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Political Dilemmas Behind the European Union Enlargement Towards the East

Ten years after the fundamental changes of 1989-91 the European continent still remains divided. Except for the territory of the former GDR, all the other countries of the Eastern and Central Europe (ECE)¹ still have the basic problem of integration unsolved, which means that they still aspire to be fully included in the European institutional system. In spite of their obvious achievements in this respect, from political point of view their ten-years long intense efforts have failed to bring about such a deep and thorough transformation as was expected just after the original political turn². Countries of the region have not yet become Member States of the European Union (EU) and repeatedly face the same challenges: they have to carry on extremely complex processes of post-communist transformations on an unprecedented scale, in spite of a visible weariness which keeps growing in certain social groups and, at the same time,

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¹ The issue of borders of the „new Europe” following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the Soviet Union itself that took place between 1989-91 remains open to a certain degree. However, the process of post-communist transformation, taking place for as many as ten years now, confirmed that some economic and cultural divisions, relics from the previous system, still remain. For example, territories of the once-existing Otoman and Habsburg empires can still easily be traced back. Accordingly, Central Europe, constituting the main subject of the present study, consists of Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia, while Eastern Europe includes territories of the former SU. Additionally, two distinctly separated sub-systems exist: those of Balkan and Baltic countries. There is a growing consensus as to this division in international literature; see: A.Ágh, *The Politics of Central Europe*, Sage, London 1998, p.4-7. On traditional divisions in Europe: G.Schöpflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe*, Balckwell, Oxford 1993, p. 10-16; S.Hungtington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon&Schuster, New York 1996, p.157-163.

² B.Geremek, the then Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, admitted to journalists following the meeting with the EU partners held on 7 December 1999: „*I did not expect that the process of accession to the Union would take such a long time*” in: *Unio, szybciej! (Union: faster!)*, „*Gazeta Wyborcza*”, 8 December 1999.

they have to meet the requirements of the European integration, due to the fact that – looking from their perspective – the EU is their only viable choice and “modernisation anchor”. The EU membership is broadly conceived in the region as the fundamental – along with the NATO membership – source of modernisation as well as of stabilisation and security for those countries.

The Union, on its part, seems not only not to make it easier for them, but also to render the process even more complex and difficult. The first Association Agreements (Europe Agreement) concluded with Poland, Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia were signed in December 1991. Other candidates from the former Soviet Bloc soon followed the path of the three above-mentioned countries, regardless of their own transformation processes, that were painful, troublesome and unforeseeable to a certain degree. Between 1994 and 1996 all the Central European countries officially applied for the EU membership, thus putting the European Communities and the Union in a entirely new situation, since the institutions of the latter organisations had been originally designed for as few as six Member States.

1. The system of criteria – incessantly renewed and extended

In response to such a challenge, the EU put forth, during the summit in Copenhagen in June 1993, an unprecedented set of conditions-criteria, to meeting of which the candidate countries were obliged in order to qualify. According to those criteria: “the EU membership requires that a candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law and human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure of market forces within the Union. Membership presupposes the candidate’s ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union”.³

Some time later the above-mentioned set of criteria – generally known as the “Copenhagen criteria” – was included in the so-called pre-accession strategy, approved during the summit of the European Council in Essen in December 1994. This strategy covered the support for the countries associated under the PHARE programme as well as an idea of the “structural dialogue”, according to which both parties – the EU and the associated countries – could hold regular meetings on different levels. Naturally, the division was maintained between “internal” and “external” countries in the context of such a dialogue. The

³ “*Bulletin of the European Communities*”, vol. 26, no. 6/1993, p.12. Polish version: *Rozszerzenie Unii Europejskiej na Wschód, (Enlargement of the European Union to the East), Dokumentacja Akcesyjna*, vol. 4, ed. B.Góralczyk, Warsaw University Centre for Europe, Warsaw 1999, p. 31.

“structural dialogue” stipulated for regular meetings to be held among ministers from the EU Member States and their counterparts from the ECE countries, according to a key scheme, determined by the so-called three pillars of the EU, approved and provided for in the Maastricht Treaty, namely the Common Market, Common Foreign and Security Policy and Justice and Home Affairs Policy. Simultaneously, beside meetings on the level of ministers and experts in all the fields covered by the “three pillars”, the EU also made it clear to its partners during those debates, that the “Copenhagen criteria” and the necessity to adapt to the requirements of the EU’s three pillars are no longer the only pre-conditions to be met before the EU enlargement to the East takes place. The candidate countries also have to take on an obligation, according to which they should unconditionally subordinate themselves to the “four freedoms” in force in the Union, which means they have to agree for and to introduce the free movement of goods, of capital, of services and of people (labour force).⁴

Certainly, the candidate countries have, before accession becomes reality, first and foremost to adapt their own legislation to requirements and regulations of the EU (to the *acquis communautaire*), which was evidenced by the fact that the accession negotiation with the first group of six candidate countries (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Slovenia and Hungary), selected by the European Commission in the summer of 1997, formally took off on 30 March 1998 with *screening* – *i.e.* with a review of law. Later on the same scenario was repeated in the case of a subsequent group of candidate countries, approved during the summit on Helsinki in December 1999, which consisted of Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia and Malta. The EU takes on a similar, serious attitude regarding the economic criteria communicated to the candidate countries at the time of signing the Maastricht Treaty, establishing the Union. Experience gained during the pre-accession period and then during negotiation with the first group of six selected countries, which in fact started in November 1998, clearly confirm that the EU party attaches great importance to fulfilment, by the candidates, of the requirements set by the “Maastricht criteria”, which means that it strictly checks and monitors the inflation rate, levels of the State

