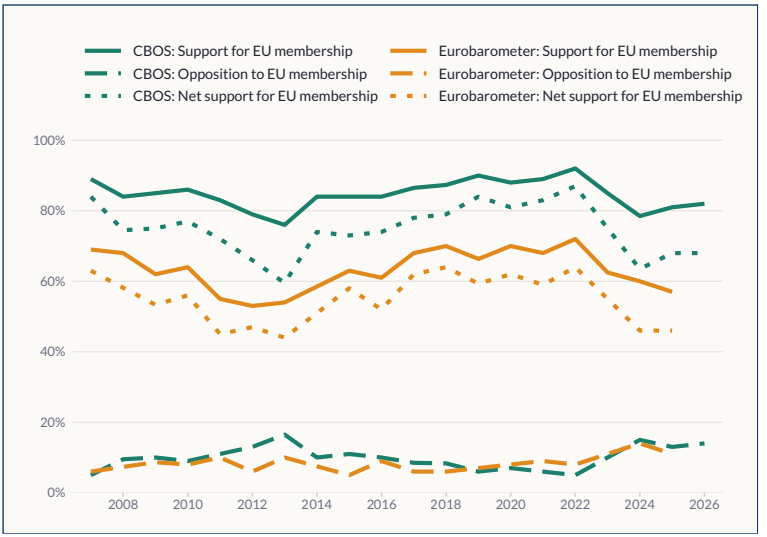
A yet different result can be found in Eurobarometer, the European Commission's public opinion study, which claims that Polish support for Polish membership of the EU has been very slowly declining in the last two years, with 57% of Poles considering it a good thing in 2025;[49] only a three-percentage-point decrease on 2024 and a six-percentage-point decrease on 2023, with 2022 likewise representing a peak of support for the EU in Poland.[50] Then, 72% of Poles thought of Polish EU membership as a good thing and 8% as a bad thing, a net result[51] 18 percentage points better than in 2025.[52]

Interesting to note here is also that the Polish public has historically been, and continues to be, more pro-EU than the publics of other EU countries. In every edition of the Eurobarometer study bar one since 2007,[53] the Polish public were more likely to say that EU membership is "a good thing" than the average respondent in the EU.[54]

48 Beata Roguska, *Polacy o integracji europejskiej*, Komunikat z badań, 19/2026 (Warsaw: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2026) <https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2026/K_019_26.PDF> [accessed 21 November 2026].
49 European Parliament, 'Autumn 2025 Survey (Eurobarometer 104.2)', 2025 <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3632> [accessed 22 November 2026].
50 European Parliament, *Socio-Demographic Trends in National Public Opinion, Edition 11: Poland*, 2025 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2025/socio-demographic-trends-national-public-opinion-edition-11/pl-sociodemographic-trends-2025.pdf> [accessed 22 November 2026].
51 The percentage of respondents opposed to subtracted from the percentage of respondents supportive of Poland's EU membership.
52 European Parliament, 'EP Spring 2022 Survey: Rallying around the European Flag – Democracy as Anchor Point in Times of Crisis', June 2022 <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2792> [accessed 22 November 2026].
53 The only exception is a 2024 study, where the result for Poland was the same as the EU-wide average.
54 European Parliament, *Socio-Demographic Trends in National Public Opinion, Edition 12: Poland*, 2026 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2026/socio-demographic-trends-national-public-opinion-edition-12/pl-sociodemographic-trends-2026.pdf> [accessed 22 November 2026].

The results of the different CBOS and Eurobarometer surveys are shown in Chart 2.1 below.[55]

Chart 2.1. Support for and opposition to EU membership in Poland in the years 2007 to 2026 according to CBOS and Eurobarometer data.



Source: Eurobarometer and CBOS surveys between 2007 and 2026.

As can be seen in Chart 2.1 above, if we were to trust either CBOS or Eurobarometer data, support for the EU in Poland still remains broadly at the same level it has been since at least 2007.

All this would suggest that polling data on Polish popular opinion about the EU is somewhat inconsistent and should be treated with caution.

Nevertheless, we can try and establish a relationship between Polish popular opinion on the EU and Polish politicians' approach to the EU.

We can determine how Eurosceptic the Polish party-political mood is by using CHES data on Polish political parties. In 2002, 2006, 2010,

55 Note that there is no Eurobarometer data for 2026 on this question, as it has not yet been released at the time of writing.

2014, 2019 and 2024, CHES surveyed experts on the position of all Polish political parties on the question of the "overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration" in the given year, on a scale of one to seven, with one meaning strong opposition to EU integration and seven meaning strong support.[56] By multiplying the result for each party by that party's popular support in the most recent election, then adding together every party's result in any given year, we can estimate how Eurosceptic or pro-EU the entire Polish party-political scene is in said year.

Then, if we use CBOS data, which is the only dataset to have been produced consistently since 2002 — including 2004, the year of Poland's accession into the EU — we can see public opinion lagging behind the party-political mood.

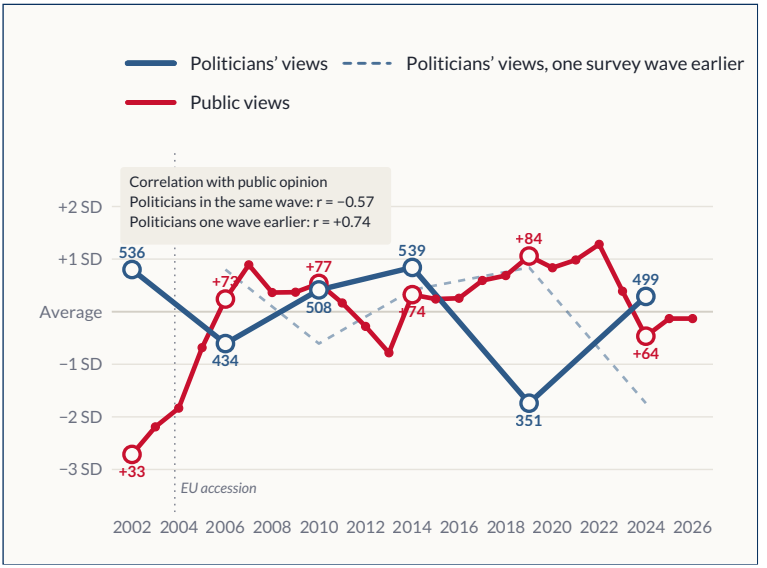
The result can be seen below in Chart 2.2, with a higher number for 'Politicians' views' (the blue line) indicating a more pro-European position.

The y-axis in Chart 2.2 shows how far the result in any given year is from the 2002 to 2024 average, expressed in standard deviations. The public view is represented by net support for Polish membership of the EU in CBOS data (red line).

As we can see, the Polish party-political establishment became more Eurosceptic between 2014 and 2019, then less Eurosceptic between 2019 and 2024. This is likely the result of PiS achieving a strong result in the 2015 and 2019 parliamentary elections, winning 37.6% and 43.6% of the vote respectively, and simultaneously getting into a conflict with the EU which lasted until PiS left the government in 2023 — a conflict which is explained in more detail later in this chapter. PiS's vote share declined in the 2023 parliamentary election, and Poland has had an overtly pro-EU government since. And although the most recent CHES data is two years old, and is therefore unable to account for the recent rise in support for KKP and Confederation, if our analysis is correct, we would expect the blue line in Chart 2.2 above to go down significantly after 2024.

56 'CHES Europe', Chapel Hill Expert Survey <https://www.chesdata.eu/ches-europe/> [accessed 22 November 2026].

Chart 2.2. Support for the EU among the Polish public and party-political establishment in the years 2002 to 2026.



Source: CBOS and CHES surveys between 2002 and 2026.

We can also see, however, that while Polish public opinion on the EU is moderately negatively correlated (-0.57)[57] with Polish politicians' views on the EU in any given year, it is strongly positively correlated (+0.74) with Polish politicians' views on the EU in the preceding wave of the CHES study. This would suggest that Polish public opinion lags behind the views of the Polish party-political scene — though this is not to suggest that one causes the other. If we are correct that the Polish party-political scene has become significantly more Eurosceptic in the last two years due to the rise in support for KKP and Confederation, we would expect that Polish popular opinion likewise becomes

57 This is the Pearson correlation coefficient: a single number that describes a relationship between two variables. It always lies between -1 and +1. A positive number means that as one variable goes up, the other tends to go up too. For example, taller people tend to be heavier, so height and weight are positively correlated. A negative number means that as one variable goes up, the other tends to go down. For example, the longer someone's daily commute, the less free time they tend to have. A number close to zero means there is no clear pattern either way.

significantly more Eurosceptic in the years to follow, even if it does not reflect the Euroscepticism of the Polish political scene just yet.

Indeed, while the supporters of KKP and Confederation have not always been vehemently Eurosceptic, they are moving in that direction. In a 2022 poll, only 50% of Confederation's voters — which at the time included KKP — expressed the opinion that the EU restricts Polish independence, as compared to 68% of voters for the Eurorealist PiS.[58] Indeed, according to CBOS data, among the supporters of KKP since KKP has separated from Confederation, more of them — by six percentage points — thought that Polexit would leave Poland worse off than otherwise.[59] Yet since then, according to a 2025 CBOS poll, Eurosceptic sentiments among Confederation supporters have now outstripped those of PiS supporters.[60]

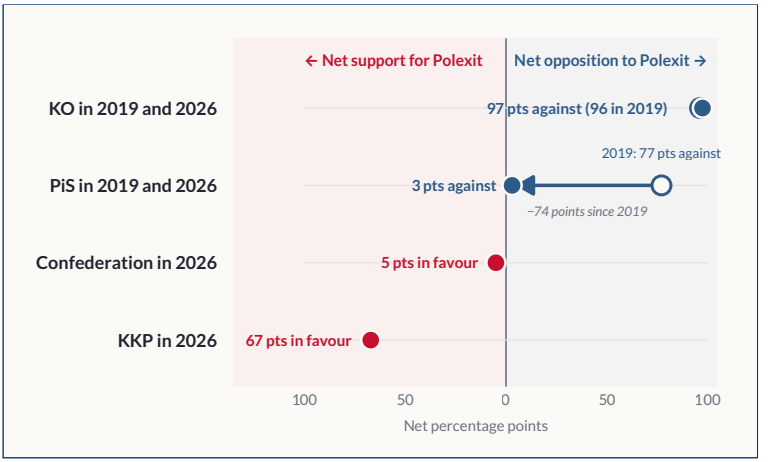
OGB data likewise suggests that a large proportion of PiS voters have become much more Eurosceptic since 2019, and that KKP supporters have moved even further than Confederation's towards Polexit, further corroborating the view that Polish popular opinion lags behind that of the Polish party-political establishment as that establishment moves further towards Euroscepticism.

A January 2026 OGB study, some of the results of which are illustrated in Chart 2.3 below, found that 46% of Law and Justice voters are opposed to Polexit, with PiS voters being three percentage points net in opposition to Polexit. This would represent a significant anti-EU shift among Law and Justice voters since 2019. Then, 87% of them

58 Polak, Hartwell and Sidło, 'Physically Present but Spiritually Distant', p. 323.
59 Zuzanna Czarnecka, *Kim są osoby deklarujące zaufanie do Grzegorza Brauna?*, Komunikat z badań, 31/2026 (Warsaw: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2026), p. 17 <https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2026/K_031_26.PDF> [accessed 22 November 2026].
60 By seven percentage points, though the 2022 and 2025 polls used different questions to measure Euroscepticism. See Beata Roguska, *Charakterystyka poglądów elektoratów głównych ugrupowań politycznych*, Komunikat z badań, 43/2025 (Warsaw: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2025) <https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2025/K_043_25.PDF> [accessed 22 November 2026] for the 2025 poll.

were opposed to Polexit (net 77 percentage point opposition to Polexit).[61]

Chart 2.3. Net support and change in support for Polexit among the supporters of different Polish political parties using data from 2019 and 2026.



Source: Violetta Baran, 'Polexit? Sondaż: PiS ma problem. Elektorat się podzielił', Wirtualna Polska, 4 February 2026 <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/polexit-sondaz-pis-ma-problem-elektorat-sie-podzielil-7250749584771392a> [accessed 21 November 2026].

In that same data, 43% of Confederation (net five percentage point support for Polexit) and 72% of KKP voters are in support of Polexit (net 67 percentage point support for Polexit). By comparison, net opposition to Polexit among the voters of the governing Civic Coalition (KO)[62] party is a staggering 97 percentage points.[63]

Having defined the two different types of anti-European sentiment in Poland, we now move on to examine their sources: democracy, migration, the environment, cronyism, social policy, and failures to confront

61 Violetta Baran, 'Polexit? Sondaż: PiS ma problem. Elektorat się podzielił', Wirtualna Polska, 4 February 2026 <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/polexit-sondaz-pis-ma-problem-elektorat-sie-podzielil-7250749584771392a> [accessed 21 November 2026].
62 *Koalicja Obywatelska.*
63 Baran, 'Polexit? Sondaż: PiS ma problem'.

Russia. The report notes whether the source motivates Euroscepticism, anti-Europeanism more broadly or anti-Europeanism which is disconnected from Euroscepticism and, where relevant, whether the source motivates only moderate anti-Europeanism, only radical anti-Europeanism or both.

For the sources of anti-Europeanism which also constitute critiques of Europe, European countries or the EU, we will avoid commenting on whether the criticisms are sound or not, except to compare their salience, but merely present the main arguments for and against them and how popular they are among different political groups.

2.3 Sources of anti-European sentiment in Poland

Democratic concerns

Both moderate and radical anti-Europeans in Poland contend that the EU is an anti-democratic institution, or at least that it harms democracy in Poland.

This criticism only concerns the EU, and therefore is a source of Euroscepticism in Poland as much as it is a source of anti-Europeanism.

This critique manifests itself in very many ways, related to the very many ways in which the philosophy of democracy can be understood.[64] Therefore, we focus only on the most prominent and current example: the controversy surrounding the Polish judiciary since 2015.

The Polish judicial affair is very complicated, and so to avoid an excessively long tangent, it will not be described in detail here. It suffices to say that, among other events, in 2015, the Civic Platform (PO)[65]-Polish People's Party (PSL)[66] governing coalition, led by Ewa Kopacz (2014-15), voted in Parliament to appoint five judges to

64 For a discussion of rival accounts, see Tom Christiano and Sameer Bajaj, 'Democracy', Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/democracy/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
65 *Platforma Obywatelska.*
66 *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe.*

Poland's Constitutional Tribunal despite there being only three posts available in said Tribunal. When the Beata Szydło-led (2015-17) PiS Government came into power later in 2015, the Parliament proceeded to appoint five other judges instead. This was despite the Constitutional Tribunal itself ruling that only the appointments of three of the five said judges — the ones chosen to fill the three vacant spots — were valid. When this happened, Szydło also refused to print the ruling in the journal which forms the basis of Polish law.[67]

The EU became involved shortly after. The Venice Commission, the legal advisory body of the Council of Europe, asserted in March 2016 that actions of the Polish Parliament, both under the 2014-15 PO-PSL Coalition Government and under the 2015-17 PiS Government, were unconstitutional,[68] following the start of an investigation by the European Commission in January 2016.[69] Between 2016 and 2021, the European Parliament also voted through four resolutions condemning the Polish Government and ordering it to follow the advice of the Venice Commission.[70] This culminated in the European Commission in 2022 blocking EU funds which were previously intended for Poland. By the time the funds were unblocked in 2024, they totalled €137 billion.[71]

67 Andrzej Dziadzio, 'Czy premier Beata Szydło powinna opublikować wyrok TK z 9 marca 2016 r.', *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 March 2016 <https://www.rp.pl/opinie-prawne/art11128071-czy-premier-beata-szydlo-powinna-opublikowac-wyrok-tk-z-9-marca-2016-r> [accessed 22 November 2026].
68 European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), *Opinion on Amendments to the Act of 25 June 2015 on the Constitutional Tribunal of Poland, CDL-AD(2016)001*, 11 March 2016, p. 22 <https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD%282016%29001-e> [accessed 22 November 2026].
69 European Commission, 'Commission Recommendation regarding the Rule of Law in Poland: Questions & Answers', MEMO/16/2644, 27 July 2016 <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/memo_16_2644> [accessed 22 November 2026].
70 European Parliament, 'Poland: Constitutional Tribunal Is Illegitimate, Unfit to Interpret Constitution', 21 October 2021 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20211015IPR15016/poland-constitutional-tribunal-is-illegitimate-unfit-to-interpret-constitution> [accessed 22 November 2026]; European Parliament, 'Resolution of 15 November 2017 on the Situation of the Rule of Law and Democracy in Poland (2017/2931(RSP))', 15 November 2017 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2017-0442_PL.html> [accessed 22 November 2026]; European Parliament, 'Resolution of 14 September 2016 on Recent Developments in Poland and Their Impact on Fundamental Rights as Laid Down in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2016/2774(RSP))', 14 September 2016 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2016-0344_PL.html> [accessed 22 November 2026]; European Parliament, 'Resolution of 13 April 2016 on the Situation in Poland (2015/3031(RSP))', 13 April 2016 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2016-0123_PL.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
71 'Poland En Route to Restore the Rule of Law and Access to EU Funds', European Newsroom, 6 March 2024 <https://europeannewsroom.com/poland-en-route-to-restore-the-rule-of-law-and-access-to-eu-funds/> [accessed 22 November 2026].

What is more, in 2017, the PiS-dominated Polish Parliament also introduced a law which allowed the Minister for Justice to remove and appoint the managers and directors of Polish ordinary courts, and for the Polish Parliament to choose some of the appointees of Polish judges (the National Council of the Judiciary, abbreviated as KRS[72]) — before, Polish judges elected said appointees from amongst themselves.[73] The law's critics contend that it was unconstitutional.[74] Then, in 2020, the PiS-dominated Polish Parliament also voted through a law which forbade judges from engaging in political activity. This included criticism of the legitimacy of some of PiS's judicial reforms, as well as applying EU law above Polish law where the two were perceived to be in conflict.[75]

In response to this, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) — the supreme court of the EU — imposed on Poland in 2021 a fine of €1 million a day.[76] The penalty ran until 2023 and was recovered by further subtracting the fine from EU funds earmarked for Poland.[77]

The EU imposing fines on Poland provided ample fuel for Polish Eurosceptics and was represented as an attack on Poland's self-determination: PiS, the Eurosceptics would contend, had a democratic mandate to reform the Polish judiciary and the EU used financial blackmail to hinder said mandate. The reforms were necessary, the

72 *Krajowa Rada Sądownicta.*
73 Patrycja Rojek-Socha, 'Sędziowskie wybory członków KRS pełne wątpliwości', Prawo.pl, 18 February 2026 <https://www.prawo.pl/prawnicy-sady/wybory-czlonkowsedziow-do-krs-przez-sedziow-jak-maja-przebiegac-opinie-sedziow,1538937.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
74 See, for example, Andrzej Dryszel, 'Wybór członków KRS: w konstytucji zabrakło precyzji?', *Rzeczpospolita*, 26 November 2017 <https://www.rp.pl/sady-i-trybunaly/art2280241-wybor-czlonkow-krs-w-konstytucji-zabraklo-precyzji> [accessed 22 November 2026].
75 Łukasz Woźnicki, '„Ustawa kagańcowa" wchodzi w życie. Wszystko, co trzeba o niej wiedzieć', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 13 February 2020 <https://wyborcza.pl/7,166575,25690703,ustawa-kagancowa-wyprowadza-nas-z-unii-wszystko-co-trzeba.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
76 Sławomir Sierakowski, 'Poland's Legal Mess', German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), 21 February 2023 <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/polands-legal-mess> [accessed 22 November 2026]; European Commission, 'Rule of Law: European Commission Asks the Court of Justice to Impose Financial Penalties on Poland', 7 September 2021 <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/bg/ip_21_4587> [accessed 22 November 2026].
77 Jorge Liboreiro, 'EU Court Upholds €320 Million Fine against Poland over Controversial Judicial Reform', Euronews, 5 February 2025 <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/02/05/eu-court-upholds-320-million-fine-against-poland-over-controversial-judicial-reform> [accessed 22 November 2026].

argument goes, especially to complete a process, begun after 1989, of de-communising the judiciary.[78]

The EU was only stopping Poland from receiving any extra money — it did not ask Poland to pay up with money it already had. However, Poland still had to make its usual contributions to the EU budget. Those averaged €7 billion a year between 2021 and 2023, meaning that, were Poland not to have been in the EU at the time, its state expenditure would have been between 4.5 and 6% lower than it otherwise was.[79]

EU sanctions also allowed Eurosceptics to portray the EU as willing to strong-arm Poland into abandoning its democracy. In the words of Ziemkiewicz: "If we give in over the usurpation of the ECJ and the European Commission, then we will have to keep giving in until we completely lose our sovereignty."[80] Przemysław Czarnek, PiS Minister of Education and Science between 2020 and 2023 and a more moderate anti-European, had likewise asserted against the background of the EU's actions that "in the European Union we are dealing with an enormous democratic deficit, we are dealing with authoritarian rule which has nothing but disregard for the rule of law."[81]

The other argument that the EU threatens Polish democracy comes from the Polish Constitutional Tribunal[82] itself — in 2021, it ruled that the Treaty on European Union, the foundational document of the EU, contradicts the Polish constitution. The problem is that the Polish constitution asserts itself to be the sovereign document of Polish law. EU law, on the other hand, sees its own rules as supreme over the constitutions of individual member states.[83] In practice, however, the conflict is ineffectual. If EU law and a member state's constitution ever came into conflict, the EU would lack mechanisms to override the latter without the member state's own consent.

78 Staniszewski and others, *The right road*, pp. 173–75, 183–96.
79 Author's calculations based on *Najwyższa Izba Kontroli* and *Ministerstwo Finansów* figures.
80 Fomina and Kopka-Piątek, *Polexit w polskiej debacie publicznej*, p. 36.
81 Fomina and Kopka-Piątek, *Polexit w polskiej debacie publicznej*, p. 14.
82 Though then involving the judges appointed by the PiS-dominated Parliament.
83 Fomina and Kopka-Piątek, *Polexit w polskiej debacie publicznej*, p. 11.

In sum, one can see, using the example of the Polish judicial controversy, how a particular interpretation of democracy can allow one to conclude that the EU is anti-democratic.

Analogous arguments are re-used by Polish Eurosceptics also in the context of other conflicts between the EU and Poland: any attempt by, or even potentiality for, the EU to assert its own interests, or the interests of other EU member states, against those of Poland, can be framed as opposed to Polish democracy.

One particular additional example of this worth flagging here is the 2026 controversy over Security Action for Europe (SAFE): effectively, €44 billion of EU loans to boost Poland's defence.[84] Besides worries concerning change in the value of the debt relating to the PLN to EUR exchange rate,[85] opposition to SAFE often rested on the argument that it gives the EU a further lever — namely, requesting the return of lent money — with which it can blackmail Poland in the event of future conflicts between the EU and Poland.[86] As the former pro-European PiS Minister Konrad Szymański (2019-22) notes, this argument can be used to oppose Polish participation in the context of any EU fiscal policy whatsoever.[87] Indeed, in the run-up to ratifying the 2021-27 EU budget in the Polish Parliament in May 2021, some Eurorealist MPs led by the then-Minister of Justice Zbigniew Ziobro (2015-23), as well as Confederation MPs, voted against the budget on no other basis than that it strengthens the EU's fiscal capabilities despite the fact that the budget committed to almost €200 billion in EU funds earmarked specifically for Poland — effectively rejecting an enormous sum of extra

84 Ministry of National Defence, 'The SAFE Agreement Signed: This Is a Great Moment for the Whole Community Working towards Peace' <https://www.gov.pl/web/national-defence/the-safe-agreement-signed-this-is-a-great-moment-for-the-whole-community-working-towards-peace> [accessed 22 November 2026].
85 Damian Słomski, 'Ile kosztuje polska pożyczka SAFE? Coraz więcej. Nowe wyliczenia', Business Insider Polska, 6 November 2026 <https://businessinsider.com.pl/finanse/slabszy-zloty-podnosi-koszty-pozyczki-safe-tyle-wiecej-mozemy-zaplacic/90bn879> [accessed 22 November 2026].
86 'Prezes PiS ostro o programie SAFE. „Szantaż polityczny"', Onet, 12 February 2026 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/prezes-pis-o-programie-safe-pisze-o-szantazu-politycznym/r7hgf7l> [accessed 22 November 2026].
87 Konrad Szymański, 'Nie jestem uspokojony zaklęciami, że polexit to wymysł Tuska', *Rzeczpospolita*, 2026 <https://www.rp.pl/plus-minus/art44218821-konrad-szymanski-nie-jestem-uspokojony-zakleciami-ze-polexit-to-wymysl-tuska> [accessed 21 November 2026].

money on the basis of the argument described in this section of the report.[88]

The democracy argument is difficult to defeat unequivocally due to this ubiquity. The best strategy in tackling it would be to demonstrate that Poland's and the EU's interests are aligned, and that therefore EU and Polish democratic interests need not come into conflict.

The other significant differentials between EU and Polish interests are therefore now explored in the rest of this chapter.

Migration

Both moderate and radical anti-Europeans in Poland contend that the EU promotes and forces Poland to adopt a harmful migration policy.[89]

Insofar as European countries only have the capacity and will to move Poland towards what is contended to be harmful migration policy as joint members of the EU, this critique is only a source of anti-Europeanism insofar as it is a critique of the EU.

Specifically, the EU Common European Asylum System (CEAS) became a source of anti-European sentiment in Poland in 2015, and memory of the EU's past handling of migration policy remains a source of said sentiment today.

As stated by the European Union Agency for Asylum, CEAS "emphasises a shared responsibility to process applicants for international protection in a dignified manner, ensuring fair treatment and similar procedures in examining cases, irrelevant of the country where the application is lodged."[90] According to Regulation (EU) 604/2013 (so-

88 Nicole Makarewicz, 'Sejm przegłosował ratyfikację Funduszu Odbudowy. „Lewica zapleczem PiS"', RMF24, 4 May 2021 <https://www.rmf24.pl/fakty/polska/news-sejm-przeglosowal-ratyfikacje-funduszu-odbudowy-lewica-zaple,nId,5210535> [accessed 22 November 2026]; 'Fundusz Odbudowy przegłosowany. Sejm przyjął ustawę o ratyfikacji unijnej decyzji o zasobach własnych', *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, 4 May 2021 <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/kraj/artykuly/8156015,kpo-glosowanie-sejm-przyjal-ustawe-wyrazajaca-zgode-na-ratyfikacje-decyzji-o-zwiekszeniu-zasobow-wlasnych-ue.html> [accessed 22 November 2026]; Konrad Szymański, 'Polska weszła na drogę do polexitu', *Rzeczpospolita*, 2026 <https://www.rp.pl/plus-minus/art43953331-konrad-szymanski-polska-weszla-na-droge-do-polexitu> [accessed 21 November 2026].

89 This is as distinct from said countries promoting a harmful consensus on migration, which is discussed later in this chapter.

90 European Union Agency for Asylum, 'Common European Asylum System and Current Issues', *Asylum Report 2020*, 2020 <https://www.euaa.europa.eu/asylum-report-2020/21-common-european-asylum-system-and-current-issues> [accessed 22 November 2026].

called 'Dublin regulation') which formed a part of CEAS, to prevent asylum seekers from submitting applications in multiple countries or being pushed back from one EU country to another, the asylum application ought to be determined by the first EU country into which the asylum seeker arrives. In effect, this led to Greece and Italy being disproportionately burdened with asylum processing. Hence, under decision (EU) 2015/1601, voted through in September 2015, 120,000 asylum seekers were to be re-located from Italy and Greece to other EU countries,[91] including about 7,000 to Poland over the course of 2016-17.[92]

Although Poland voted in favour of decision (EU) 2015/1601 in September 2015, the following month the Government changed hands from a PO-PSL coalition to PiS. In 2016, the Szydło-led PiS Government — following an approving vote in Parliament[93] — refused to honour the decision. Hungary and Slovakia likewise challenged the decision's legality, with the support of the new Polish Government.

Albeit the legal challenge failed, the EU lacked any mechanism to enforce the decision, and so ultimately Poland only accepted 7,212 asylum seekers through the CEAS system between 2015 and 2025, including none of the 120,000 under decision (EU) 2015/1601.[94]

Law and Justice's campaign against CEAS culminated in a referendum in 2023, announced by the Government of the time, in which one of the questions asked: "Do you support the admission of thousands of illegal immigrants from the Middle East and Africa, in accordance with the forced relocation mechanism imposed by the European bureaucracy?" Although 96.8% of participants in the referendum voted

91 Sylwia Mazur, 'Między suwerennością a solidarnością. Mechanizm relokacji w unijnej polityce azylowej', Instytut Sobieskiego, 16 September 2024 <https://sobieski.org.pl/miedzy-suwerennoscia-a-solidarnoscia-mechanizm-relokacji-w-unijnej-polityce-azylowej/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
92 'PiS chce, by Sejm przyjął uchwałę ws. uchodźców', TVN24, 9 February 2016 <https://tvn24.pl/polska/pis-chce-by-sejm-przyjal-uchwale-ws-uchodzcow-ra617745-ls3172088> [accessed 22 November 2026].
93 Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 'Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 1 kwietnia 2016 r. w sprawie polityki imigracyjnej Polski', *Monitor Polski*, 2016, poz. 370 <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WMP20160000370> [accessed 22 November 2026].
94 Eurostat, 'Incoming "Dublin" Transfers by Submitting Country (migr_dubti)' <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_dubti/default/table?lang=en> [accessed 22 November 2026].

'No,' the turnout was only 40.9%, rendering the result non-binding, as it fell below the minimum 50% validity threshold for Polish referenda.[95]

The Eurorealist PiS effectively used CEAS as a means of scaring voters over the prospect of asylum seekers arriving in Poland. This combined both generic worries regarding migration — especially irregular migration from culturally distant countries — and the fact that Poland had already issued hundreds of thousands of residence permits to Ukrainians. Already in 2014, 247,000 Ukrainians gained residence permits in Poland and 2,318 applied for asylum.[96] By 2016, that former number rose to over 500,000: Poland was issuing more residence permits per capita than any major EU country,[97] almost entirely on account of the number of Ukrainians it was accepting — many of them fleeing Russian aggression, though the vast majority officially had their permit accepted for employment reasons.

On the other hand, under the 2015-23 PiS Government, the number of non-European foreign residents in Poland also increased: from around 18,000 to over 86,000, an over fourfold increase.[98] This raises the question of how real the purported issues created by an extra 7,000 arrivals would have been.

The EU has since adopted a more restrictive policy on irregular migration. In November 2026, several EU member states — Germany, Denmark, Austria, Greece and the Netherlands — announced a scheme to deport more irregular migrants to Rwanda "if deportees cannot be returned to their country of origin."[99] Indeed, the number of

95 Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza, 'Referendum ogólnokrajowe 2023: wyniki', 2023 <https://referendum.gov.pl/referendum2023/pl/wyniki/pl> [accessed 22 November 2026].
96 Urząd do Spraw Cudzoziemców, 'Zestawienia roczne' <https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc/zestawienia-roczne> [accessed 22 November 2026]. The Polish Service for Foreigners' Affairs changed its methodology after 2014, and so there is no directly comparable data to compare against this number for later years.
97 Rafał Hirsch, 'Najnowsze dane Eurostatu: Polska w 2016 przyjęła więcej imigrantów niż Niemcy', Gazeta.pl, 16 November 2017 <https://next.gazeta.pl/next/7,151003,22653064,najnowsze-dane-eurostatu-polska-w-2016-przyjela-wiecej-imigrantow.html> [accessed 22 November 2026]. The only EU countries which issued more residence permits per capita than Poland in 2016 are Malta and Cyprus.
98 Izabela Kacprzak and Grażyna Zawadka, 'PiS szeroko otworzył drzwi dla cudzoziemców spoza Europy, którymi straszył Polaków', *Rzeczpospolita*, 13 June 2023 <https://www.rp.pl/spoleczenstwo/art38600021-pis-szeroko-otworzyl-drzwi-dla-cudzoziemcow-spoza-europy-ktorymi-straszyl-polakow> [accessed 22 November 2026].
99 Olivia Ireland and Bethany Bell, 'Five EU Countries Announce Migrant Deportation Centre in Rwanda', BBC News, 16 November 2026 <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cw987343352go> [accessed 22 November 2026].

irregular migrants deported from the EU more than doubled between 2021 and 2025, from 68,000 to 139,000.[100] Moreover, in 2024, the EU replaced Regulation 604/2013 with the New Pact on Migration and Asylum (or 'EU Migration Pact'), which came into force in 2026.[101] The Pact, while still containing a relocation mechanism similar to previous law, also includes provisions for the faster deportation of asylum seekers whose claims are rejected.[102]

Despite this, even the overtly pro-EU Tusk criticised the Pact, saying he will "protect Poland against the relocation mechanism,"[103] and so effectively conceding the anti-Europeans' argument on migration. Some ways to further navigate migration as a source of anti-European sentiment in Poland are suggested in chapter four of this report.

