

## Europeanization of Security Sector Reform in Poland: Implementation of Democratic Oversight

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### Introduction

This paper analyzes security sector reform (SSR) in Poland as a case of Europeanization by focusing on the integration of the principle of democratic civilian oversight into the political system since 1989. The aim of the paper is to track down the reasons behind the transformation of Polish civil-military relations from a system of ‘executive dominance’ during the early stages of reform to one that relies on a ‘broad based civilian control’ (Epstein, 2005) or ‘assertive control’ (Coughlan, 1998) from 1996 onwards. Following the framework posed by Avant (2000), the analysis is conducted in three steps. During the first two, I focus on the material and ideational changes that govern the post-Cold War era and examine their possible influence on the particular choices made with regard to the democratic governance of the Polish armed forces. The third step integrates the material and ideational changes that form the antecedent conditions for change with the domestic political context in order to explain the timing of correct implementation of the principle of democratic civilian oversight for the Polish case.

Avant (2000) poses one of the most complex and convincing arguments regarding choice of reform in civil-military relations by deeply engaging with concepts often found in the literature on public policy and institutional change or reform. According to her argument, institutional change is more likely to occur in the presence of material and ideational changes as antecedent conditions coupled with an exogenous shock and the formation of a new elite coalition around a novel idea that supports institutional reform. In the absence of one of these factors, the policy outcome is either partial reform or no reform at all. Whereas the antecedent conditions exemplify dominant explanations of the realist and sociological institutionalist schools as to why institutional change takes place, the last condition posed by Avant aims to bring politics into the picture. In this sense, the domestic political context is central in providing the final impetus for institutional change in line with a particular choice of action. More specifically, in the presence of the necessary conditions of material and ideational changes and external shock, full reform is more likely to occur when dominant elites are either indifferent towards reform or are positioned around interests or ideas that are divergent enough to destabilize a conservative focal point and when they manage to form a new coalition around a new interest or idea (Avant, 2000).

This paper presents an evaluation of this argument through a case study of SSR in post-communist Poland. However, whereas Avant focuses mainly on the ‘decision to reform’ as the outcome variable, my aim is to further test the strength of her argument by extending the outcome variable to ‘implementation of reform’. The relevance of implementation is underlined by at least three distinct fields of study in political science. In the realm of public policy, it is widely acknowledged that the policy cycle comprises of many stages and the nature and extent of policy implementation is as central for institutional change as the decision to reform (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010; Streeck and Thelen 2005). Secondly, in the context of Central and East European countries (CEECs) in the aftermath of the Cold War, implementation stage is arguably

more crucial for the overall reform agenda than the actual decision to reform. Recent studies on Europeanization and compliance with EU law suggest that Poland joins other post-communist countries in ‘the world of dead letters’; meaning that whereas Polish political institutions are suitable for transposing new legislation in an effective and timely manner, correct enactment of these rules is lacking to a large extent (Falkner and Treib, 2008). Thirdly, reform implementation is becoming increasingly relevant for the recent scholarship in civil-military relations. This is especially the case when post-communist transitions are subject of debate given that implementation is regarded as a ‘second generation problematic’ in civil-military relations and that Poland, as a consolidated democracy, faces more challenges in this area compared to any other (Cotter et. al., 2005). After all, realization of democratic measures of civilian control is less about institutional structures and more ‘about the democratic quality of these structures in their everyday operation’ (Cotter et. al., 2002). Given these motives, I examine the reasons behind why Poland experienced a change in the implementation of the principle of democratic civilian oversight during its post-Cold War attempts of SSR.

The results of my analysis support Avant’s arguments. First, the implementation of the principle of democratic oversight was preceded by material and ideational changes that provided the enabling background for major reform attempts to take place. In particular, the size and speed of rewards, low number of veto players, a good cultural fit between old and new norms and the role played by epistemic communities have been influential factors in bringing about the changes in Polish civil-military relations during the initial phase until 1996. However, during this time period, democratic civilian oversight principle was not implemented to its fullest as the oversight function remained in civilian hands but was far from being democratic in nature due to the substantial degree of presidential dominance. Hence, the material and ideational changes explain only a part of the success story that Polish SSR is.