⁴ This statement seems to be best evidenced by the structure of the accession debate, divided preliminarily into 29 and finally into 31 negotiation areas, the first four of which have been areas including the „four freedoms” – *Stanowiska Polski w ramach negocjacji o członkostwo Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w Unii Europejskiej (Polish positions within negotiation on the Republic’s of Poland membership in the European Union)*, the Government Representative Responsible for Negotiation on the Republic’s of Poland membership in the European Union, the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, Warsaw, February 2000, p.17-75; *Negotiating Positions of the Republic of Slovenia for Negotiations on Accession to the European Union*, Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana, January 2000, p.13-72.

budget deficit and of public debt, variations of the foreign currencies exchange rate as well as long-term interest rates in the candidate countries.⁵

One can confirm, in the light of past experience both from the pre-accession period and from that of negotiation, that the EU does not renounce the once-adopted strategy and attempts not to bring any differentiation or any kind of hierarchy between the five conditions (the Copenhagen criteria), which it regards as equally important, while, at the same time, it evaluates and screens all candidates, taking also all the remaining conditions into account – namely the “three pillars”, the “four freedoms”, the “Maastricht criteria” and so on. Implementation of such a strategy is confirmed by any of the official EU’s documents concerning its enlargement to the East⁶, as well as temporary Reports of the European Commission in which “progress achieved on the way towards accession” is assessed.⁷ Looking from the perspective of the candidate countries, such documents reveal an image of a partner who not only stands firmly to the once-adopted strategy, but also fails to show any flexibility and forbearance in relation to candidates, as might be appropriate. The EU seems to take little account of the fact that its partners – candidates from the East, experience the unprecedented challenges and enormous difficulties, resulting from long-lasting backwardness and negligence which had been closely connected with the legacy of the communist rule and with the preceding periods in their history. To be sure, the Central Europe, defined as it is in the present study, has never belonged – with the exception of Czech Republic, perhaps – to the most developed regions of our continent.

2. The Union’s dilemmas

At the time when the issue of a next, already fifth enlargement of the European Communities and the EU began to take shape as a real and actual

⁵ More on economic criteria set in Maastricht; see: L. Oręziak *Economic and Monetary Union* in: *Unia Europejska. Podręcznik akademicki*, (The European Union. An Academic Handbook) Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 1998, p.274. According to those criteria, the inflation rate may not be higher by 1.5 percentage points and the interest rate by 2 percentage points above the level of respective rates of the three countries that have recorded the best inflation ratios; foreign currencies exchange rates have to be maintained within the narrow margin (+/- 2.25%) for at least 2 years; current budgetary deficit < 3% of GDP and public debt < 60% of GDP.

⁶ This thesis has been proved by the documents collected in the above-quoted volume *Enlargement of the European Union to the East*.

⁷ Two such reports have been published so far, the first one in November 1998 and the second one in October 1999. As far as Poland’s candidacy is involved, the text of the first report has been published in the volume *Enlargement...*, *op. cit.*, p.385-443. The second one, *Regular Report from the Commission on Poland’s Progress Towards Accession*, a total of 95 pages, has been published on 13 October 1999.

matter, usually referred to as “enlargement towards the East”, a vivid debate started among the EU Member States regarding this issue, both on the national and supra-national levels. Its participants realised quite soon that in this particular case it would be necessary to go beyond the basic dilemma, related to the very existence and activities of the EU, which is contained in a slogan „enlargement or deepening”. In the situation where as many as 12 countries – since December 1999 – has been approved as candidates to the EU membership, most of them featuring a much lower standard of life than is the case in EU, the Union faces an entirely new set of circumstances which is totally incomparable to those taking place during any previous round of enlargement.

Initially the EU attempted to proceed within the adopted scheme (or even a dogma): either enlargement or deepening. Such a statement is justified in the light of the documents of the summit of the European Council held in Essen in December 1994, when the scenarios of the EU enlargement towards the East were limited to presentation, to the candidate countries, of the time-tables regarding reviews of their policies and budgets. Any possible issues of institutional transformations, connected with such an enlargement, were postponed until the first Intergovernmental Conference – IGC⁸, which was held in 1996-97. The Conference brought, as its final product, the Amsterdam Treaty, which, however, did not include the expected stipulations concerning institutional changes. Solution of this complex issue was deferred again and it was announced that this particular problem would be addressed during the next IGC.⁹ Such a decision was negatively commented among the candidate countries. As assessed by Leszek Jesień, a Polish political analyst, the policy of the EU enlargement towards the East “lost in Amsterdam” and the most obvious conclusion that can be drawn from the conference is a statement that the enlargement is not going to happen successfully until „*general European interests outweigh particular ones*”.¹⁰

Therefore, after the IGC finished and the Amsterdam Treaty was signed, the whole debate could as well start anew since there were no real solutions brought about and no binding decisions made in this respect. Especially in the academic

⁸ K.Hughes, *Eastward Enlargement of the EU: EU Strategy and Future Challenges*, RIIA, European Programme Working Paper no. 2, London 1996.