Environmental policy

Both moderate and radical anti-Europeans in Poland contend that the EU promotes and forces Poland to adopt a harmful environmental policy.

Insofar as European countries only have the capacity and will to move Poland towards what is supposed to be harmful environmental policy as joint members of the EU, this critique is only a source of anti-Europeanism insofar as it is a critique of the EU.

Specifically, the EU's European Green Deal, approved in 2020, became a major source of Eurosceptic feelings in Poland. The Deal, aiming chiefly to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 among EU member states, has been intensely criticised for its alleged effects on EU — and so, by extension, Polish — competitiveness and the cost of living.

100 Eurostat, 'Third-Country Nationals Returned following an Order to Leave (migr_eirtn)' <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_eirtn/default/table?lang=en> [accessed 22 November 2026].
101 European Commission, 'Common Implementation Plan for the Pact on Migration and Asylum, COM(2024) 251 final', 12 June 2024 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52024DC0251> [accessed 22 November 2026].
102 European Commission, 'Pact on Migration and Asylum' <https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en> [accessed 22 November 2026].
103 'European Parliament Agrees on Stricter EU Migration Rules', Deutsche Welle, 10 April 2024 <https://www.dw.com/en/european-parliament-agrees-on-stricter-eu-migration-rules/a-68782568> [accessed 22 November 2026].

Polish Eurosceptics' disdain for the EU's environmental policy was most famously encapsulated by Czarnek in a 2026 speech in which he asserted that Poland "has no Green Deal, no shitty renewables [*OZE-sroze*] financed through subsidies. We have our coal supply, our natural riches, and let us stay away from them!"[104]

Poland would be uniquely negatively affected by the Deal, it is alleged by the Deal's Polish detractors, due to coal constituting a disproportionately large part of Poland's energy supply.[105] While solid fuels — primarily coal — constitute only 15.2% of the EU's energy production according to the most recent Eurostat data, they constitute 65% of Poland's energy production: the highest level in the EU.[106] Seventy-eight per cent of that is coal.[107] Indeed, Mateusz Morawiecki, the Law and Justice Prime Minister of Poland (2017-23) at the time of the Deal's approval, secured in 2019 an opt-out from the Deal's 2050 target for Poland — uniquely from among all EU countries.[108]

Fuel was poured on the fire in 2021, when the ECJ sided with Czechia in a lawsuit against Poland concerning the extension of a licence for extraction at the Turów coal mine.[109] Czechs argued that the mining cannot proceed without the environmental impact assessment required by EU law.[110] Poland was ordered by the ECJ to halt mining immediately and fined €500,000 for each day the mine continued operating.[111]

104 'Burza wokół Przemysława Czarnka. Polityk odpowiada na krytykę', Onet, 9 March 2026 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/przemyslaw-czarnek-tlumaczy-sie-z-oze-sroze-bede-demontowal-te-panele/3yfjfpp> [accessed 22 November 2026].
105 Fomina and Kopka-Piątek, *Polexit w polskiej debacie publicznej*, pp. 10, 21.
106 Eurostat, 'Simplified Energy Balances (nrg_bal_s)' <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/nrg_bal_s__custom_14748778/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=02898c9f-705a-4888-8d36-89f26e947764&c=1765791458874> [accessed 22 November 2026].
107 'Poland', Ember, 30 October 2026 <https://ember-energy.org/countries-and-regions/poland/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
108 Anna Słojewska, 'Polskie weto klimatyczne w Brukseli', *Rzeczpospolita*, 13 December 2019 <https://energia.rp.pl/klimat/art17014431-polskie-weto-klimatyczne-w-brukseli> [accessed 22 November 2026].
109 Fomina and Kopka-Piątek, *Polexit w polskiej debacie publicznej*, p. 10.
110 '*Czech Republic v. Poland* (Mine de Turów)', Climate Case Chart, Sabin Center for Climate Change Law <https://www.climatecasechart.com/document/czech-republic-v-poland-mine-de-turow_1bd9> [accessed 22 November 2026].
111 Court of Justice of the European Union, 'Judgment of the Court in Case C-554/24 P *Poland v Commission*', Press Release No 5/26, 22 January 2026 <https://curia.europa.eu/site/upload/docs/application/pdf/2026-01/cp260005en.pdf> [accessed 22 November 2026].

As with the fine discussed earlier in the context of Poland's judiciary, Poland refused to pay, and so the money was instead deducted from EU funds otherwise earmarked for Poland.[112] PGE, the company operating the mine, warned that the ECJ's ruling placed the country on the "path to a wild energy transformation" and opined that "the Union's Green Deal is failing before our very eyes." Critics of the ECJ's decision likewise alleged that the coal coming from the mine was necessary for power generation infrastructure which provided 7% of Poland's electricity, making it impossible for Poland to maintain energy security without the mine continuing operations.[113]

Indeed, the European Green Deal should cost Poland between €357 and €380 billion in total.[114] This is even despite Poland already having weaned itself off coal in recent years: as a proportion of Poland's energy production, coal has fallen from 91% in 2006 to the level it is today.[115]

However, the more a full green transformation is delayed, the costlier it will become: according to the Polish Economic Institute (PIE)[116], "long-term operation of existing coal-fired power plants and supplementing capacity with new coal-fired plants, would be [more expensive than more immediate green transformation]. The outcome would be persistently high electricity prices" and 40% higher overall costs.[117] What is more, unless Poland partakes in the transformation, it will be unable to make use of EU funds earmarked for that purpose, which

112 'EU to Withhold Poland Funds over Coal Mine Dispute', Deutsche Welle, 8 February 2022 <https://www.dw.com/en/turow-coal-mine-eu-to-withhold-poland-funds-over-dispute/a-60705585> [accessed 22 November 2026].
113 Polska Agencja Prasowa, 'TSUE nakazał Polsce natychmiastowe wstrzymanie wydobycia węgla w kopalni Turów', Bankier.pl, 21 May 2021 <https://www.bankier.pl/wiadomosc/TSUE-nakazal-Polsce-natychmiastowe-wstrzymanie-wydobycia-wegla-w-kopalni-Turow-8117609.html> [accessed 22 November 2026]; Chancellery of the Prime Minister, 'Polish Government Will Not Permit Closure of Turów Coal Mine' <https://www.gov.pl/web/primeminister/polish-government-will-not-permit-closure-of-turow-coal-mine> [accessed 22 November 2026].
114 Elżbieta Kawecka-Wyrzykowska, 'Can Poland Afford the Energy Transition?', in *Poland in the European Union*, ed. by Adam A. Ambroziak (Warsaw: SGH Publishing House, 2025), pp. 67–69.
115 'Poland', Ember.
116 *Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny.*
117 Kawecka-Wyrzykowska, 'Can Poland Afford the Energy Transition?', p. 69.

would cover a small majority of the total outlay based on 2025 calculations.[118]

One might question whether the EU's zeal for decarbonising the EU's energy sector will continue — political appetite for decarbonisation has significantly declined in the last few years across Europe. This is reflected, for example, in the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen's (2019-ongoing) 2026 'State of the Union' address. There, not a single mention was made of the words "green," "emissions" or "decarbonisation," and "environment" was only referred to in the context of a cyber environment;[119] all of this in contrast to, among others, her 2025 address,[120] and despite von der Leyen being herself the author of the European Green Deal. But in truth, appetite for decarbonisation is still there, only framed in the language of affordability and energy independence, with a call "to double down on our affordable, homegrown, clean energy"[121] — though that leaves more room for Poland to manoeuvre, given its coal supply is indeed homegrown.

Today, even pro-Europeans in Poland have somewhat conceded to Eurosceptics on the environmental argument. Morawiecki, who secured the original Polish opt-out from the Green Deal, is himself fairly pro-European. Most importantly, in 2024, Tusk declared that he will seek further changes in the Green Deal and that Poland will go its own way on environmental policy "without European coercion."[122] The ruling Tusk-led Government has also, in 2026, celebrated further concessions in the Green Deal, effectively making the green transformation more drawn out and the EU's measures less demanding,[123] while

118 Kawecka-Wyrzykowska, 'Can Poland Afford the Energy Transition?', p. 80.
119 Ursula von der Leyen, '2026 State of the Union Address', 16 September 2026 <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/SPEECH_26_1868> [accessed 22 November 2026].
120 Ursula von der Leyen, '2025 State of the Union Address', 10 September 2025 <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/SPEECH_25_2053> [accessed 22 November 2026].
121 von der Leyen, '2026 State of the Union Address'.
122 Aleksandra Krzysztoszek and Donagh Cagney, 'EU Council Position Hardens against Nature Restoration Law', Euractiv, 5 April 2024 <https://www.euractiv.com/news/eu-council-position-hardens-against-nature-restoration-law/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
123 Ministerstwo Klimatu i Środowiska, 'Zmiany ETS: Komisja Europejska uwzględniła polski głos' <https://www.gov.pl/web/klimat/zmiany-ets-komisja-europejska-uwzglednila-polski-glos> [accessed 22 November 2026].

the KO Economy Minister (2023-ongoing) Andrzej Domański has led a 15-country-wide intra-EU coalition to, among other things, review the EU's carbon taxes.[124] Again, some ways to navigate the EU's approach to environmental policy as a source of Euroscepticism in Poland are suggested in chapter four of this report.

Cronyism

Both moderate and radical anti-Europeans in Poland contend that the EU facilitates and is rife with cronyism, in particular as pertaining to those part of a pro-European, liberal, Western establishment who discriminate against the Poles who are not part of said establishment.

This criticism is generally only levelled against the EU, likely because discriminating against other countries in the context of bilateral relations is accepted as the right thing to do — it is only fair to favour one's own country in international affairs. The EU, however, supposedly provides a platform for multiple decision-makers — as aforementioned, members of a liberal, Western establishment — from multiple countries to help each other and band together against Poland.

Cronyism therefore here refers to how EU institutions treat different Polish politicians differently, supposedly on account of their personal relationships and political affiliations.

The two starkest examples of this pertain, first, to the EU's relationship with Tusk — the political nemesis of Law and Justice in particular, but also of much of the Polish political right — and, second, to the EU's supposed favouritism towards Western European countries and decision-makers, and especially Germany and Germans, against whom Poles are fairly prejudiced as compared with other European nations.

124 Bartosz Nyga, 'Deklaracja warszawska. Ponad 15 państw UE chce wzmocnienia konkurencyjności przemysłu', XYZ, 26 October 2026 <https://xyz.pl/dzieje-sie/deklaracja-warszawska-ponad-15-panstw-ue-chce-wzmocnienia-konkurencyjnosci-przemyslu-2258> [accessed 22 November 2026].

BOX 2.2

Poles' perceptions of Germany

The centre of anti-European Poles' attention is most often Germany. It provides the focal point around which criticisms of the EU and Europe more broadly converge.

The reason for this is not just that Germany is Poland's largest, most important European neighbour, and that the current President of the European Commission, von der Leyen, is German, but also that the Polish public bears a unique dislike towards Germans, as can be seen in Chart 2.4 below.

Of the 21 nations or ethnicities tested by CBOS in 2026, a majority of Poles only expressed sympathy towards Italians, Czechs and Slovaks from among Europeans. Notably, net sympathy[125] towards Germans (positive three percentage points) is the same as towards the Chinese, despite Germany being an ally of Poland and China being a serious geopolitical threat.

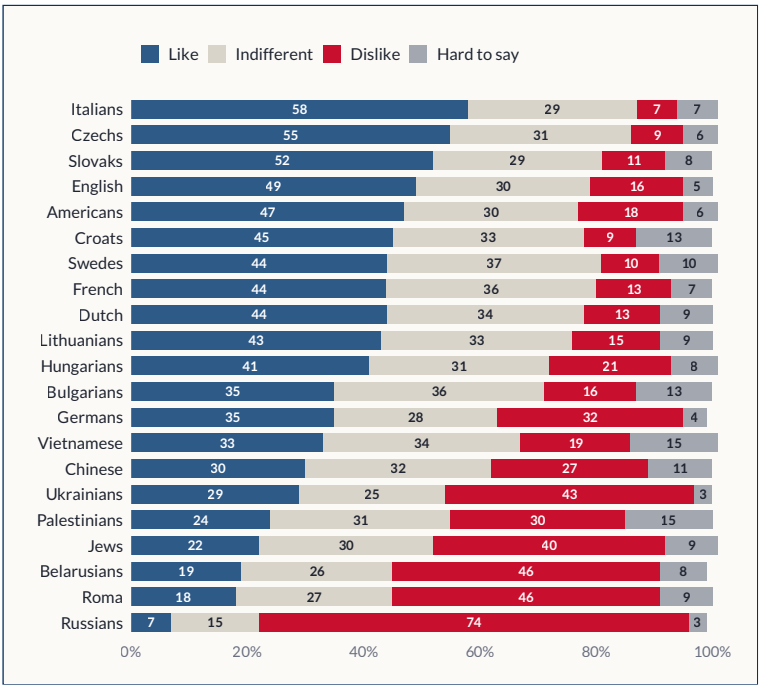
According to the 2026 edition of the Polish-German barometer study — the most recent one — this is chiefly led by historical resentment: 61% of Poles think that one of the two main reasons for poor Polish-German relations is a lack of penance from Germany for German war crimes and Polish losses suffered through the course of the Second World War.[126]

Portraying Germany as the reflection of Europe makes it easier to criticise Europe than if Poles instead associated Europe more closely with nations such as Italy or France, both of which are perceived, on average, very positively among Poles: net sympathy for each, in the CBOS data illustrated in Chart 2.4 below, is respectively positive 51 and positive 31 percentage points. Other Central European nations are well-regarded too: Czechs, for example, can boast a net sympathy of positive 46 percentage points. The only European nations less well-

125 The proportion who expressed sympathy subtracted the proportion who expressed dislike.
126 Agnieszka Łada-Konefał and Jacek Kucharczyk, 'Barometr Polska–Niemcy 2026: między pamięcią a bezpieczeństwem', Fundacja Współpracy Polsko-Niemieckiej, 3 November 2026 <https://fwpn.org.pl/barometr-polska-niemcy-2026-miedzy-pamiecia-a-bezpieczenstwem/> [accessed 22 November 2026].

regarded than Germany are Ukraine, which has net sympathy among Poles of negative 14 percentage points, and Belarus, a Russian ally, which has a net approval of negative 27 percentage points.

Chart 2.4. Poles' attitude towards different nations in 2026.



Source: Jan Kujawski, Stosunek Polaków do innych narodów, Komunikat z badań, 16/2026 (Warsaw: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2026) <https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2026/K_016_26.PDF> [accessed 21 November 2026].

Even so, most Poles think that Polish-German relations are good. In the aforementioned Polish-German barometer study, 57% of Poles expressed that opinion; only 19% thought Polish-German relations are bad.[127]

127 Łada-Konefał and Kucharczyk, 'Barometr Polska–Niemcy 2026'.

First, on Tusk. Polish Eurosceptics often contend that the EU gives Tusk and his political formations special treatment as compared to Tusk's Polish political opponents — especially PiS — and use this as an argument against the EU broadly, contending that it is a hive of cronyism. For example, Arkadiusz Mularczyk, a former Law and Justice Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (2022-23), argued in an interview with the Turkish media outlet Anadolu that "the European establishment supported … Prime Minister Donald Tusk's Civic Platform (PO) party" and so "used a lot of political and diplomatic instruments, and a lot of manipulation, against" PiS, accusing the EU of "double standards."[128] Similar arguments have been made by several other Law and Justice politicians.[129]

This argument is difficult to evaluate in full, as nobody — likely not even Tusk himself — knows the full extent to which Tusk's personal relationships with EU officials and decision-makers determine how they behave towards Tusk and to what extent it motivates them to act in Tusk's interests, especially as some of this behaviour might be unconscious. We have no way of reliably describing and comparing against a counterfactual scenario in which Tusk has fewer friends and allies across the EU. What we can do, however, is look at a case where the EU has acted favourably towards Tusk where a reasonable explanation other than personal favouritism is difficult to justify.

The starkest recent example of this is the release of EU funds to Poland that were frozen due to Poland's judicial controversy, as discussed earlier in this chapter. They remained frozen until the end of

128 Jo Harper, 'Polish Party Blames EU "Manipulation" for Losing Power after 8 Years', Anadolu Agency, 6 May 2024 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/polish-party-blames-eu-manipulation-for-losing-power-after-8-years/3211152> [accessed 22 November 2026].
129 See, for example, Aleks Szczerbiak, 'Is Poland's Right-Wing Ruling Party Becoming More Eurosceptic?', Notes from Poland, 6 September 2022 <https://notesfrompoland.com/2022/09/06/is-polands-right-wing-ruling-party-becoming-more-eurosceptic/> [accessed 22 November 2026]; Zoltán Kottász, 'Polish Presidency Exposes EU Hypocrisy', *European Conservative*, January 2025 <https://europeanconservative.com/articles/news/polish-presidency-exposes-eu-hypocrisy/> [accessed 12 September 2026]; Ada Michalak, 'Wójcik: Ludzie w Brukseli to manipulanci, którzy zabrali pieniądze Polakom', *Rzeczpospolita*, 27 September 2022 <https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art37125631-wojcik-ludzie-w-brukseli-to-manipulanci-ktorzy-zabrali-pieniadze-polakom> [accessed 22 November 2026].

the 2015-23 PiS Government, and were only released in February 2024, after KO came into power and Tusk became Prime Minister.[130] The reason for this, the European Commission alleged, is that by February — only two months into Tusk's rule — Poland achieved major milestones in reforming its judiciary as set out by the European Commission and Council in accordance with the European Parliament's resolutions discussed earlier in this chapter: namely, the disciplinary regime aimed at Polish judges was reformed to be less partial.[131] However, Tusk's pre-election promise to secure the release of said funds suggests that he was able to pre-guarantee the European Commission's judgment on the funds' release.[132]

Anti-Europeans also allege that the reforms are not, in fact, major. Among others, the Parliament still appoints judges to the KRS following the moderately anti-European President Karol Nawrocki's veto of a bill which was aimed at reforming that aspect of the Polish judiciary.[133] In the words of Piotr Trudnowski, former President of the Polish think tank the Jagiellonian Club, writing in December 2025, "[c]ourts have not been freed of political partisanship, nor have there been any electoral reform proposals that would realise the judgments of international tribunals. It turned out that the fundamental obstacle [to the release of EU funds] was a change in Polish government to one which is better liked in Brussels."[134] What is more, the changes that have indeed been introduced were introduced at least partly on the back of a bill intro-

130 Anna Słojewska, 'Unijne kary dla Polski odmrożone', *Rzeczpospolita*, 14 April 2023 <https://www.rp.pl/prawo-dla-ciebie/art38316171-unijne-kary-dla-polski-odmrozone> [accessed 22 November 2026].
131 European Commission, 'Questions and Answers on Rule of Law and EU Funds for Poland', QANDA/24/1223, 29 February 2024 <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_24_1223> [accessed 22 November 2026].
132 Koalicja Obywatelska (@Obywatelska_KO), post on X, 27 August 2023 <https://x.com/Obywatelska_KO/status/1695834597055979868> [accessed 22 November 2026].
133 See Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 'Przebieg procesu legislacyjnego: druk nr 2108' <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm10.nsf/PrzebiegProc.xsp?nr=2108> [accessed 22 November 2026].
134 Piotr Trudnowski, 'Jedna czwarta Polaków popiera Polexit? Unia Europejska nie jest bez winy', Klub Jagielloński, 11 December 2025 <https://klubjagiellonski.pl/2025/12/11/jedna-czwarta-polakow-jest-za-polexitem-unia-europejska-nie-jest-bez-winy/> [accessed 21 November 2026]; see also Piotr Zaremba, 'Trybunał Konstytucyjny można przejąć. Ale co dalej?', Interia, 11 September 2026 <https://wydarzenia.interia.pl/felietony/news-trybunal-konstytucyjny-mozna-przejac-ale-co-dalej,nId,23542278> [accessed 22 November 2026].

duced by Duda in 2022[135] — and not by the Tusk-led Government — following negotiations between the then-PiS Government and the EU.[136]

There have also been suggestions, both from Polish pro- and anti-Europeans, that Tusk and KO have, if anything, been detrimental to addressing Poland's judicial crisis.

First, in 2026 the Tusk-dominated Polish Parliament elected Maciej Berek to the Constitutional Tribunal despite him having served as a Minister in the Tusk cabinet between 2023 and 2026, seemingly forgoing any pretence of intending for the Constitutional Tribunal's impartiality, an issue which lay at the heart of the criticism of the constitutionality of Law and Justice's judicial reforms.[137] Even the centre-left liberal Polish think tank Batory Foundation has disavowed the Government's handling of the judicial affair, instead suggesting a fresh re-election of all existing members of the Polish Constitutional Tribunal.[138]

Most damningly, however, Tusk's Government ordered the use of the police on the 30th of October 2026 to surround the Constitutional Tribunal and in effect transferred control of the Tribunal to judges elected during the course of the KO-led Government, an action which was condemned as antithetical to the rule of law not just by President Nawrocki[139] and the entire opposition,[140] but also again by the Batory

135 'Ustawa z dnia 9 czerwca 2022 r. o zmianie ustawy o Sądzie Najwyższym oraz niektórych innych ustaw', *Dziennik Ustaw*, 2022, poz. 1259.
136 Katarzyna Konieczko, 'Opinia do ustawy o zmianie ustawy o Sądzie Najwyższym oraz niektórych innych ustaw (druk nr 902)', Senat Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 27 January 2023 <https://www.senat.gov.pl/download/gfx/senat/pl/senatekspertyzy/6669/plik/902o.pdf> [accessed 22 November 2026].
137 See, for example, Paweł Musiałek, 'Donald Tusk nie pierwszy raz „fauluje" w grze o Trybunał Konstytucyjny. 10 tez po decyzji w sprawie Macieja Berka', Klub Jagielloński, 14 August 2026 <https://klubjagiellonski.pl/2026/08/14/donald-tusk-nie-pierwszy-raz-fauluje-w-grze-o-trybunal-konstytucyjny-10-tez-po-decyzji-w-sprawie-macieja-berka/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
138 Tomasz Zalasiński, *Trybunał Konstytucyjny – scenariusze przywracania praworządności: od działań naprawczych do resetu konstytucyjnego* (Warsaw: Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego, 2026) <https://www.batory.org.pl/publikacja/trybunal-konstytucyjny-scenariusze-przywracania-praworzadnosci-od-dzialan-naprawczych-do-resetu-konstytucyjnego/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
139 Kancelaria Prezydenta RP (@prezydentpl), post on X, 31 October 2026 <https://x.com/prezydentpl/status/2116382544161608100> [accessed 22 November 2026].
140 Marcin Czekaj, 'Kaczyński zobaczył Morawieckiego i od razu zareagował. „Siadaj tutaj"', Interia, 31 October 2026 <https://wydarzenia.interia.pl/kraj/news-kaczynski-zobaczyl-morawieckiego-i-od-razu-zareagowal-siadaj,nId,23566799> [accessed 22 November 2026].

Foundation[141] as well as even the leader of the PL2050 parliamentary club[142] and by PSL,[143] both of which remain members of the Tusk-led Government.[144] The European Commission, unhelpfully, had endorsed the move.[145]

Ultimately, the extent to which reforms to the Polish judiciary instituted by Tusk's Government are major or not is somewhat subjective, but one can see how Tusk's political opponents can interpret unlocking EU funds soon after he re-entered government as crony behaviour from the EU. On the other hand, it is also difficult to draw a hard line between cronyism and what is merely diplomacy or friendly party relations — Tusk is a member of the European People's Party (EPP) in the European Parliament, the same party as von der Leyen. Foreign relations, for better or worse, are inevitably and to a large extent determined by personal relationships and charisma, and the effects of those can be eerily similar to the effects of cronyism. Indeed, befriending important foreign officials is one of the chief tasks of diplomats.

In fact, the 2015-23 PiS Government did its relations with the EU no favours by routinely using anti-European rhetoric, some of the examples of which are given earlier in this chapter, so it would not be surprising that the EU is more inclined to co-operate with PiS's rival. Conversely, one might expect that PiS's allies in Europe — for example, the Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni (2022-ongoing), who belongs to the ECR together with PiS — would treat Poland more favourably under a PiS Government than under a Tusk-led one, and that the EU in general might be more favourable towards Law and

141 Krzysztof Izdebski (@K_Izdebski), post on X, 31 October 2026 <https://x.com/K_Izdebski/status/2116325749674160609> [accessed 22 November 2026].
142 *Polska 2050*.
143 Kamila Grenczyn, 'Oni nie przyjdą na spotkanie w Belwederze w sprawie TK. Kosiniak-Kamysz: uważam to za błąd', TVN24, 16 November 2026 <https://tvn24.pl/polska/spotkanie-w-belwederze-sprawie-tk-wladyslaw-kosiniak-kamysz-komentuje-nieobecnosc-czesci-klubow-st9341163> [accessed 22 November 2026].
144 Szymon Hołownia (@szymon_holownia), post on X, 31 October 2026 <https://x.com/szymon_holownia/status/2116440097214108066> [accessed 22 November 2026].
145 Wojciech Kość, 'Commission Backs Tusk as He Vows No Compromise in Court Showdown', *Politico*, 1 November 2026 <https://www.politico.eu/article/european-commission-backs-donald-tusk-over-poland-constitutional-court-judges/> [accessed 22 November 2026].

Justice than towards KO should the ECR hold more sway in the EU than the EPP does.[146]

The second major argument in favour of the EU being a crony institution is that it discriminates against Poland and in favour of the traditional great powers of Europe — and in particular Germany, for reasons alluded to in Box 2.2 earlier. For example, Suski in 2021 argued that Brussels and Germany co-operated to occupy Poland, just as Germany did over the course of the Second World War, and that the EU is ultimately a vehicle for German interests without regard for the interests of Poland.[147] This kind of rhetoric is not limited to Suski, but is common among Polish anti-Europeans, both moderates and radicals.[148]

It is true that Germany does hold more sway in the EU than Poland. This, however, is primarily the result of Germany being a larger state, with a population of 84 million as compared to Poland's 37, which therefore is better represented in the European Parliament — there are 96 German MEPs, and only 53 Polish MEPs, which still grants Poland more MEPs per capita than Germany (1.4 vs 1.1 MEPs per million people) — and draws from a larger pool of manpower when the EU recruits for its civil service.

It is also, however, due to Poland's own failures to promote its interests within the EU. Nor is this only because of Eurosceptics refusing to engage with the EU to signal their Euroscepticism or to prevent further Polish integration with the EU. In 2017, for example, six Polish PO MEPs voted in favour of a resolution in the European Parliament calling for sanctions against Poland. They did this presumably to signal their opposition to PiS's aforementioned judicial reforms at the

146 At the time of writing, the EPP is the largest party in the European Parliament, with 185 MEPs. The ECR has only 84 MEPs.
147 'Suski porównuje Unię do najeźdźców z czasów wojny. „Będziemy walczyć z okupantem brukselskim"', TVN24, 9 September 2021 <https://tvn24.pl/polska/marek-suski-o-okupancie-brukselskim-posel-pis-porownuje-unie-europejska-do-najezdzcow-z-ii-wojny-swiatowej-st5407176> [accessed 22 November 2026].
148 Fomina and Kopka-Piątek, *Polexit w polskiej debacie publicznej*, p. 14.

time,[149] but the sanctions suggested by the resolution they supported directly hindered Polish interests. Attempts to push through a domestic policy change — even if, the MEPs would presumably argue, the change would benefit Polish interests — took priority over a direct hit to Polish economic wellbeing and standing within the EU.

Indeed, even despite Germany generally being better represented within the EU than Poland and Poland's inability to promote its interests in the EU, there are instances of Poland and Germany clashing within the structures of the EU and Poland coming out on top; and even of Poland representing the side more in favour of deeper integration with the EU, discrediting the suggestion that the EU is a vehicle of German occupation, as per the words of Suski.

One example of the former is when, in July 2021, the ECJ ruled against Germany and in favour of Poland regarding an extension of OPAL — energy infrastructure allowing Russia to export gas to Germany and France. The ruling stated that, when the European Commission — after a Germany-sponsored resolution — permitted for the full capacity of OPAL to be used (hitherto, a maximum of 50% was permitted), it broke the EU's rules on energy solidarity, and the European Commission's decision was ruled illegal and reversed.[150]

More recently, during the EU's negotiations for the 2028-34 budget, currently set to be over 53% larger than the EU's 2021-27 budget, Germany has been leading the push for a smaller EU budget — a cut of €400 billion, amounting to 20% of the total, having rejected the offer of an 8% cut from the President of the Council of the EU[151] — at the same time as Poland has been pushing for a preservation of the enlarged

149 'UE: sześciu europosłów PO głosowało „za" rezolucją; PiS przeciw', Polska Agencja Prasowa, 15 November 2017 <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C1168608%2Cue-szesciu-europoslow-po-glosowalo-za-rezolucja%3B-pis-przeciw.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
150 Bartosz Bieliszczuk and Szymon Zaręba, 'EU Court Sides with Poland in OPAL Dispute', PISM Spotlight, 58/2021 (Warsaw: Polish Institute of International Affairs, 16 July 2021) <https://www.pism.pl/publications/eu-court-sides-with-poland-in-opal-dispute> [accessed 21 November 2026].
151 Andreas Rinke, 'Exclusive: Germany Demands $450 Billion Cut to "Unaffordable" EU Budget, Document Shows', Reuters, 30 June 2026 <https://www.reuters.com/business/germany-demands-450-billion-cut-unaffordable-eu-budget-document-shows-2026-06-30/> [accessed 22 November 2026]; Gregorio Sorgi, 'Germany Warns EU that €159B Budget Cuts Are Not Enough', *Politico*, 10 October 2026 <https://www.politico.eu/article/friedrich-merz-germany-warns-eu-e159b-budget-cuts-not-enough/> [accessed 22 November 2026].

budget.[152] Nor is this merely because Germany is a net contributor to the budget. Rather, the German Chancellor (2025-ongoing) Friedrich Merz has openly called for reducing the emphasis on greater EU integration in favour of letting nation-states be "the primary driver of EU policy."[153] This directly contradicts the suggestion that a larger, better-financed, more centralised and integrated EU is in Germany's interests and against Poland's — at least unless both Polish and German governments happen to simultaneously be acting against their respective countries' interests, which seems unlikely.