A second way in which the results support Avant’s argument regards the nature of political elite’s interest in defense matters and their constellations across the political arena. During the initial phase of reform, the political elite in Poland prioritized other reforms at the expense of growing military autonomy. However, because this situation was coupled with divergent interests especially between the presidency and the legislature regarding the norm of democratic oversight, Poland was able to break away from the system of presidential dominance with the change of government in 1995. Due to the second phase of reforms after 1996, Poland now enjoys a successful implementation of the democratic civilian oversight principle. The analysis aims to show that this was only possible through a combination of material and ideational changes as antecedent conditions and the enabling nature of the domestic political context following the year 1995. Before turning to the three-step evaluation of Avant’s argument, however, I present an overview of Polish SSR as a case of Europeanization.

## Europeanization and SSR in Poland

Whereas the term Europeanization has multiple meanings, I use ‘Europeanization’ to describe processes whereby EU ‘rules, procedures, policy paradigms ... and shared beliefs and norms’ are ‘incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and

subnational) discourse, identities, political structures and public policies' of member and candidate states (Radaelli, 2003). This definition is referred to as a 'top-down' one in the Europeanization literature; meaning that the concept is mainly used for explaining the impact of the EU on a particular domestic setting (Borzal, 2005). In line with this particular understanding of Europeanization, my main interest lies with examining SSR in Poland as a part of a wider reform agenda that developed in connection with the Polish aspirations for becoming a member of the EU as well as a partner in the western security alliance. In this sense, central to my analysis is the fact that both the antecedent conditions (material and ideational changes) and the empowerment of specific elites in the domestic context has been intertwined with the enlargement agendas of the EU and NATO to give way to the specific form of reform program in Poland.

Some might argue that the Europeanization framework is more useful for policy areas where the EU has formal competence in. From this point of view, SSR may not seem to be the most obvious policy area to look for the effects of Europeanization since the EU does not possess a common supranational policy in the area of civil-military relations. This argument predicts that effects of Europeanization should be minimal due to the fact that formal competence with regard to civil-military relations lies exclusively with member states. However, there are few scholars that consider SSR as an instance of Europeanization in the enlarged EU (Bromley, 2007; Bynander, 2006; Dijkstra, 2012) and there are in fact good reasons why the initial argument does not necessarily hold for the most recent members of the EU, including Poland.

Firstly, effects of Europeanization have shown great variance between the old members of the EU (EU-15) and the new members who joined the Union during the 2004/7 enlargement wave due to the introduction of accession conditionality for the latter group. Whereas it is true that EU-15 has experienced higher levels of Europeanization for policy areas that are under supranational competence, areas of EU conditionality went beyond the limits of supranational competence in the case of new members. In fact, during their candidacy to the EU, most CEECs had to demonstrate to EU officials and EU member states that they were committed to carrying on reforms in areas as diverse as judicial reform, minority protection and anti-corruption, most of which were not a part of the EU acquis. The extensive reforms that CEECs took on in the area of civil-military relations can also be added to this list of areas where the EU used its conditionality strategy to push for reform in its enlargement zone. Secondly, 'democratic conditionality' of the EU summarized in the Copenhagen criteria of 1993 introduced for the first time the stability of institutions as a condition for EU membership. For many of the CEECs and other potential candidates of the EU, stable institutions signaled the requirement to make substantial reforms in the area of civil-military relations. As a result, their attempts at reforming their civil-military relations structures were closely linked to their overall democratization agenda that rested on establishing well functioning political institutions which could guarantee democratic consolidation (Cizre, 2004).

One of the most prominent challenges of Europeanization studies regards the difficulty of separating the European effect from other possible external factors such as the effects of globalization or other international organizations (Haverland, 2005). In the case of SSR in Poland such a challenge arises when one takes the involvement of NATO into consideration. In other words, how can we be sure that the result of the

SSR program in Poland is mainly an outcome of EU influence through the use of conditionality? The outright answer is that we cannot. During the Polish transition, both the EU and NATO have been involved in different stages of reform to different extents (Dijkstra, 2012) and the fact that SSR comprises of an extensive reform area makes it even more difficult to link all subsequent changes to a single international organization.