⁹ L.Friis and A.Murphy, *The European Union and Central and Eastern Europe: Governance and Boundaries*, “*Journal of Common Market Studies*”, June 1999, p.223. K.Vida, *Az Európai Unió intézményei reformjának kényszerpályái (Limitations of the EU's institutional reform)*, Institute for World Economics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Series “Challenges”, no. 117, May 1999. R.Trzaskowski, *Polityczne podstawy procesu poszerzenia Unii Europejskiej, (Political basis of the Eastern Enlargement of the EU)*, Warsaw, June 1998, p.2-6.

¹⁰ L.Jesień, *Po Amsterdamie, przed poszerzeniem. Panorama polityczna Unii Europejskiej (After Amsterdam, before enlargement. Political landscape of the EU)*, College of Europe Natolin, Warsaw 1998, p.4.

circles it occurred quite soon, that an idea of differentiation among the candidate countries is the dominating one. Some time later some well known and high-ranked politicians joined this debate as well. While most ideas put forth at that time weren't brand new, the debate became very vivid again, including such concepts as "flexible attitude", "Europe of various speeds", "differentiation", "differing geometries" and "Europe *a la carte*" in relation to the candidates from the ECE.

The following scenarios of the EU enlargement towards the East developed, basing on that debate taking place between 1998 – 2000 (and still going on):

- long transitional periods (derogations) before full membership is obtained;
- the Union of different speeds – which means individual ways and periods to attain membership ("regatta");
- partial membership, *i.e.* participation of the candidate countries only in some selected sectors and policies;
- the Union of differentiated geometry, within which each Member State individually specifies in which programmes and policies it intends to participate.¹¹ According to this idea, each candidate country would attain the membership according to its own, separate time-table. The Economic and Monetary Union is an example of such a policy where Member States are differentiated by division into the "Euro zone" and "others".

Two out of the above mentioned scenarios should be further explained, namely that of the Union of "various speeds" and of the "differentiated geometry" (concentric circles). Both have been based upon an assumption that the integration would proceed not only according to individual models, but at a different pace as well. Moreover, both of them assume that aims behind the integration are binding for all the parties involved in the process and that only those countries (either candidate ones or already being Member States), which meet all the requirements imposed thereupon, may participate in it. The idea of the "differentiated geometry" consists in an assumption, that a clear distinction will develop inside the EU – perhaps a long-lasting one – between a "hard nucleus", having a highest degree and level of integration, and, around it, concentric circles of the countries featuring lesser degrees of integration with the "central" ones. The most important difference between the scenario of "various speeds" and of that of the "differentiated geometry" is, that according to the latter one, aims of integration would be fully binding only for those countries which are to belong to the "hard nucleus". Among the examples of such a policy being actually implemented, the Schengen Agreement (ratified

¹¹ S.Senior Sello and K.Smith, *The Consequences of Eastern Enlargement of the European Union in Stages*, EUI Working Papers, no. 97/51, San Domenico 1997, p.52.

by 13 EU Member States and entered into force in 9 of them by now), the Western European Union (WEU) and the above-mentioned Economic and Monetary Union (without participation of Denmark, Greece, Sweden and United Kingdom) may be mentioned.

Situation of the candidate countries from the ECE has only changed in one respect – subject to the Amsterdam Treaty, the Schengen Agreement was included in the *acquis communautaire*. Accordingly, if those countries intend to access the EU, they also have to take on the obligations arising out of that agreement, which presents an additional, serious difficulty for the candidate countries which have State borders with other non-candidate countries (such as Poland, Slovakia and Hungary, all of them bordering with the Ukraine). This is a further, considerable challenge for them before they can enjoy the EU membership.

The debate on the EU enlargement towards the East broke out anew early in the year 2000, in relation with decisions made during the Helsinki summit (extension of the group of candidate countries from 6 to 12) and with a commencement – in the mid-February 2000 – of work of the second IGC, which should finally solve, by the end of the year 2000, as it is assumed, institutional issues connected with the EU enlargement to the East.¹² Looking from the point of view of the candidate countries, the first months of debates of the second IGC don't seem very positive since it proceeds slowly and is far from dynamic¹³, giving rise to fears, whether the assumed time-table will be met, according to which the EU is to be ready for the adoption of new members from the ECE as early by the end of 2002.

The debate on the future of EU as a whole became, on the other hand, very vivid. As far as reputable politicians are concerned, the first ones to utter their opinions were Richard von Weizsacker, the former president of Germany, Jean-Luc Dehaene, the former prime-minister of Belgium and Lord Simon, the former Minister of Trade of the United Kingdom, who, in the autumn of 1999, prepared a special report for the new President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi. The “three wise men”, as they have been referred to since that time, indicated in their report the tasks for the second IGC and drew a vision of Europe reformed from the Atlantic ocean to the Black Sea. They also foresee the future composition of the European Commission following the EU enlargement (the number of commissioners equal to that of the Member States), suggested that the

¹² Fundamental issues to be solved during the second IGC were: establishment of a number of commissioners in European Commission, redefinition of weighing votes and extension of majority voting. More in: R.Trzaskowski *Lizbona zrobi wszystko (Lisbon will do everything)*, „Unia & Polska”, 7 February 2000, p.8,9.