That said, there exist multiple examples of the interests of Western European member states being favoured over those of Poland in the EU. One example is the 2018 EU regulation on employment rights, which generally benefitted France, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Belgium while disadvantaging Poland and Hungary.[154] In particular, Polish Eurosceptics can see that the strategic direction of the EU is well-aligned with German interests: examples include EU Regulation 443/2009 concerning emission performance standards in the automotive sector, which was adjusted to meet almost all the requests of the German automotive industry;[155] the Mercosur deal, which is set to significantly benefit German exporters[156] while disadvantaging Polish

152 'Poland among Countries Which Oppose Further EU Budget Cuts', Polska Agencja Prasowa, 15 October 2026 <https://www.pap.pl/en/news/poland-among-countries-which-oppose-further-eu-budget-cuts> [accessed 22 November 2026].
153 Gerardo Fortuna, 'Why Berlin and Brussels Keep Butting Heads', *Politico*, 5 November 2026 <https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/brussels-playbook/why-berlin-and-brussels-keep-butting-heads/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
154 Jakub Bińkowski and Konrad Trzonkowski, *Od montowni do sterowni, czyli polska droga z obrzeży do serca Europy: bilans 22 lat członkostwa w UE i horyzont na przyszłość* (Warsaw: Związek Przedsiębiorców i Pracodawców, 2026), pp. 35–36 <https://zpp.net.pl/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/Raport_Od_montowni_do_sterowni_final23102026.pdf> [accessed 21 November 2026]; Court of Justice of the European Union, 'Wyroki w sprawach C-620/18 i C-626/18', Komunikat prasowy nr 155/20, 8 December 2020 <https://curia.europa.eu/site/upload/docs/application/pdf/2020-12/cp200155pl.pdf> [accessed 22 November 2026].
155 Bińkowski and Trzonkowski, *Od montowni do sterowni*, p. 36.
156 Patricia Enssle, 'The EU–Mercosur Agreement: Fresh Momentum for European–Latin American Relations', *International Reports*, 7 July 2026 <https://www.kas.de/en/web/auslandsinformationen/artikel/detail/-/content/das-eu-mercosur-abkommen> [accessed 22 November 2026].

farmers;[157] or the aforementioned European Green Deal, which was well-aligned with existing German *Energiewende* plans.[158]

Nonetheless, at least economically, Poland benefits from the EU more than Germany does. Even though Germany does benefit from EU membership and EU expansion — for example, between 2004 and 2009, German GDP was one percentage point higher than it would have otherwise been thanks to the EU's enlargement in 2004[159] — the economic benefits of the EU for Poland are extraordinary, and overshadow those reaped by Germany. Indeed, between 2004 and 2024, not just Poland, but every country in Central and Eastern Europe — Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia — recorded a higher growth rate than Germany.[160] The full economic benefits of EU membership for Poland are explored in more detail in section 3.3 of this report.

In sum, the cronyism argument is difficult to defeat entirely due to there being no clear distinction between crony behaviour and successful, relationship-based diplomacy. The argument that the EU systematically discriminates against Poland and in favour of the EU's great powers, and especially Germany, is likely to remain popular regardless thanks to its rhetorical advantages: the strength of anti-German sentiment among the Polish public, discussed in Box 2.2 earlier, and Poland's historic negative or mixed relations with Europe's great powers. The best way to address it would be to demonstrate the extent to which Poland benefits from the EU's arrangements and reform Polish diplomacy within the EU; some ways of doing so are suggested in chapter four of this report.

157 Igor Tomasz Olech, 'Why Mercosur Hits a Nerve in Rural Poland – for Farmers and the Environment', ARC2020, 17 February 2026 <https://www.arc2020.eu/why-mercosur-hits-a-nerve-in-rural-poland-for-farmers-and-the-environment/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
158 Michel Deshaies, 'The German Energiewende: A Green Deal Template or Planned Failure?', in *A Green Entrepreneurial State?*, ed. by Magnus Henrekson, Christian Sandström and Mikael Stenkula (Cham: Springer, 2026), pp. 131–47 <https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-032-15512-2_7> [accessed 22 November 2026].
159 Damian Kopiński and others, *The Big Bang Enlargement: 20 Years of Central Europe's Membership in the EU* (Warsaw: Polish Economic Institute, 2024), p. 20 <https://pie.net.pl/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/The-Big-Bang-Enlargement_20-years-of-Central-Europes-membership-in-the-EU.pdf> [accessed 21 November 2026].
160 Kopiński and others, *The Big Bang Enlargement*, p. 12.

Left-wing social policy outlook

Both moderate and radical anti-Europeans in Poland contend that the EU, and Europe — and especially Western Europe — generally favour an excessively left-wing social policy outlook which is causing a value shift which ultimately threatens to undermine Polish values, identity and civilisation unless Poland separates from and reasserts itself against Europe and the EU.

While this criticism does concern the EU, it would persist even if the EU were to disappear, and so is a source of anti-Europeanism beyond just being a source of Euroscepticism.

What the Polish Institute of Public Affairs (ISP) describes as "identitarian" (*tożsamościowy*) Polexit is in response to what Polish anti-Europeans see as Europe threatening the religious and cultural identity of Poland, and even a sort of colonisation. The authors of the ISP report, who are overtly pro-European, equate this supposed threat to "respecting human rights and the rules of non-discrimination … European values and norms are presented … as requirements from above, attacking Poland's Catholic identity and national sovereignty. At the centre here are the rights of LGBT+ peoples as well as European standards of providing international asylum."

This, the authors contend, is the central source of anti-European and openly pro-Polexit sentiments in Poland.[161] They quote influential Polish conservative journalist and thinker Paweł Lisicki's claims that, when Poland joined the EU in 2004, it was merely an economic and political union, while more recent EU proposals concerning hate speech and banning sexual discrimination amount to "social engineering and rainbow Sovietism."[162] Indeed, so-called "cultural Marxism" is also one of the central critiques of the EU in the aforementioned *Polexit* report prepared by Confederation in 2019.[163]

161 Fomina and Kopka-Piątek, *Polexit w polskiej debacie publicznej*, p. 21.
162 Fomina and Kopka-Piątek, *Polexit w polskiej debacie publicznej*, p. 37.
163 Trosiak, 'Uwarunkowania członkostwa Polski w Unii Europejskiej', p. 76.

Political scientists Aleksandra Polak, Christopher Hartwell and Katarzyna Sidło likewise argued in a 2023 study that culture lies at the centre of anti-Europeanism in Poland. "Poles' growing sense of cultural difference from Western Europe — which they share with other Central and East European (CEE) nations — has been exploited in its own support by PiS who have argued that the distinctiveness of the Polish character means that there may quite reasonably be more differences than commonalities between them and other EU member states," they write.[164] While the authors focus on PiS in the quoted passage, the same argument could be applied to an even greater extent to Confederation and KKP.

Criticism of Europe's left-wing social policy outlook is often combined with the criticism of the EU's handling of migration mentioned earlier in this chapter, with anti-Europeans contending that EU countries have allowed for their own national identity and civilisation to be diluted by the arrival of large numbers of people with meaningfully different values and culture.[165] Indeed, in 2017, "more than half the respondents to a survey [in Poland] declared their reluctance to accept Muslim refugees even if it would mean Poland having to leave the European Union," suggesting that cultural and religious, rather than economic, fears over migration seem to be central to Polish opposition to migration.[166]

The critique of Europe's supposedly left-wing outlook on social policy might seem like a weird worry given the lack of obvious formal enforcement mechanisms with which Europe might change Polish society, culture or identity. But, first, change can take place in Poland even without any formal mechanisms making it happen. And, second, some such formal mechanisms do in fact exist.

First, on change taking place passively. In the eyes of many anti-Europeans who express the above worries, the process of European

164 Polak, Hartwell and Sidło, 'Physically Present but Spiritually Distant', p. 301.
165 Polak, Hartwell and Sidło, 'Physically Present but Spiritually Distant', p. 314.
166 Polak, Hartwell and Sidło, 'Physically Present but Spiritually Distant', p. 315.

integration means that newly integrated societies become, at least to some extent, passive absorbers of cultural pressures and find themselves moulded to fit the European stencil. And while there is debate among academics just to what extent said societies are passive recipients of cultural influence, and to what extent they are actively interpreting the cultural influences they are subjected to, it is possible that those societies indeed are subject to at least some cultural pressures which they cannot help but, to some extent, absorb.[167]

Second, on formal mechanisms. There have been cases where formal changes have taken place in Poland in a secularising or socially left-wing direction as a result of Poland being a member of the EU. Recently, for example, it has become possible to register gay marriages in Poland if they have been conducted elsewhere in the EU, meaning that the legalisation of gay marriages elsewhere in the EU has resulted in a social change in Poland — though, even then, this required a change in government regulations in Poland,[168] and has been ruled unconstitutional by the Polish Constitutional Tribunal.[169]

Earlier, in 2021, the EU had also suspended the payout of a part of the EU's pandemic recovery and development funds earmarked for Poland as a consequence of some Polish voivodeships signing up to resolutions "opposing the introduction of LGBT ideology into local communities."[170] Here, the consequences were purely the result of action from the EU. However, as with the suspension of EU funds discussed earlier in the context of judicial reform and environmental policy, were it not for the EU, no funds at all would have been available; and, second, the resolutions adopted by Polish voivodeships had

167 Polak, Hartwell and Sidło, 'Physically Present but Spiritually Distant', p. 303.
168 'Poland to Register Same-Sex Marriages Concluded Abroad', Polskie Radio, 22 May 2026 <https://www.polskieradio.pl/395/7789/artykul/3690299,poland-to-register-samesex-marriages-concluded-abroad> [accessed 22 November 2026].
169 Mateusz Mikowski, 'Trybunał Konstytucyjny: transkrypcja aktów małżeństw jednopłciowych jest niezgodna z konstytucją', *Rzeczpospolita*, 28 July 2026 <https://www.rp.pl/w-sadzie-i-w-urzedzie/art44897701-trybunal-konstytucyjny-transkrypcja-aktow-malzenstw-jednoplciowych-jest-niezgodna-z-konstytucja> [accessed 22 November 2026].
170 Angelika Pitoń, 'EU Suspends Regional Funds to Poland over "LGBT-Free Zones"', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 6 September 2021 <https://wyborcza.pl/7,173236,27539888,eu-suspends-regional-recovery-funds-to-poland-over-lgbt-free.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].

no effect except as a political communications exercise, and so did not represent any meaningful change in Polish society, but merely expressed a mood which already existed, even if said mood was indeed hurtful to the persons affected.

Besides, Polish conservatives might be concerned about EU developments in social policy even when they do not affect Poland. For example, in 2024, the European Parliament voted to include abortion in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights,[171] and in 2025 to create an opt-in mechanism for countries to finance abortions for women from Poland to undergo the procedure in other EU member states when it is illegal in Poland.[172] Although neither vote has resulted in any consequences for Poland — the former was non-binding, and the latter has not been acted on by the European Commission[173] — it is easy to understand why somebody who genuinely believes that abortion is morally reprehensible would not wish to even affiliate their country with an institution which acts in this way.

On the other hand, the above constitutes merely anecdotal, rather than systematic, evidence. Overall, it is unclear that the EU deserves a reputation as a socially left-wing, secularising force. In fact, the EU's history is inextricably linked with the history of Christianity and Catholicism in particular.

The roots of the EU are Christian democratic, and one of the founders of the European Communities which preceded the EU, Robert Schuman,[174] argued in favour of them in Strasbourg in 1949 by appealing to "the fulfilment of the same recurrent dream that for ten centuries has revisited the peoples of Europe," a dream which "the

171 'Inclusion of the Right to Abortion in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights', HowTheyVote.eu, 11 April 2024 <https://howtheyvote.eu/votes/168054> [accessed 22 November 2026].
172 Claudia Chiappa, 'Europe Votes to Expand Abortion Access in Historic Ballot', *Politico*, 17 December 2025 <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-votes-to-expand-abortion-access-in-historic-vote/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
173 Commission of the Episcopates of the European Union (COMECE), 'EU Bishops Praise EC Decision on "My Voice, My Choice", Caution against ESF+ for Abortion Services' <https://www.comece.eu/eu-bishops-praise-ec-decision-on-my-voice-my-choice-caution-against-esf-for-abortion-services/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
174 European Union, 'Robert Schuman: The Architect of the European Integration Project' <https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/eu-pioneers/robert-schuman_en> [accessed 22 November 2026].

Roman church of the Middle Ages" attempted to fulfil.[175] Schuman was intensely religious, a scholar of theology and was declared Venerable — the first of the three stages in the canonisation process — by the Catholic Church in 2021.[176]

Even earlier, the leading advocate of European integration was Otto von Habsburg,[177] as had been the Habsburgs before him[178] — the very idea of a supranational allegiance to a Christian institution predates nationalism, and European integration precedes the EU in the form of various monarchies, not least the dynastic lands of the Habsburgs.

At least at its founding, then, the EU, as well as other attempts at European co-operation and integration, did not represent a socially left-wing, secularising force, but the opposite: a conservative, Christianising force.

Nor is this legacy purely historical. In 1999, before Poland joined the EU in 2004, Pope John Paul II visited Poland — his homeland — among other reasons to appeal to Poles to support the EU in a referendum for Poland's accession, and did so again to Polish pilgrims in Rome in 2003. His appeal was one of the most significant factors behind Poland's strong support for the EU at the time.[179]

Today, too, the founding, Christian, conservative principles of the EU are represented at least by the EPP — for long the largest party in the European Parliament — and the ECR. The outputs of the EPP's official think tank, the Wilfred Martens Centre, are often overtly conservative: in one article, the think tank's strategic coordinator, Federico Ottavio Reho, writes explicitly of the importance of politics

175 Robert Schuman, 'Speech in Strasbourg, 16 May 1949', Schuman.info <https://www.schuman.info/Strasbourg549.htm> [accessed 22 November 2026].
176 Holy See Press Office, 'Promulgazione di Decreti della Congregazione delle Cause dei Santi', Bollettino, 19 June 2021 <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2021/06/19/0395/00862.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
177 Laura Balázs, 'Otto von Habsburg's Concept of Europe (1952): Thoughts on Europe That Are Still Relevant', Otto von Habsburg Foundation, 21 June 2022 <https://habsburgottoalapitvany.hu/en/otto-von-habsburgs-concept-of-europe-1952-thoughts-on-europe-that-are-still-relevant/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
178 Robert Cooper, 'The European Union and the Habsburg Monarchy', The Institute for Human Sciences, 2012 <https://www.iwm.at/transit-online/the-european-union-and-the-habsburg-monarchy> [accessed 22 November 2026].
179 Staniszewski and others, *The right road*, p. 155.

returning to Christian theology and for "conservatism and Christian Democracy [to be] civilising forces in Western politics."[180] In another, the think tank emphasises the importance of Europe's "shared civilisational values" for the future of the EU, though it admits that "recent decades have seen … the EU [drift] towards progressive technocracy [and away from the EU's founding conservative ideals]."[181]

Conservative social policy perspectives are just as common among the other, smaller, right-of-centre parties in the EU, such as the PfE. In sum, in the current 2024-29 European Parliament term, of the 720 seats in the European Parliament, over 375 (52%) are controlled by right-of-centre parties.[182]

Partly as a consequence of this, and partly as a consequence of broader rightward trends in European politics, the EU has markedly moved to the right on social policy in recent years, most notably on immigration. Von der Leyen, for example, in her 2026 'State of the Union' address, explicitly embraced right-leaning sovereigntist rhetoric: "we will never compromise on protecting our borders. It is we, Europeans, who decide who comes to our Union and under what circumstances."[183] Tusk, when outlining the strategic goals for the Council of the EU for the first half of 2025, likewise deliberately embraced right-leaning sovereigntist rhetoric and invoked the words of Pope John Paul II: "Be not afraid … The future is in our hands. Not Chinese, not Russian, not American – in our hands … I am convinced that we will be working together for the good of a greater Europe. Europe is, was, and will always be great."[184] And indeed, over the course of 2025 and 2026, a united right in the European Parliament won several votes to pass legislation to tighten immigration rules in the EU, including to

180 Federico Ottavio Reho, 'Christian politics is thriving, only without Christian theology', *Centre Write*, 4 February 2026 <https://centrewrite.brightblue.org.uk/christian-politics-is-thriving-only-without-christian-theology/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
181 Federico Ottavio Reho, *Conservative Europeanism: A Forgotten Tradition* (Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2025) <https://www.martenscentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/CES-InFocus_Conservative-Europeanisme-WEB.pdf> [accessed 22 November 2026].
182 European Parliament, 'Political Groups' <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/organisation-and-rules/organisation/political-groups> [accessed 22 November 2026].
183 von der Leyen, '2026 State of the Union Address'.
184 Staniszewski and others, *The right road*, p. 348.

make it easier to deport asylum seekers[185] and set up deportation centres outside the EU.[186]

To add to the above, even if one were to concede that the EU is indeed a socially left-wing, secularising force, Polexit would do little to avert the impacts of said force. Poland would not remain isolated from the values, trends and cultural pressures coming from the EU no matter its EU membership status.[187] Poles would likely read similar books, watch similar TV shows and follow similar social media channels as they do now; Polexit would have no impact on these, despite them being the major contributors to any potential change in Poland's socio-cultural attitudes.

Conversely, Poland is much better able to affect whether the EU is a socially left-wing, secularising force — and so whether that force affects Poland — by remaining within the EU. Indeed, should social conservatives win sufficient support within the EU, the EU could even become a socially right-wing, Christianising force. This was a manifesto goal of PiS in the late noughties: a "Europe of Nations" based on Christian traditions and values: "European Union without these traditions and values undercuts the roots of its own civilization, becomes a heartless and technocratic creation."[188] That goal was reiterated in 2017 by the then-Prime Minister of Poland, Morawiecki, in a TV interview about Poland's relationship with the EU: "We want to reshape Europe, bring it back, such is my dream, re-Christianise it, as sadly in many places there are no [Christmas] carols, churches are empty…"[189]

In sum, then, the social outlook argument has some force, but strong counter-arguments against it can be made. Alas, examples of said counter-arguments being prominently used are scarce. Again, sugges-

185 Keystone-SDA, 'EU Parliament Votes in Favor of Outsourcing Asylum Procedures', Bluewin, 17 December 2025 <https://www.bluewin.ch/en/news/international/eu-parliament-votes-in-favor-of-outsourcing-asylum-procedures-li.3013838> [accessed 22 November 2026].
186 'EU Parliament Approves "Strictest-Ever" Migration Law', Newswav, 17 June 2026 <https://newswav.com/article/eu-parliament-approves-strictest-ever-migration-law-A2606_P8j76J> [accessed 22 November 2026].
187 Kuraszkiewicz, 'Nie twórzmy iluzji kolejnej sarmackiej arkadii'.
188 Polak, Hartwell and Sidło, 'Physically Present but Spiritually Distant', p. 312.
189 'Mateusz Morawiecki ma ambitny cel. „Chcemy rechrystianizować Europę. To moje marzenie"', Gazeta.pl, 8 December 2017 <https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114884,22758869,mateusz-morawiecki-ma-ambitny-cel-chcemy-rechrystianizowac.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].

tions on how to re-emphasise the EU's right-leaning conservative credentials are made in chapter four of this report.

Failures to confront Russia

Failures to confront Russia affect anti-European sentiment in Poland in two ways. First, the critique that Europe has failed to confront Russia is a source of anti-European sentiment among moderate anti-Europeans. Second, Russia is itself a source of radical anti-European sentiment in Poland and elsewhere. The two will be discussed separately here.

The above would remain just as potent if the EU were to disappear — or indeed strengthen, as the EU has generally served as a vehicle for hindering Russian interests, as discussed later in this section — and so it has nothing to do with Euroscepticism. Nevertheless, the anti-Europeanism it generates would still motivate Poles to disassociate from the EU — not because of the EU itself, but because they do not wish to associate with other European countries — hence it is covered in this report.

First, on Europe failing to confront Russia. The importance of opposing Russia as a motivation for Polish pro-Europeanism is reiterated by several Polish commentators. The liberal Polish journalist Jarosław Kuisz, for example, writes that the primary reason why PiS supported Poland joining the EU in 2004 was that "such a move was a historical necessity to escape Russia's zone of influence, as well as … an expression of historical justice" for the Interwar Period.[190] "[To] survive the hardships of Russian rule, [Poland] identified with these twenty interwar years more than with any other period of [its] history;" a time when Poland could firmly present itself as a member of the European community and simultaneously outside of Russian control.[191]

190 Jarosław Kuisz, *The New Politics of Poland: A Case of Post-Traumatic Sovereignty* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023), p. 240 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.21996455> [accessed 21 November 2026].
191 Kuisz, *The New Politics of Poland*, p. 245.

Consequently, European attempts to appease or even co-operate with Russia have provoked animosity towards Europe among Poles. The former German Chancellor Angela Merkel's (2005-21) relative willingness to listen to and negotiate with the Russian President Vladimir Putin (2000-08; 2012-ongoing),[192] especially in relation to Nord Stream — two pipelines for exporting natural gas from Russia and into Germany — has consistently been a source of Polish critique since at least 2006, when Radosław Sikorski — then the Polish Minister for Defence (2005-07) — called Nord Stream "a new Ribbentrop-Molotov"[193] in reference to the pre-Second World War USSR-Nazi Germany alliance. In later years, the use of Nord Stream has likewise consistently attracted criticism from Law and Justice politicians.[194]

Other notable examples include France's sale of Mistral helicopter carriers to Russia in 2011 — later cancelled in 2014[195] — and the EU's willingness to resume talks with Russia in the aftermath of the 2008 Invasion of Georgia, including for self-interested reasons of "energy, economy."[196]

Even when anti-Russian action was taken by other Europeans, it was often seen in Poland as misguided. A 2026 Jagiellonian University study analysed 2,445 articles in major Polish media from 2014 and 2022 and noted that military "cooperation in the EU and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was [consistently, in both 2014 and 2022] seen as being dominated by the largest countries in the EU,

192 Liana Fix, 'The End of the Merkel–Putin Couple', *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, 21 January 2021 <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/end-merkel-putin-couple> [accessed 22 November 2026].
193 'Niemcy wściekłe na Sikorskiego', Gazeta.pl, 4 May 2006 <https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/polityka/7,198013,3321425.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
194 See, for example, Polska Agencja Prasowa, 'Kaczyński o Nord Stream: interesy Polski nie zostały uwzględnione', WNP.pl, 22 February 2011 <https://www.wnp.pl/energia/kaczynski-o-nord-stream-interesy-polski-nie-zostaly-uwzglednione,133227.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
195 'Francja nie sprzeda Rosji Mistrali', *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, 25 November 2014 <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/artykuly/837665,francja-nie-sprzeda-rosji-mistrali.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
196 'Polska godzi się na rozmowy UE–Rosja', *Wprost*, 10 November 2008 <https://www.wprost.pl/swiat/144102/polska-godzi-sie-na-rozmowy-ue-rosja.html> [accessed 22 November 2026]; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 'AFP: Lithuania Insists That EU–Russia Talks Remain Frozen' <https://eu.mfa.lt/en/news/45/afp-lithuania-insists-that-eu-russia-talks-remain-frozen:3407> [accessed 22 November 2026].

which did not understand Russia and did not want to take into account the experience of the post-communist member states."[197]

On the other hand, Polish policy has not always matched Polish rhetoric towards Russia. Poland used to import almost all its oil from Russia as recently as 2014 — six years after the Invasion of Georgia — and four-fifths of its oil before 2022. And it was only in June 2025 that the 49.9%-state-owned Polish company Orlen stopped importing Russian oil into Czechia.[198]

At the same time, the European Commission effectively hindered the Russian state-owned energy company Gazprom from establishing a monopoly in several European countries over the course of the 2010s — though it was criticised in Poland at the time for not also fining Gazprom for past anti-competitive behaviour.[199] The Commission even prevented Poland itself from importing more gas from Russia in 2010 — a deal negotiated by the then-Tusk-led 2007-11 Government with Gazprom in 2009. Szymański, himself a former PiS minister, argues therefore that Europe's actions against Russia are relatively under-appreciated in Poland: "A [Polish] right-wing voter … will not find out that … the EU has now committed in law to completely abandoning Russian fossil fuels … it is thanks to EU sanctions that this war [between Russia and Ukraine] is incomparably more expensive (by €200 billion) for Russia … that European help for Ukraine today is more than America's."[200]

Second, on Russia actively sponsoring radical anti-Europeans in Poland. There is strong evidence to suggest that Moscow is taking active steps to strengthen Polish anti-Europeanism. Most notably,

197 Agnieszka K. Cianciara, 'Coming of Age in Europe? Polish Perceptions of Power Relations within the EU and NATO', *Europe-Asia Studies* (2026), p. 18 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09668136.2025.2173420> [accessed 21 November 2026].
198 ORLEN, 'ORLEN uwolnił region od ropy naftowej z Rosji', June 2025 <https://www.orlen.pl/pl/o-firmie/media/komunikaty-prasowe/biezace/2025/czerwiec-2025/ORLEN-uwolnil-region-od-ropy-naftowej-z-Rosji> [accessed 22 November 2026].
199 'KE podjęła decyzję w sprawie ugody z Gazpromem. Bez kar dla monopolisty', *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, 24 May 2018 <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/biznes/artykuly/10661817,gazprom-uniknie-kar-za-monopolistyczne-praktyki.html> [accessed 22 November 2026]; 'Ostateczna ugoda z Gazpromem już blisko. KE uruchomiła proces', Forsal, 4 May 2018 <https://forsal.pl/artykuly/1121501,ostateczna-ugoda-z-gazpromem-juz-blisko-ke-uruchomila-proces.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
200 Szymański, 'Polska weszła na drogę do polexitu'.

Poland's most vehemently anti-European party, KKP, has strong links with Moscow.

The party's leader, Grzegorz Braun, has attended meetings with an organisation that facilitates global leaders' communication with Moscow,[201] and senior KKP members have attended Russian-organised parties and receptions,[202] including in Russia itself.[203] KKP politicians also feature in Russian state-owned media[204] and frequently argue in favour of Russia in major traditional and social media, as well as on public fora. Indeed, Mateusz Piskorski, who is on trial for espionage on Russia's behalf and was detained by Polish security services for that reason between 2016 and 2019,[205] has been announced as KKP's prospective parliamentary candidate.[206]

Braun himself has been meeting with Russian espionage at least since 2015, and his travel to Russia-linked events has been funded by an organisation which has also funded Russian espionage.[207] Most recently, in 2026, he called for a return of a German-Polish-Russian cooperation pact — the 'Kaliningrad Triangle' — at a meeting with the

201 Anna Mierzyńska, 'Czarnecki i Braun wśród putinistów. Ujawniamy, kim są ich „koledzy" z indyjskiej organizacji', OKO.press, 7 October 2026 <https://oko.press/indyjska-organizacja-czarnecki-i-braun-wsrod-putinistow> [accessed 22 November 2026].
202 Jarosław Kocemba, 'Politycy związani z Braunem na przyjęciu w ambasadzie Rosji', Wirtualna Polska, 13 June 2026 <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/politycy-zwiazani-z-braunem-na-przyjeciu-w-ambasadzie-rosji-7296278438152224a> [accessed 22 November 2026].
203 Grzegorz Rzeczkowski, 'Braun i kontakty z ludźmi rosyjskiego wywiadu. „Ta działalność powinna zostać prześwietlona"', *Newsweek Polska*, 16 December 2023 <https://www.newsweek.pl/polska/polityka/grzegorz-braun-i-kontakty-z-ludzmi-rosyjskich-sluzb-to-trzeba-przeswietlic/rsjwl73> [accessed 22 November 2026].
204 For example, 'Grzegorz Braun pokazany w rosyjskiej telewizji. Poszło o te słowa', Onet, 2 October 2022 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/grzegorz-braun-pokazany-przez-rosyjska-propagande-chodzi-o-to-haslo/vsssmxw> [accessed 22 November 2026].
205 'Mateusz Piskorski wyszedł z aresztu', Onet, 16 May 2019 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/mateusz-piskorski-wyszedl-z-aresztu/44rbn2q> [accessed 22 November 2026].
206 Jacek Sokołowski, 'Trochę Władysław Gomułka, trochę Szczęsny Potocki. Grzegorz Braun głęboko wierzy, że służy Polsce', Klub Jagielloński, 10 March 2026 <https://klubjagiellonski.pl/2026/03/10/troche-wladyslaw-gomulka-troche-szczesny-potocki-grzegorz-braun-gleboko-wierzy-ze-sluzy-polsce/> [accessed 21 November 2026].
207 Rzeczkowski, 'Braun i kontakty z ludźmi rosyjskiego wywiadu'; Anna Mokrzanowska, 'Tajemnicze wyjazdy do Rosji współpracowników Grzegorza Brauna. Za wszystko płacił Kreml', *Wprost*, 12 November 2023 <https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/11477281/tajemnicze-wyjazdy-do-rosji-wspolpracownikow-grzegorza-brauna-za-wszystko-placil-kreml.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].

overtly pro-Russian Alternative for Germany (AfD)[208] party in Germany.[209]

KKP's communications most often position Russia in a favourable light by comparing it to Ukraine. One of the party's media figures, Bartosz Bekier, is a self-proclaimed fascist who has called for a Polish-Russian alliance and a partition of Ukraine.[210] Braun himself has said that Ukraine — not Russia — is to blame for the Invasion of Ukraine, having discriminated against the Russian minority in Ukraine, and that NATO is likewise to blame for having expanded too far.[211] In 2022, in the immediate aftermath of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, Braun was the only member of Poland's parliament not to support a resolution condemning Russia for violating international law according to the resolution's sponsor.[212]

Clearly, KKP is advancing and promoting Russian interests. At the same time, it is attacking the enemies of Russia — Europe, the EU, NATO[213] and Ukraine.[214] Braun had burnt the EU flag in 2025,[215] built his platform around Polexit[216] and viciously slandered several European countries, including by describing Lithuania as a "small, depopulated, nasty, anti-Polish, Bismarckian, Anglo-Saxon and Jewish

208 *Alternative für Deutschland.*
209 Grzegorz Wierzchołowski, 'Ramię w ramię z AfD w obronie Nord Stream. Grzegorz Braun: „Uwielbiam zapach rosyjskiego gazu o poranku"', Niezależna.pl, 7 October 2026 <https://niezalezna.pl/polska/ramie-w-ramie-z-afd-w-obronie-nord-stream-grzegorz-braun-uwielbiam-zapach-rosyjskiego-gazu-o-poranku/581118> [accessed 22 November 2026].
210 Tomasz Synowiec, 'Antyszczepionkowcy, zwolennicy Rosji i proaborcjoniści. Kto stoi za Grzegorzem Braunem?', Klub Jagielloński, 11 September 2026 <https://klubjagiellonski.pl/2026/09/11/antyszczepionkowcy-zwolennicy-rosji-i-proaborcjonisci-kto-stoi-za-grzegorzem-braunem/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
211 Anna Mierzyńska, 'Poseł polskiego Sejmu promuje w Warszawie prorosyjskie oświadczenie obwiniające Ukrainę i NATO', OKO.press, 26 June 2022 <https://oko.press/posel-polskiego-sejmu-promuje-prorosyjskie-oswiadczenie> [accessed 22 November 2026].
212 Jacek Ozdoba (@OzdobaJacek), post on X, 27 January 2022 <https://x.com/OzdobaJacek/status/1486705764307808264> [accessed 22 November 2026].
213 Mierzyńska, 'Poseł polskiego Sejmu promuje w Warszawie prorosyjskie oświadczenie'.
214 Wojciech Czuchnowski, 'Jak Braun i Korwin-Mikke wspierają Rosję w trakcie agresji na Ukrainę. Nie próżnuje też Janusz Kowalski', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27 February 2022 <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,28162412,jak-braun-i-korwin-mikke-wspieraja-rosje-w-trakcie-agresji-na.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
215 'Grzegorz Braun zabrał i spalił flagę UE. Ruch wojewody', TVN24, 9 May 2025 <https://tvn24.pl/katowice/katowice-grzegorz-braun-podeptal-flage-ue-wytarl-w-nia-buty-a-na-koniec-spalil-reaguje-wojewoda-st8452180> [accessed 22 November 2026].
216 Adrian Kasprzycki, 'Pol-exit głównym celem Konfederacji Korony Polskiej. Pomorski lider: „25–30 proc. Polaków chce wyjść z UE"', Radio Gdańsk, 3 February 2026 <https://radiogdansk.pl/audycje/gosc-radia-gdansk/2026/02/03/pol-exit-glownym-celem-konfederacji-korony-polskiej-pomorski-lider-25-30-proc-polakow-chce-wyjsc-z-ue/> [accessed 22 November 2026].

creature;"[217] and interrupting a Holocaust lecture in Warsaw by exclaiming that he "will not be under the German boot."[218]

Although KKP, in the month when this is being written, is polling at no more than 11.6%[219] — though it has risen from as little as 3.1% in August 2025[220] — as will be explored in the next chapter, it is not necessary to be the most popular party to move the needle on a country's relationship with Europe. And although Russian support is not the only factor behind KKP's rise, it has undoubtedly contributed to it.