In order to overcome this challenge, I choose to limit my study to an area of high political salience within SSR, namely the implementation of the principle of democratic civilian oversight of the armed forces. The element of democratic oversight receives more attention from the EU due to its direct link with democratic political institutions and its importance with regard to the overall democratization objectives set out under the democratic conditionality of the EU. The European Commission also addresses this principle in its country progress reports and provides assistance programs for its implementation in EU's candidate countries. Recent literature suggests that EU officials in Brussels are able to influence civilian aspects of SSR whereas technical and military elements are subject to NATO impact to greater degrees (Dijkstra, 2012). My expectation is further supported by the uneven record of NATO members in implementing democratic oversight, exemplified most dramatically in the case of Turkey who has shown extremely low levels up until the recent constitutional amendment of 2010 (Gursoy, 2011). Due to these reasons, I argue for the relevance of studying the implementation of the democratic oversight principle in Poland within the framework of Europeanization.

At the heart of the principle of democratic civilian oversight lies the idea that all actions and decisions of the security forces should be subject to civilian scrutiny by politically accountable actors and institutions. This principle involves the establishment of a series of constitutional constraints in the form of checks and balances for the regulation of the civil-military relations. The main objectives of the reforms that aim to establish this principle in practice are to guarantee the political neutrality of the security sector and to ascertain civilian supremacy over its decisions and actions. Central to the model is the idea of the shared responsibility of the executive and legislative branches of the government in controlling and overseeing the armed forces (Caparini and Fluri, 2002). Whereas the executive branch is held responsible for establishing control over all military activity, the parliament assumes a supervisory role over both the executive and the military. Important pillars of reform the redefinition and legal separation of civil and military competence, parliamentary oversight of defence activities (especially the budget) as well as ensuring government discretion over all aspects of the security sector. Since the 1990s, especially with the pressure exerted through EU and NATO membership requirements, democratic civilian oversight emerged as a guiding principle of SSR in the EU's enlargement zone and its formal requirements had to be met by all applicant states subject to the Copenhagen criteria (Cizre, 2004).

Within the field of classic civil-military relations, the principle of democratic oversight is closely linked to mechanisms by which military autonomy can be curtailed. According to this literature, one of the most crucial indicators of high military autonomy is the military's ability to bypass the decisions and scrutiny procedures of democratically elected governments (Pion-Berlin, 1992). In parallel to this line of thought, the practical implications of a successful implementation of the

democratic oversight principle would be to decrease the autonomy of the armed forces and to guarantee the stability and supremacy of democratic institutions. In this sense, one of the most challenging tasks for political leaders of post-communist Poland has been to integrate this principle in to the everyday life of politics, a process that has very much been influenced by Poland's integration with regional and other international alliances during its democratic transition (Cottey et. al., 2005). With regard to this challenge Coughlan (1998) quotes Oniszkiewicz, a former minister of defense (MoD), revealing that 'the idea that the military should be placed under direct civilian control' was very much a novelty.

For Poland, the implementation of the norm of democratic civilian oversight required first and foremost a constitutional change that would guarantee the placement of all aspects of defense policy under the surveillance of the elected civilians. Whereas the institutionalization of this principle came into effect during the first phase of SSR, it was not instantiated in practice before 1996. In this sense, the full implementation of democratic oversight was realized only after new chains of command were put into place with the 1996 reforms (Epstein, 2006). Throughout the SSR program since the early 1990s, other reforms that targeted the security sector also benefitted the legitimation of this principle. Even though changes with regard to downsizing the army, cutting defense expenditures or redefining rules for conscription did not directly relate to the issue of oversight, they nevertheless provided its social grounding by assisting the demilitarization of the Polish society in general (Cottey et al, 2005).

A less challenging aspect of implementing the norm of democratic oversight in Poland was to cut the ties between the Communist Party and the armed forces. Polish system of civil-military relations has traditionally been an outlier in its region for the strong connection between the military and the society rested in the image of the military for being a positive national actor (Epstein, 2006). This image did not change during the post-communist transition period due to the understanding on the side of the society that it was the Communist Party who penetrated into military affairs and not vice versa. In addition to this, Polish military regarded the communist control as an undesirable form of societal relationship (Coughlan, 1998) and the reformed Communist Party had a stronger incentive to legitimize itself through supporting democratic consolidation during the transition period (Epstein, 2005).

