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Poland and the European Union: Sociological Problems

Polish European Union membership aspirations require changes in our country. In general, the matter relates to the fact that certain legal, economic, political, and other standards prevail in the Union. Poland will have to conform to all such standards, pursuant to European Union requirements, as it is us who wish to become EU members, not the other way round. The issue of complying with demands is not the only one, however. We intend to operate within a specific system, and an opportunity for successful interference is indispensable. The social system is what I have chiefly in mind, and the social system is what I describe in this paper. I am aware of the close interrelation of economic, political, cultural, legal-and-institutional processes with social aspects. I believe, nevertheless, that human life rests on social community foundations, with the law, economy, and politics constituting different zones of social activity, established to perform specific functions with regard to the society and to individuals alike.

Hence, Poland is to adjust not only in the sense of complying with certain procedural requirements, but in a deeper sense as well. Consequently, the evolution of West European and European Union states carries a deeper sense; it is based on certain foundations, against which the variable norms and standards perform a secondary role only. I wish to pay some attention to the matter in this paper, as it is sometimes worth knowing, what the fundamental logic of complicated and occasionally very inconsistent processes within the Union is. Let us assume that we are capable of defining such **philosophy** of the Union. It will then be very easy to declare that Poland is to reorganise herself in view of her capability of adjusting to such European social philosophy.

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The problem, however, is that crucial changes are occurring both in Poland and in the European Union, in a sense entirely independently of our membership aspirations. The adjustment programme – in the sense both narrow and broad – remains vastly related to processes dominant in EU life, as well as to those prevalent in life in Poland. I shall make an attempt to characterise these processes, highlighting complications to be unavoidably encountered by the adjustment process unavoidably taking place under such conditions.

I believe that much of the chaos in EU member states and societies has been caused by the in-depth changes occurring worldwide and stemming from a *revolution* of the civilisation. Such changes are deepest and most omnipresent in countries most advanced in terms of civilisation progress. There are other reasons behind the crisis of the social order recognised as the European Union foundation. Some symptoms of this crisis are side effects of mechanisms otherwise responsible for very positive functions, with others being effects of factors which had launched favourable processes in the forming of the public order, but have completed their function, and if not harmful today, they certainly require a reform or replacement with other more modern mechanisms, i.e. better adjusted to meet contemporary challenges.

Poland also remains under the pressure of such civilisation *revolution*, although it has a lesser impact on us, given the lag in economy, education, and technology. So-called **social transformation** is the gravest problem we are suffering today. I shall comment on this phenomenon in my article as well.

The fundamental purpose of this paper is to outline selected macro-social aspects of European integration on the one hand, of Polish transformation towards liberal democracy on the other, with a third angle provided by Poland's entry to the European society system. I also think it noteworthy to use the occasion to consider whether a European social order and a European society exist today, or whether they have begun developing, at the very least.

1. The European integration philosophy

The 20th century brought remarkably dramatic experience to the European society. Totalitarian movements alongside tragic and profound economic crises mark the early days of the most disgraceful pages of our common history. They jarred the so-called cultured nations of Europe with depths of barbarism, and proved war to be an inevitable consequence of such system forms.

Survivors of both world wars shall be carrying a load of their complexes until the day they die. Neither will the next generations shake these complexes off completely. With great probability, much time shall pass before such words as “Jew”, “Pole”, “German”, or “Russian” are entirely free of associations with the historical context described. Hence, peace has become the crucial value of

post-war Europe. The awareness of world wars having had their reasons – economic and system-related primarily – has become an imperative of more profound thoughts concerning the bases of post-war life.

These tragic experiences have resulted in democracy and market economy being recognised as two of the most important pillars of the contemporary world's success. It has been grasped that there are no guarantees of peace beyond liberal democracy and controlled market economy. European integration is the third pillar; it cannot exist without the former two, however.