In sum, then, while it is true that Europe has, on some occasions, failed to confront Russia, it is also true that Poland had not taken all the steps it could to alleviate the Russian threat, and so one can hardly blame Europeans for not having done the same. On the other hand, Russian support of radical anti-Europeanism in Poland is actively pushing Poland away from Europe — as it is also in other European countries[221] — though it is not so far-reaching as to be able to succeed without tapping into already existing sources of anti-Europeanism, listed earlier in this chapter. Again, some ways to address this are provided in chapter four of this report.

217 Grzegorz Braun (@GrzegorzBraun_), post on X, 12 October 2024 <https://x.com/GrzegorzBraun_/status/1845041751737708841> [accessed 22 November 2026].
218 Jakub Bojakowski, 'Poseł Braun znów narozrabiał. Zablokował wykład, niszcząc mikrofon i głośnik', *Wprost*, 30 May 2023 <https://www.wprost.pl/polityka/11243521/posel-braun-znow-narozrabial-zablokowal-wyklad-niszczac-mikrofon-i-glosnik.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
219 Anna Kozińska, 'Pierwszy sondaż po przewrocie w TK. Znamy nastroje Polaków', Wirtualna Polska, 5 November 2026 <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/pierwszy-sondaz-po-przewrocie-w-tk-znamy-nastroje-polakow-7347439223032288a> [accessed 22 November 2026].
220 Paulina Ciesielska, 'Wygrywają, ale bez szans na rządzenie. Mamy najnowszy sondaż', Wirtualna Polska, 21 August 2025 <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/wygrywaja-ale-bez-szans-na-rzadzenie-mamy-najnowszy-sondaz-7191317600635488a> [accessed 22 November 2026].
221 Sokołowski, 'Trochę Władysław Gomułka, trochę Szczęsny Potocki'.

2.4 Conclusion

There is not one single source of anti-European sentiment in Poland, but underlying almost all of it is an argument about sovereignty: barring the threat of Russia, the sources discussed earlier in this chapter serve effectively as individual examples to prove the broader point that Polish sovereignty is under threat from the EU and Europe.

For every policy area where the EU makes decisions, whether that be migration, the environment, or social policy, they are taken out of Poland's hands, the argument goes; and the very actions of European countries are a threat to Polish national identity. Besides, the argument continues, it is Europe which has been the main threat to Polish sovereignty over the years: it either failed to object to or even actively participated in the loss of Polish independence in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, and Poles still have not fully recovered.[222]

Before we move on, there is also one omission worth addressing. This chapter has not mentioned the adoption of the Euro (€), be it as a source of Euroscepticism or pro-EU enthusiasm. But, in truth, the Euro scarcely features in conversations about the EU and Europe in 2026 in Poland, as it scarcely did in discussions in the UK in the run-up to Brexit. And although, unlike Poland, the UK was exempt from ever having to adopt the Euro,[223] in practice, the prospect of Poland adopting the Euro is so distant, and the political appetite for it so lacking relative to the enormity of the challenge, that the topic is currently just as ineffectual in Poland as it had been in the UK in the run-up to Brexit.

As the Polish economy continues to develop, the Euro may emerge as a major source of either Euroscepticism or pro-EU sentiment in Poland in coming years; an analysis of the Euro's impact on Poland's relationship with Europe should be done then. Between then and now,

222 Kuisz, *The New Politics of Poland*, p. 237.
223 EUR-Lex, 'United Kingdom: EMU Opt-Out Clause', Summaries of EU Legislation <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/ALL/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Al25060> [accessed 22 November 2026].

however, the relevant facts are bound to change in ways which would make conducting such an analysis with the facts of today a folly.

Having examined the sources of Polish anti-Europeanism, the next chapter in this report will look at the case of the United Kingdom in the run-up to and since Brexit in order to examine what motivated British anti-Europeanism, and Euroscepticism in particular. It will then draw seven lessons for Poland from the experiences of the UK with Brexit.



CHAPTER THREE

Learning lessons from Brexit

Having provided an overview of anti-European narratives in Poland, this report now examines the development of anti-European, and specifically Eurosceptic, narratives in the UK from the time it joined the EU in January 1973 until its departure in 2020, a period during which two referenda were held on the subject (see Box 3.1, below), and four Prime Ministers were brought down by it: Margaret Thatcher (1979-90), John Major (1990-97), David Cameron (2010-16) and Theresa May (2016-19). It will then consider seven lessons from the UK's experience with the EU and Brexit for Poland and the spectre of Polexit.

BOX 3.1

The UK's two EU membership referenda

The UK has had two referenda on EU membership: one in 1975, when the EU was known as the European Economic Community (EEC), and the other in 2016. Despite having joined the EEC in 1973 under Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath (1970-74), the country's membership remained contentious, especially on the left and among its key party representative, the Labour Party.

Having narrowly defeated Heath's Conservatives by four seats at the February 1974 election[224] and secured a three-seat House of Commons

224 David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of February 1974* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1974).

majority — 319 seats out of 635 — at the October 1974 election,[225] the new Labour Government under Harold Wilson held the UK's first referendum on EU membership in an attempt to settle the issue without destroying party unity.[226] Before doing so, however, Wilson attempted a renegotiation of the "Tory terms" of the UK's EEC membership negotiated by his predecessor, Heath.[227]

While in practice these proved limited — such as improved trading access to the EEC for the UK's Commonwealth allies, the Commonwealth being an association comprised primarily of former territories of the British Empire[228] — they were enough to permit Wilson to unequivocally personally support the pro-EEC/EU side in the referendum.[229] However, in a break with UK constitutional conventions, individual cabinet ministers were free to campaign for either the 'Yes' side, that is, to remain in the EEC/EU, or the 'No' side — to leave.[230]

Ultimately, 'Yes' triumphed, securing 67% of votes cast.[231] While all four UK nations voted 'Yes', there were smaller majorities in Northern Ireland (52%) and Scotland (58%) than in England (69%) or Wales (65%).[232]

Although the outcome was different in 2016, the reasoning behind the decision to hold the 2016 referendum was similar to the reasoning of 1975.

The Conservative Party had become increasingly Eurosceptic since the late eighties following the passage of the 1986 Single European Act — the legislation implementing the EU common market, an economic zone mandating the free movement of goods, capital, services and people between all EU countries. Whereas Conservatives such as Thatcher viewed the European common market "as an end in itself," more fervent pro-Europeans saw it as a step on the road to further

225 David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of October 1974* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1975), p. 275.
226 Dominic Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle for Britain, 1974–1979* (London: Penguin, 2013), pp. 319–23.
227 Robert Saunders, *Yes to Europe! The 1975 Referendum and Seventies Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 79–90.
228 Staniszewski and others, *The right road*, p. 85.
229 Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*, pp. 79–90.
230 Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, p. 323.
231 For the 1975 referendum, see Saunders, *Yes to Europe!* A breakdown of the result can be found on pp. 383–84.
232 Ibid.

integration.[233] Consequently, as the EEC continued to expand, some Conservatives, including Thatcher, felt — however implausibly, given that "ever closer union" had been a stated objective of the EU since 1957 — that they had been duped.[234] Indeed, by the time the then Major Government (1990-97) came to steer through legislation implementing the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, Euroscepticism had emerged as a serious destabilising force for the Conservative leadership.[235]

This was despite Major's Government having secured in 1991 for the UK, before the Maastricht Treaty was signed, an opt-out from the third stage of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), an integratory initiative of the EU which began in 1990. The third stage, which began in 1999, involved, most importantly, a single EU monetary policy, the irrevocable fixing of conversion rates between EU countries and the introduction of the Euro.[236] Major's aforementioned opt-out from the third stage of the EMU laid the foundations for several important further opt-outs to come, most notably the 1997 opt-out from the Schengen Agreement, which abolished border controls between EU member states.[237] Since the UK left, Ireland and Cyprus are the only EU member states not participating in the Agreement, though Ireland does so primarily to respect its open border agreement with the UK, historically important for maintaining social cohesion in Northern Ireland.

By the time that David Cameron became Prime Minister, as well as pressure from within his own party, he also faced a growing threat from the avowedly Eurosceptic United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). From still polling at only 2% in 2011,[238] the party steadily rose in the polls in the following years, finishing 2012 with 15% in the

233 Andrew Geddes, 'Europe', in *The Political Thought of the Conservative Party since 1945*, ed. by Kevin Hickson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 113–32 (p. 123); Hugo Young, *This Blessed Plot: Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair* (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 329–37.
234 Young, *This Blessed Plot*, pp. 335–38.
235 Tom McTague, *Between the Waves: The Hidden History of a Very British Revolution, 1945–2016* (London: Picador, 2025), pp. 259–62.
236 European Central Bank, 'Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)' <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb/history-arts-culture/history/emu/html/index.en.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
237 Ciarán O'Kelly and others, 'The Brexit Trajectory: Structure and Agency in a Potential Polexit', *Frontiers in Political Science* (2026), p. 9 <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/political-science/articles/10.3389/fpos.2026.1726767/full> [accessed 21 November 2026].
238 Populus, 'Times/BPC Poll, December 2011', December 2011 <https://web.archive.org/web/20150924101404/http://www.populus.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/OmTimes-BPC-Dec11(1).pdf> [accessed 22 November 2026].

polls[239] and reaching 22% in one poll in 2013.[240] Consequently, in 2013, Cameron announced that he would hold a referendum on Brexit should his Conservative Party win a majority at the 2015 general election, a promise that he duly kept after unexpectedly winning said majority.[241]

Like Wilson, Cameron hoped that taking the decision out of the government's hands and giving it to the electorate would satisfy the Eurosceptics in his party and prevent the implosion of his Government. Cameron himself was firmly and openly in favour of the UK remaining in the EU and attempted to renegotiate the terms of the UK's EU membership before holding the referendum to attempt to shore up the UK's position within the EU and consequently also Brits' perception of it.

Unlike Wilson, however, Cameron lost the June 2016 referendum by 51.9% to 48.1%.[242] In a reversal of 1975, England and Wales recorded the strongest 'Leave' votes, at 53.4% and 52.5% respectively, whereas the strongest 'Remain' votes were in Scotland and Northern Ireland, at 62% and 55.8% respectively.[243] Just over four decades after voting to stay, the UK was out.

3.1 Main Eurosceptic narratives in British politics, 1973 to 2020

Much as Polish anti-Europeans are divided earlier in this report into moderate and radical categories, British Eurosceptics have traditionally been divided between so-called "hard" and "soft," with the former advocating either withdrawal or radical renegotiation of the UK's terms of membership, and the latter limiting their criticisms to certain

239 Opinium, 'Political Polling 21st December' <https://web.archive.org/web/20160303223218/http://ourinsight.opinium.co.uk/survey-results/political-polling-21st-december> [accessed 22 November 2026].
240 George Eaton, 'UKIP Just Two Points behind the Tories in New Poll', *New Statesman*, 20 May 2013 <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2013/05/ukip-just-two-points-behind-tories-new-poll> [accessed 22 November 2026].
241 Philip Cowley and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 2015* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
242 Elise Uberoi, 'Analysis of the EU Referendum Results 2016', House of Commons Library, 29 June 2016 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7639/> [accessed 27 September 2026].
243 Uberoi, 'Analysis of the EU Referendum Results 2016'.

parts of EU architecture.[244] Indeed, Euroscepticism has been the only notable form of anti-Europeanism in the UK in the run-up to Brexit, with some caveats explored in Box 3.2 below, and therefore Euroscepticism, rather than anti-Europeanism more broadly, is the sole focus of this chapter.

BOX 3.2

Britain, the Commonwealth and the USA

The only significant form of anti-Europeanism in the UK, besides Euroscepticism, has been the willingness to look beyond Europe, towards the UK's former colonies, with the two foci often seen as mutually exclusive, or at least competing.

Indeed, while the UK's evolving relationships with its former colonies ultimately did not play a decisive role in either the 1975 or the 2016 referendum campaigns, they had a significant bearing on the UK's initial interactions with the bloc. Despite the unique and ongoing constitutional and cultural links between the UK and its former colonies, not least through the Commonwealth of Nations — a loose association of mostly former British colonies, protectorates and dominions which emerged from the ashes of the British Empire[245] — any notion that the UK with its former Empire could act as a potential third force between Europe and the US has long since faded. The binary choice presented to Brits today is rather that between alignment with Europe or alignment with the US, itself a former British colony with which the UK attempts to maintain a 'special relationship,' with the Commonwealth unable to stand on its own merits.

Historically, reluctance to abandon Britain's traditional Commonwealth ties was a key reason for Britain's delayed entry into the bloc.[246] Even as the Empire disintegrated from 1947 onwards — the year India

244 Kevin Hickson, *Britain's Conservative Right since 1945: Traditional Toryism in a Cold Climate* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 64.
245 Philip Loft, 'The Commonwealth', House of Commons Library, 7 March 2023 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9478/> [accessed 18 October 2026].
246 Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Abacus, 2006), p. 223.

and Pakistan gained independence — there was initially hope among British elites that, as the effective leader of a large bloc in its own right, joining the EEC would be unnecessary, as well as a belief that it constituted a betrayal of traditional ties with countries who had fought for the Empire in two world wars.[247] The Commonwealth, it was hoped, would allow the UK to continue acting as a major power in its own right and, as a result, act as a bridge between Europe and the rest of the world and as a third power between Europe and the other major English-speaking superpower, the United States.

Of particular interest were ties with the so-called "Old Commonwealth" — that is, the predominantly white, former British settler colonies like Australia, Canada and New Zealand,[248] which had gradually achieved full self-government before the Second World War. These countries maintained strong cultural links with their mother country, and to this day retain the British monarch as head of state.[249]

Even on the left, Britain's membership of the Commonwealth was seen as a way of demonstrating solidarity with newly independent third-world states.[250]

However, as trading links between Britain and its former colonies declined, and it became more and more obvious that the Commonwealth could not serve as a vehicle for projecting British influence abroad, it became less of an obstacle to Britain's entry into the EEC/EU.[251] As historian Robert Saunders points out, between the early fifties and 1972 — the year before the UK formally joined the EEC — the share of British exports going to Commonwealth countries more than halved, falling from 49% to just 19%.[252]

During the 1975 referendum campaign, the 'No' side attempted to argue that EEC membership imperilled Commonwealth ties.[253] The 'Yes' side successfully countered this, pointing out that Common-

247 Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 223.
248 Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*, p. 269.
249 David Torrance, 'The King's Style and Titles in the UK and the Commonwealth', House of Commons Library, 31 January 2024 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-11058/> [accessed 18 October 2026].
250 Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*.
251 Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*, pp. 260–62.
252 Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*, p. 260.
253 For the Commonwealth during the 1975 referendum campaign, see Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*, chap. 9, pp. 254–77.

wealth governments endorsed the UK's continued membership — 32 Commonwealth heads of government expressed support for the UK's renegotiated EEC membership terms.[254]

As for US ties, Washington had been encouraging British EEC membership since the early sixties.[255]

Consequently, former British colonies and the Commonwealth barely featured at all during the 2016 referendum campaign,[256] although, thanks to an historical quirk, citizens of Commonwealth countries resident in the UK could vote in it.[257]

While, as will be discussed later in this chapter, the British government moved quickly to negotiate trade deals with several Commonwealth countries post-Brexit, including Australia and New Zealand, their benefits were limited as compared to the benefits of trade with the EU.

Nevertheless, dreams of a closer union between Britain and its former colonies as an alternative to the EU live on in some quarters.

One example is the CANZUK movement, established in 2015, which proposes freer movement of people and trade between Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand.[258] Among the touted benefits, pooling the resources of the 133-million-strong bloc "would not only bolster national security but also project a stronger, more cohesive presence in international forums."[259] The idea has gained some prominent supporters — such as the Canadian Conservative party leader since 2022, Pierre Poilievre.[260] However, the lack of enthusiasm from, among others, the Australian and British governments, suggests it is unlikely to happen.[261] Indeed, at the time of writing,

254 Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*, pp. 275–77.
255 Young, *This Blessed Plot*, p. 128.
256 For example, the index to Tim Shipman's account of the referendum campaign does not contain a single reference to the Commonwealth. See Tim Shipman, *All Out War: The Full Story of Brexit* (London: William Collins, 2017).
257 Kevin Ponniah, 'EU Referendum: The Non-Britons Planning to Vote', BBC News, 20 May 2016 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36316467> [accessed 18 October 2026].
258 'About Us', CANZUK International, 2026 <https://www.canzukinternational.com/about> [accessed 18 October 2026].
259 'Why CANZUK?', CANZUK International, 2026 <https://www.canzukinternational.com/why-canzuk> [accessed 18 October 2026].
260 Grant Wyeth, 'CANZUK: A Fringe Idea Whose Time Has Come?', Diplomat, 30 March 2026 <https://thediplomat.com/2026/03/canzuk-a-fringe-idea-whose-time-has-come/> [accessed 18 October 2026].
261 Wyeth, 'CANZUK: A Fringe Idea Whose Time Has Come?'.

Canada is instead set to join the EU as what had been termed at one point as an "associate member."[262]

The other, more realistic alternative, is closer alignment with the US. This option has been promoted heavily especially by free-market UK think tanks such as the Prosperity Institute or the Institute of Economic Affairs. The former, in a 2025 report, argues that the "UK should maintain its current arrangement with the EU while focusing its efforts on building trade relationships with other allies, most importantly the United States of America" and that only misalignment with Europe makes it possible to strike deals with said allies.[263] A similar argument was made by the latter in a 2019 paper.[264]

Worth highlighting here is that, even despite the 'special relationship' between the UK and the USA according to which the UK is uniquely close to the USA from among European countries, at the moment of writing, 45% of polled Brits would prefer closer relations with Europe than with the US, and only 12% would prefer the opposite.[265]

Three of the main Eurosceptic narratives to have played out during the lifetime of the UK's membership were concerns about a loss of sovereignty, the perceived negative effects of EU membership on the British economy and the effects of the EU on immigration.

Sovereignty

As is also the major theme in Eurosceptic discourse in Poland, the first criticism of the EU in the UK concerned the impact of EU membership on British sovereignty.

262 Jessica Rawnsley, 'Canada Welcomes EU Proposal to Become "Associate Member"', BBC News, 17 September 2026 <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwly7vkke4jxo> [accessed 22 November 2026].
263 Emmanuel Igwe and Fred de Fossard, *A Road to Nowhere: Why the UK–EU Reset Is Not the Answer* (London: Prosperity Institute, 2025) <https://www.prosperity.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/A-Road-to-Nowhere.pdf> [accessed 22 November 2026].
264 'IEA Report Re-published: Plan A+ – Creating a Prosperous Post-Brexit UK', Institute of Economic Affairs, 27 September 2019 <https://iea.org.uk/media/iea-report-re-published-plan-a-creating-a-prosperous-post-brexit-uk/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
265 YouGov, 'Should Britain Have a Stronger Relationship with Europe or the US?' <https://yougov.com/en-gb/trackers/should-britain-have-a-stronger-relationship-with-europe-of-the-us> [accessed 22 November 2026].

Both left- and right-wing versions of this critique existed in the UK. On the left, figures such as the Labour Leader Michael Foot (1980-83) on principle opposed any watering down of the powers of the House of Commons, a body he felt lay at the core of British democracy.[266] Similarly, left-wing Cabinet Minister Tony Benn (1974-79) warned in the seventies that the EEC/EU would "destroy the whole basis on which the labour movement was founded, and its commitment to democratic change" by transferring powers away from the elected British Parliament to a democratically unaccountable European Commission:[267] a criticism famously echoed by the right-wing Nigel Farage in 2010 in a speech targeted at the then-President of the European Council (2009-14), Herman Van Rompuy.[268]

On the right, although the Conservative Party was not as concerned with threats to national sovereignty as the left, there were exceptions. For example, Enoch Powell, who had previously served as a Conservative Cabinet Minister (1962-63, 65-68), urged voters to vote for Labour in February 1974. He saw Labour as the best hope for either drastically renegotiating the terms of Britain's EEC membership or withdrawing from it.[269] This, according to Powell, was necessary to stop Britain from becoming "one province in a European super-state."[270]

While not the primary feature of the 1975 campaign, the 'Yes' side countered the sovereignty argument by emphasising that, while sacrificing some national powers formally, pooling sovereignty had increased EEC member states' practical ability to determine their own futures.[271] It also helped that the referendum occurred at a time when relatively few additional steps towards deeper integration were taking place, and that, as pro-EEC supporters emphasised,[272] any binding

266 McTague, *Between the Waves*, p. 164.
267 Tony Benn, *Against the Tide: Diaries, 1973–76* (London: Arrow Books, 1990), pp. 342–43.
268 'Ukip's Nigel Farage Tells Van Rompuy: You Have the Charisma of a Damp Rag', *Guardian*, 25 February 2010 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/feb/25/nigel-farage-herman-van-rompuy-damp-rag> [accessed 22 November 2026].
269 McTague, *Between the Waves*, p. 99.
270 McTague, *Between the Waves*, p. 99.
271 Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*, p. 249.
272 McTague, *Between the Waves*, p. 190.

EEC powers were, in any event, largely confined to areas such as agriculture and commercial law.[273]

This argument was a familiar one to British politics. Indeed, when the UK first joined the EEC in 1973, some early supporters of membership included the last generation of Conservative imperialists. For such Conservatives, membership offered the chance to defend both British and broader European interests against both the major superpowers of the day: the USA and the Soviet Union,[274] as discussed in Box 3.2 earlier.

However, as the competences of the EU gradually expanded following 1975, concerns around sovereignty once again came to the fore: this time more strongly on the right.

Tensions increased when the pace of European integration accelerated in the nineties. Previously, European integration was largely confined to economic liberalisation measures, which Conservatives generally supported. However, the stated ambition of European Commission President Jacques Delors (1985-95) to expand the so-called "social dimension" of EU law, and his prediction that within a decade "80% of our economic legislation, and perhaps even our fiscal and social legislation as well, will be of Community origin," was too much for them.[275]

Indeed, it was Delors' ambitions that prompted Thatcher, who had campaigned on the 'Yes' side in 1975, to give her famous "Bruges" speech,[276] which marked a turning point in Conservative public attitudes towards Europe. In it, she warned against "a European superstate exercising a new dominance from Brussels"[277] and argued that it would be "folly" to impose on different European countries "some sort of identikit European personality."[278]

273 Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*, p. 243.
274 Hickson, *Britain's Conservative Right since 1945*, p. 67.
275 McTague, *Between the Waves*, pp. 208–13.
276 Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography*, 3 vols (London: Allen Lane, 2013–19), iii: *Herself Alone* (2019), pp. 147–50.
277 Moore, *Herself Alone*, pp. 148–49.
278 Geddes, 'Europe', p. 124.

Worse, because national vetoes had, in many areas, been replaced by qualified majority voting in the Council of the European Union (then known as the 'Council of the European Communities') in 1986, the UK's ability to guard against further integration measures being imposed from Brussels against its will was further weakened.[279]

Rightly or wrongly, Conservatives increasingly felt that the Europe to which they had signed up — a common market — had evolved to the point where it became a threat to national sovereignty and democracy itself,[280] strongly echoing Eurosceptic Polish concerns discussed in the previous chapter. As May's former co-Chief of Staff (2016-17) and current Conservative MP (2024-ongoing) Nick Timothy remarked in 2020, thanks to successive ECJ rulings, the EU's legal remit expanded to "everything from taxation to immigration control," severely limiting the capacity of national governments to respond to popular demands and act with sovereignty.[281]

Economy

The perceived negative economic impacts of EU membership have been a consistent critique of the EU in the UK since at least 1973, although they evolved over time.

Among the strongest opponents of EU membership were those on the left who perceived the bloc as a capitalist cabal that would prevent the implementation of socialist economic policies in the UK.[282] Benn, as well as future Labour Leader, Jeremy Corbyn (2015-20),[283] were some of the most prominent exponents of this view, which remained strong within Labour even after the 1975 referendum defeat. Labour's 1983 manifesto, for example, pledged, among other things, to take the UK out of the EEC/EU, enabling it to use its newfound freedoms to protect

279 Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*, pp. 242–43.
280 Nick Timothy, *Remaking One Nation: The Future of Conservatism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020), pp. 146–47.
281 Timothy, *Remaking One Nation*, pp. 146–47.
282 Adrian Williamson, *Conservative Economic Policymaking and the Birth of Thatcherism, 1964–1979* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 193.
283 Gabriel Pogrund and Patrick Maguire, *Left Out: The Inside Story of Labour under Corbyn* (London: Vintage, 2021), p. 42.

British fisheries and expand state investment in domestic industry.[284] While this critique never entirely disappeared, it gradually faded from the eighties onwards, and played a far smaller role in the 2016 campaign, in which Labour was overtly pro-EU.

Several critiques of the economic impact of the EU also existed on the right. Initially, much of the Conservative Party supported Britain's membership of the EU for the very reasons much of the left opposed it, namely that the so-called "four freedoms" — of goods, capital, people and services — would force British industries to become more competitive.[285] However, as the British economy was in a much stronger position as relative to the rest of the EU in 2016 than in 1975, opponents of membership increasingly portrayed Brussels as holding back UK economic growth through excessive regulation and fiscal contributions. The most extreme version of this, the so-called "Singapore-on-Thames" envisaged a post-Brexit UK whose light-touch regulatory environment would be a natural source of growth.[286]

Conversely, hoping to repeat the success of the anti-independence 'Better Together' campaign of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, in which voters by a 55% to 45% margin voted for Scotland to remain in the United Kingdom after a campaign which centred around the potential economic costs of leaving the UK, the 'Remain' side focused in 2016 on the potential economic costs of withdrawal as the chief argument against Brexit.[287]

Unfortunately for 'Remain,' however, its warnings of economic doom meant the campaign lacked a positive, compelling message of its own, and Brexiteers dismissed its warnings as "Project fear."[288] Additionally,

284 Labour Party, '1983 Manifesto', Archive of Labour Party Manifestos <http://www.labour-party.org.uk/manifestos/1983/1983-labour-manifesto.shtml> [accessed 27 September 2026].
285 Williamson, *Conservative Economic Policymaking*, pp. 193–95.
286 'Sling the Singapore Model out of the Brexit Debate', *Financial Times*, 31 July 2017 <https://www.ft.com/content/08726b32-75f2-11e7-a3e8-60495fe6ca71?syn-25a6b1a6=1> [accessed 27 September 2026]; 'EU Vote: Where the Cabinet and Other MPs Stand', BBC News, 22 June 2016 <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-35616946> [accessed 21 November 2026].
287 Iain Black, 'All the Fear, None of the Hope: EU Referendum Campaigns Should Learn from Scotland', Conversation, 1 June 2016 <https://theconversation.com/all-the-fear-none-of-the-hope-eu-referendum-campaigns-should-learn-from-scotland-59768> [accessed 2 October 2026].
288 Kate Fall, 'The View inside David Cameron's No. 10', in *The Brexit Effect, 2016–2026*, ed. by Anthony Seldon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2026), pp. 35–52 (pp. 48–49).

'Leave' counter-attacks, such as its claim that withdrawing from the EU would — implausibly — free up £350 million per week to spend on the NHS achieved some cut-through. Polling by YouGov from June 2016, for example, found that a plurality of voters (36%) thought that Brexit would be good for the NHS, while just 24% thought it would be bad.[289]

It also did not help that at least some of the 'Remain' side's warnings were baseless. For example, despite the then-Chancellor of the Exchequer, the pro-'Remain' George Osborne (2010-16), warning less than a fortnight before the day of the 2016 referendum that he would have to introduce an emergency budget in the event of a successful 'Leave' vote, featuring £30 billion in spending cuts and tax rises, such a budget never came to pass.[290]

Migration

A key anti-EU narrative experienced in the UK in the lead-up to Brexit concerned immigration.

Unlike the sovereignty critique, immigration "was barely mentioned" in 1975.[291] Partly because of the relatively weak UK economic position at the time, the number of EEC citizens in the UK actually fell between its joining in 1973 and the 1975 date of the referendum, so the EEC could hardly be blamed for any immigration woes. The only exception was Northern Ireland, where Protestant Unionists feared that an influx of Catholics from the Republic of Ireland, also an EEC member, would undermine their demographic position,[292] but Northern Irish Protestants only constituted under 2% of the UK's population in 1975.[293]

289 Peter Kellner, 'Why Voters Chose Brexit (and Then Regretted Their Choice)', in Seldon, *The Brexit Effect*, pp. 101–18 (p. 107).
290 'George Osborne Warns of "£30 Billion Hole in Public Finances" if UK Leaves EU – Video', *Guardian*, 15 June 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/video/2016/jun/15/george-osborne-warns-of-30-billion-hole-in-public-finances-if-uk-leaves-eu-video> [accessed 2 October 2026].
291 Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*.
292 Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*, p. 309.
293 *1971 Census: Aggregate Data; Great Britain* [data collection], 2nd edn, SN 5563 (UK Data Service) <https://datacatalogue.ukdataservice.ac.uk/studies/study/5563> [accessed 22 November 2026].

The salience of EU-led immigration increased substantially after 2004 when, unlike most other existing EU member states, the UK granted immediate freedom of movement to the ten member states (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta) that joined that year.[294] Two further Eastern European states joined in 2007 (Romania and Bulgaria), prompting similar fears about a migrant influx.[295] Indeed, by 2016, over a million workers from Eastern Europe were in the UK.[296]

While not the only fear behind rising anti-immigration sentiment in the UK at that time — the percentage of Brits who agreed that there are "too many immigrants in Britain" increased from 54% in 2001 to 68% in 2007[297] — the fact that the EU was widely perceived to have led to increased immigration lay at the heart of said sentiment.[298] The growth of migration from the EU came at a time when public concern was already increasing about the perceived failure to bring down what were then historically high levels of net immigration. Before the late nineties, net migration to the UK averaged less than 100,000 per year.[299] By 2007, however, this hit a then-record 207,000.[300] While, in part thanks to tighter restrictions on non-EU migrants, this fell to 177,000 in 2012, it soon crept up again largely due to higher arrivals from the EU. Whereas, in the year ending June 2012, net migration from the EU to the UK was 187,000, it reached 322,000 by the year ending June 2016.[301]

294 Erica Consterdine, 'The Huge Political Cost of Blair's Decision to Allow Eastern European Migrants Unfettered Access to Britain', Conversation, 16 November 2016 <https://theconversation.com/the-huge-political-cost-of-blairs-decision-to-allow-eastern-european-migrants-unfettered-access-to-britain-66077> [accessed 24 September 2026].
295 'Romania Dismisses UK "Invasion" Fears', BBC News, 31 December 2013 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-25560462> [accessed 2 October 2026].
296 'EU Migration: Eastern European Workers in UK Pass One Million', BBC News, 17 August 2016 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-37109747> [accessed 2 October 2026].
297 Ipsos, 'Immigration Poll' <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/immigration-poll> [accessed 22 November 2026].
298 McTague, *Between the Waves*.
299 Office for National Statistics, 'International Migration: A Recent History', 15 January 2015 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/internationalmigrationarecenthistory/2015-01-15> [accessed 2 October 2026].
300 Office for National Statistics, 'International Migration: A Recent History'.
301 Madeleine Sumption, Ben Brindle and Peter William Walsh, 'Net Migration to the UK', Migration Observatory, 27 May 2026 <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/long-term-international-migration-flows-to-and-from-the-uk/> [accessed 2 October 2026].