Civilianization of MoDs were yet another challenge regarding democratic oversight. During the initial phase of reform, the office of the MoD went back and forth between civilians who previously served in the armed forces and who did not. The appointment of Parys, Poland's first MoD with no military background was a major event publicly supported by certain segments of the Polish civil society (Epstein, 2005). However, Kolodziejczyk, for instance, the defence minister who both preceded and succeeded Parys, was a retired military officer. And even though he clashed with the presidency on competences of the MoD, he held his post for three periods and represented an organization that was 'civilian' on paper (Betz, 2004). The lack of institutional continuity and unqualified staff members only added to the difficulty of the task (Cottey et. al., 2002).

Even against these challenges, Poland appeared as a front-runner in the area of civil-military relations. The prospects of EU and NATO membership as well as the

assistance and cooperation programs prior to membership served as strong impetus for change in Polish civil-military relations (Epstein, 2005). In this sense, the SSR process has managed to guarantee the stickiness of first generation reforms that aims at to establish a politically neutral military force. But as a result, the determining factor behind the full implementation of the democratic oversight principle was to guarantee that a wider range of civilian political actors was able to use the oversight function. However, what Cottey et. al. (2002) call a ‘second generation problematique’, was not addressed until 1996. Consequently, the year 1996 reflected a critical juncture in the implementation of democratic oversight. Prior to this date, oversight had been civilian but not necessarily democratic as the presidency was the single dominant channel through which civilian oversight took place. The 1996 changes marked a departure from this trend by introducing a ‘broad-based’ system of control (Epstein, 2006), which signalled the successful implementation of civilian oversight that was also democratic.

Against this background of Europeanization framework for understanding SSR in Poland, I now turn to the evaluation of Avant’s argument. The reasoning behind her argument is that institutional change is only possible in the presence of material and ideational changes that form the antecedent conditions for change. However, these changes alone do not explain the nature and timing of reform, which in fact depends on the domestic political context and elite constellations within it (Avant, 2000). For the purpose of evaluating this claim in the light of the Polish experience of post-Communist SSR, I conduct an analysis of material and ideational changes as well the extent to which political context played a role in the implementation of the principle of democratic oversight in transitional Poland.

### Antecedent Conditions: Material and Ideational Changes

Before the introduction of accession conditionality and chapter negotiations, Europeanization scholars mainly based their studies on the EU’s current member states. However, as the prospects of ‘Eastern enlargement’ of the EU led its institutions and member states to condition membership on the fulfillment of the democratic criteria and the adoption of the EU *acquis* prior to membership, field of Europeanization has also extended its empirical focus to include countries in the EU’s enlargement zone. Much of this literature concerns itself with the impact of the EU on the politics, policies and political of the countries in question (Borzal, 2005). However, major differences from the previous research agenda remain mostly due to the highly hierarchic and uneven nature of relations between the EU and its candidate states during candidacy as well as the ambiguities and uncertainties involved in the negotiation phase (Grabbe, 2003).

By relying on the growing body of literature in Europeanization studies on CEECs, the aim of this section is to outline the material and ideational changes that has laid the ground work for the successful implementation of the principle of democratic oversight in post-communist Poland. Even though material and ideational changes might be perceived as competing explanations in the wider institutionalist literature (Hall and Taylor, 1996), for the case of SSR in Poland, material benefits and ideas seem to have mattered for different types of elites. For instance, Epstein’s (2005) study suggests that political elites in Poland referred to desired principles quite often

during the reform process even in the absence of promised benefits from the west, whereas the military elite saw no reason for reform unless there was a membership guarantee from international organizations.

### Material Changes

External incentives model, developed by Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2004; 2005) provides one of the most elaborate models for the rational institutionalist school of 'Eastern Europeanization' studies. The model aims to provide an explanation for different degrees of domestic adoption of EU rules by CEECs and is very much suited for outlining the material changes that has influenced the behavior and decisions of Polish political elite during the era of democratic transition following the introduction of accession conditionality for EU membership. The model rests on the premises that the relationship any accession country has with the EU is a hierarchical one and that the domestic political elites formulate a cost-benefit analysis to determine whether costs of adoption are low enough to push for reform in a particular area.