¹³ Ibid. *IGC. Kości zostały rzucone (IGC: Bones have been thrown)*, „Unia & Polska”, 12 June 2000, p.17.

right of veto in the Council of the Union be limited to a necessary minimum, specified voting principles in the Council by the qualified majority of votes (unanimity only in exceptional cases) and postulated for the role of the European Parliament to be extended.¹⁴ Some of the ideas of the “three wise men” were re-addressed early in 2000 by Jacques Delors, the former long-time president of the European Commission, who, in an interview for the journal “*Le Monde*” argued the philosophy of enlargement, adopted during the Helsinki summit. In his opinion, Europe as an entity consisting of 27 or 30 or even more unified countries would be totally unable to attain its basic political aims. Moreover, it would become an excessively „amorphous” organism. Accordingly, he suggested that the Europe’s “avant-garde” establish a “federation of national States”.¹⁵ On the other hand, he did not put it clear what the regions beyond such a “federation” should look like.

The debate in question became even more dynamic after Joschka Fischer, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany, presented, on 12 May 2000, in the Humboldt University in Berlin, his idea of “federal Europe”. In his opinion a federation should be established on the continent “subject to a constitutional treaty”. In other words, it is necessary, according to Fischer, to “implement a basic change from an association of countries to full parliamentisation in the form of European Federation”.¹⁶ This proposal, usually regarded as “premature”, caused a vivid, intense debate all over Europe, on the future of the continent.¹⁷ Quite independently, an article written by the former president of France Valéry Giscard d’Estaing and the former Chancellor of Germany, Helmut Schmidt, published in a number of most important European magazines, had wide repercussions. The authors suggested that a deep reform of the EU institutions and structures should be carried out before the Union is enlarged towards the East.¹⁸

¹⁴ H.Grabbe, *A teraz dokąd? (Where now?)*, “*Unia & Polska*”, 15 May 2000. According to this British author, what we are observing is not only delaying work of the IGC, but also a problem that “*nobody among the Union leaders is mentally capable to cope with the challenge of enlargement*”, and furthermore, those politicians “*cannot foresee consequences resulting from the adoption of new Member States*”.

¹⁵ “*The Central European Review*”, no. 4(27)/1999, p.2,3.

¹⁶ “*The Central European Review*”, no. 1(28)/2000, p.4. Full text of Fischer’s address in: *Quo vadis, Europe?*, “*Gazeta Wyborcza*”, 25 May 2000.

¹⁷ I.Davidson, *Europa federalna i jej wrogowie (Federal Europe and its enemies)*, “*Rzeczpospolita*”, 1 June 2000; M.Cichocki, *Europa – znikający punkt (Europe – vanishing point)*, „*Życie*”, 31 May 2000. The answer of J.P.Chevenement, French Minister of Foreign Affairs and J.Kavan, Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs to Fischer’s proposals in: “*Gazeta Wyborcza*”, 9 June 2000.

¹⁸ *Wysokie pokoje i przedsionki (Grand rooms and vestibule)*, „*Gazeta Wyborcza*”, 13-14 May 2000.

The following conclusions can be drawn from that debate at its present stage:

- modification of the EU institutions is indispensable since they were originally established for as few as six Member States and it is not possible to enlarge EU towards the East unless they undergo a thorough reform;
- the EU enlargement towards the East cannot be avoided at the present stage, however, it has to be preceded by a number of fundamental changes in the EU structures, mechanisms and institutions;
- at present, before the enlargement towards the East takes place, Europe is in need of a far-reaching political vision as well as a bold concept of the future development of the continent; there is no doubt that a certain form of federalism has to be seen as an appropriate solution for the future, however this issue still requires a number of explanations and agreements among the EU Member States;a
- from the point of view of the ECE countries, some signals heard quite frequently during the debate on "federalism", have to be regarded as distressing ones as they present an idea of the "centre of gravity" which may imply consolidation of divisions that have already been in place on the continent.¹⁹
- there are fears still persisting among the post-communist countries-candidates to obtain the EU membership, that at the stage of enlargement their region may be partitioned in one way or another into fragments, that it's peripheral situation may be intentionally maintained unchanged and that it may be pushed into a marginal position for good if it is left for a long time or even permanently outside the borders of Europe conceived as a "hard nucleus" (to be read as: an entrenched fortress).

3. Dilemmas of the candidate countries

The most fundamental feature distinguishing the countries situated in the Eastern part of Europe, that have been presently aspiring for the EU membership, is their most recent history, namely: the experience of communism ("real socialism") as well as post-communist transformation. In this sense they form a group of candidates absolutely incomparable to previous ones. This is another point proving that the presently prepared enlargement is of a totally

¹⁹ Vaclav Havel, the President of the Czech Republic, commented d'Estaing's and Schmidt's proposals in the following way: „*An idea that two Europes may exists independently one beside another in a permanent way – democratic, stable, prosperous and integrating Europe as well as that less democratic, less stable, and less prosperous – is, in my opinion, thoroughly mistaken*”, „*Gazeta Wyborcza*”, 13-14 May 2000.

unprecedented nature. It is that specific “post-communist” perspective that puts a number of features of the candidate countries of the above-mentioned region under scrutiny and explains some of their behaviours. They have to cope with the legacy of the preceding, wholly discredited and collapsed system, while making, at the same time, intense adaptation and modernisation efforts within the process of integration. As a result, their tasks and aims in the context of transformation are doubled by the integration aims – all of that has to be done under conditions of limited means and resources in this respect.