Making matters worse, the 2015 refugee crisis, which saw over a million refugees — mainly from extra-European countries, such as Syria and Afghanistan — entering European territory helped to exacerbate the sense of crisis, even though relatively few such migrants came to the UK.[302] Of the 1.3 million asylum applications to EU countries that year, 442,000 were made in Germany, 174,000 in Hungary and 156,000 in Sweden.[303] By contrast, just 39,000 asylum requests were made in the UK.[304]

The political effects of the increased immigration soon made themselves felt. Previously a fringe force, Nigel Farage's first major political vehicle, UKIP, emerged as the third-largest party at the 2004 UK elections — the year that the aforementioned ten states joined the EU — to the European Parliament, winning 16% of the vote.[305] Immigration was at the core of its message, with its manifesto proclaiming that the UK was "bursting at the seams, its towns near-gridlocked, its hospital waiting lists growing."[306] Ten years later, it emerged as the largest party in the 2014 UK elections to the European Parliament, winning an outlier 27% of the vote — the first ever time that Labour and the Conservatives had been defeated at the national level in European Parliament elections.[307] Once again, concerns about immigration were at the heart of its message. Only by leaving the European Union, UKIP warned, could Britain bring numbers down.[308]

Indeed, this was a classic tactic of right-leaning populist parties. While such parties are almost always very Eurosceptic, they are also

302 Nando Sigona and Michaela Benson, 'The UK's Refugee "Invasion" Is a Brexit-Made Policy Failure', *Political Quarterly*, 10 November 2022 <https://politicalquarterly.org.uk/blog/the-uks-refugee-invasion-is-a-brexit-made-policy-failure/> [accessed 28 September 2026].
303 Phillip Connor, 'Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015', Pew Research Center, 2 August 2016 <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/> [accessed 2 October 2026].
304 Connor, 'Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015'.
305 Robert Ford and Matthew Goodwin, *Revolt on the Right: Explaining Support for the Radical Right in Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 46–48.
306 Gaby Hinsliff, 'It Feels like the BNP – Only in Blazers', *Guardian*, 30 May 2004 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2004/may/30/otherparties.immigrationandpublicservices> [accessed 4 October 2026].
307 Grace McQuade, 'The Rise of UKIP and Its Impact on UK Politics', British Politics at Queen's, 3 March 2024 <https://blogs.qub.ac.uk/pb-happ/2024/03/03/the-rise-of-ukip-and-its-impact-on-uk-politics/> [accessed 27 September 2026].
308 Patrick Wintour, 'Ukip's Manifesto: Immigration, Europe – and That's It', *Guardian*, 20 May 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/may/20/ukip-manifesto-europe-immigration> [accessed 4 October 2026].

disproportionately likely to support restrictive migration policy measures, and so the two make for a natural combination when there is no pro-EU party offering a credible plan for limiting immigration.[309]

Unsurprisingly, immigration also lay at the heart of the official 'Leave' campaign in 2016. In place of the EU's freedom of movement, 'Leave' promised a so-called "Australian-style points system,"[310] which would supposedly allow the UK to only bring in the most skilled migrants who would bring the most value to the UK economy. A points-based system was indeed brought in in late 2020 by Boris Johnson during his time as Prime Minister (2019-22), however, as explored later in this chapter, it did not lead to a decrease in immigrant numbers in the UK.

By contrast, the failure of the 'Remain' campaign to make any serious attempt to rebut concerns around immigration — the fear being that even discussing the issue which the 'Leave' side seemed to own would legitimise it, or at least give it undesired publicity — meant that said concerns went nigh completely unaddressed.[311]

Consequently, only the 'Leave' side was perceived by the public to address the immigration issue. According to a YouGov poll taken just before the 2016 referendum, some 84% of prospective 'Leave' voters thought that Brexit would reduce immigration.[312] Indeed, polling evidence suggests that concerns about immigration were, together with the related issue of sovereignty, the largest factor behind the UK's 2016 'Leave' vote. As academic Roger Eatwell and then-academic Matthew Goodwin point out, "support for Brexit was stronger in areas that during the preceding decade had experienced rapid inward migration."[313] For example, between 2001 and 2011, the town of Boston saw

309 Bartłomiej Staniszewski and William Prescott, *Populist pushback? Understanding and defeating European populism* (London: Bright Blue, 2026) <https://www.brightblue.org.uk/populist-pushback-kas/> [accessed 21 November 2026].
310 Rowena Mason, Heather Stewart and Anushka Asthana, 'Boris Johnson Insists Immigration Pledge Is Not Bid to Oust Cameron', *Guardian*, 1 June 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/01/boris-johnson-insists-not-presenting-post-cameron-government-vote-leave> [accessed 27 September 2026].
311 Shipman, *All Out War*, pp. 302–05.
312 Kellner, 'Why Voters Chose Brexit', p. 101.
313 Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, *National Populism: The Revolt against Liberal Democracy* (London: Pelican, 2018), pp. 165–66.

the percentage of foreign-born residents quintuple, reaching 15% of the total: 75% of its voters backed Brexit at the 2016 referendum.[314]

3.2 Consequences of Brexit

This chapter will now focus on three main consequences of the Brexit vote: the impact of Brexit on British sovereignty, economy and migration. It will then apply the historical lessons of Brexit to the case of Poland.

Impact of Brexit on UK sovereignty

Since Brexit was hugely disruptive to British domestic politics and made it more difficult for Britain to represent its interests in Europe, it seriously and negatively affected practical British sovereignty, at least in the short term. Unable to determine what form of Brexit to take and politically bound to implement a result that most of the Members of Parliament opposed, Brexit disrupted the British state's practical capacity to deliver almost any national objective other than Brexit itself for three-and-a-half years.

First, on British domestic politics. Brexit was the primary reason for the rapid churn of Prime Ministers which took place after the 2016 referendum. From the outset, David Cameron, who had unsuccessfully campaigned for 'Remain,' felt he had no choice but to resign upon losing the referendum — the Prime Minister who called for 'Remain' could not, he argued, credibly deliver the Brexit he had tried to stop.[315]

His successor, Theresa May, proved inadequate to the task.[316] Having come into office without adequate time to prepare, she — and many in her Party — lacked an understanding of what realistically could be negotiated, and was unable to placate those in the Conservative Party who either wanted her to go further than she was prepared to, or to

314 Eatwell and Goodwin, *National Populism*, p. 166.
315 David Cameron, *For the Record* (London: William Collins, 2019), p. 680.
316 For May's premiership, see Anthony Seldon with Raymond Newell, *May at 10: The Verdict* (London: Biteback, 2019).

aim for a softer Brexit. Indeed, Britain's negotiating position, based on pre-established "red lines" — namely, positions on immigration, EU budget contributions, the ECJ and trade that the UK was not willing to budge on through the course of negotiations — meant that the UK showed its cards before the negotiations had even truly begun and limited the UK's ability to make further demands or push back against the EU's by offering concessions.[317]

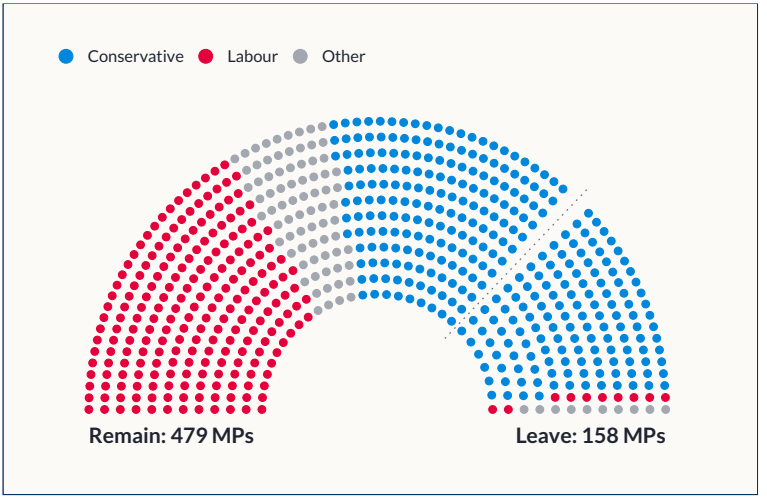
At the core of the problem lay the nature of the 2016 referendum. Because the British Parliament is sovereign and the primary source of political legitimacy under the uncodified British constitution, referendum results are not constitutionally binding. At the same time, by agreeing to hold the referendum, Parliament effectively delegated the decision to voters directly and bound its MPs to follow suit.[318] When the result went against the wishes of most MPs — 479 MPs were opposed to Brexit, while 158 of them supported it, at the time of the referendum,[319] as shown in Chart 3.1 below — the two came into opposition in a way the British constitution had hitherto not accounted for.

This was made worse by the fact that the referendum understandably did not propose any specific type of Brexit, meaning that 'Leave' supporters campaigned on several mutually exclusive visions of what the UK would look like outside the EU. Broadly, those lay on a spectrum between two extremes: the aforementioned 'Singapore-on-Thames,' with Britain breaking free of the EU's protectionist policies and regulation, opening itself up to the world and a future of rapid economic growth; and a much more conservative vision of Britain which prioritised sovereignty and national self-assertion and which

317 Brexit Task Force of the International Relations Committee, *A Review of Economic Analyses on the Potential Impact of Brexit*, ECB Occasional Paper Series, 249 (Frankfurt am Main: European Central Bank, 2020), p. 9 <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/pdf/scpops/ecb.op249~3538acd426.en.pdf> [accessed 21 November 2026].
318 'Beyond Brexit: Towards a British Constitution', Constitution Unit Blog, 22 February 2019 <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/2019/02/22/beyond-brexit-towards-a-british-constitution/> [accessed 27 September 2026].
319 'EU Vote: Where the Cabinet and Other MPs Stand', BBC News.

was primarily motivated by the desire to reduce the effects of globalisation on the UK, including by reducing immigration into the UK.[320]

Chart 3.1. Views of British MPs on Brexit at the time of the 2016 Brexit referendum.



Source: 'EU Vote: Where the Cabinet and Other MPs Stand', BBC News, 22 June 2016 <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-35616946> [accessed 21 November 2026].

Thus, no single vision commanded a majority and, at various points, the 2017-19 House of Commons rejected several competing visions of Brexit. This included the Brexit deal negotiated by May's Government, a so-called "no-deal Brexit" — immediately leaving the EU without any transitional arrangements; a Norway-style arrangement combining common market membership but remaining outside the EU's formal structures; continued membership of a customs union with the EU but not the common market; or a second Brexit referendum.[321] The logjam

320 Bartłomiej Staniszewski, 'Dziesięć lat po wyjściu z UE Brytyjczycy żałują Brexitu', *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, 22 June 2026 <https://edgp.gazetaprawna.pl/opinie/artykuly/11266193,dziesiec-lat-po-wyjsciu-z-ue-brytyjczycy-zaluja-brexitu.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
321 Peter Walker, 'MPs Reject All Alternative Brexit Options', *Guardian*, 27 March 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/mar/27/mps-reject-all-alternative-brexit-options> [accessed 27 September 2026].

was only broken when a new Prime Minister, Boris Johnson (2019-22), called and won a snap election promising a weary electorate that he would "get Brexit done."[322]

At the same time, the enormous amount of political energy spent trying to resolve the Brexit problem meant, as the *Financial Times* reported in 2019, "that ministers and officials have limited capacity to consider anything else".[323] For example, longstanding problems around housing, crime or the future of social care were all neglected by a parliament and government consumed by the EU withdrawal process.[324]

The effects of the British government having spent so much of its political capital on discussing and legislating for Brexit rather than for other important areas are difficult to measure exactly, but one can consider just how much dissatisfaction with the British political establishment has risen since Brexit to realise how ineffectual British governments have been in said period.[325] Although the combined vote share for Labour and the Conservatives has slightly recovered since hitting an all-time low of just 34% in March 2026 according to Politico's UK meta-poll, it remains at 51% at the time of writing: by comparison, it was at over 80% as recently as 2017.[326]

Party infighting did not help. Brexit fuelled instability within the Conservative Party for reasons explained earlier in this chapter, and the situation was not much better for Labour: while almost all of Labour's MPs were in favour of 'Remain,' as shown in Chart 3.1 earlier, 68% of Labour's constituencies from the 2017 general election voted for Brexit, and the left-wing arguments against the EU still held sway among some of Labour's MPs.[327] Indeed, Labour's confusing 2019

322 For the 2019 general election, see Robert Ford and others, *The British General Election of 2019* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).
323 James Blitz, 'How Brexit Is Killing Domestic Policy', *Financial Times*, 8 February 2019 <https://www.ft.com/content/992a58e2-2b9f-11e9-a5ab-ff8ef2b976c7?syn-25a6b1a6=1> [accessed 28 September 2026].
324 Toby Helm and Eleni Courea, 'Brexit Deadlock "Is Blocking Vital Domestic Policy Reforms"', *Guardian*, 15 December 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/dec/15/mps-warn-brexit-deadlock-sucking-life-out-of-government> [accessed 6 October 2026].
325 Staniszewski and Prescott, *Populist pushback*.
326 Hanne Cokelaere, 'United Kingdom — Parliament Voting Intention', *Politico*, 16 November 2026 <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/united-kingdom/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
327 Edward Fieldhouse, 'Labour, Voters and the Brexit Conundrum', UK in a Changing Europe, 9 December 2019 <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/labour-voters-and-the-brexit-conundrum/> [accessed 6 October 2026].

policy of renegotiating the Conservatives' Brexit deal before holding a referendum on it proved a factor in what became Labour's worst general election result since 1935 — in the aftermath of the 2019 election, Labour was left with only 203 out of 650 seats in the House of Commons.[328]

Second, on the effect of Brexit on Britain's ability to represent its interests in Europe. Britain is still enormously affected by EU law, in particular by EU regulation, tariffs and certification rules, but is now unable to debate or vote on said law in either the European Parliament or any other of the major EU bodies listed in section 1.2 of this report.

One example of this is the EU's regulation on food standards: in order for UK businesses to be able to continue exporting to the EU, the UK agreed to adopt full EU rules in this area now and in the future without having any meaningful input into the design of the legislation. The National Farmers' Union in Scotland, for example, stated that the agreement turns the UK into a "rule taker" even as that same document argued that the agreement is a net benefit to Scottish agriculture.[329] Other notable examples include the UK committing to link its emissions trading scheme with the EU's, effectively surrendering the ability to set its own rate at which generating emissions is charged (normally referred to as a 'carbon price');[330] the UK's inability to shape the terms of the SAFE scheme, explained earlier in the report, significantly reducing the British defence sector's ability to participate in the programme despite its eagerness to do so and forcing it to instead partake on "third-country terms;"[331] and the UK's inability to partake in decision-making in the context of the EU's 2026 Industrial Accelerator Act, which risks cutting the UK out of European-origin rules which

328 Fieldhouse, 'Labour, Voters and the Brexit Conundrum'; 'UK Results: Conservatives Win Majority', BBC News, 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2019/results> [accessed 6 October 2026].
329 NFU Scotland, *Defra UK–EU SPS Agreement: NFUS Submission*, April 2026 <https://www.nfus.org.uk/userfiles/documents/2604%20Defra%20UK-EU%20SPS%20Agreement%20NFUS%20SUBMISSION.pdf> [accessed 22 November 2026].
330 Joël Reland, *Linking Emissions Trading Schemes: Key Challenges* (London: UK in a Changing Europe, 2025) <https://media.ukandeu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/UKICE-ETS-insight.pdf> [accessed 22 November 2026].
331 Agence France-Presse, 'UK Fails to Reach Deal to Access EU Defence Scheme', Kyiv Post, 28 November 2025 <https://www.kyivpost.com/amp/post/65195> [accessed 22 November 2026].

are set to bind the procurement rules for industrial products for EU countries, potentially with disastrous results for British suppliers.[332]

Indeed, a representative of a consortium of British businesses, who asked to be kept anonymous, informed us that the most impactful legislation for their sector — which exports much of their produce to the EU — is still coming from the EU but, since Brexit, it has been far more difficult for them to represent their views to the relevant decision-makers, as they can no longer be elected or even easily found in the UK, and when they can be found, they are not interested in the views of British industry. Instead, representing British interests has been left to the UK's diplomatic efforts within the EU, which are consequently stretched and much more limited in their efficacy as compared to formal representation within the EU executive and legislature, which the UK enjoyed as a member state. In other words, in many respects, the fate of British firms still lies in the hands of the EU. And even when negotiating with entities outside of the EU, the UK can no longer rely on the EU's huge market size and its experienced negotiation teams, weakening its relative negotiating position.[333]

Impact of Brexit on the UK economy

While the economic impact of Brexit remains heavily debated, it likely has negatively affected economic growth.

Several estimates of the impact of Brexit on the UK economy have been produced, both before and after Brexit. The most thorough of those have used synthetic control — a method of economic modelling which involves devising a counterfactual scenario based on the reproduction of the surveyed unit (in this case, the UK) from among units

332 Marc Jutten and Marcin Szczepański, 'International Dimension of the Proposed Industrial Accelerator Act', EPRS Briefing (Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service, 17 September 2026) <https://eprs.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS_BRI(2026)791495> [accessed 22 November 2026].
333 Frank Schimmelfennig and others, 'Brexit – The EU Membership Crisis that Wasn't?', *West European Politics* (2024), p. 1005 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402382.2024.2325780> [accessed 21 November 2026].

with similar characteristics (in this case, other countries) and statistically adjusted weights in relation to this similarity.[334]

According to one, from Aston University, exports from the UK to the EU fell by 22.9% in the first 15 months after the introduction of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement which replaced the trading rules which governed EU-UK trade before Brexit. The UK had also consequently experienced a 42% decline in the variety of goods exported to the EU.[335] According to another, a 2026 analysis from the Centre for European Reform, British exports to the EU were down 12% and imports from the EU down 16% compared to pre-Brexit levels.[336]

Worse, the situation could yet deteriorate further. For example, the EU's proposed "Made in Europe" rules, which prioritise European manufacturers for contracts and subsidies, could leave British manufacturers at a significant disadvantage unless the UK is granted an exemption.[337]

Most estimates of the impact of Brexit on the UK economy, however, focused on measuring the impact of Brexit on the UK's GDP. One 2019 study found that the Brexit vote alone had caused a UK GDP loss of 1.7% to 2.5% by 2018. Later, a 2022 study estimated that Brexit had lowered UK GDP by 5.5% by mid-2022, and another 2026 study estimated that the UK lost around 8% of its GDP as a consequence of Brexit by 2023.[338] This is even despite the increase in immigration into the UK which followed Brexit, illustrated in detail in Chart 3.3 later in this chapter.

334 Kopiński and others, *The Big Bang Enlargement*, p. 9.
335 Leokadia Oręziak, 'Lessons That Poland Can Learn from Brexit' (2024), p. 72 <https://journalse.com/lessons-that-poland-can-learn-from-brexit/> [accessed 21 November 2026].
336 John Springford and Anton Spisak, 'The Cost of Brexit, Ten Years On: The Impact of Leaving the Customs Union and Single Market on UK Trade', Centre for European Reform, 18 June 2026 <https://www.cer.eu/insights/cost-brexit-ten-years-impact-leaving-customs-union-and-single-market-uk-trade> [accessed 28 September 2026].
337 Kate Whannel, Chris Mason and Isabella Allen, 'New EU Industry Rules Would Damage UK, Warns Burnham', BBC News, 22 September 2026 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cv2dwylkl7weo> [accessed 7 October 2026].
338 Nicholas Bloom and others, *The Economic Impact of Brexit*, NBER Working Paper, 34459 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2026), p. 9 <https://www.nber.org/papers/w34459> [accessed 21 November 2026].

With that said, the most prominent study of the impact of Brexit on the UK's GDP was produced for the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) in 2026. It found that, by the end of 2025, the UK's GDP per capita was 6 to 8% lower than it would have been had Brexit not happened; "investment was reduced by 12% to 13%, employment by 3% to 4% and productivity by 3% to 4%." The spread was based on the use of two methods: synthetic control, described earlier, and "a micro-level analysis that uses firm-level data from the Decision Maker Panel (DMP), a monthly survey of over 11,000 UK firms, with responses each month from 2,000–2,500 firms," covering about a tenth of the UK's private-sector employment. Where synthetic control produced the more damning 8% figure, microanalysis produced the slightly more charitable 6% figure.

BOX 3.3

The limits of synthetic control analysis

The chief objection to the argument that Brexit has hurt the UK economy is that the method used to demonstrate it is inherently flawed.

The economist Julian Jessop, for example, has argued that synthetic control "simply cannot separate out the impact of Brexit from other reasons why some economies have grown more quickly (or slowly) than the UK since 2016," those other reasons including "the impact of the Covid pandemic and the energy crisis, and many others."[339] And, indeed, the choice of countries to be compared against the UK for the purposes of synthetic control, as well as the choice of weights to adjust for how similar different economies are to the UK's, is somewhat arbitrary.

The better method, Jessop argues, is to compare the UK against individual countries instead of against a collection of differently weighted ones. There, the UK comes out much more favourably than

339 *The Great Stagnation: Why Britain Stopped Growing*, ed. by Daniel Freeman and Kristian Niemietz, Hobart Paperback, 227 (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 2026), p. 181 <https://iea.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Great-Stagnation-Interactive.pdf> [accessed 22 November 2026].

in the synthetic control analyses cited above: real GDP growth in the UK between 2016 and 2025, for example, has been second-highest among the four European countries of the G7, at 12.2%. Germany, by comparison, has only grown by 6.0% in the same period.[340] In Jessop's words, "Brexit has largely been a non-event in macroeconomic terms. Indeed, the real story is how little impact that leaving the EU has had."[341] Worth noting is that similar claims have also been reiterated by some pro-EU economists, including Wolfgang Münchau.[342]

The NBER study itself admits limitations of the synthetic control approach: "There is no single best way to weight the comparator countries together." To alleviate this problem, NBER considered "five different approaches to show that our results are robust to the choice of weighting methodology: (i) simple unweighted, (ii) GDP weighted; (iii) GDP/air distance (gravity) weighted; (iv) UK trade weights; and (v) a formal synthetic control."[343] The different approaches, expectedly, produced different results; however, no matter which weights were used, and indeed what choice of countries the counterfactual analysis was made against, synthetic control analysis would suggest the UK has indeed suffered from Brexit.

On the most optimistic scenario, UK GDP per capita fell by 4% against a counterfactual scenario where Brexit has not happened. On the most pessimistic, it fell by 11%. Likewise, no matter what choice of countries was made to compare the UK against, the economic impact of Brexit still came out negative. In the words of the study, the estimate "is robust to dropping each country individually except for the US, which if dropped roughly halves the predicted [negative] impact."[344]

Nevertheless, one can see how, especially if synthetic control analysis does not account for a set of different approaches to weighting methodology and the choice of comparator countries, it is easy for detractors of the analysis' findings to dismiss them as arbitrary.

340 Freeman and Niemietz, *The Great Stagnation*, p. 186.
341 Freeman and Niemietz, *The Great Stagnation*, p. 187.
342 Peter Franklin, 'When Will the Experts Apologise for Their Brexit Predictions?', UnHerd, 19 April 2021 <https://unherd.com/newsroom/when-will-the-experts-apologise-for-their-brexit-predictions/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
343 See Bloom and others, *The Economic Impact of Brexit*, for an explanation of the five approaches.
344 Bloom and others, *The Economic Impact of Brexit*, p. 11.

Indeed, NBER's microanalysis might seem to demonstrate that Brexit has had a negative effect on the UK economy even if we were to accept the arguments of the detractors of synthetic control analysis, described in Box 3.3 above. According to the microanalysis, "firms with a higher level of pre-referendum exposure to the EU … experienced higher investment growth in the pre-referendum period. The size of this difference is large … a firm with prior EU exposure of 0.1 (the mean value) rather than zero would have had, on average, 0.9% faster investment growth per year before the referendum. This was likely because more EU exposed firms tend to be more globalized and trading, and so typically faster growing. But after 2016, investment growth was lower for more EU exposed firms …. prior EU exposure of 0.1 rather than zero would be associated with about 0.6% lower annual growth of investment."[345] All this means that the effects of Brexit, when isolated, have indeed been negative for British business, at least in the 2016 to 2025 period. Adjusted for the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, said analysis would suggest that the UK's GDP was 6% lower at the end of 2025 than it would have been were it not for Brexit, as aforementioned.

But, according to Jessop, this analysis too fails to adequately adjust for all the other events which may have influenced EU-exposed businesses between 2016 and 2025 besides Brexit. In Jessop's words, "divergences in the performance of individual firms depending on their exposure to the EU may also be picking up the relative weakness of major European economies over this period (especially Germany), or other factors such as the impact of the UK's relatively high energy costs on the competitiveness of goods which are mainly exported to the EU."[346]

What is more, the NBER analysis notes that "exports and imports to the EU only fell once the new [trade agreement between the UK and

345 Bloom and others, *The Economic Impact of Brexit*, pp. 20–21.
346 Julian Jessop, 'Three Reasons Why You Should Never Trust a "Doppelgänger"', Julian Jessop's Substack, May 2026 <https://julianhjessop.substack.com/p/three-reasons-why-you-should-never> [accessed 22 November 2026].

the EU] came into effect in 2021, with no significant impact before that. Lower trade itself is therefore unlikely to have been a significant contributor to lower productivity before 2021."[347] This suggests that the counterfactual decline in UK GDP per capita due to Brexit has been at least partially caused by an increase in business uncertainty and transition costs, rather than just a decline in trade. Those are costs which have already been internalised by the UK and would not be reversed were the UK to re-enter the EU; conversely, it would have to bear them again.

That said, there have been some opportunities arising from Brexit on which the UK has been able to capitalise. However, the gains have so far proven limited.

First, no longer being bound by the EU's common external tariff, the UK has been able to enter its own free trade agreements for the first time since 1973, and agreements have been signed with, among others, Australia and New Zealand. Similarly, in 2026, the UK gained full access to the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), becoming the first non-Indo-Pacific power to do so.[348]

However, the gains from these new agreements have been somewhat limited, not helped by the fact that the UK's relatively limited market size — 69.5 million inhabitants — means that it lacks the same economic leverage as much larger blocs, like the 452-million-strong EU.[349] For example, the estimated value of the Australia and New Zealand free trade agreements, which both came into force in 2023, was just 0.1% of UK GDP.[350] Similarly, as per "the UK government's own projections, the estimated long-run increase in its GDP from joining CPTPP

347 Bloom and others, *The Economic Impact of Brexit*, p. 21.
348 Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade, 'UK Secures Full Access to £13 Trillion CPTPP Trading Bloc', 1 September 2026 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-secures-full-access-to-13-trillion-cptpp-trading-bloc> [accessed 27 September 2026].
349 Alex Stojanovic, 'Will the UK Benefit from an Independent Trade Policy?', Institute for Government, 3 April 2019 <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/article/comment/will-uk-benefit-independent-trade-policy> [accessed 27 September 2026].
350 James Kane, 'The UK's New Free Trade Agreements Mark a Beginning and an End for UK Trade Policy', Institute for Government, 1 June 2023 <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/comment/free-trade-agreements-trade-policy> [accessed 27 September 2026].

is 0.08 per cent."[351] In sum, according to the Resolution Foundation, the combined impact of having to forgo all trade agreements signed by the UK since Brexit in order to rejoin the EU would be a mere 0.7% hit to Britain's GDP.[352]

When it comes to larger trade partners, Brexiteers often suggest that the UK should benefit from pivoting towards the US rather than Europe. However, since Brexit, "the UK has, in practice, become less, rather than more, exposed to US trade. The UK experienced a sharp fall in its share of total US goods imports, which fell by 25 per cent (from 2.9 per cent in 2019 to 2.1 per cent in 2024)."[353]

Negotiating more substantial trade deals will likely prove difficult. Even before the US's protectionist turn under the second Trump Administration,[354] and despite a free trade agreement with the United States being a high priority for Boris Johnson,[355] significant roadblocks, such as Britain's reluctance to open up parts of its health system to American firms, made negotiating one a challenge.[356]

Other theoretical benefits of Brexit exist, but there seems to be little appetite among British voters for them. As former Foreign Office Special Adviser Ben Judah noted, were the UK to "push down taxes by curtailing public services and slashing regulation to attract global firms," in line with the 'Singapore-on-Thames' vision of Brexit, then "a higher-growth Brexit is possible … [but] flexible markets and more fossil fuels are incompatible with [the recent] Employment Rights Act and [the Government's] clean power push. That leaves Rejoin as the

351 Marianne Schneider-Petsinger, 'Real Value for the UK in Joining CPTPP Is Strategic', Chatham House, 31 March 2023 <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/03/real-value-uk-joining-cptpp-strategic> [accessed 27 September 2026].
352 Elliott Christensen and others, *Mountain Climbing* (London: Resolution Foundation, 2026), p. 56 <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2026/01/Mountain-climbing.pdf> [accessed 21 November 2026].
353 Christensen and others, *Mountain Climbing*, p. 54.
354 Will Prescott, 'Trump's Tariff Plan Has Been Tried Before. It Failed', *Spectator*, 2 April 2025 <https://spectator.com/article/trumps-tariff-plan-has-been-tried-before-it-failed/> [accessed 7 October 2026].
355 Heather Stewart, 'Britain's Hopes of Early Post-Brexit Trade Deal with US Appear Dashed', *Guardian*, 21 September 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/sep/21/britains-hopes-of-early-post-brexit-trade-deal-with-us-appear-dashed> [accessed 7 October 2026].
356 Faisal Islam, 'Brexit: The UK's Window of Opportunity to Do a US Trade Deal', BBC News, 2 March 2020 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-51702860> [accessed 7 October 2026].

only source of a significant growth uplift."[357] Even less contentious reforms, such as scrapping EU-era nutrient neutrality laws, have proven difficult.[358] On the contrary, 62% of Brits actively want the UK to follow the same rules on food and drink as the EU, for example, and only 23% are opposed.[359]

In sum, analyses vary. A report by the EU Brexit Task Force summarised 17 different economic analyses of the potential impact of a no-deal Brexit — and therefore the most radical departure from the EU of all the potential forms of the UK's post-Brexit relations with the EU — on the UK economy: their estimates for the impact of a no-deal Brexit on the UK's GDP ranged from negative 1.7% to negative 9.9%.[360] Since that study came out, the UK think tank Resolution Foundation has produced similarly wide-ranging estimates, with the GDP per capita cost of Brexit estimated by them to lie between 4.3 and 10.4%.[361]

Given the wide range of estimates of the economic costs of Brexit and the levels of disagreement among economists regarding them, it is not difficult to see why, for a Brexit proponent, the economic costs of Brexit may seem negligible at worst, and a price worth paying at best — though it is true that no reputable British economist has argued that the impact of Brexit on the UK economy has definitely been a net positive, often blaming this on the UK Government's poor handling of Brexit.[362]

Conversely, the EU has not been hurt to the same degree by Brexit as the UK. The flows of goods from the EU into the UK have largely continued, but in reduced volumes. The reason for this is that, while

357 Ben Judah, 'Labour Has One Path to Election Victory: Rejoining the EU', *The Times*, 9 May 2026 <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/politics/article/keir-starmer-eu-britain-labour-ccq0qv9bc> [accessed 4 October 2026].
358 Megan Kenyon, 'Murky Waters: What Comes Next for Nutrient Neutrality?', *New Statesman*, 5 September 2023 <https://www.newstatesman.com/spotlight/sustainability/2023/09/murky-waters-nutrient-neutrality-pollution-regulations> [accessed 4 October 2026].
359 'Majority Want Closer EU Ties on Food, Defence and Youth Mobility', Best for Britain, 4 February 2026 <https://bestforbritain.org/majority_want_closer_eu_ties_on_food_defence_and_youth_mobility/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
360 Brexit Task Force, *A Review of Economic Analyses on the Potential Impact of Brexit*, p. 20.
361 Christensen and others, *Mountain Climbing*, p. 53.
362 See, for example, David Frost, 'Nobody Is Confronting the Great Remainer Lie about Brexit', *Telegraph*, 21 June 2024 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/06/21/britain-should-be-proud-of-brexit/> [accessed 22 November 2026].