According to the external incentives model, material changes influence reform outcomes through four mechanisms. The model predicts higher levels of reform when the size and speed of rewards are high, when there are fewer veto players in the political system, when conditions are determinant and when the credibility for rewards and threats is high (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004). Poland generally experienced higher levels on the two former mechanisms and lower levels on the latter two during its candidacy to the EU. So I argue that the big size and the high speed of the award of EU membership and the number of veto players being low contributed towards the initial advancements in Polish civil-military relations during the 1989-1996 period. On the other hand, the reason for the initial reforms being only partial was that the enabling mechanisms were coupled with low determinacy of conditions and low credibility of conditionality.

Firstly, for Poland, together with rest of CEECs who were offered EU membership in return for substantial reform, the carrot of EU membership provided the most important impetus for change in all areas where change was required by the EU members states (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005). The actual promise of enlargement, rather than other forms of cooperation with the EU meant that the benefits at the end of the road were too big to miss out on. As far as speed of awards is concerned, there was a lot of ambiguity regarding the timeframe of enlargement and the EU changed and actually gradually tightened its conditionality strategy as the process went along (Grabbe, 2006). However, for Poland, the speed of awards was expected to be among the highest in the region due to the fact that Poland was considered to be one of the 'front-runners' of the enlargement countries (Sedelmeier, 2006). As a result, Polish political elite knew that Eastern enlargement would not take place without Poland, which arguably contributed to the feeling that 'the benefits were just around the corner' given that conditions were met.

Secondly, CEECs in general and Poland in particular generally lacked veto players who opposed the wider reform agenda. This was mainly due to the fact that membership perspective was too attractive and the political elite was united around the idea that 'reuniting with the West' was the most desirable way forward (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005). In cases of SSR, however, the military elite

can emerge as a powerful and controversial force that can act as a veto player at times. And in fact, Polish military is quite unique in its region for the high degree of public support and legitimacy it enjoys even in the aftermath of the fall of communism (Cottey et. al., 2005). Coupled with the ability to make up and express its institutional preferences publicly, Polish armed forces could have acted as a veto player when SSR was in question. Even though SSR in Poland did witness times of crisis that reflected disagreements between civilian and military elites, the armed forces did not act as a veto player as long as perceived benefits of reform were higher than the costs. One such benefit was NATO membership and Polish military officials were careful not to challenge the principle of democratic oversight as long as it remained as one of the most crucial conditions for integration into the Western alliance (Epstein, 2005).

So far, I attempted to demonstrate that Poland has definitely experienced some material changes as necessary conditions for reform prior to EU membership and these changes provided the initial impetus for change along the principle of democratic civilian oversight of the armed forces. However, not all four mechanisms for translating material changes into reform were present during the pre-accession period. And for this reason, the initial reform phase for the security sector remained partial at large.

To begin with, determinacy of conditions for SSR in Poland was far from being high. Most of the initial reforms that were targeted towards establishing civilian control over the armed forces took place on the basis of the democratic conditionality of the EU as outlined in the Copenhagen criteria of 1993 (Cizre, 2004). However, even though the democratic conditionality remains at the heart of EU enlargement process, it is not as specific as *acquis* conditionality, which undoubtedly provides more specific guidance with regard to the details of required reforms. For the political elite in Poland, taking on extensive SSR was necessary for EU membership but the terms of reform remained largely ambiguous. Hence, the initial phase of reform up until 1996 introduced the principle of civilian oversight only partially. Reform was carried out due to the fact that minimal changes were necessary in order to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria. But the nature of oversight introduced during this time lacked the 'democratic' aspect given the high levels of presidential power that was able to bypass the legislative. Consequently, the ambiguity in the required model for SSR resulted in partial implementation of the democratic oversight principle.

In addition to the low levels of determinacy, credibility of conditionality has also been low for Poland during the pre-accession period. The mechanism of credibility works when both the promises and the threats are credible. Hence, the government of the acceding country must believe that promises will be kept in return for sufficient levels of reform and that diversions from reform will be met with punishment in form of a delay in or disappearance of membership. Since Poland was considered as the *sine-qua-non* of Eastern enlargement and its political elite had the unique opportunity of actually negotiating terms of membership with the EU (Goetz, 2004), the threat of punishment by the EU member states was not fully present. Together with the lack of determinant conditions for SSR, the low credibility of EU conditionality explains why the principle of democratic conditionality was only partially implemented until the year 1996.