As far as the process of the post-communist transformation is involved, it can be seen as a long-lasting traumatic experience since an abrupt decline of the hitherto-practised ways of behaviour and mental habits has taken place in the frame of it.²⁰ The transformation in question is a multi-facial process, which should be approached to and studied with a comprehensive attitude covering a number of areas.²¹ According to one of the most widespread theories of that concept, it encompasses several different fields, including, in the first rank: establishment of full, modern democracy (interpreted as provision of broad freedom as basic institution and strictly related to the introduction of rules of lawfully governed State), marketisation (attainment of free and efficient market economy), shaping of genuine national identity (both in the sense of building of “civil society” and in that of nation building) as well as mental changes (mainly in the aspect of transgression from a centralised model based upon discipline and hierarchy to an open one basing on freedom, individual enterprise and entrepreneurship) and transformations in the field of external relations, including withdrawal from the hitherto-existing links and associations and acquiring membership in wholly different organisations and alliances.²²

According to such an understanding, post-communist transformation is a process which is: deep, long-lasting, widespread, radical, unpredictable and astonishing to a high degree since it had neither been foreseen nor defined in any

²⁰ Post-communism transformation has been defined this way – as „*traumatic experience*”, by Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka, who has studied this issue in the Stanford University: P.Sztompka, *Trauma wielkiej zmiany. Społeczne koszty transformacji (Trauma of grand change. Social costs of transformation)*, Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw 2000, p.17-23.

²¹ *After Communism. A Multidisciplinary Approach to Radical Social Change*, ed. E.Wnuk-Lipiński, Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw 1995.

²² *Transformations of Post-Communist States*, ed. W.Kostecki, K.Żukrowska and B.Góralczyk, Macmillan, London 2000, p.297-298. The notion of „post-communism” may also be conceived in a different way – as, firstly, a period in global politics after the decline of the Soviet Union and its satellite Eastern European block or, secondly, as continuation of influences exerted by the representatives of the former system upon new, democratic societies. See: *Changing Rules. Polish Political and Economic Transformation in Comparative Perspective*, ed. L.Holmes and W.Roszkowski, Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw 1997, p.5.

scenarios before it started. As such, the transformation in question results in a decline of all the existing myths, idols, structures, mechanisms and ways of behaviour. Quite naturally, it also implies changes in behavioural and mental patterns as well as general philosophy of life.

Problems related to post-communist transformation are countless. First and foremost the basic one, namely, that it is freedom that presents a fundamental challenge both for new structures of State and for societies. One has to be fully aware of the fact that legacy remaining after the previous system is very extensive. Leslie Holmes, an Australian political expert, who has studied this issue, presented a model of constitutive features of post-communism, consisting of as many as fourteen issues, which have been as follows: attainment and consolidation of national independence, virtual non-existence of a culture of compromise, high expectations related to leadership, lack of confidence to political institutions, considerable depth of changes taking place in everyday life, rejection of teleologism, a feeling of a provisional character of situation, dynamism, lack of stability, lack of a feeling of security as well as emptiness in the field of ideas and, finally, moral confusion.²³ Of course, such an itemisation can neither be final nor exhausting.²⁴ However, even in its present form, it forms a vivid evidence of how deep and complex is the process of a thorough social and political transformation we face. Indeed, one could proceed with such a specification of issues, extending it to all the five above-mentioned fields. For example, in the area of civil society, the problem has been described by the Polish expert Anna Wolff-Powęska, in the following way: in her opinion „the notion of civil society means, putting things very shortly, fulfilment of the three basic postulates: such a society should be organised as a horizontal structure (as opposed to a vertical organisation in totalitarian systems), it should be active (as opposed to passive one) as well as open (as opposed to closed)”.²⁵

This is just one out of a number of examples showing, that indeed a thorough change of the hitherto-adopted “play rules” has been taking place. However, different features and past experiences of the previous system, as well as a complex framework of issues covering virtually all the fields, make the

²³ L.Holmes, *Post-Communism. An Introduction*, Polity Press, London 1997, p.17.

²⁴ They have been extended for the sake of exemplification by Iván Völgyes, an American expert of Hungarian origin, complementing this set with various elements of material legacy such as devastated transport and communication networks infrastructure, dull and uninspired housing architecture, a burden of heavy industry or technological backwardness. See *The Legacies of Communism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Z.Bárány, I.Völgyes, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1995, p.2-13.