Britain has imposed relatively few regulatory restrictions on post-Brexit imports from the EU, UK exports are now subject to the full set of standard EU customs and regulatory controls, making low-margin exports unprofitable. In particular, the escalation in those barriers caused a 3% increase in food prices per year in the UK between 2020 and 2021, more heavily impacting poorer households, for whom food expenditure is a larger proportion of their total incomes.[363]

Table 3.1. Summary of different estimates of the medium-to-long-term economic impact of Brexit on the UK's GDP / GDP per capita / welfare

Source	Lower bound	Upper bound
NBER	-4%	-11%
EU Brexit Task Force	-1.7%	-9.9%
Resolution Foundation	-4.3%	-10.4%
Total range	**-1.7%**	**-11%**

Source: Bloom and others, The Economic Impact of Brexit; Brexit Task Force, A Review of Economic Analyses on the Potential Impact of Brexit; Christensen and others, Mountain Climbing.

Indeed, the aforementioned report by the EU Brexit Task Force also summarised eight different economic analyses of the potential impact of a no-deal Brexit on the EU's GDP, and its estimates ranged from -0.3% to -1.5%.[364] While those estimates are expectedly lower than those of the impact of Brexit on the UK's GDP, note that the upper bound of this estimate is only 0.2 percentage points away from the lower bound of the estimate of the impact of Brexit on the UK's GDP in Table 3.1.

363 Oręziak, 'Lessons That Poland Can Learn from Brexit', p. 74.
364 Brexit Task Force, *A Review of Economic Analyses on the Potential Impact of Brexit*, p. 20.

Overall, while Brexit has created some economic opportunities for the UK, these have not to date outweighed the economic costs, and show few signs of doing so in the near future. Even the proponents of Brexit do not attempt to claim that Brexit has been of net economic benefit to the UK, but limit themselves to denying that it has economically hurt the UK. With that said, the economic impact of Brexit has been unclear enough that it is difficult to use the supposed effects of Brexit on the UK economy as a pro-EU trump card.

Impact of Brexit on immigration into the UK

Arguably one of the greatest broken promises of Brexit concerns immigration. While, as promised by the pro-Brexit side during the 2016 referendum campaign, free movement with the EU ended following the conclusion of the post-Brexit transition period on 31 December 2020,[365] the post-Brexit migration system comprehensively failed to deliver the lower levels of net immigration which the pro-'Leave' campaign had promised in 2016.

On one level, the UK's post-Brexit immigration system delivered on the promise that, for the first time in decades, British governments would gain full control over who came into the country and under what conditions.[366] EU citizens — save those from Ireland, who were covered by the aforementioned open border agreement with the UK, as well as those who had arrived before Brexit and were covered by transitional arrangements — lost the automatic right to live in the UK, and with it access to UK benefits and the ability to study at British universities at local, generally much lower, fees.[367] Similarly, British cit-

365 Home Office, 'Immigration Act Receives Royal Assent: Free Movement to End on 31 December 2020', 11 November 2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/immigration-act-receives-royal-assent-free-movement-to-end-on-31-december-2020> [accessed 27 September 2026].
366 Home Office, 'Immigration Act Receives Royal Assent'.
367 Madeleine Gower and others, 'After Brexit: Visiting, Working and Living in the EU', House of Commons Library, 17 July 2026 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9157/> [accessed 6 October 2026].

izens lost those same rights in respect of all EU member states except for Ireland.[368]

In place of free movement, the UK's so-called "points-based immigration system" applied to all migrants, regardless of nationality, with the promise of "high-skilled workers" to create a "high wage, high-skill, high productivity economy".[369] Only skilled migrants with a job offer and who met the new salary thresholds, typically £25,600 per year (19% below the UK median salary at the time of Brexit of £31,461 a year)[370] would be entitled to receive dedicated 'Skilled Worker' visas.[371] Around the same time, to bolster the competitiveness of British universities in the international student market, foreign students who had completed a Bachelor's or Master's degree in the UK would be eligible for a revived two-year post-study work visa — that visa's previous incarnation had been scrapped in 2012.[372]

Unfortunately, three main design flaws meant the system failed to work as intended.[373] First, the relaxation of post-study visa rules encouraged a growing number of international students to bring family members with them — the number of such dependants increased more than eightfold between 2019 and 2022, hitting 136,000.[374] Second, the lowering of the salary threshold for non-EU skilled workers similarly led to more Skilled Worker visas being issued to them — from 108,000 in 2019 to 204,100 in 2022.[375] Third, and most consequentially, a poorly designed Care Worker visa was introduced which effectively

368 Gower and others, 'After Brexit'.
369 Home Office, 'The UK's Points-Based Immigration System: Policy Statement (Accessible Version)', 19 February 2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uks-points-based-immigration-system-policy-statement/the-uks-points-based-immigration-system-policy-statement> [accessed 6 October 2026].
370 Office for National Statistics, 'Employee Earnings in the UK: 2020', 2020 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/2020> [accessed 22 November 2026].
371 Home Office, 'The UK's Points-Based Immigration System'.
372 Kingsley Napley, 'At Last: The Graduate Visa Is Finally Here!', 5 March 2021 <https://www.kingsleynapley.co.uk/our-insights/press-releases/at-last-the-graduate-visa-is-finally-here/> [accessed 6 October 2026].
373 Madeleine Sumption, 'On Immigration', in Seldon, *The Brexit Effect*, pp. 398–414.
374 Patrick Jack, 'UK Student Visas: Government Cracks Down on Dependants', *Times Higher Education*, 23 May 2023 <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/uk-student-visas-government-cracks-down-dependants> [accessed 6 October 2026].
375 Georgina Sturge, 'How Has Immigration Changed under the UK's New "Points Based" System?', House of Commons Library, 27 September 2022 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-11254/> [accessed 6 October 2026].

allowed the care sector to import any worker from abroad, so long as they had a rudimentary understanding of English.[376] As well as problems relating to the exploitation of low-paid care workers,[377] the number of workers imported was huge, with some 350,000 visas issued to care workers and their dependants in 2023 alone.[378]

Combined with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic — which saw several years' worth of students arrive in the UK after border restrictions were eased post-pandemic — and one-off humanitarian visa programmes for Hong Kong residents and Ukrainian nationals,[379] annual net migration hit a record 906,000 in the year ending June 2023,[380] over 1% of the UK population at the time. While a succession of crackdowns followed — in 2024, the Conservatives banned most international students from bringing dependants and raised the typical Skilled Worker visa salary threshold to £38,700,[381] while the much-maligned Care Worker visa was scrapped in 2025[382] — the damage had already been done.

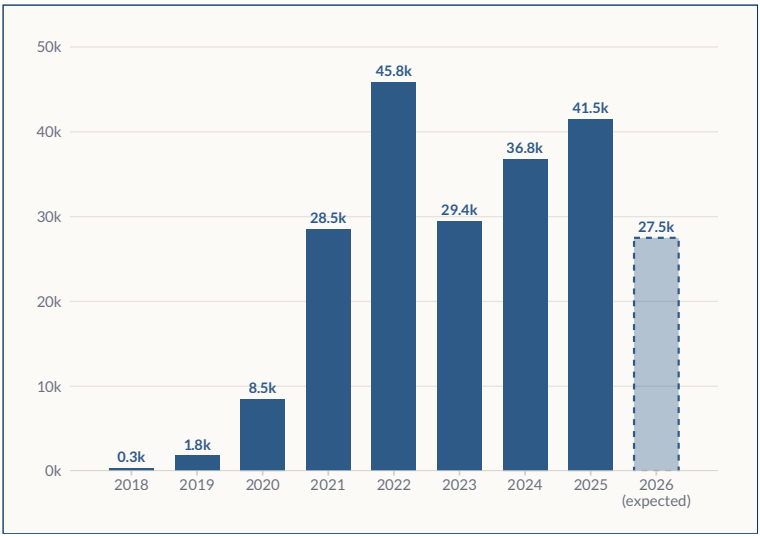
The UK's departure from the EU has also complicated the UK's ability to control boat crossings of irregular migrants across the English Channel. As an EU member state, the UK was a signatory to the Dublin regulation, according to which any EU member state was entitled to send back any asylum seekers to the first EU member state they entered,[383] as discussed earlier in section 2.3 of this report. While not the only factor — the arrivals of irregular migrants predated the UK's

376 Sumption, 'On Immigration', pp. 403–04.
377 Sumption, 'On Immigration', pp. 403–04.
378 'Social Care Sector Continues to Drive Demand for Overseas Workers as New Data Shows Public Sector Roles Dominate Work Visas', Migration Observatory, 29 February 2024 <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/press/social-care-sector-continues-to-drive-demand-for-overseas-workers-as-new-data-shows-public-sector-roles-dominate-work-visas/> [accessed 6 October 2026].
379 Sumption, 'On Immigration', pp. 403–04.
380 Migration Advisory Committee, 'Net Migration Report (Accessible)', 13 May 2025 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/migration-advisory-committee-report-on-net-migration/net-migration-report-accessible> [accessed 6 October 2026].
381 Home Office, 'Home Secretary Action Delivering Major Cut in Migration', 30 April 2024 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-action-delivering-major-cut-in-migration> [accessed 6 October 2026].
382 Home Office, 'Overseas Recruitment for Care Workers to End', 11 May 2025 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/overseas-recruitment-for-care-workers-to-end> [accessed 6 October 2026].
383 Sigona and Benson, 'The UK's Refugee "Invasion" Is a Brexit-Made Policy Failure'.

formal departure, with almost 2,000 such migrants arriving in 2019,[384] and the UK's reputation as an English-speaking nation makes it attractive to some irregular migrants regardless — it has made the problem worse.[385]

As shown in Chart 3.2 below, in 2021, 28,500 irregular migrants arrived in the UK, and in 2022 the number peaked at 45,800 such migrants a year. Prior to 2018, in no single year were there more than 100 such crossings recorded.[386]

Chart 3.2. Number of irregular migrants entering the UK each year, 2018 to 2026.



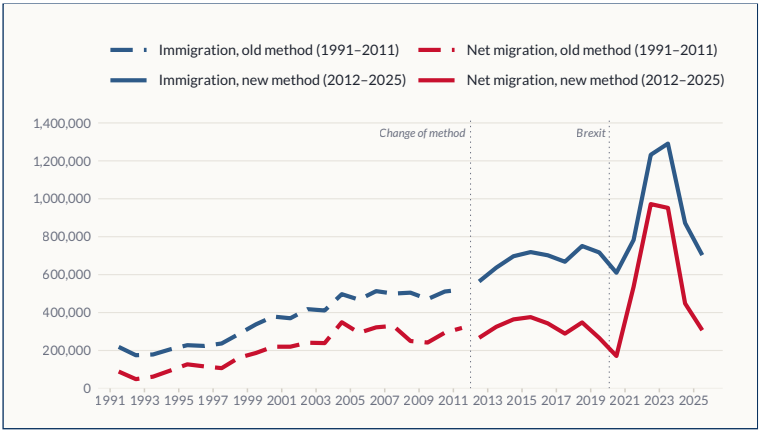
Source: 'Channel Crossing Tracker', Migration Watch UK <https://www.migrationwatchuk.org/channel-crossings-tracker/> [accessed 21 November 2026].

384 Esme Kirk-Wade, 'Statistics on Small Boat Channel Crossings', House of Commons Library, 2 September 2026 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10590/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
385 Tamara Kovacevic and Tom Edgington, 'Was Starmer Right to Link Brexit to a Rise in Small Boat Crossings?', BBC News, 27 September 2026 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c87yqp7eyqdo> [accessed 27 September 2026].
386 Alex Bish, 'A Decade of Small Boat Migrants – How Did It Begin?', BBC News, 12 July 2025 <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy0w9zw57glo> [accessed 22 November 2026].

The number has since slightly declined, to around 33,000 as of the year ending June 2026.[387] If trends for 2026 continue, around 27,500 irregular migrants are expected to make the Channel crossing through the course of 2026.[388]

Ultimately, while Brexit did give the UK the legal tools to reduce legal immigration, the failure to use those tools effectively, combined with the additional post-Brexit challenges of repatriating irregular migrant arrivals from EU member states, meant that Brexit was instead followed by a record increase in migration to the UK, as we can see in Chart 3.3 below: the opposite of what many of Brexit's proponents intended.

Chart 3.3. UK migration flows excluding British citizens, 1991 to 2025.



Source: 'Estimates of UK Net Migration, Immigration, and Emigration: 1991 to 2025', Migration Observatory, October 2026 <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/F2-Net-migration-1991-2025.html> [accessed 21 November 2026].
Note: Net migration refers to total immigration of non-UK citizens minus total emigration of non-UK citizens.
The Office for National Statistics (ONS), which produces the data visualised above, has changed its methodology from 2012 onwards. This is why data from 2012 onwards is discontinuous with pre-2012 data.

387 Kirk-Wade, 'Statistics on Small Boat Channel Crossings'.
388 'Channel Crossing Tracker', Migration Watch UK <https://www.migrationwatchuk.org/channel-crossings-tracker/> [accessed 21 November 2026].

3.3 Lessons for Poland

Lesson one: If Brexit was economically disadvantageous for the UK, Polexit would be economically disastrous for Poland

While synthetic control analysis suggests that Brexit was a slight net negative for the UK economy, with the UK's GDP per capita up to 11% lower than it would have been had the UK remained in the EU, the same method suggests that Polexit would be an economic disaster for Poland.

According to one 2019 synthetic control study, Polish GDP per capita in PPP[389] terms was between 20% and 50% higher by 2019 than it would have been had Poland never joined the EU.[390] Another study, from 2026, suggests that Polish GDP was 54% higher in 2025 than it would have been had Poland not joined the EU, even adjusting for inflation.[391] And perhaps most famously, a 2024 study from PIE suggested that Polish GDP per capita in PPP terms was 39.6% higher that year than it would have been had Poland never joined the EU, again after adjusting for inflation.[392] A later 2026 synthetic control study from PIE which looked at GDP adjusting only for inflation instead of through PPP similarly found that Polish GDP per capita was between 22 and 61% higher that year than it would have been had Poland never joined the EU.[393]

Indeed, according to the 2019 study, joining the EU also resulted in a 65% decrease in poverty or social exclusion risk in Poland between 2005 and 2022, from 45.3% to 15.9%.[394]

389 Purchasing power parity, which adjusts nominal GDP by the money's purchasing power in said country. For example, if the average basket of goods in country X cost $100, and in country Y it cost $50, but the two had identical nominal GDP, then after adjusting through PPP, country Y's GDP would be double that of country X's.
390 Kopiński and others, *The Big Bang Enlargement*, p. 10.
391 Bińkowski and Trzonkowski, *Od montowni do sterowni*, p. 28.
392 O'Kelly and others, 'The Brexit Trajectory', p. 8.
393 Szymon Chudziak and others, *Tygodnik Gospodarczy PIE*, 13/2026 (Warsaw: Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, 2 April 2026) <https://pie.net.pl/tygodnik-gospodarczy-13-2026-2-kwietnia-2026/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
394 Kopiński and others, *The Big Bang Enlargement*, p. 34.

What is more, the impact of Polexit would be more significant than that of Brexit even if Poland did not sever its ties with the EU as completely as the UK did. A 2026 Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers (ZPP)[395] study found that, even if Poland were to have joined the common market instead of becoming a full EU member in 2004, akin to the situation Norway finds itself in — an option lauded by Ziemkiewicz, among others[396] — its real GDP would still be 20% lower than it is currently.[397]

The reason for this is that Poland always has been and always will be very economically dependent on the rest of Europe, in a way the UK never was. In the words of the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM)[398] analyst Przemysław Biskup, "Poland still has closest [sic] ties to the same countries as before [EU] accession, and the intensity of contacts has increased. This also means that it is counterproductive to look for alternatives to EU membership, as in the foreseeable future the EU will be the only large, developed, and geographically close market for Poland."[399] The Polish think tank Sobieski Institute likewise notes that as "early as 2014 … more than 4 million jobs in Poland were tied to exports to the EU market, against slightly more than 2 million in the United Kingdom. As a share of total employment, this was more than 20% in Poland and less than 10% in the United Kingdom. More recent estimates for Poland indicate that this figure has already risen to more than 5 million."[400] ZPP find that, relative to the UK at the moment of Brexit, Poland exports over three times more as a proportion of its GDP to the EU; imports over twice as much as a proportion of GDP from the EU; its trade with the EU, as a percentage of GDP, is

395 *Związek Przedsiębiorców i Pracodawców.*
396 Bińkowski and Trzonkowski, *Od montowni do sterowni*, p. 29.
397 Bińkowski and Trzonkowski, *Od montowni do sterowni*, p. 32.
398 *Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych.*
399 Piotr Dzierżanowski, 'Poland and EU Economic Integration 2004–2024', in Biskup, *20 Years of Poland in the European Union*, p. 32.
400 Arkady Rzegocki and others, *A Shrinking Power – 10 after the Brexit Referendum: An Economic, Political and Social Assessment of the United Kingdom* (Warsaw: Instytut Sobieskiego, 2026), p. 28 <https://sobieski.org.pl/en/a-shrinking-power-10-after-the-brexit-referendum-an-economic-political-and-social-assessment-of-the-united-kingdom/> [accessed 22 November 2026].

worth 154% more; and that the EU constitutes 38% more of Poland's total trade.[401]

Therefore, while the economic consequences of Brexit for the UK have been, at best, a "non-event"[402] and, at worst, somewhat manageable, for Poland they have the potential to be disastrous. If anything, the lack of an economic disaster in the UK unambiguously caused by Brexit might embolden supporters of Polexit, who would wrongly expect a similarly manageable level of damage in Poland.

What is worse, sufficiently motivated supporters of Polexit will be able to dismiss the economic analyses which suggest that leaving the EU comes with economic disadvantages: as discussed in Box 3.3 earlier, any such analyses inevitably are exposed to critique, and the same criticisms which have been used to dismiss economic analyses which suggest that the UK has suffered from Brexit economically will be used to dismiss economic analyses which suggest that Poland would suffer economically from Polexit.

Lesson two: Concerns around sovereignty, not economics, are enough for a country to leave the EU

Relatedly, although the economic argument against Polexit is even stronger than the economic argument against Brexit ever was, no matter its strength, that argument alone will never be a sure guarantee against Polexit.

Survey evidence backs this up. The people who voted for Brexit rarely did so for economic reasons. Polling by Lord Ashcroft from 2016 shows that the pro-'Remain' side comprehensively won the argument on the economy. Job prospects, the cost of living, economic security, investment by international companies and, crucially, "the economy as a whole" were considered, on average, to turn out better if the UK remained in the EU than if it left. By far the strongest arguments for Brexit, on the other hand, were, in descending order, "ability to control

401 Bińkowski and Trzonkowski, *Od montowni do sterowni*, p. 34.
402 Freeman and Niemietz, *The Great Stagnation*, p. 187.

our own laws," "border controls" and "the immigration system."[403] In other words, while the pro-'Remain' side won the economy argument, they lost the sovereignty and immigration arguments, explained earlier in this chapter. As the Director of the Brussels Institute for Geopolitics, Luuk van Middelaar, identifies, feelings of national belonging trumped economic interests in the Brexit vote.[404]

But it is the sovereignty and the related immigration arguments which feature in both past UK and current Polish anti-European narratives. There is, therefore — at least in principle — no reason why they could not lead to the same result in Poland as they did in the UK.

This is not to mention that several other anti-European arguments are common in Poland which never were in the UK, such as Europe's unwillingness to oppose Russia. In that, if anything, anti-European narratives are only more developed in Poland than they were in the UK in the run-up to Brexit.

Lesson three: Populism and Euroscepticism go hand-in-hand

As explored in chapter two, it is the populist parties in Poland which have spearheaded Eurosceptic narratives in Poland. KKP in particular is a populist party par excellence, but Confederation and PiS likewise exhibit characteristics of populist parties.[405] And, as explored in this chapter, it was a populist party which provided the political fuel for the 2016 Brexit referendum: UKIP.

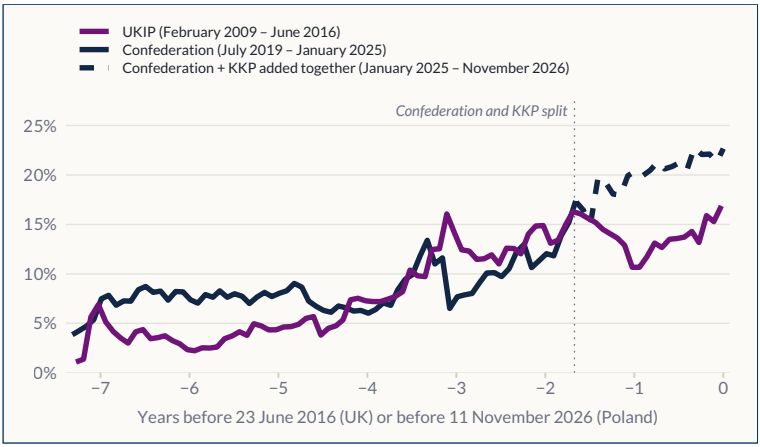
Indeed, populists will always be incentivised to be Eurosceptic. As we wrote in *Populist pushback*, a lack of trust in the European Parliament is the single most defining characteristic of voters for populist parties in Europe: more so than any particular views about economic or social policy, or struggling with the cost of living, emotional attach-

403 Lord Ashcroft, 'How the United Kingdom Voted on Thursday… and Why', Lord Ashcroft Polls, June 2016 <https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2016/06/how-the-united-kingdom-voted-and-why/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
404 Luuk van Middelaar, 'Seven Brexit Propositions: Towards a Union that Protects', in *Brexit and Beyond: Rethinking the Futures of Europe*, ed. by Benjamin Martill and Uta Staiger (London: UCL Press, 2018), p. 72 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt20krxf8.14> [accessed 21 November 2026].
405 See Staniszewski and Prescott, *Populist pushback*.

ment to one's country or the lack of trust in any national institution.[406] This follows naturally from the definition of populism: by rallying 'the people' against 'the elites,' populists are already inclined against large institutions controlled by the supposed elites. The larger and more distant the institutions, the more distant from 'the people' they seem, and inevitably, the supra-national EU, with its offices in Brussels, will be an obvious target.

This means that populist parties will always tend towards Eurosceptic positions. And Poland already sees a higher level of support for Eurosceptic, populist parties than the UK ever did in the run-up to Brexit: the combined polling share of KKP and Confederation in Poland has been consistently above 20% in all polls for several months now, something which UKIP had never consistently achieved, as can be seen in Chart 3.4 below, and continues to rise at the time of writing.

Chart 3.4. A comparison of the polling averages of strongly Eurosceptic parties in Poland in the seven years before November 2026 and in the UK in the seven years before the 2016 Brexit referendum.



Source: All Polish parliamentary and UK general election opinion polls aggregated on Wikipedia in the years 2009 to 2026.

406 Staniszewski and Prescott, *Populist pushback*.

Worth noting is also that support for UKIP collapsed after the Brexit referendum, as the party lost its raison d'être. At the 2017 general election, which happened under a year after the 2016 Brexit referendum, UKIP only won 1.8% of the vote. This should serve as a caution for KKP and Confederation.

Lesson four: The support of the Government is not needed in order to facilitate an exit from the EU

Polish pro-Europeans must not rest easy in the assumption that, as long as the likely parties of government are against Polexit, Polexit will not happen.

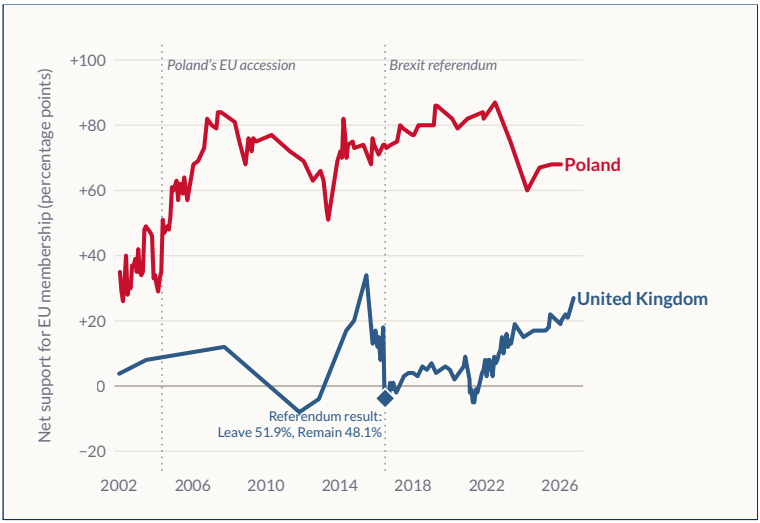
Traditionally, the role of parties of government in Poland has been played by KO and PiS, much as in the UK that role is played by the Conservatives and Labour. And although Labour was consistently anti-Brexit in the run-up to the 2016 Brexit referendum and most Conservative MPs likewise opposed Brexit, as can be seen in Chart 3.1 earlier, Brexit nevertheless happened. It was sufficient for there to exist an able minority of pro-Brexit politicians, largely outside of Government — again illustrated in Chart 3.1 — to secure a concession for a Brexit referendum from the otherwise pro-EU Cameron, in which they triumphed over both the Prime Minister and the Labour Opposition.

Worth highlighting is also that Brexit would not have happened when it did were it not for the political talent of Farage. While Farage alone would not have been able to lead Britain to Brexit were it not for the structural factors which enabled him, it remains that, without Farage, the campaign to make Brexit happen would have at least taken longer and, by then, those underlying structural factors may have changed: for example, the recent worldwide shift away from free markets and towards a more protectionist style of politics may have weakened the 'Singapore-on-Thames' argument; or the EU's shift towards a harder line on immigration, discussed in section 2.3, may have weakened the link between anti-immigration and pro-Brexit sentiments.

Brexit was possible since Farage was able to rally the public against the EU and competently work with the support he had, even despite not being in a party of government. In a similar fashion, the increasing support for anti-European parties in Poland can facilitate a change in public mood against the EU, as we had argued in Box 2.1 earlier.

With that said, as we can see in Chart 3.5 below, at least according to CBOS data, Polish opinion is still far more pro-EU than British public opinion ever was in the 14 years running up to Brexit or since.

Chart 3.5. Net support for EU membership in Poland and the United Kingdom, 2002 to 2026.



Source: Ipsos, YouGov and CBOS surveys between 2002 and 2026.

Despite this, Eurosceptic parties are also more consistently popular in Poland than UKIP ever was in the UK, as shown in Chart 3.4 earlier. If KKP and Confederation manage to convert their party-political support into support for Polexit, net support for EU membership in Poland could fall yet further. Note in Chart 3.5 how quickly support for EU membership collapsed in the UK between 2015 and the Brexit ref-

erendum under pressure from effective pro-Brexit campaigning groups.

In sum, Farage never had to become Prime Minister, or even enter government, in order to facilitate Brexit. He exerted enough political pressure on the governing Conservatives from outside government to make Cameron agree to a referendum, which ended in Brexit. Indeed, as mentioned earlier in section 2.2, Poland's main opposition party leader now says that if the EU cannot be reformed otherwise, Poland could open talks on leaving.[407] By teasing the remote prospect of Polexit, Kaczyński is copying Cameron's answer to UKIP in an attempt to win back voters from KKP and Confederation. The result could well also be a copy of what happened in the UK.

Lesson five: Exiting the EU itself solves nothing

Of the sources of Eurosceptic feeling in the UK in the run-up to Brexit discussed earlier in this chapter, none of them have disappeared. On the contrary, as discussed, many of them have worsened: the UK is, in practice, less sovereign; has likely suffered economically; and has only seen the annual number of immigrants arriving into the country increase since Brexit, as shown in Chart 3.3 earlier.

Some of this is due to Brexit itself, but some of this is also due to the Government failing to act in the aftermath of Brexit. For example, there was, in principle, no reason why the UK Government could not have tightened British borders after Brexit. Instead, as discussed in section 3.2, for political reasons the 2019-22 Johnson Government did the opposite — Johnson himself has blamed inflationary pressures.[408] Indeed, ironically, CEAS, the very regulation which was the source of Polish worries concerning the EU and migration as described in section 2.3 earlier, would have allowed the UK to return the irregular migrants who arrived in the UK after Brexit back to the first EU coun-

407 'Kaczyński mówił o negocjacjach w sprawie wyjścia Polski z UE'.
408 Tim Shipman, 'Boris Johnson: Where did Tories go wrong? Thinking they didn't need me', *The Times*, 12 October 2024 <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/politics/article/boris-johnson-interview-tim-shipman-wgg6kh66b> [accessed 22 November 2026].

try which they entered enroute.[409] And so, partly because the UK was no longer a part of CEAS, its irregular migration problems significantly worsened post-Brexit, as one can see in Chart 3.2 earlier.

An analogous story could play out with Poland and Polexit. Polexit would be no guarantee that problems to do with democracy, migration, environmental policy, cronyism and social policy would be addressed. On the contrary, Polexit could consume so much of Polish politicians' political capital that they would be left unable to legislate to address any of the above, only making the problems worse.

Indeed, debates in Poland about Polish democracy, social, environmental and migration policy, cronyism and Russia are not limited to the EU, but often also concern domestic Polish politics — KKP's plans to allow more Indians to immigrate to Poland, for example, have recently come under criticism from the rest of the Polish right[410] — but this critique would attract little attention were it to be drowned out in a sea of Polexit-related political speculation.

Lesson six: The EU is neither intrinsically left- nor right-coded

Rather than changing people's values so as to make them like the EU more, it is also possible for the way people perceive the EU to change without a change in their underlying values.

Whereas the EU used to be seen more negatively by the British left and more positively by the British right at the time of the 1975 referendum, this had changed by 2016: largely because the EU itself had changed, but also because interpretations of the same values within the UK have changed. Where the EU used to be seen as an abode of free trade, this changed as the EU introduced more and more regulation, but also as British free-marketeers began looking less to Europe and more to the outside world.

409 European Union Agency for Asylum, 'Further Reading about Dublin Procedure' <https://lsa.euaa.europa.eu/dublin-procedure/further-reading-about-dublin-procedure> [accessed 22 November 2026].
410 Agnieszka Kublik, 'Nacjonaliści coraz bardziej podzieleni. Teraz w sprawie Hindusów', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 5 October 2026 <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75968,33061479,nacjonalisci-coraz-bardziej-podzieleni-teraz-w-sprawie-hindusow.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].

In the same vein, pro-Europeans in Poland should not give up on entire political blocs because they see them as inevitably anti-European or, conversely, rest easy in the assurance that a bloc will always remain pro-European. Should migration, for example, worsen as a problem outside of the EU at the same time as the EU toughens its own borders, the anti-migration sentiments as a source of Euro-scepticism might disappear altogether.