As a result, as important as these important material changes are for providing a strong stimulus for change in the area of civil-military relations, they alone cannot provide a full account of the sudden break in the implementation record of the democratic oversight principle in 1996 and the move towards a model of broad based civilian authority during the second phase of SSR.

### Ideational Changes

Field of Europeanization also provides a rich arena for explaining the ideational and discursive changes that took place in CEECs during the years leading to their EU membership. This school of thought generally feeds from sociological institutionalism that emphasizes the logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 1989). The literature emphasizes mechanisms such as cooperative informal institutions, role of norm entrepreneurs, socialization and learning as well as the cultural fit that determines the legitimacy of rules to be adopted (Borzell, 2005; Schmidt and Radaelli, 2004; Checkel 1999).

On a normative basis, in CEECs in general and Poland in particular, the idea of ‘returning to Europe’ played a major role for the push towards substantial reforms during the initial years of transformation. In fact, Poland was among the few countries in the region where there was a higher cultural fit with the democratic norms of the union and there was little need for the EU to stress its democratic conditionality (Sedelmeier, 2006). Much of Poland’s success in establishing this fit was due to the strong resistance towards communism in the past and the ability of the Communist Party to reform itself and continue to be a political actor during the pre-accession period (Vachudova, 2005). In particular, the unification of the otherwise divided political elite behind the idea of democratic oversight and the comparatively higher compliance rates signaled an attempt by the reformed Communist Party to ‘relegitimize themselves in a new era’ by ‘[t]aking the country “West”’ (Epstein, 2005).

A great extent of the ideational basis for the changes that took place in Poland between 1989 and 1996 stemmed from the ‘triumph of the American “idea”’ for guiding SSR and the subsequent involvement of NATO in remodeling civil-military relations as the leading security institution in Europe (Croft, 2000). It is of course possible to argue that the reasons behind Poland’s cooperation with NATO had more of a material basis as far as NATO membership was a possibility and such argument might be correct to some extent. However, the fact that the Polish political elite used a rhetoric that championed ‘ideals’ and described NATO as a benchmark for the ‘civilizational standard’ even before NATO membership prospect was on the table demonstrates how strong ideational changes have been in relation to civil-military relations reforms (Epstein, 2005).

During the communist years, Poland experienced high levels of domestic opposition to the regime (Vachudova, 2005). As a result, in the eyes of the Polish public, who showed a strong and visible negative stance towards communism, sharing the same ideals as the Western alliance was only natural and helped legitimize the need for reforms that it brought with it. Equating democratic principles championed by western international organizations, such as the EU and NATO, with the opposition against communism or the Soviet Union was visible among the Polish civil society as

well. For instance, some segments of the Polish society who took an active role in the Solidarity movement are also known for the pressure they provided on government officials for appointing the first civilian MoD of post-communist Poland during the initial years of reform (Epstein, 2005). This aspiration of acting as ‘good international citizens’ and ‘[promoting] democratic values’ in the international arena has usually expressed itself as public support for peacekeeping operations abroad (Cottey et. al. 2005). Similarly, the introduction of the principle of civilian oversight was a must in the eyes of the political elite and the public, not necessarily as a condition for NATO membership, but because it reflected the appropriate way of conduct. On the other hand, in sharp contrast to the civilians, the Polish military elite regarded NATO membership as a necessary carrot for supporting the reforms to come (Epstein, 2005).

As predicted by the theorists of sociological institutionalism, ideas played a key role during the Polish SSR also through the channel of influential norm entrepreneurs who are members of relevant epistemic communities in the world. According to Epstein (2005), one such epistemic network was formed between Western political and academic groups and NATO officials on one side and Alojzy Karkoszka, a Communist Party member who would later become the first Polish deputy MoD, on the other. Trusted and respected by both the communist regime during the Cold War and the western parties, Karkoszka was very much a part of the global epistemic community that regarded principles such as democratic civilian oversight as a suitable aspect of a desirable system of civil-military relations. Throughout his role as a negotiator between NATO and Poland, he acted as medium of diffusion and legitimation for this key principle at the domestic level as a result of his experience as a scholar and as an acting member of a relevant global community (Epstein, 2005).