²⁵ A.Wolff-Powęska, *Oswojona rewolucja. Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w procesie demokratyzacji (Domesticated revolution. East-Central Europe in democratisation process)*, Instytut Zachodni, Poznań 1998, p.143.

post-communist transformation not only a lengthy and painful process, but also require coming up with new definitions of many notions and concepts, often very basic ones, such as „equity”, „common welfare”, „democracy” or „progress” in the context of new challenges and circumstances. In all the countries undergoing this process, a kind of a very peculiar “post-communist” mentality could be observed, especially at an early stage, understood primarily as a lack of constant points of reference. As Jan Kofman and Wojciech Roszkowski wrote, those countries “not really know where they have come from and their societies have still been uncertain as to where they are bound, in spite of having some evidences that “the new” begins to dominate over the structures that are relics of the past”.²⁶

Such considerations can be seen as evidences, proving that the process of post-communist transformation has not yet be completed – admittedly, it could not have been completed considering an enormous scale of change. Furthermore, what should be seen as self-explanatory in conditions of such a deep transformation, it implies new social divisions, mainly to that social groups who come off the transformation process winning and those (being, at least during the first stage, in majority), who lose. It is relatively easy to define both groups. The first one consists mainly of well-educated and high-skilled persons, well-educated young people, dynamic entrepreneurs displaying positive attitudes towards reform, foreign languages-speaking persons or those acquainted with Western mechanisms and structures. One easily finds more transformation “winners” among urban communities than in the countryside. Quite conversely, the losing group consists, in the first rank, of elder persons, low-skilled, those not speaking foreign languages or those who had low-level resources at the time systemic changes took off.²⁷ It is mainly within the latter group that prejudice, fears and misunderstandings arise, with the accelerated Westernisation provoking anti-Western and anti-market attitudes.²⁸

Furthermore, such a complex and multi-facial and still incomplete process of post-communist transformation has overlapped with further, equally serious challenges, related to the necessity of integration with the Western structures, as well as tasks in the fields of modernisation and adaptation to processes and trends for globalisation that have taken place at the same time. Accordingly, the sequence of tendencies is that the second stage of transformation converts to

²⁶ J.Kofman, W.Roszkowski, *Transformacja i postkomunizm (Transformation and post-communism)*, Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Historiy of the University in Białystok, Warsaw 1999, p.159.

²⁷ *Winners and Losers of EU Integration. Policy Issues for Central and Eastern Europe*, World Bank and Bertelsmann Stiftung, Washington 2000, p.39-41. J.Bielecki, *Europa dla wybranych (Europe for the chosen ones)*, „Rzeczpospolita”, 15 May 2000.

²⁸ A.Wolff-Powęska, op. cit., p.202.

modernisation which is necessary in order to adapt to the integration aims set forth as well as to objectively observed globalisation processes. Jadwiga Staniszkis, who has studied this issue, goes as far as to state that „*weak post-communist democracies quite suddenly found themselves in a post-democratic era*”²⁹, which – quite conceivably – makes conceptual confusion involved still worse, resulting in frustration becoming deeper and deeper and leading to attitudes of cynicism or even political nihilism.

As one can see in such a broad perspective, post-communist countries-candidates for the EU membership face many more tasks and challenges than just those arising out of their obligation to adapt to requirements and to meet criteria set by the EU as pre-conditions for their accession thereto. These countries have to complete their tasks in the scope of post-communist transformation and their achievements (or defeats) experienced while pursuing that goal, determine, to a considerable degree, their chances and starting positions in the process of European integration. However, making real efforts to prevent formation of a group of countries and, within them, specific social groups, who would – quite justifiably – get the feeling of being “double losers”, should not only be a vital issue for the candidate countries, but for their partners on the part of European Union as well. Such risk seems to be the case, since those groups have experienced serious hardships of the transformation process in the first place – having come losers out of it – and, worse still, then they may get the feeling of being losers again during the process of integration. Formation and subsequent consolidation of such groups could entail far-reaching consequences. Firstly, we would have to deal with groups of countries and social layers prejudiced to the West and distrustful in its views and intentions. Secondly, such groups would eagerly follow any vocal political forces (both in domestic and global arena) hostile to European integration. Thirdly, a new partition of the European continent would thus be consolidated and strengthened, resulting in the attainment of goals quite converse to those sought after, namely, disintegration could take place instead of an integration.

4. Problem identification

1. European integration, just as capitalist economy, is not a zero sum game. A division into winners and losers, already showing up during the process of post-communist transformation, should in no case become fixed in the process of integration, since that would entail a threat that a group of “double losers” could emerge, with all natural, negative consequences arising out of such a

²⁹ J.Staniszkis, *Post-Communism – the emerging enigma*, Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw 1999, p.164.

partition. In short, success of some parties should ensure advantages to other ones.

2. The leaders of European countries have to specify already at the present stage, *i.e.* before the EU enlargement towards the East takes place, what is the meaning of a concept of a State at present – as well as which traditions of State one should follow today. In other words, integration is not going to succeed neither as an intention nor as an actual project, unless we define a role of State (a limited one, of course, but to which degree?) in the process of integration. Admittedly, it is from this process that – as indicated by a serious body of evidence – a form of either federation or confederation will arise – anyway, it is going to be a supranational (supra-State) structure.