Lesson seven: People do not become pro-EU when EU funds are spent on them

In the UK, the regions which received the most EU funding voted in favour of Brexit. A 2019 study from the London School of Economics (LSE) looked at the causal relationship between EU funding and Brexit support, and concluded that "EU money does not influence citizens' support for the EU."[411] The two UK regions which received the most EU funding per capita were Cornwall and West Wales: both had received more than €750 per person in EU funding up to the point of the 2016 referendum and, indeed, "were entitled to receive around 26% of the total amount of total EU development funds allocated to the UK" despite constituting only 4% of the UK population.[412]

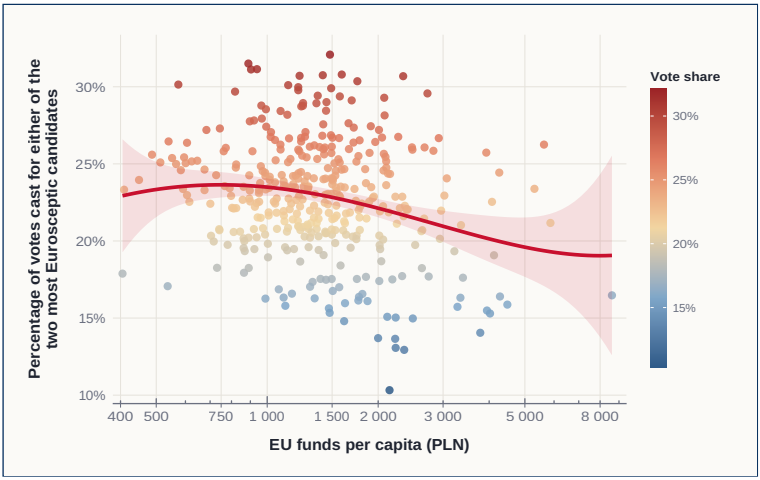
Cornwall voted 56.5% in favour of 'Leave,' and every county in West Wales, with the exception of Gwynedd and Ceredigion, likewise voted for 'Leave' — often by large margins, such as in the county of Blaenau Gwent, where 'Leave' won 62% of the vote.[413] The aforementioned LSE study even looked at whether there was any difference in support for 'Leave' and 'Remain' between similar voters in West and East Wales — where the former would have received much more in EU funding per person than the latter — and found "no evidence that Welsh wards located in the region receiving higher EU funds have voted comparat-

411 Riccardo Crescenzi, Marco Di Cataldo and Mara Giua, 'It's Not about the Money: EU Funds, Local Opportunities, and Euroscepticism', *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, 84 (2020) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0166046219304296> [accessed 22 November 2026].
412 Crescenzi, Di Cataldo and Giua, 'It's Not about the Money', p. 6.
413 'EU Referendum Results', BBC News, 2016 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results> [accessed 22 November 2026].

ively more for either 'Remain' or 'Leave,' conditioning on the distance from the border."[414]

The same is true for Poland. As can be seen in Chart 3.6 below, there is no strong correlation in Poland between Euroscepticism and the level of EU funds invested where one lives.

Chart 3.6. Relationship between EU funds spent per capita and percentage of votes cast for radical anti-European candidates in the 2025 presidential election in each Polish *powiat*.



Source: 'Mapa dotacji UE', 23 November 2026 <https://mapadotacji.gov.pl> [accessed 21 November 2026]; Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza, 'Wybory Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej', 23 September 2025 <https://prezydent2025.pkw.gov.pl/prezydent2025/pl/dane_w_arkuszach> [accessed 21 November 2026].

To measure this, we looked at the amount of EU funding per capita given to each Polish *powiat* and compared this with the percentage of voters in said *powiat* who voted in the first round of the 2025 Polish presidential election for either of the most Eurosceptic candidates: Mentzen or Braun. If EU funds positively influenced voters' perceptions of the EU, we would expect that, the more a *powiat* receives in EU funds, the less likely it is to support either Mentzen or Braun.

414 Crescenzi, Di Cataldo and Giua, 'It's Not about the Money', p. 15.

In fact, such a relationship hardly exists, as can be seen in Chart 3.6 above.[415]

In the chart, each dot represents one *powiat*. Its colouring reflects how much of the *powiat* voted for Mentzen or Braun, with blue reflecting a more pro-EU vote, red reflecting a more Eurosceptic vote and yellow representing being close to the average. The line is drawn using polynomial regression and shows how support for either Mentzen or Braun in the 2025 election (the first variable) changes together with the amount of EU funds spent per capita in an area (the second variable). The shaded area illustrates a 95% confidence interval for the relationship between the two variables.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) there — namely the proportion of the variation in the percentage of the vote cast in a *powiat* for either Mentzen or Braun that can be predicted from the amount of EU funds spent per capita in said *powiat* using our polynomial regression — is only 0.055, which suggests that the relationship between the two variables is nigh random: the closer R^2 is to 1, the more one variable explains the other, and the closer it is to 0, the less one variable explains the other.

What is more, in another analysis we attempted, where we adjusted for whether a *powiat* is urban or rural, R^2 decreased to only 0.003, meaning that EU funds per capita likely track whether a place is urban or rural, and it is that, rather than the EU funds themselves, which better explains whether a *powiat* is likely to vote for Mentzen or Braun. Likewise, Pearson correlation between the two variables then dropped from -0.22 (where a number closer to -1 means that less EU funding correlates with a higher combined vote share for Mentzen and Braun) to -0.004.

This does not mean that EU funds do not cause Polish people to be more pro-EU, but it does mean that they are not sufficient to make

415 We also tried a model where Braun was double-weighted relative to Mentzen, reflecting the fact he is more anti-European than Mentzen, but it produced almost identical results, so we kept the above for the sake of simplicity.

people definitely pro-EU, and that, if they do cause people to be more pro-EU, this effect is not strong enough so as to be overriding, at least at a local level. Combined with the results from the aforementioned LSE study, it would seem likely that the effect, if it exists, is so small as not to be noticeable in data. In the words of the study, we "interpret this finding as evidence that entitling citizens with more EU funds would not change their feelings towards Europe."[416]

This would seem to contradict the perception that Poles support the EU merely because of the amount of EU funding that Poland receives. And though seeing media coverage of the amount of EU funds spent in one's country or area may have a positive effect on one's feelings towards the EU, this is a different question altogether.

3.4 Conclusion

There are many parallels to be drawn between Poland and the UK when it comes to their relationship with the EU. Both are concerned about their sovereignty. Both are concerned about migration. Both have a mainstream right-of-centre party which, in an attempt to court the Eurosceptic populist right, pushes the country away from the EU.

But there are also differences. Support for Polexit is lower than support for Brexit ever was. At the same time, however, support for Eurosceptic parties in Poland is strong and growing, and more sources fuel Euroscepticism and anti-Europeanism in Poland than had been the case in the UK. Polexit would also be far more damaging for Poland than Brexit ever had the potential to be, yet unless pro-Europeans in Poland make a positive case for Europe, that disaster could well come to be.

The next chapter moves on to offer 11 recommendations for a stronger Poland in Europe, including both tactical and policy changes.

416 Crescenzi, Di Cataldo and Giua, 'It's Not about the Money', p. 15.



CHAPTER FOUR

Recommendations for a stronger Poland in Europe

◆ ◆ ◆

So far, this report has examined the nature of the anti-European narratives in Poland and the UK, as well as drawn lessons from the latter for the former.

This chapter now presents some recommendations to strengthen Poland's position in Europe and ultimately outline a positive vision of Poland in Europe.

4.1 Policy approach

So far, pro-Europeans in Poland have largely used two tactics in order to oppose Polish anti-Europeans: re-using pro-Europe arguments which worked in the noughties, when Poland first joined the EU; and scaremongering over the potential negative consequences of anti-Europeanism.

The first of those tactics no longer works, as Poles are already familiar with those arguments: namely, that the EU offers a rich export market for Poles, and that it represents a post-communist "return to Europe." In that, even if they have merit, they are no longer sufficient to fully address the counterarguments against Europe which have appeared since Poland's accession to the EU.[417] Indeed, many of the sources of anti-European sentiment in Poland, discussed in section 2.3

417 Biskup, 'Polish Society and European Integration in 2003–2024', p. 27.

of this report, have only manifested in the last few years, be that concerns over migration or environmental policy.

The second of those tactics does little to persuade Poles who are already anti-European. When presented with two alternatives, both of which have negative consequences, voters will often pick the one which is untested. And anti-Europeans already see the status quo as bad, so convincing them that anti-Europeanism would lead to a scenario which, too, is bad, is not enough to persuade them.[418] Indeed, attempts to do so in the UK, branded 'Project fear,' as discussed in section 3.1, have only been counterproductive.

Besides, talking down Poland outside of the EU is a difficult sell when the Eurosceptics at whom that message is targeted often base their political identity around a belief in the strength and uniqueness of Poland, as is indeed the case.[419]

At heart, both Brexit and the spectre of Polexit are ultimately the result of the EU representing one side in a binary division: in the words of the best diagnostician of Brexit, the author David Goodhart, that between the "Somewheres," who are rooted in their homes, and the "Anywheres," who do not associate their home with any one physical place.[420]

The Anywheres "dominate our culture and society. They tend to do well at school … then usually move from home to a residential university in their late teens and on to a career in the professions that might take them to [a big city] or even abroad for a year or two. Such people have portable 'achieved' identities, based on educational and career success which makes them generally comfortable and confident with new places and people."[421] They place "a high value on autonomy, mobility and novelty and a much lower value on group identity, tradition and national social contracts." They are "comfortable with immig-

418 Uta Staiger, 'The Heart of the Matter: Emotional Politics in the New Europe', in Martill and Staiger, *Brexit and Beyond*, p. 234 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt20krxf8.31> [accessed 21 November 2026].
419 Staiger, 'The Heart of the Matter', p. 234.
420 David Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics* (London: Hurst, 2017), p. 10.
421 Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere*, p. 10.

ration, European integration and the spread of human rights legislation." They often love to travel, meet different people and learn about different cultures, and while they would rarely express this out loud, often look down on the Somewheres.[422]

The Somewheres, on the other hand, "are more rooted and usually have 'ascribed' identities."[423] They "are more socially conservative and communitarian."[424] They feel uncomfortable about many aspects of cultural and economic change. To them, the local church, football club, factory or high street is not merely an amenity, but the centre of their identity. They often see the Anywheres as patronising and representatives of distant, unrelatable elites.[425]

The two reflect a value divide that cuts across age, income and education.[426]

In the UK, almost every Anywhere voted for 'Remain' in 2016, while Somewheres were divided — it was to them that 'Leave' was pitched, ultimately with success.[427] And though the 'Singapore-on-Thames' vision of Brexit, explored in the third chapter, was arguably compatible with being an Anywhere, in Poland that vision of Polexit is almost non-existent: concerns about the EU's excessive protectionism and regulation are not a major source of Polish anti-Europeanism, unlike they were in the UK, and instead Polish anti-Europeanism centres around concerns to do with Polish sovereignty, as explored in chapter two.

Indeed, the EU, in the eyes of most — including its proponents — represents the Anywheres, but it is the Somewheres with whom the political winds are blowing.

Unless the EU appeals to the Somewheres, it will not survive in Poland. Polish Somewheres must be persuaded that integration with Europe is to the benefit of their home. That it is in the interests of Pol-

422 Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere*, p. 10.
423 Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere*, p. 10.
424 Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere*, p. 11.
425 Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere*, p. 9.
426 Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere*, p. 14.
427 Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere*, p. 27.

ish sovereignty, and the interests of their local voivodeship, town, village, neighbourhood and church or football club — rather than having some other, less localised benefits, whether that be environmental, economic or social.

In the words of the Director of the Brussels Institute for Geopolitics, Luuk van Middelaar, the divide between those in favour of the EU and those against the EU is a "divide between, on the one hand, voters who generally appreciate the EU for its freedom, openness, and the opportunities it offers and, on the other hand, those who ultimately fear the disorder and disruptions that the EU creates in terms of migration, competition for jobs, or the loss of national sovereignty … between the 'mobile', often the entrepreneurs, the young, students, the well-off, or those who have nothing to lose when leaving their country, and the 'sedentary', who are fine staying home."[428] Indeed, the latter type — effectively, the Somewheres — is not merely "fine staying home," but they love their home, and they love it much more than Europe or the EU. In fact, they love it so much that they are unwilling to surrender any of its identity, traditions or self-determination in the name of the shared benefits of European integration. For European unity and the EU to survive, Europe and the EU must convince the Somewheres that Europe and the EU are in the interests of their home and that their home is stronger in Europe — that their home's identity, traditions and self-determination are best protected by remaining in Europe.

This is not to say that Brexit and the threat of Polexit are merely narrative failures to portray Europe or the EU in a certain way. Changing the narrative around Europe in Poland will require meaningful and substantive policy change to come with it — otherwise, any narrative change will be effectively impossible, with anti-Europeans becoming eventually disenchanted at best, and able to dismiss said narrative by exposing its lack of underlying substance and inability to effect real change from the get-go at worst.

428 Van Middelaar, 'Seven Brexit Propositions'.

The only solution, then, is to offer a unified, cohesive — and therefore easy to explain and sell, as opposed to a series of tangentially related facts and arguments — vision, narrative and policy programme of a stronger, richer Poland in Europe in which Poland is an essential part of Europe and which is unlike the status quo, underlaid by real, substantive policy change to legitimise said change in narrative.

4.2 Policy tests

When formulating our recommendations, we applied four key principles that our recommendations seek to exemplify.

- **Fiscal and political realism.** There is no point recommending policies which can never come to be. This involves both fiscal realism — only recommending proposals which would not come at an excessive cost to a state's finances — and political realism — only recommending proposals for which there is some political appetite and which would not be so difficult to implement as to require a disproportionate amount of time and effort to be implemented.

  While there can be merit in making very ambitious recommendations in the hope that making the recommendation moves the political needle in their direction, the intention of our report is to make recommendations which could begin to be implemented almost immediately following our report's release.
- **Concreteness.** The recommendations of this report concern the subject-matter of the rest of this report. Therefore, while we could recommend proposals that are so extensive as to help with almost anything — say, aim for Poland's higher education sector to be one of the best in Europe — they would hardly be focused on the topic at hand. We will eschew such recommendations.

  We could also recommend proposals that are excessively vague — for example, to 'boost Poland's diplomatic corps' or to 'focus more

on EU politics.' Such recommendations leave open the difficult and interesting questions — how Poland's diplomatic corps ought to be boosted, or what focusing more on EU politics entails, for example. For our recommendations to be useful, we want them to propose something specific and non-trivial, and so we eschew vague recommendations.

- **Sovereignty.** All our recommendations seek to respect or increase Poland's ability to assert its identity and sovereignty as Poland. As such, when formulating them, we discriminated against any suggestions which would in any way decrease Poland's ability to self-determine, surrender Poland's decision-making ability to non-Poles or erase Poland's national distinctiveness.

  The aim of this test, besides the intrinsic merits of sovereignty, is to ensure that our recommendations do not drive the Poles who already have reservations about Europe further away from Europe.
- **Europeanness.** All our recommendations seek to bring Poland closer to Europe. As argued throughout this report, Poland stands to benefit massively from improving its standing within Europe and reaping more of the potential benefits of Poland being a European country. For Poland to further distance itself from Europe, conversely, would forgo said benefits. Indeed, the main purpose of this report is to learn from the UK to outline a positive vision of the future of Poland in Europe, and so all our recommendations seek to serve just that vision.

We also distinguish between tactical and policy recommendations. The former concern the way politicians and political operators should act aside from policy implementation; the latter concern strictly what policies a pro-European Polish government ought to look to implement.

4.3 Tactical recommendations

Recommendation one: Identify issues where moderate anti-Europeans will support deeper integration with the rest of Europe and build ad hoc policy coalitions around said issues.

While Eurorealists express opposition to some aspects of European integration, as the term would suggest, they are open to or even supportive of other aspects of it. Politically, therefore, the easiest way to bring Poland closer to Europe is to form broad coalitions for just those aspects.

Moderate anti-Europeans' willingness to bring Poland closer to Europe has been expressed multiple times. Besides PiS's declared willingness to build a "Europe of Nations" in the noughties, discussed in chapter two of this report, PiS had entertained pro-European sentiments on other occasions. For example, in 2018 the party set as its campaign slogan for elections to the European Parliament: "Poland — the heart of Europe." Since then, the most pro-European of PiS's politicians have generally joined Morawiecki's political formation, Growth Plus (R+),[429] which was formed in 2026, but PiS remains avowedly in favour of Poland's membership in the EU, even despite signalling increasing willingness to negotiate the conditions upon which Poland could leave the Union — in Kaczyński's own words, he is primarily interested in reforming the European Commission, not in leaving the EU altogether.[430]

As Natasza Styczyńska, Assistant Professor at the Jagiellonian University, has argued, "although the [Polish anti-Europeans] criticise the current state of affairs and argue for less political cooperation, they do express support for specific EU policies. They advocate for cooperation with the neighbours, for example Eastern Partnership, energy

429 *Rozwój Plus*.
430 Kacper Komaiszko, 'Kaczyński chce przebudowy UE. Wskazał kilka metod, w tym wyjście ze wspólnoty', *Rzeczpospolita*, 29 October 2026 <https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art45414251-kaczynski-chce-przebudowy-ue-wskazal-kilka-metod-w-tym-wyjscie-ze-wspolnoty> [accessed 22 November 2026].

union or the common defence and foreign policy."[431] Since Styczyńska wrote the above, Kaczyński has also expressed support for putting forward a new EU founding treaty, which would form the basis for a reformed EU, one more conducive to the political ambitions of the Law and Justice leader.[432]

To add to this, both Polish pro-Europeans and Eurorealists should be united in unequivocally supporting Polish interests, and therefore never vote against the interests of Poland in the name of party-political interests, as had been the case with six Polish MEPs in 2017, as discussed in section 2.3.

In general, then, pro-Europeans should identify where specific EU and European policies are supported by moderate Polish anti-Europeans, Eurosceptics and Eurorealists — in particular, PiS as well as R+ — and form ad hoc coalitions around said issues, across party lines. Indeed, as former Foreign Affairs Minister and R+ MP Szymon Szynkowski vel Sęk has opined, "Instead of merely criticising, we should be looking for allies — for which there is space … not just blocking subsequent proposals and bills, but also actively attempting to find solutions."[433]

Given that such coalitions would almost certainly command the majority in both Polish parliamentary chambers, as well as in public opinion polls, they would have unprecedented legitimacy, as far as Polish politics goes, to push their proposals through. This would also allow for them to be represented in Brussels and not just — as has been the case thus far for a lot of Polish European policy — merely in Warsaw.[434]

There is the risk that this would allow those remaining outside of the coalitions to position themselves as the 'true' representatives of the anti-establishment forces, and so win the anti-establishment vote.

431 Natasza Styczyńska, 'Contesting European Union from the "Heart of Europe": A Peculiar Case of Polish Populist Euroscepticism after 2015', *Political Studies Review* (2023), p. 668 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/14789299231218661> [accessed 21 November 2026].
432 Komaiszko, 'Kaczyński chce przebudowy UE'.
433 Szymczyk, 'Nawet bez ani jednej złotówki z unijnych funduszy'.
434 Szymczyk, 'Nawet bez ani jednej złotówki z unijnych funduszy'.

However, the authors of this report would discourage relying on anti-establishment sentiments as a long-term political strategy regardless, for reasons explained in our other reports.[435] To minimise this risk, those outside of the coalitions could be portrayed as prioritising party-political interests over the unambiguous interests of the country — the cross-party nature of the coalitions could be used as proof of just how obvious those interests are.

Indeed, some examples of cross-party co-operation in Polish politics have gone together with electoral success, such as Mentzen's willingness to speak to both Nawrocki and KO's Rafał Trzaskowski in the run-up to the second round of the 2025 Polish presidential election to ask them to endorse his list of political demands. Soon before, Mentzen won 14.8% of the vote in the first round of the election, the second-best result for the third-placed candidate in Polish presidential elections since 2005.

Worth noting is also that policy campaigning does not have to come with party-political campaigning. More and less pro-European parties might find it desirable to achieve the same policy goals, but this does not necessitate that they have to campaign publicly together on that basis. And policy campaigning on Polish integration with the rest of Europe ought to be more politically realistic than joint party-political campaigning on the same issue.

Recommendation two: Use the language of the sovereigntist right whenever possible when talking about Europe.

As shown earlier in this report, the issue of sovereignty is underlying nigh all sources of anti-European sentiment in Poland, much as it underlaid much of the support for Brexit in the UK in the run-up to the 2016 referendum. The sovereigntist right in Poland, however, currently owns the language of sovereignty and, furthermore, is moderately anti-European at best.

435 Staniszewski and Prescott, *Populist pushback;* Staniszewski and others, *The right road.*

To counter this, pro-Europeans ought to use the language of the sovereigntist right as much as possible. While this might bring further attention to the issue of sovereignty and so move the debate to the sovereigntists' 'home turf,' otherwise Polish pro-Europeans risk making the same mistake that the supporters of 'Remain' in the UK made before 2016 in respect to immigration, as discussed in section 3.1.

Campaigning around Europe and the EU should talk about the strength and prosperity of Europe and portray Poland as one of an elite band of self-selecting countries, each of which has remarkably rich ancestry and culture. It should talk about Europeans being stronger together and emphasise the historical strength of Europe. Campaigning material could even make direct historical references to European historical figures banding together with Polish characters: Copernicus could be portrayed chatting with Descartes and Thomas Aquinas; a Polish seventeenth-century hussar could be portrayed drinking together with a French soldier from the Napoleonic Wars and a German High Gothic knight; John Paul II could be shown giving a speech in the same video as Socrates and Emperor Justinian. The image of a centuries-long band of brothers should be cultivated in which Poland is an intrinsic and long-lasting member of a shared, European community, with the EU serving as a continuation of its centuries-old institutions: as discussed in section 2.3, the EU has a conservative, religious historical heritage. Polish voters should feel patriotic pangs not just when thinking of Casimir the Great or John Sobieski, but also — albeit, naturally, to a lesser extent — about Charlemagne or Isabella I, and not just when thinking of Frédéric Chopin and Adam Mickiewicz, but also of Franz Liszt and Lord Byron. Going to visit Versailles or St Peter's Basilica should inspire not just awe, but also patriotic pride. In other words, Europe should be presented as a home for Polish Somewheres.

This tactic would flip the Polish 'cronyism' critique of Europe, discussed in section 2.3, on its head: it would concede that Europe is an exclusive club of countries, but that Poland is a part of it just as much

as the countries of Western Europe, appealing to Polish sovereigntists' sense of national pride and exclusivity. In the words of the Polish sociologist Jan Grzymski, "Poland joining the EU completed an important aspect of Poland's [post-communist] transformation: at its start, it was often spoken and written of a 'return to Europe,' from which Poland has, in some way, been pushed out by communist rule."[436] This emotion ought to be resurrected in new form.

That Poland is not looked down on but rather belongs to the European community could be reinforced by quoting European news items which increasingly frequently talk up Poland: whether that be the German trend of "Polandmaxxing,"[437] or the slew of articles in the British press which praise the Polish economy,[438] politics,[439] culture[440] and safety.[441]

With that said, this tactic will struggle for legitimacy unless the attitudes of Western Europeans likewise reflect the perception that Poland is an intrinsic part of Europe. And while to some extent they already do,[442] this tactic must be coupled with a stronger Polish presence at important international political and diplomatic events and

436 Joanna Konieczna-Sałamatin, *Polska i Polacy w Unii Europejskiej* (Warsaw: Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego, 2024), p. 1 <https://www.batory.org.pl/publikacja/polska-i-polacy-w-unii-europejskiej/> [accessed 21 November 2026].
437 See, for example, Philipp Fritz, 'Sauber, sicher, wohlhabend – Warum Polen plötzlich so boomt', *Welt*, 4 September 2026 <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/plus6a6088f2a8dd005bc4b72e9f/sauber-sicher-wohlhabend-warum-polen-ploetzlich-so-boomt.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
438 Matthew Lynn, 'Why Does Starmer Think Britain Should Be Richer than Poland?', *Spectator*, 27 February 2023 <https://spectator.com/article/why-does-starmer-think-britain-should-be-richer-than-poland/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
439 Con Coughlin, 'Poland Is Now the True Leader of Free Europe', *Telegraph*, 28 April 2022 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/04/28/poland-now-true-leader-free-europe/> [accessed 22 November 2026]; Daniel Johnson, 'Poland Will Be Wealthier than Britain by 2030 – It's Time We Took Notice', *Telegraph*, 7 May 2023 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2023/05/07/poland-europe-superpower-communism-putin-military/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
440 Phoebe Cornish, 'Walkable European City with a "Spectacular" Square Is Perfect for Winter', *Express*, 18 October 2025 <https://www.express.co.uk/travel/europe/2122772/walkable-city-krakow-poland> [accessed 22 November 2026].
441 Liv Kelly, 'The Underrated European Country Named the Cheapest Destination for Solo Women Travellers', *Time Out*, 10 April 2025 <https://www.timeout.com/news/the-underrated-european-country-named-the-cheapest-destination-for-solo-women-travellers-041025> [accessed 22 November 2026].
442 Coughlin, 'Poland Is Now the True Leader of Free Europe'; Daniel Johnson, 'Europe's Future Is Looking Increasingly Polish', *Telegraph*, 21 August 2026 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2026/08/21/europe-future-looking-increasingly-polish/> [accessed 22 November 2026]; 'How Poland Can Keep Its Place at the Heart of Europe', *Economist*, 22 May 2025 <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2025/05/22/how-poland-can-keep-its-place-at-the-heart-of-europe> [accessed 22 November 2026].

conferences[443] and a properly designed strategy for the promotion of Poland abroad:[444] one that includes an emphasis on the role that Poland has played and plays in European history.

In practical terms, this tactic would also mean a push for a change in some institutional behaviours.

First, polling regarding Polish membership in the EU sometimes juxtaposes EU membership with sovereignty, or at least asks whether it has a negative impact on Polish sovereignty, with no option for respondents to answer that it has a positive impact on Polish sovereignty.[445] Instead, as a standard practice, polling framed in this way should include the option that the EU has a positive impact on Polish sovereignty.

This could start to be achieved by making the argument that this is indeed the case, as outlined in this report, and eventually commissioning polling which includes said option. If polling shows that this view is held at least by a sizeable minority, it would pressure all polling on said question to include the view that EU membership benefits Polish sovereignty as an option.

Second, in official state documents, too, the EU and other European institutions Poland is a member of ought not to be referred to in the third person, but instead in the first-person plural, clearly demarcating that Poland is an intrinsic member of a shared European community and contributing to a change in Polish public consciousness in that direction.

443 Mateusz Mielczarek, 'Czy Polska wie, że Europa widzi w niej lidera?', *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, 31 October 2026 <https://edgp.gazetaprawna.pl/opinie/artykuly/11338900,czy-polska-wie-ze-europa-widzi-w-niej-lidera.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
444 Cf. Magda Żugier, '520 mln zł na promocję Polski. „Czuję się podwójnie oszukany"', Money.pl, 25 August 2026 <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/520-mln-zl-na-promocje-polski-czuje-sie-podwojnie-oszukany-7322265440467392a.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
445 See, for example, Roguska, *Polacy o integracji europejskiej*.

Recommendation three: Emphasise Poland's existing decision-making achievements within the EU.

Also to negate the 'cronyism' critique of the EU, as well as to negate feelings of Poland as lacking decision-making power in the EU, whether that be where it comes to environmental, social, migration or other policy, pro-Europeans ought to portray Poland as a leading stakeholder in the EU and talk up Poland's achievements in getting its way in the EU.

There are multiple Polish achievements within the EU which could be lauded, but victories achieved under the PiS Government of 2015 to 2023, and especially under the 2017 to 2023 premiership of Morawiecki, are of particular importance. This is because achievements made by Eurorealists will be more appealing when attempting to sway anti-European and Eurosceptic voters. Focusing on them would demonstrate that moderate anti-Europeans' goals can be met without leaving the EU but are rather best achieved by working with the EU.

Some examples include the successful negotiation with the EU on the European Green Deal, discussed in section 2.3; the successful push for reform, together with Czechia, Hungary and Slovakia, of the EU's proposals for a permanent asylum seeker relocation mechanism between 2016 and 2020;[446] the successful push for a more punitive approach towards Russia following the 2022 Invasion of Ukraine;[447] and the design and introduction of the popular 'Clean Air' and 'My Electricity' programmes in 2018 and 2019 respectively, in line with the EU's own environmental policy of the time — of the 15.5 million

446 Poland led the push for the so-called 'elastic solidarity' mechanism, which has since become very politically popular also in the rest of Europe.

447 See, for example, 'Morawiecki o sankcjach i odejściu od rosyjskiego gazu. „Polska będzie niezależna jeszcze w tym roku"', Polsat News, 25 March 2022 <https://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2022-03-25/morawiecki-o-odejsciu-od-rosyjskiego-gazu-polska-bedzie-niezalezna-jeszcze-w-tym-roku/> [accessed 22 November 2026]; 'Skąd Orlen sprowadza ropę do Polski? Koncern pokazał dane', Money.pl, 3 December 2022 <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/skad-orlen-sprowadza-rope-do-polski-koncern-pokazal-dane-6840528441174592a.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].

households in Poland,[448] almost 700,000 had taken part in the former programme by September 2023,[449] and over 715,000 in the latter by the end of 2025.[450]

4.4 Policy recommendations

Recommendation four: Lead on a coalition of European countries to deepen the EU's common market.

It is in Poland's interests to deepen the EU common market and to pivot away from EU funds as the main benefit of Poland's membership of the EU. As the Polish economy continues to grow, Poland will receive less and less from EU funds,[451] the contributions to which are mostly based on a country's Gross National Income (GNI),[452] but will continue to benefit from the common market.

While the full economic impacts of Poland's membership of the EU are discussed in section 3.3, it is worth comparing here the relative impact of EU funds and membership of the common market on Polish economic growth.

EU funds resulted in the Polish economy being 5.3% larger in PPP terms than it otherwise would have been by 2026, including by providing 48% of the funding for motorway expansion and 25% of the funding for telecommunications expansion.[453] However, the impact of Poland's membership of the EU in general has been an economy between 20 and 54% larger in PPP terms than it otherwise would have been, as discussed in section 3.3. Consequently, we can infer that EU funds have

448 Adam Juszczak and others, *PIE Economic Weekly*, 24/2026 (Warsaw: Polish Economic Institute, 19 June 2026) <https://pie.net.pl/en/economic-weekly-24-2026-june-19-2026/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
449 Narodowy Fundusz Ochrony Środowiska i Gospodarki Wodnej, 'Pięciolecie programu Czyste Powietrze: beneficjenci oszczędzają na rachunkach' <https://www.gov.pl/web/nfosigw/pieciolecie-programu-czyste-powietrze-beneficjenci-oszczedzaja-na-rachunkach> [accessed 22 November 2026].
450 Piotr Pająk, 'Koniec naboru w Moim Prądzie. Przybyło niemal 700 MWh w domowych bateriach', Gramwzielone.pl, 15 September 2025 <https://www.gramwzielone.pl/energia-sloneczna/20332314/koniec-naboru-w-moim-pradzie-przybylo-niemal-700-mwh-w-domowych-bateriach> [accessed 22 November 2026].
451 Bińkowski and Trzonkowski, *Od montowni do sterowni*, p. 22.
452 'Explainer: How Does the EU Decide and Fund Its Long-Term Budget?', Reuters, 28 April 2026 <https://www.reuters.com/business/how-does-eu-decide-fund-its-long-term-budget-2026-04-28/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
453 Paweł Chorąży, 'The Impact of EU Cohesion Policy on Poland's Systemic Transformation', in Biskup, *20 Years of Poland in the European Union*, p. 37.

been responsible for only between about a fourth and a tenth of the total economic benefit Poland gets from EU membership, the rest being the result of deeper economic integration with the rest of the EU. Were the common market deepened, the economic argument in favour of the EU would be even stronger, and the EU funds argument would be weakened in relative terms.[454]

And there is plenty of scope for the European common market to go further. According to estimates by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), existing barriers within the EU common market are equivalent to an eye-watering 44% tariff on goods and 110% on services.[455]

The exact ways in which the EU common market could be deepened, as well as their effects, go beyond the topic of this report, and could be the subject of their own series of extensive reports. To flag merely some of the most important, they include: harmonising the regulation and certification of EU service providers so as to allow businesses from each EU country to provide their services in another without having to acquire separate certifications;[456] shared EU labelling and waste management rules on goods sold across the EU, to allow EU businesses to easily sell their goods in other EU countries and to avoid the need for exporting waste;[457] ensuring that 'EU Inc' legislation is not diluted;[458] the integration of EU energy markets to smooth out intermittency and ensure the security of supply;[459] or deepening EU-level regulatory sandboxes — a framework under which private initiatives can apply to test business models which are not covered by, or which even disobey, existing regulations, akin to, for example, Esto-

454 Dzierżanowski, 'Poland and EU Economic Integration 2004–2024', p. 32.
455 Philip Blenkinsop, 'EU to Propose Removing Business Barriers to Enhance Competitiveness amid US Tariffs', *Insurance Journal*, 21 May 2025 <https://amp.insurancejournal.com/news/international/2025/05/21/824643.htm> [accessed 22 November 2026].
456 See, for example, Blenkinsop, 'EU to Propose Removing Business Barriers'.
457 Philip Blenkinsop, 'Tariffs Could Be the Spur Europe's Single Market Needs', Reuters, 11 June 2025 <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/tariffs-could-be-spur-europes-single-market-needs-2025-06-11/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
458 Eleonora Vasques, '50 CEOs and Investors Urge Brussels Not to Dilute the EU Inc Law', Euronews, 11 September 2026 <https://www.euronews.com/2026/09/11/50-ceos-and-investors-urge-brussels-not-to-dilute-the-eu-inc-law> [accessed 22 November 2026].
459 Szymon Ananicz and others, *Nowy rozdział* (Warsaw: Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego, 2021), p. 90 <https://www.batory.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Nowy-rozdzial_Transformacja-UE-a-Polska.pdf> [accessed 21 November 2026].

nia's 'Accelerate Estonia' initiative[460] — to make sure they truly have the power to circumvent existing EU and willing member state regulations.[461]

Recommendation five: Lead on the creation of an *Intermarium* coalition within the EU.