The combination of these material and ideational changes only explain a part of the story. Whereas they together provide the necessary impetus for SSR to gain momentum during the initial years of transition, they fall short of explaining the timing of successful implementation of democratic oversight, which did not take place before the 1996 reforms. During this initial period, even though the Polish public was united behind the idea of oversight, they did not differentiate between the different versions of it (Epstein, 2006). In addition, influential personalities such as Karkoszka, did not have a chance to transfer their knowledge into political action until this initial phase was over. In order to understand why Poland witnessed a major break from the model of executive dominance, I now examine the nature of the domestic political context, which, according to Avant, is a key determinant of real institutional change.

## Polish Domestic Political Context in Transition

The previous sections aimed to outline the material and ideational changes that provided the necessary background conditions without which the principle of democratic oversight would not have become a practical reality in the context of Polish SSR. The aim of this section is to demonstrate that these important changes were coupled with a supportive domestic political context only after 1996. This critical juncture gave way not only to the integration of this important principle into the Polish political life but also to the successful implementation of it since then. As argued by Avant (2000), the enabling factor in the Polish political context at the time

stemmed from the clear split between the presidency under Walesa and the legislative authority, which helped destabilize the existing focal point in civil-military relations. This strong cleavage was coupled with a lack of civilian expertise in defence related matters during the initial phase of reform, which explains the partial nature of the democratic oversight reforms. However, with the change of president in 1995, political elites were once again able to reunite themselves around a new understanding of civilian control, which was more democratic than the 'concentrated executive model' due to its broad-based nature. And as a result, Poland was able to push through reforms that would enable the full implementation of this very crucial aspect of SSR.

Polish SSR went through two main phases during the pre-accession period to the EU. The initial phase between 1989 and 1996 reflected an understanding of civilian control in the form of 'executive dominance' (Epstein, 2006) and was not necessarily democratic. It very much relied on the informal links between the presidency under Walesa and the office of the Chief of General Staff and bypassed the oversight authority of the MoD. Whereas several events of the 1992-1995 period reflected a tension between the presidency, military and the legislature, the result was more autonomy for the armed forces at the expense of the legislative authority (Epstein, 2006). The first of such events took place as Parys, who was serving as the first civilian defence minister of post-communist Poland, challenged president Walesa on the grounds that Ministry of Defence (MoD) had not been properly consulted during the appointment of the CGS. However, his accusations did not find public and bureaucratic support and instead of spurring discussions about the proper implementation of Decaf principles, this incident led to the resignation of Parys and the subsequent collapse of the government. As a result, the informal link between the military and the presidency was strengthened which translated as a rise in military autonomy rather than democratic oversight (Yaniszewski, 2002; Epstein, 2006).

A second incident that challenged the model of executive dominance took place as Kolodziejczyk, the defence minister who both preceded and succeeded Parys, openly clashed with Walesa on the oversight function of the MoD and that of the presidency. However this time, instead of legally challenging minister's claims, Walesa held a vote among the generals on whether or not Kolodziejczyk should be holding his post. As the result of the vote removed the minister out of his office, the lack of implementation concerning the principle of democratic oversight was more apparent than ever (Dutkiewicz, 2004). This politically tense incident came to be known as the 'Drawsko affair' in Polish civil-military history and its effects lingered as a dramatic reminder of the fact that the successful implementation of the principle of democratic oversight was everything but easy for the political elite (Herspring, 2000).

What is striking about the initial phase of reform was that the indifference of the political elite towards defence related matters provided a strong explanation as to why reform remained only partial with regard to the area under investigation. One of the motives behind this initial indifference was the fact that the Political elite paid more attention to the 'general issues of political and economic restructuring' as opposed to SSR (Cotter et al, 2002). As a result, for the case of Poland, a major reason why the military elite remained unchallenged during instances such as the Parys and Drawsko affairs was the lack of interest on the part of the political elite. A second motive was due to a lack of civilian expertise in defence matters. During the communist period,

defence policy had to a large extent been dictated from outside and the Communist Party had full control over the Polish army to the resentment of Polish military officials who were historically used to keeping a very strong institutional profile (Coughlan, 1998). So during the post-Communist transition period, politicians in Poland had no previous experience of making, overseeing and implementing defence policy. This indifference has certainly contributed to the partial nature of reforms as exemplified in a civilian but not a democratic oversight of the armed forces under the presidency of Walesa.