Memory of past wars and totalitarian systems is not the only factor encouraging integration. The post-war European and global situation was no mere element either.¹ The Soviet Union, who had incurred tremendous wartime losses, became a political winner. They also seemed determined to use any and all means available to export their system worldwide, and to expand their international influence. This forced West European states to co-operate, as the last thing they wished to witness was the import of such goods. Fear of Russian expansion constituted a major factor for the vitality of the European integration concept.

Today, however, the development in the global situation has become much more important. Europe is losing its importance, in every area imaginable. Long ago, she has ceased being a political power capable of setting conditions on the global arena, and of enforcing her own interests to the world community. Small European countries separately have no great opportunities of economic expansion. One could quote numerous factors weakening the global position of European states. Integration seems to be the correct antidote in any aspect possible.

While I am describing relatively obvious matters, this obviousness is a profit drawn from the second half of the twentieth century in Europe, and provides a foundation to integration processes. Reiterating: liberal democracy, controlled market economy, and European integration are the three fundamental pillars of the post-war social order in the western part of our continent. This is the order we wish to join. This order lies at the foot of various legal and political solutions, norms and value hierarchy systems. I shall now attempt to briefly describe them.²

Let us attempt to provide a short definition of the contemporary essence of democracy. Democracy does not only spell the lack of censorship, and a multitude of political parties. Such are the necessary ingredients indeed, but not sufficient,

¹ See K. Wielecki, *Wprowadzenie do problematyki integracji europejskiej (Introduction to the Problems of European Integration)* in: *Integracja Europejska: fakty, problemy, poglądy (European Integration: the Facts, the Problems, the Opinions)*, ed. K. Wielecki, Warsaw 1994.

² More on the subject in: K. Wielecki, *Wprowadzenie do integracji europejskiej (Introduction to European Integration)*, Warsaw University Centre for Europe, Warsaw 1998.

however. Neither does democracy mean that everybody can say or do what they please.

Democracy is a social compromise, applying the rigour of law to protect elements of the social agreement, whilst leaving all the other areas in life to citizens. A consensus, which as of the moment of signing remains beyond any scope of everyday debate enables social balance, required for people to live in peace, and for the state to perform its functions. The existence of such balance is possible when a major part of the society share the principles laid down as foundations thereof. They are codified in an act of law basic to the state and the citizens – the Constitution.

A democratic agreement encompasses the various scopes of tripartite power: legislative, executive, and judicial. Within a scope defined by the constitution, authorities are not limited in their functions. Moreover, competencies cannot be exceeded: an element protecting entire political system and the state in their entirety against autocracy, and any attempts at violating the social agreement. The balance is renewed in elections, when power is entrusted to such party as has gained the majority of votes. Thus, every citizen can express his or her will.

An extremely important element of the democratic system is that of the so-called fourth power, i.e. the mass media. Their huge impact on human attitudes and choices makes them a powerful instrument of rule, occasionally dangerous, and always controlling the authorities' moves. Hence, democracy assumes the existence of independent media, whose freedom may only be limited by virtue of principles contained in the Constitution.

The equality of people forms the basis of democracy, obviously in two aspects only, as in all the other matters human beings naturally vary, whereas the democratic state is not even empowered to enter such areas. Hence, equality prevails in areas of law and politics. As all citizens are equal before the law, neither property nor the origin of birth or position may constitute a reason for applying different rules. The state carries the responsibility of protecting this social rule. All are equal in the political sense. This means that after constitutional conditions have been met, everybody has the right of announcing his or her political views, and to partake in political life (actively or passively) following rules applicable to all the others.

Moreover, a number of iron-cast rules form the foundations of any democratic compromise. The rule of respect for the individual is the first most important principle. Individual citizens enjoy freedom within the framework of the existing law. The law, on the other hand, shall only limit civic freedom to an extent required to maintain co-operation throughout the society, and to protect the rights and freedom of others (minorities included) against any third-party endeavours. Such law, which sets an absolute minimum of requirements to the citizens, shall be conformed to with no compromise. As said before, all citizens

shall be subject to the law on an equal basis. The law may be and is amended, albeit under extraordinary conditions and following a special course of action. Independent courts are liable for law enforcement. Thanks to the above, the law is protected against any interference of authorities or populist trend.