The aim of this proposal is to counterbalance the EU's focus on the interests and perspectives of Western Europe. While it is understandable that, since the largest countries of the EU are in Western Europe, the interests, perspectives and language of Western Europe are the primary focus of the EU, this creates a feeling of neglect and destroys the legitimacy of the EU in the rest of Europe — including in Poland, as discussed in section 2.3. In effect, the citizens of EU countries outside of Western Europe do not feel like the citizens of sovereign entities, but rather as the citizens of minor powers forced to accept the dictates and culture of larger, richer, historically dominant Western European states.

Intermarium — a coalition of states spanning Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Croatia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovenia and even potentially Austria,[462] with strong interest also in the EU's eastern flank, namely Ukraine, Belarus, central Asia and, most of all, Russia — would itself constitute a form of European integration by bringing Poland closer to *Intermarium*'s other member states. Moreover, by leading on the creation of *Intermarium*, Poland and other member states could assert their own sovereignty within the EU as members of a powerful bloc, outstripping even France, hitherto the EU's second-largest economy, in GDP PPP terms.

460 Accelerate Estonia, 'About Us' <https://accelerate.ee/about-us/> [accessed 22 November 2026]; see also Anastasia Bektimirova, 'Three Big Ideas #40', Entrepreneurs Network, 30 July 2025 <https://www.tenentrepreneurs.org/blog/3-big-ideas-40> [accessed 22 November 2026]; Leo Ringer, 'Europe is still the best place for tech. Its regulation is its best asset', *Centre Write*, 14 September 2026 <https://centrewrite.brightblue.org.uk/europe-is-still-the-best-place-for-tech-its-regulation-is-its-best-asset/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
461 Silvie Rohr, 'The 28th Regime: Make It a Sandbox, Not Another Paper Form', Verfassungsblog, 29 October 2025 <https://verfassungsblog.de/28th-regime_company-law/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
462 Szymczyk, 'Nawet bez ani jednej złotówki z unijnych funduszy'.

The bloc could seek to reach joint decisions such that every member state's interests would be well-represented and its voice heard, especially given that the countries comprising *Intermarium* have many common interests which are not shared with the rest of the EU: not least economic convergence with the rest of the EU which, generally, significantly outstrips the countries of *Intermarium* in GDP per capita terms. Nevertheless, Poland, as by far the bloc's largest member — both in terms of GDP and population size — would be the most natural fit for the bloc's leader, giving it a newly prominent position within the EU's power structures.[463]

Worth flagging is also that *Intermarium* is a popular initiative among some Eurorealists, including the former President Andrzej Duda,[464] and so should command broad-spanning support if also embraced by pro-Europeans.

Recommendation six: Lead on the creation of an anti-foreign interference unit within the EU.

Russian influence as a source of anti-Europeanism in Poland could be addressed in a way which not only confronts the source itself, but through its very means brings Poland closer to Europe: by leading on the creation of an EU anti-foreign interference unit.

Such a unit would confront foreign interference in domestic politics not just in Poland, but also in Germany, France, Italy and all the other countries of the EU where such a threat is real. Poland is the natural candidate to lead on such a unit, given both its unique strategic position as the largest EU member state neighbouring Russia and extensive Polish institutional expertise in Russian modes of operation.[465]

463 Ananicz and others, *Nowy rozdział*, p. 91.
464 See, for example, Jędrzej Bielecki, 'Polityka zagraniczna: Duda wraca do koncepcji Międzymorza', *Rzeczpospolita*, 18 August 2015 <https://www.rp.pl/kraj/art11513271-polityka-zagraniczna-duda-wraca-do-koncepcji-miedzymorza> [accessed 22 November 2026]; Marcin Kuśmierczyk, 'Trójmorze – czym jest koncepcja forsowana przez prezydenta Andrzeja Dudę?', Onet, 4 July 2017 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/trojmorze-czym-jest-koncepcja-forsowana-przez-prezydenta-andrzeja-dude/7mmjm4f> [accessed 22 November 2026].
465 Ananicz and others, *Nowy rozdział*, p. 91.

While there exists no polling on the popularity of this sort of unit in Poland operating specifically at the EU level, the 2026 Polish-German barometer identifies "working together to combat Russian disinformation" as the single most popular proposal for Polish-German co-operation among Poles from the ones tested in the barometer, with 69% of Poles considering it an "important" form of co-operation (and 55% considering it "very important"): even more than co-operation on energy security (66%) or military co-operation (65%).[466] This is despite Poles' unique dislike of Germany relative to other EU countries, discussed earlier in Box 2.2. An EU-level initiative of this sort should prove even more popular.

The details of how such a unit ought to operate and the scope and nature of its powers go beyond the scope of the report, and should be based on studies of the nature of and effective institutional responses to hybrid warfare and foreign political interference, but at this stage it is most important to emphasise that the unit must be politically neutral and independent.

If the unit were to be seen as a means for pro-Europeans, Western Europeans, Germans, the ruling Government or any other politicised entity to push its own agenda — for example, by hindering any criticism of the EU or blocking the activities of anti-Europeans even when there is limited evidence that those are sponsored by a foreign power — it would only prove counter-productive and fuel perceptions that the EU is crony and anti-democratic. Ideally, the unit should be staffed only by security, intelligence and military personnel, and if party-political involvement should prove inevitable, appointments should be made on the basis of a consensus between opposing parties.

Recommendation seven: Lead on the creation of an EU-level coalition of countries using shared regulatory assessments,

466 Łada-Konefał and Kucharczyk, 'Barometr Polska–Niemcy 2026'.

procurement and technical requirements for nuclear energy development.

Nuclear energy would, in the long term, allow its adopters to eliminate carbon emissions from energy generation as well as provide a plentiful and secure supply of cheap electricity. It also boasts impressive support among the Polish population: 92% of Poles support the development of more nuclear power plants in Poland.[467] In that, it avoids both the environmental and future-proofing concerns surrounding fossil fuels as well as the political and intermittency difficulties[468] linked to renewable energy sources, described in section 2.3. By positioning Poland as a leader in the promotion of nuclear energy, it would be possible to allay both Polish Eurosceptics' concerns surrounding EU environmental policy as well as EU policy concerns around Polish carbon emissions.

What is more, this can be at least in part done by integrating Poland more deeply with the rest of the EU. One of the chief barriers to the development of more nuclear energy generation, both in Poland and in many other countries of the EU, is the cost involved in the regulatory and technical oversight of such development as well as the procurement of the necessary capital and fuel. Currently, this is done in the EU largely on a country-by-country basis: each country has its own nuclear energy regulator with its own standards and technical rulebook, as well as different procurement routes — for example, while Czechia has favoured a competitive tendering process,[469] the Polish

467 'Ponad 90 proc. Polek i Polaków stawia na atom – wyniki sondażu dla resortu energii', ZielonaGospodarka.pl, 26 January 2026 <https://zielonagospodarka.pl/ponad-90-proc-polek-i-polakow-stawia-na-atom-wyniki-sondazu-dla-resortu-energii-22092> [accessed 22 November 2026].
468 See here for a discussion: 'Can We Afford to Be Afraid of Nuclear Power?', *Guardian*, 6 July 2025 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/jul/06/can-we-afford-to-be-afraid-of-nuclear-power> [accessed 22 November 2026].
469 'Czech Regional Court Decides against EDF Case', World Nuclear News, 25 June 2025 <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/articles/czech-regional-court-decides-against-edf> [accessed 22 November 2026].

Government appointed a third-party vendor directly,[470] while France has a state-owned vendor, EDF,[471] which it uses for all projects.

Instead, regulatory assessment, technical requirements and procurement should all be shared within the scope of a coalition of the willing. Procurement would benefit from economies of scale, while shared technical requirements and procurement would prevent the duplication of efforts, without various national agencies assessing the same aspect of a similar design over and over again in their respective countries. Instead, a shared agency would produce a single assessment for a design, which could then be replicated in each country which is a member of the coalition.

Following this philosophy — approving a design once, then allowing for it to be replicated, rather than reassessing it each time — has contributed to South Korea having some of the lowest nuclear energy infrastructure development costs in the world, almost three times lower than Poland's neighbour Slovakia and about four times lower than the United Kingdom, as of 2024.[472] Indeed, the nuclear power plant Hinkley Point C in the UK is set to cost double (£10 million per MW, or 50 million zł per MW; by comparison, nuclear energy infrastructure development in Poland currently costs only 18% less)[473] what a plant with the exact same reactor design in France had cost, partly due to the added costs of the UK regulators re-assessing the design which had already been assessed by the French regulators, and partly due to the stop-start nature of nuclear energy infrastructure develop-

470 Patrycja Wysocka and Joanna Syrek, 'Poland: Legal Situation of Subcontractors in the Construction of a Polish Nuclear Power Plant', Chambers and Partners, 16 October 2024 <https://chambers.com/articles/poland-legal-situation-of-subcontractors-in-the-construction-of-a-polish-nuclear-power-plant> [accessed 22 November 2026].
471 EDF, 'The Nuclear Fleet in France' <https://www.edf.fr/en/the-edf-group/producing-a-climate-friendly-energy/nuclear-energy/the-nuclear-fleet-in-france> [accessed 22 November 2026].
472 Tone Langengen and others, 'A New Nuclear Age', *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, 2 December 2024 <https://institute.global/insights/climate-and-energy/a-new-nuclear-age> [accessed 22 November 2026]; Sam Dumitriu, 'How to Get New Nuclear Built Faster' <https://www.samdumitriu.com/p/how-to-get-new-nuclear-built-faster> [accessed 22 November 2026].
473 Malwina Gadawa, 'Ile będzie kosztował polski atom? Są nowe wyliczenia', Money.pl, 26 August 2025 <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/ile-bedzie-kosztowal-polski-atom-sa-nowe-wyliczenia-7193319093906176a.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].

ment and procurement in the UK, as opposed to the more constant pipeline of projects that exists in France.[474]

Those same economies of scale could be captured by Poland, as well as all other members of the Poland-led coalition.

Recommendation eight: Subsidise Polish citizens to sit on European standardisation committees.

While research on this is scarce, finance is a known barrier to participation in European standardisation committees — the committees charged with standardising regulation across the EU, and so taking part in the design process for said regulation.[475]

Said committees come in three forms: European Committee for Standardization (CEN) committees; European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (CENELEC) committees; and European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI) committees.

Participating in each involves a financial cost. For CEN and CENELEC, each EU member state participating in a given committee sends a national delegation, and to participate in the delegation, a person or organisation needs to volunteer or be nominated.[476] For ETSI, an organisation needs to apply and pay a membership fee, which varies from €2,100 to €162,450 (mostly depending on revenue), to gain access to the committees.[477]

On top of this, there is an opportunity cost: time spent preparing for, working at and travelling to a standardisation committee meeting is time spent not doing work which would more directly contribute to meeting an organisation's running costs or just making a profit. While the work can bring prestige, some access to networking and some abil-

474 Sam Dumitriu, 'How Red Tape Holds Back Nuclear Power' <https://www.samdumitriu.com/p/how-red-tape-holds-back-nuclear-power> [accessed 22 November 2026].
475 European Trade Union Confederation, *Call for Tender: Access Conditions to National Mirror Committees, Version 2.1*, May 2021 <https://etuc.org/sites/default/files/page/file/2021-07/2021-05%20-%20call%20for%20tender%20-%20access%20conditions%20to%20national%20mirror%20committees%20-%20version%202.1.pdf> [accessed 22 November 2026].
476 CEN-CENELEC, 'Get Involved' <https://www.cencenelec.eu/get-involved/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
477 ETSI, 'Contribution Classes' <https://www.etsi.org/membership/contribution-classes/> [accessed 22 November 2026].

ity to move the needle on the EU's regulatory alignment, those benefits struggle to outstrip the opportunity cost of participating; in the case of ETSI, there is also a high non-opportunity cost.

To have more influence on EU regulation, and for EU regulation to better reflect the needs and wants of Polish businesses — including when it comes to environmental policy, a source of Euroscepticism in Poland as discussed in section 2.3, but not only — more Poles should be incentivised and enabled to attend European standardisation committee meetings. As such, the Government ought to compensate Polish citizens who sit on said committees for their time lost and travel costs.

Time lost could be compensated as 80% of a person's hourly or daily — in the case of committee meetings which span multiple days — earnings, while travel costs could be compensated in full up to a daily limit of 1,000 zł. The compensation could either be done directly or, if the Polish citizen in question is already being compensated by their organisation, could be paid to said organisation. The total cost of this programme, on the scale of the government budget, would be negligible.

Recommendation nine: Allow small- and micro-sized Polish enterprises to access export vouchers covering translation, legal advice and certification abroad for the first 10,000 zł of such costs related to foreign contracts in the EU.

Another major barrier stopping Polish businesses reaping in full the benefits of EU markets and so hindering further economic integration between the EU and Poland is the difficulty understanding unfamiliar markets. Especially for small businesses, the initial costs of expanding to a new market — and therefore acquiring the relevant expertise, legal advice, certification and so on — are very high relative to the business' profits, and the risks involved disproportionate. Indeed, although 67.5% of Polish businesses are small- or medium-sized, measured by GDP contribution, only 33.1% of Polish exports are conducted

by small- or medium-sized businesses,[478] with 77% of those destined for the EU.[479] Compliance costs for Polish small and medium businesses exporting to the EU average €8,000 per country per year.[480]

To cushion those initial costs and kick-start smaller Polish businesses' operations in the EU, the Polish Government should make available export vouchers covering translation, legal advice and certification abroad for a Polish small- or micro-sized business' first foreign contract in the EU. The voucher should be worth 10,000 zł — based on the approximate minimum costs of conducting due diligence analysis for a small firm by a legal firm before a large business transaction[481] — and could be used to reimburse the aforementioned costs only after a business signs its first EU export contract, but before two years have elapsed since the contract was signed. The voucher should also be available only for micro- and small-sized Polish enterprises as defined by the European Commission, namely those with fewer than 50 employees and with a yearly turnover of less than €10,000,000.[482]

Given that, between 2020 and 2024, the number of Polish small and micro businesses trading with the EU has grown by, on average, around 17,000 a year (with almost all this growth being driven by an increase in the number of firms exporting to the EU),[483] and that we expect this policy to increase this number, the total cost of this policy would be, at minimum, 170 million zł (€39.5 million) a year, under the assumption that every Polish firm trading with the EU incurs at least 10,000 zł in trading costs — the true minimum cost would likely be

478 Mariusz-Jan Radło and Jakub Piznal, *Export Barriers for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises* (Warsaw: Polityka Insight, 2022), pp. 9–10 <https://www.politykainsight.pl/_resource/multimedium/20307971> [accessed 22 November 2026].
479 *Poland: The Single Market – A Gateway to Economic Growth* (Copenhagen: Implement Consulting Group, 2024), pp. 14–15 <https://cms.implementconsultinggroup.com/media/uploads/articles/2022/A-reboot-of-the-single-market/2024_Poland_The-Single-Market-a-gateway-to-economic-growth.pdf> [accessed 22 November 2026].
480 *Poland: The Single Market*, p. 31.
481 Kancelaria Dejnowicz, 'Opinia prawna – kiedy warto ją zamówić i co powinna zawierać? (due diligence, ryzyka)', 4 April 2026 <https://dejnowicz.pl/opinia-prawna-kiedy-warto-ja-zamowic-i-co-powinna-zawierac/> [accessed 22 November 2026].
482 EUR-Lex, 'Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: Definition and Scope' <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/PL/legal-content/summary/micro-small-and-medium-sized-enterprises-definition-and-scope.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].
483 Eurostat, 'Trade by NACE Rev. 2 Activity and Enterprise Size Class (ext_tec01)' <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ext_tec01__custom_24082543/default/table> [accessed 22 November 2026].

lower — and the assumption that the policy does not improve the number of Polish firms trading with the EU.

On the contrary, if the policy were to be wildly successful and increased the number of Polish small and micro businesses trading with the EU by 100%, we would expect this cost to double to 340 million zł (€79 million) a year, again under the assumption that every Polish firm trading with the EU incurs at least 10,000 zł in trading costs.

Poland's current goods and services balance of payments with the rest of the EU was a positive €32.5 billion in 2025, and it has been positive every year since 2012.[484] This, combined with the fact that Polish small- and micro-sized businesses are almost six times as likely to be exporting to rather than importing from the EU,[485] means that the policy should contribute much more to Polish GDP than is spent on it: indeed, its cost may even be recouped through an increase in business tax receipts, though more data and more detailed econometric analysis would be needed to know that for certain.

Recommendation ten: Add an extra 30% of European stocks and shares to the tax-free allowance in OKI from 2027.

In 2027, Poland is set to adopt OKI:[486] an instrument that will allow Poles to save up to 100,000 zł's worth of stocks and shares tax-free, so long as the stocks and shares in question are either listed on the Polish stock exchange or form a part of a fund or index that is at least 70% composed of Polish stocks and shares.[487]

The introduction of OKI should make it easier for Poles to accumulate savings and avoid the 19% tax rate which is otherwise charged on dividends and gains made from selling stocks and shares. However, limiting the instrument to, at a minimum, 70% Polish stocks and

484 Eurostat, 'Balance of Payments by Country – Annual Data (BPM6) (bop_c6_a)' <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/BOP_C6_A__custom_24082105/default/table> [accessed 22 November 2026].
485 Eurostat, 'Trade by NACE Rev. 2 Activity and Enterprise Size Class'.
486 *Osobiste Konto Inwestycyjne.*
487 Maciej Rudke, 'Nowe rozwiązanie pozwoli ominąć podatek Belki. Największy polski bank pokazuje korzyści', Business Insider Polska, 15 October 2026 <https://businessinsider.com.pl/poradnik-finansowy/inwestowanie/osobiste-konto-inwestycyjne-juz-od-2027-roku-polacy-unikna-podatku-belki/gj3qh73> [accessed 22 November 2026].

shares means that returns for Polish investors will be more limited, and their savings more exposed, than would be the case if OKI allowed for more diversified investments. While there is an obvious benefit from more people investing in Polish stocks and shares, it would likewise be a benefit for Poles to accumulate more savings and produce higher returns on them, making them more financially secure and allowing their higher returns to translate into higher expenditures in the Polish economy.

Indeed, when a similar instrument was considered in the UK — the then-Chancellor of the Exchequer, Jeremy Hunt (2022-24), considered introducing a "British Individual Savings Account" in 2024 that would have functioned similarly to how OKI is set to function — the idea was criticised for being "mercantilist"[488] and for benefitting companies which might be listed in the UK but do not operate there, and vice versa, discriminating against companies which operate mostly in the UK but are not listed there.[489] Analogous criticisms can be applied to OKI.

There is, therefore, a case for allowing more diversification within OKI, at least in principle. The Government should look to allow a higher percentage of investments in OKI to come from outside of Poland, and specifically from Europe — a market with which Poland is already well-integrated, and so a market the growth of which would also benefit Poland. A by-effect of this would be more Poles who are literally more invested in Europe and European interests, hence facilitating deeper Polish-European integration.

The obvious criticism of this change would be that money invested in European stocks is money not invested in Polish stocks. However, this must be balanced against the above considerations pertaining to Poles' ability to save and produce maximum returns for later in life,

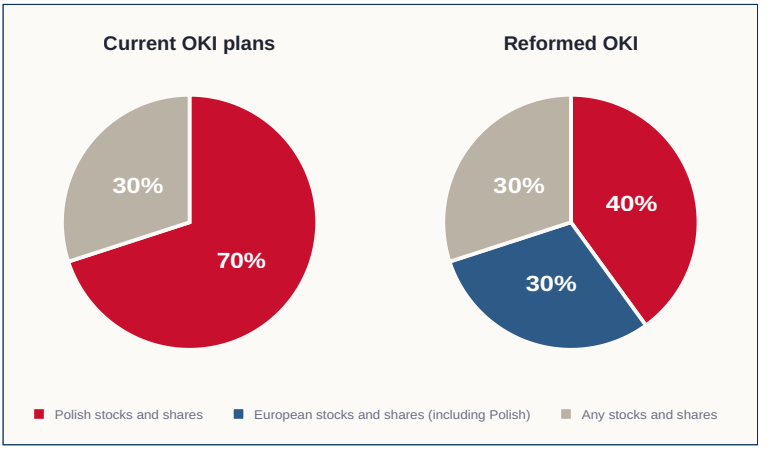
488 Maxwell Marlow, 'Say No to Neo-Mercantilism!', Adam Smith Institute, 1 March 2024 <https://www.adamsmith.org/blog/say-no-to-neo-mercantilism> [accessed 22 November 2026].
489 Dan Neidle, 'A British ISA Would Be a Handicap for British Savers and a Gift to Tax Lawyers', ConservativeHome, 4 March 2024 <https://conservativehome.com/2024/03/04/dan-neidle-a-british-isa-would-be-a-handicap-for-british-savers-and-a-gift-to-tax-lawyers/> [accessed 22 November 2026].

especially juxtaposed against Poland's impending demographic difficulties which might necessitate a reduction in the value of the state pension and Poles relying more on private savings later in life.

Furthermore, investing into European stocks does not preclude investing into Polish stocks: on the contrary, with OKI offering greater flexibility as to where to invest, it might prove that more people make use of the instrument, and so more money is invested into Polish stocks in total as a consequence.

So as not to make the instrument excessively complicated for Polish investors, OKI could be modified such that up to 30% more of the stocks and shares in an investor's portfolio could come from a European stock exchange and still qualify for OKI's tax break; and that shares in funds and indices that are at least 40% composed of Polish stocks and shares and at least 70% composed of European stocks and shares — including Polish — could also qualify for OKI's tax break: in other words, an extra 30% allowance would be created for European investments on top of the existing allowance for non-Polish investments, as visualised in Chart 4.1 below.

Chart 4.1. Comparison of current OKI plans and how OKI would look under recommendation ten.



Recommendation eleven: Offer top Polish students subsidies to study at top EU universities on the condition that they return to Poland for a minimum of five years after the completion of their studies.

The Polish higher education sector is one of the weakest in the EU. Despite Poland being the EU's sixth-largest economy, of the 53 universities in the EU which are in the top 200 of the THE World University Ranking, none are in Poland.[490] What is more, over a fifth of students at Polish universities have the literacy skills expected of ten-year-olds or worse, the highest such proportion in the OECD, and 15% have the numeracy skills expected of ten-year-olds or worse.[491]

While ideally the Polish Government should, in the longer term, aim to improve the Polish higher education sector, in the short term some of the improvements to Polish labour productivity and innovation which would otherwise have been realised by a better higher education sector could be realised by other EU universities.

The Polish Government should offer the best 0.5% of Polish *liceum*[492] graduates, ranked by their *matura*[493] results, scholarships covering both full course fees and maintenance, up to €20,000 a year, if they manage to secure a place for an undergraduate degree at a university which is in the top 100 of either the THE[494] or QS[495] world university rankings. This would be about 1,000 students a year.[496]

While course fees at European universities vary significantly, the maximum cost of this programme should not exceed €80 million

490 See 'World University Rankings', *Times Higher Education* <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/latest/world-ranking> [accessed 22 November 2026].
491 'Students Are Doing Worse than You Think', *Economist*, 25 June 2026 <https://www.economist.com/international/2026/06/25/students-are-doing-worse-than-you-think> [accessed 22 November 2026].
492 Upper secondary school with an academic focus.
493 The exams taken at the end of Poland's secondary education.
494 See 'World University Rankings'.
495 See QS, 'QS World University Rankings' <https://www.topuniversities.com/world-university-rankings> [accessed 22 November 2026].
496 Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 'Polska szkoła w liczbach: najnowsze dane GUS z okazji rozpoczęcia roku szkolnego' <https://new.stat.gov.pl/informacje-prasowe/polska-szkola-w-liczbach-najnowsze-dane-gus-z-okazji-rozpoczecia-roku-szkolnego> [accessed 22 November 2026]; we would expect the next cohort of *liceum* graduates to number around 220,000 pupils; however that number will fall in upcoming years due to the lower number of children in each subsequent Polish school cohort.

(around 345 million zł) a year, depending on the courses students choose: longer courses would prove more expensive, but most European undergraduate degrees are only three years long.

The scholarships could be offered in the form of an after-inflation 0% interest, government-backed loan which is completely written off if the student returns to Poland within a year of graduation and is continuously resident in Poland for a minimum of five years after their return. This would ensure that the programme does not inadvertently contribute to the emigration of top Polish talents away from Poland.

The positive economic effects of this programme are difficult to estimate precisely due to there being no data on the earnings of the graduates of elite foreign universities in Poland specifically, but a study of the earnings of graduates of elite versus less prestigious universities in the UK found that a degree from a "very top" university increases earnings by over 50% on average as compared to the "average degree."[497] Inferring from this, given that the average graduate in Poland would earn approximately 5.4 million zł over a 40-year working life,[498] we can expect each scholarship to lead to a 2.7 million zł benefit to the Polish economy if they were awarded to the average university student, as opposed to the top 0.5% of each cohort. Even under this assumption, this is at least a sixfold return on the government's investment, depending on the course fees, maintenances costs and the length of the university course the student undertakes. In truth, the real return would likely be much higher.

Care should be taken that this policy does not become excessively regressive, with students from families which can afford more and more expensive tuition being disproportionately awarded the scholar-

497 Jack Britton and Chris Belfield, 'Using Graduate Earnings to Assess Universities', Institute for Fiscal Studies, 11 June 2018 <https://ifs.org.uk/articles/using-graduate-earnings-assess-universities> [accessed 22 November 2026].
498 Estimate produced from Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 'Komunikat w sprawie przeciętnego wynagrodzenia w pierwszym kwartale 2026 r.', 2026 <https://stat.gov.pl/sygnalne/komunikaty-i-obwieszczenia/lista-komunikatow-i-obwieszczen/komunikat-w-sprawie-przecietnego-wynagrodzenia-w-pierwszym-kwartale-2026-r-,271,52.html> [accessed 22 November 2026]; OECD, 'Education at a Glance 2026: Poland', 2026 <https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/education-at-a-glance-2026_c0e523a9-en/poland_d5ee27fd-en.html> [accessed 22 November 2026].

ships. This could be achieved by either introducing the policy alongside a more comprehensive reform of the Polish educational system so as to ensure that pupils of equal abilities have equal chances of achieving a good *matura* result, or by means-testing the scholarship scheme through a taper rate reducing the value of the scholarship in proportion to the student's household income above a certain threshold; or both.

As a by-effect, the students, after finishing their studies, would return to Poland having a better understanding of the opportunities available when doing business in the rest of the EU and having established strong links with another part of Europe and other Europeans — much superseding any links which can be established during student exchange programmes such as Erasmus[499] — further facilitating Polish-European integration, especially if said students end up working in Polish media, politics or other opinion-shaping roles. It would serve to, again, flip the 'cronyism' critique of the EU on its head by involving Poles in networks of well-educated Europeans, and make Europe feel more at-home to those who participate in the scheme.

4.5 Conclusion

The suggestions in this chapter would go some way to bringing Poland closer to Europe while, at the same time, not provoking — and perhaps even appeasing — the concerns of Polish anti-Europeans. Of course, they do not go all the way. As hinted at in section 4.2, many more important changes could be made, but which go far beyond the scope of this report: further prioritising Polish economic growth, improving Poland's demographic situation, improving the Polish higher education sector, modernising the Polish military and so on.

499 See, for example, Ministry of Science and Higher Education, 'An Overview of the Erasmus Programme for the 20th Anniversary of Poland's EU Membership', 2024 <https://www.gov.pl/web/science/an-overview-of-the-erasmus-programme-for-the-20th-anniversary-of-polands-eu-membership> [accessed 22 November 2026].

In particular, defence is an important area where Poland could be brought much closer to Europe: 79% of Poles are in support of a "common security and defence policy among [EU] Member States," and only 18% are opposed.[500] And there is scope for Poland to be much more integrated into European defence procurement and manufacturing than it currently is: as of 2024, for example, the Polish Government was losing about €2.4 billion a year just in the opportunity cost of the missing economies of scale from joint EU-level defence procurement.[501] But we deliberately avoided the topic of defence, partly because social and economic, rather than defence policy, have the greater effect on people's sentiments towards Europe; and partly because the topic of defence integration is so deep and complex that we could not do it due justice without going on a very lengthy tangent.

Nonetheless, following our targeted interventions should go a long way to shoring up Poland's standing within Europe and facilitating a future where Poland is stronger and more sovereign than it has ever been since regaining independence.

500 European Commission, 'Standard Eurobarometer 105: Spring 2026', May 2026 <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3613> [accessed 22 November 2026].
501 Marco Centrone and Meenakshi Fernandes, *Improving the Quality of European Defence Spending*, EPRS Study, PE 762.855 (Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service, 2024), p. 19 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/762855/EPRS_STU%282024%29762855_EN.pdf> [accessed 22 November 2026].

Conclusion

There is much to learn from Brexit but, as with many things, people often draw the lessons they want to draw rather than the ones they ought to draw.

For Eurosceptics, Brexit demonstrates that you can leave the EU without any catastrophic consequences, and that the tide is turning against the EU. It shows that ordinary, hard-working, rooted people are against the EU and, if they unite, they will overcome opposition from the pro-EU establishment.

For enthusiasts of the EU, it is a case study in regret. It goes to show how leaving the EU fixes nothing, but instead only deepens your problems, and that after leaving, you will wish to have remained.

Both are right in some respects. The problems that the UK had before Brexit are still with the UK, some of them worse than before. And public opinion in the UK has become more pro-EU since Brexit. But Polish Europhiles pointing at the UK and gloating will do nothing to help Poland remain in the EU, and indeed in Europe more broadly.

For a European Poland to survive and prosper, Europe must become a place where ordinary, hard-working, rooted people can see their home, with Poland at the heart and brain of it and with other Europeans as their inalienable friends and neighbours — this is what the recommendations of this report have tried to achieve. Otherwise, no matter how disastrous the economic projections look, or how pro-EU the political establishment might appear, if the political winds keep blowing where they are blowing now, Poland will head the way of the UK, towards Polexit and away from Europe.

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For Eurosceptics, Brexit demonstrates that you can leave the EU without any catastrophic consequences, and that the tide is turning against the EU. It shows that ordinary, hard-working, rooted people are against the EU and, if they unite, they will overcome opposition from the pro-EU establishment.

For enthusiasts of the EU, it is a case study in regret. It goes to show how leaving the EU fixes nothing, but instead only deepens your problems, and that after leaving, you will wish to have remained.

Both are right in some respects.

The problems that the UK had before Brexit are still with the UK, some of them worse than before. And public opinion in the UK has become more pro-EU since Brexit. But Polish Europhiles pointing at the UK and gloating will do nothing to help Poland remain in the EU, and indeed in Europe more broadly.

For a European Poland to survive and prosper, Europe must become a place where ordinary, hard-working, rooted people can see their home, with Poland at the heart and brain of it and with other Europeans as their inalienable friends and neighbours.

This is what this report tries to achieve.