3. The structure of EU is, to a certain degree, a product of ideology, a concept born in the elite circles and an authoritatively imposed one. The project will succeed, provided that societies are included in the process. So far, more threats and failures than attainments may be seen in this field on both sides – in the EU Member States and in the candidate countries alike. Citizens of the EU Member States reason the way tax-payers do: who is going to pay for the EU enlargement (towards the East)? Western politicians have been afraid of conclusions which may be drawn out of such calculation, since they are well-aware that tax-payers constitute their electorate. Who among politicians will stand out and show enough courage – contrary to short-sighted calculations made by his own electorate – to instil into his society a vision of larger, more powerful, consistent and, in consequence, more competitive Europe?

4. Societies of the candidate countries have responded to that process in quite a different way. They are largely weary with lengthy and agonising process of transformation, and suffer from the so-called “transformation fatigue”. There is a risk of this feeling being doubled by the overlapping experience of an “integration fatigue” – which may ensue some very serious, even dangerous effects for the whole process of integration, since demagogue and populist politicians will stand for in the candidate countries (it is easy to point them out in each country right now) eager to reforge social discontent into their own political capital, built upon opposition to the integration process.

5. The progress that has been reached so far in the process of integration has to be seen primarily as a project undertaken by the elite circles, whilst the ultimate results of it are going to depend largely on societies: tax-payers in the West, those taking part in referenda in the East. The candidate countries have got more “homework” to do – not only and exclusively those arising out of their obligation to meet the criteria imposed thereupon by the EU. First and foremost, they have to reach an appropriate stage of preparation of their public opinion for the process of integration. To make things more difficult, public opinion – as put by Elżbieta Skotnicka-Illasiewicz, a sociologist studying this issue, in her

analysis – “is shaped, on the one hand, by information policy of the State which is far from competent since it lacks consistence, as well as by activities of particular political parties, which are also incompatible with it since parties take no responsibility for opinions uttered by their politicians, and by the media which still have not been fully competent. On the other hand, it is formed by declared opponents of Polish membership in the Western structures, who try to make cheap political capital on those most disadvantaged and lost within the recent processes, incapable of facing neither transformation taking place domestically, nor – to even a higher degree – any <imminent new trends>”.³⁰ One should add that the point of this analysis should be extended beyond Poland as it describes phenomena that can be observed in the whole region.³¹

6. A vision of Europe in the future – as rightly noticed by Norman Davies, a reputable expert in the history of the continent – may not be „crippled and limited just to its Western part (...). Making no use of the collapse of the former Soviet block for the sake of the EU enlargement has to be seen as a serious historic mistake, since such a particular moment in history is not going to happen again”.³² In other words, there exists a threat that the integration – as slowed down and delayed as it is – will miss the most advantageous moment to happen and, as a result, instead of a „shared European home” as Michail Gorbachov once dreamed of³³, we will still face a situation vividly described by the already-quoted Norman Davies: „Europe is partitioned into two parts. Its Western part is in good condition: a sound roof, central heating, everything refurbished and gleaming with fresh paint. The Eastern part of the house is a ruin covered by a leaking roof full of holes, with broken windows, cold and dirty”.³⁴ Neither the structure called EU can successfully exist, nor construction of the house completed, if such a situation is maintained any longer.

³⁰ E.Skotnicka-Illasiewicz, *Rozum odzyskać przed szkodą (To regain reason before the harm)* „Unia & Polska”, 8 November 1999.

³¹ I.Hegedűs, *European Ideas - Hungarian Realities*, “Federal Trust: European Essays”, no. 1, 1999. An essay presented to the European Sociological Association in Amsterdam, August 1999. See also: an analysis of the first ten years of Hungarian democracy and transformation: B.Góralczyk, *Węgierski pakiet (Hungarian package)*, Familia, Warsaw 2000, p.196-201 and 249-255.

³² N.Davies in an interview with B.Wildstein, the author of a volume of interviews with the most outstanding intellectuals, on the dilemmas and challenges at the turn of the millenia (among other interviewed there were F.Fukuyama, P.Johnson, Z.Brzeziński, S.Hungtington, L.Thurow): B.Wildstein, *Profil wieku (Profiles of the Century)*, Politeja – Świat Książki, Warsaw 2000, p.97.

³³ It should be reminded that the last Soviet Union leader conceived the shared „general, European home” both as „necessity and opportunity”. See M.Gorbaczow, *Przebudowa i nowe myślenie dla naszego kraju i całego świata (Reconstruction and new thinking for our country and for the whole world)*, PIW, Warsaw 1988, p.267.

³⁴ N.Davies, op. cit., p.97.

7. The present round of the EU enlargement (towards the East) is incomparably more difficult than the previous ones, because it never happened before, that countries aspiring for the membership formed a whole area almost entirely considerably different than the existing Member States, in terms of a stage of economic development and standards of life.³⁵ Some kind of ambivalence has to appear in such circumstances. On the one hand, any hasty actions should be avoided. Considering the scale of disproportion, everything has to be carefully prepared. On the other hand, however, any further delay may result in the already mentioned fatigue of material on the part of the candidate countries; namely, it can lead to the “integration fatigue”. As described by two Polish authors: “*Ten years after the political turning-point in the European continent it is difficult to find any reserves that can be mobilised. However, in further five years or so the task of finding them is going to become even more difficult.*”³⁶ Putting things different way, we face a risk of missing the momentum for integration.