As the political tensions around the Parys and Drawsko incidents show, the initial phase of SSR was also dominated by divergent constellations among the political elite in Poland. On the one side were the presidency and the CGS who supported a large degree of military autonomy and on the other stood the MoD and the legislative authority that wished to make use of their oversight authority over defence policy. This divergence is a strong demonstration of the fact whereas the Polish elites were united around the idea of reform in their efforts at 'returning back to Europe', they held opposing beliefs as to what reforms were necessary towards that end. These major disagreements concerning the nature of democratic oversight was in fact a reflection of the on-going struggle to define the basics of the constitutional order for the Polish political elite. Perhaps in contradiction to the classic civil-military relations literature, the particular problem Poland has been facing in this area was less due to disagreements between the civil and the military fold and more to ones among the political elites of the time (Coughlan, 1998).

Whereas the Parys and Drawsko incidents were far from challenging the military autonomy of the Polish armed forces, they nevertheless appeared as enabling factors that shifted 'a conservative focal point' (Avant, 2000) and led to the evolving of the Polish SSR towards a more democratic path. Because elite constellations were divergent enough to challenge the notion of 'executive dominance', with the change in presidency in 1995, Poland could properly implement the principle of democratic oversight through introducing a 'broad-based' system of control (Epstein, 2005).

The switch from the concentrated model to a more broad-based model of democratic oversight was actually being discussed among the Polish legislature since 1993. But due to Walesa's presidential veto against such legislation, other civilian actors found it increasingly difficult to exercise a joint authority on defence matters (Epstein, 2006). However, the election of Kwasniewski appeared as a major break and the political elite was now unified behind a novel norm that was to define the nature of civil-military relations during the later phase of institutional change (Coughlan, 1998).

In order to instantiate the norm of democratic civilian oversight in practice, a new command structure was established within the Polish military. Following this change, the three separate forces of the army were no longer only linked to the CGS, but were also directly linked to MoD (Epstein, 2006). Hence the MoD no longer had to stage a political fight for the democratic control of an increasingly autonomous CGS every time it felt side-lined during the making of defence policy, but could make use of its oversight function directly over the different commands within the Polish army without going through the CGS. In this sense, the post-1996 reforms mark a clear juncture with the military autonomy that dominated the Polish civil-military relations

scene under the first phase of reforms. The new focal point around democratic civilian control also included other influential figures in Polish politics such as 'Jerzy Milewski of the National Security Bureau, Jerzy Szmajdzinski of the Sejm Defense Committee, and Danuta Waniek, Head of the President's Office' (Epstein, 2005).

## Concluding Remarks

SSR has been a challenging task even for a country like Poland that has been praised as the democratic front-runner of the CEE region. Specifically, the implementation of the principle of democratic civilian oversight has proven to be quite cumbersome. However, following the initial phase of reform between 1989 and 1996, Polish reformers did succeed in implementing this principle in practice, which also counted towards the consolidation of Polish democratic reforms in general.

Through an examination of the SSR program of post-Communist Poland as an instance of Europeanization, this paper aimed to look for the reasons behind the successful shift from a system of 'executive dominance' to a system of 'broad based civilian control' for the Polish civil-military relations around the reforms of 1996. The results are in conformity with Avant's argument that whereas certain material and ideational changes provide the necessary conditions for reform, they are not sufficient for explaining their extent and timing. What is decisive for full reform to take effect depends on the ability of domestic political elites to reunify around new focal point. In the Polish case, material and ideational changes that stemmed from the processes Europeanization proved to be particularly beneficial for the initial phase of reform. However, real change in Polish civil-military relations came only after 1996, and the material and ideational changes cannot fully account for the specific timing of full implementation. What was crucial for the changes of 1996 was the fact that Polish political elite managed to break away from the conservative focal point of executive dominance and to rearrange their interests along the idea of a 'broad-based civilian control' of the armed forces.

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