Two counteracting tendencies clash in social life. The need to maintain a necessary level of civic co-operation imposes organisational rigour; pushes for the forming of accountable institutions (the state, first and foremost); and requires a delegation of people and competencies to introduce measures enabling co-operation enforcement. This is the problem of power.

When people and empowered groups come into existence, they show a natural tendency to accumulate revenues, measures, and instruments used to execute such power. The authority elite inevitably strive for an extension of the reign and rule. One may risk a statement that any authority elite display a necessary tendency to constantly maximise the powers held, and hence to exceed the level required for co-operation. Even if cases contrary to the above rule were to be detected in the past or to occur in the future, it is much better to assume in advance that there are no exceptions thereto.

One of the basic tasks of democracy is precisely that of offering protection against such unavoidable desires of those at the helm. This is the essence of the division of powers and the independence of courts, which is why democracy is a system where rulers are elected and subsequently controlled by the society. Although regardless of place or time, people in power have unhealthy appetites, there are mechanisms making it difficult or indeed impossible to indulge in authoritarian practice. Such mechanisms can only exist in democracies. This is one of the reasons for its superiority over other systems.

The objective of any democracy is to protect the rights of an individual and of the society against unjustified attack of empowered institutions. Those at the helm, however, are not the only threat thereto. The pressure of local groups, neighbour communities, and of similar informal conglomerates is probably even more of a threat. No authority is capable of launching infiltration and pressure mechanisms as efficient as so-called social control.

People or groups greatly differing from the average – the disabled, political and national minorities, etc. – face a threat of particular discomfort. Any action threatening individualism, that is freedom of the individual undermines the basic rule of the democratic and liberal order.

The post-war social order is protected against similar pathologies by liberal values. These primarily include respect for human freedom. Human rights are the subject matter of utmost care in EU member states and within the Union itself. They have been codified, and an entire system of institutions protecting citizens whose rights have been violated were founded. The European Union has even offered an opportunity of appeal for a single citizen or a group of citizens,

should human rights be violated in a given state, and should the victim exhaust any available and legally compliant protection measures in his or her own country. The judgement of thus founded EU institution is final and binding.

Individual freedom is expressed as a right to act in any way not prohibited by law, whereas the law only regulates areas of citizens' lives crucial to the well being of the society in general. Hence, as the law does not limit people more than is absolutely necessary, it is an instrument of protection against any limitations to individual freedom imposed by authorities, informal groups, or other individuals.

In any liberal democracy, special functions are assigned to the state being a form of sovereign self-organisation of a society inhabiting a given territory, formed in a common cultural tradition, targeting the implementation of superior objectives (duration, development, expansion), and expanding the lifetime opportunities of citizens.

Hence, within its internal functions, the state is to regulate and stabilise a negotiated and socially divided compromise between objective claims of citizens and social groups. It seems that the concept is slowly gaining appreciation of West European intellectuals, politicians, and strategists. It has been reflected in the idea of regionalisation, and of expanding the civic society, local democracies included.

The state should perform one other function within a democratic society, however: it ought to protect – in the letter of democratically implemented law – citizens and social groups against a civic society, should such society prove to be violating the law in limiting objectivity beyond a boundary depicted by objectivity interests. As has been said already, this is possible as well.

The market economy is the other foundation of EU operations. In West European countries, it has had a long history of tradition. Freedom of economic action and a relative independence of economy and politics are both rules fought for since the times of the English and the French Revolutions. This well-founded tradition is also reflected in the fact that it is the market – not political decisions of those in power or the pressure of the people – that passes ultimate decisions.

Such independence means that regardless of the political opinion of the elite in power, people have something to eat and a job. The market is largely indifferent to election winners and losers. The market simply follows its own rules. Economic stability of the states depends precisely on the absence of any excess interference with market rules. Thus, the first and foremost responsibility of any government is to protect the market against non-market interference, with the second being that of providing proper conditions for economic development.