8. The EU indeed seems to have no strategic concept to counteract the emergence of new divisions in the European continent. Contrary to verbal declarations, according to which „we will do anything” (an attitude which was displayed quite recently, during the Portuguese presidency in the first half of 2000), true progress in integration activities has been slow, giving rise to new questions and doubts in the candidate countries. Is it possible that the EU is already satisfied with economic benefit it gets from the implementation of the association agreements (Europe Agreement) and that its economic interests related to the opening of Eastern European markets have already been gratified? Is it possible that, basing upon this, EU intends to slow the adhesion process down?³⁷

³⁵ According to the data of the renowned Vienna-based economic studies institute WIIS, assuming an EU average to be 100, national income *per capita* in the candidate countries in 2000 were as follows: Czech Republic – 69, Poland – 42, Slovakia – 50, Hungary – 54, Slovenia – 75, Bulgaria – 25, Romania – 28: “*Rzeczpospolita*”, 11 May 2000. Calculation carried out by the European Commission is a little different yet generally similar, for example Czech Republic – 63, Slovenia – 68, Hungary – 48, Poland – 42: *Composite Paper. Progress by the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe in Meeting the Membership Criteria*. Brussels, 13 October 1999.

³⁶ W.Cimoszewicz, the former Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland, in co-operation with the author of the present study, *Partyniactwo to partactwo (Partocracy is a mess)*, “*Gazeta Wyborcza*”, 20-21 May 2000.

³⁷ K.Popowicz, *Dlaczego Polska prawdopodobnie nie wejdzie do UE przed 2005 rokiem? (Why is Poland probably not going to become the EU Member State before 2005?)*, “*Unia & Polska*”, 6 March 2000; A.Inotai, *Political, Economic and Social Arguments for and against EU Enlargement. A Survey of the Influence Pressure Groups*, Institute for World Economics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Working Papers no. 101, Budapest, July 1999.

9. Until now the process of accession of the candidate countries to EU looks, from their perspective, like a shooting to a moving target: with new conditions and criteria being imposed upon them repeatedly and new hindrances arising one after another. External borders of the EU (Schengen) have been one of the pivotal issues in this respect. How to adopt some of the ECE countries to EU unless they are screened off and fenced from their Eastern neighbours? It seems unlikely that customs and visa policies, conceived in a traditional way and implemented according to long-established practices, are advisable solutions. Some flexibility is needed in this respect. Otherwise, divisions existing upon the continent will rather deepen than disappear.

10. Following several centuries when Machiavellism and Darwinism dominated, it is time that a new political philosophy is created. At present one has to stress things which bring together and not things which divide. The EU enlargement towards the East may be successfully completed only if its aims are confined to such concepts as: co-operation, inter-dependence, confidence, establishment of new relations, facing challenges together. General principle of solidarity should be a key notion in this area. This is particularly important point: should the EU flounder in a morass of confederation – or an otherwise-called structure being in fact an external circle of EU, void of a principle of solidarity – then, to the candidate countries of the Eastern Europe, membership in such a Union would mean little more than just their participation in the Council of Europe, OSCE or OECD.³⁸ It is quite obvious that such a situation would be very far from their fundamental objective, according to which EU as an organisation featuring the largest potential and possibilities, is to become their “modernisation anchor”.

5. Conclusion

Two years after the negotiation process with the first group of candidate post-communist countries took off, one has an impression that neither party is fully prepared to bring it to an end. What’s even worse, they seem to have just a vague understanding of how Europe should look like following completion of the EU enlargement towards the East. One has to be conscious that this round of enlargement, completely different than any previous one, constitutes a wholly new undertaking. This is a construction of new architecture upon the continent. This is why leaders and elite circles have such an essential role to play during the process, especially in the present Member States, since it is them who have to give outlines of such a “new architecture” (admittedly, there is no such vision

³⁸ As pointed out by J.Lukszewski, Rector of the College d’Europe in Bruges in the years 1961-90), and ambassador of the Republic of Poland in France (1990-96), “*Unia & Polska*”, 20 March 2000.

at the moment these words are put to paper). It is them who set new conditions (criteria) to the candidates and who, in fact, have been treating candidates as petitioners who file their applications. The crucial issue is not to disappoint those petitioners and not to discourage them.

Political elite in ECE faces tasks which are still even more complex and difficult. They have to mobilise themselves and their societies (in circumstances where public attitude towards further changes is far from enthusiastic) to an enormous effort which has to be undertaken within the process of integration, to get a lot of “homework” done, which is necessary, considering all the conditions and criteria imposed upon the candidate countries. Finally, they have – just as Western elite circles do – to convince their societies that integration is indeed going to be of advantage. Unless such a general belief truly exists, the EU enlargement towards the East may not only prove unsuccessful, but also – which is even more likely – result in creation of a kind of a crippled creature. Hopefully, nobody among those initiating the process would welcome such an outcome.

At the moment when the process of negotiation with “post-communist” candidates enters its key stage, one has an irresistible impression that neither party is ready for the enlargement. Such a non-optimistic conclusion can possibly (and hopefully will) be reverted only provided that further, intense efforts are made, combined with imagination and courage. Europe experiences a real opportunity to break through historic divisions. The question is whether Europeans will stand up to such a grand challenge?