The state has to naturally have funds available to perform its functions, with the economy obviously being the only source. Thus, the state can and should draw money from the market to feed its budget. Moreover, the state can and

should see to it that business operations do not violate certain general moral and system rules. Thus, entrepreneurs have to conform to the law, employees' social rights included; they have to observe technological standards protecting the life and health of employees and consumers, etc.

Thus, the essence of market economy-based systems consists in a certain balance being maintained. The economy should only provide for such limitations as are useful to the society, and as do not make it destructive. The economy ought to have sufficient freedom, enabling its dynamic development. Market economy based on capitalist ownership forms is not – as opposed to communist economy – the product of a theory put to use *par force*. Although the former has obviously been based on a theory as well, it is largely a result of a centuries-long learning process in a society. Capitalism and the market economy have been perfected by trial and error. The cost was considerable. Economic crises of the twenties and thirties had been crucial reasons of World War Two. To a relatively large extent, they are also factors of totalitarian systems, as said before. Hence, it should not be surprising that the control of market mechanisms, devised to protect against such misfortune forms a major part of the European economic and social **philosophy**.

Matters are similar in the area of allowable intervention in market rules. Orthodox liberals and Adam Smith followers believe in the “*invisible hand of the market*” and the “*night watchman state*”, which means that they trust that as long as the state does not interfere at all, the free market can cope by itself. The reality is regrettably different. Therefore, nowhere and in no market economy is there such thing as total freedom in economy. The only question is whether state intervention does not prevent long-term economic growth, and whether the methods applied conform to the letter of law and of capitalist economy.

These two pillars have laid down the foundations for European integration, which I primarily consider an attempt at forming a social community, undertaken by people in many ways divided, and in many ways different. It is no mere feat to convert differences into a positive power. Even in families, consensus and agreement are frequently difficult. How can they be possible in a Europe inhabited by millions? The sole basis for integration may be provided by a common bond – usually sought by sociologists in areas of business, tradition, and culture – sufficiently strong to overcome centrifugal forces.

Europeans ought to co-operate closely, as they live on common soil, and are in a sense condemned to each other's company. History has proven already how difficult this is. The hope that the third millennium of the new era shall bring fulfilment of dreams of peace, prosperity, and respect for human rights in Europe can come true. Current integration processes are an extremely advanced, successful, and non-precedent attempt. Today, a united Europe within the European Union is a realm of peace, economic development, respect for the

human being, and all the most fundamental human values embedded in our old ancient common culture. It would be worthwhile to consider the main processes behind such phenomena, and also whether from the viewpoint of Western Europe all integration achievements can be retained without EU enlargement. I believe not. I am also deeply convinced that from the Polish perspective, European Union membership is a tremendous opportunity of participating in EU successes.

Comments concerning freedom, democracy, and the civic society would most probably remain the substance of dreams of a bunch of humanists were it not for specific legal and economic mechanisms, which have converted these theoretical concepts into a major problem in contemporary Europe. These mechanisms have formed a certain ethical climate, bringing permanent changes to the overall system of values.

Post-war integration of West European states have forced politicians, lawyers, sociologists, economists and political science experts to ask themselves a question if today's system of organising societies is sufficient to meet the challenges they are facing. States are institutions encountering particular criticism.

Two separate positions have actually emerged. Firstly: any integration processes are possible provided they do not violate the integrity of the state perceived as the supreme value. Believers in the above support a concept of a so-called **Europe of motherlands**, that is an integration structure based upon agreements signed by and between entirely sovereign states.

According to the other position, traditional states are barriers to integration, which is an indispensable element of economic success and peacekeeping, and even of cultural identity. In the context of the global process of cultural uniformity, and of the Americanised version of mass culture expansion, the above is not without sense. According to supporters of the above, functions of states ought to change, as what a European government – after a fashion – would be formed, capable of truly efficient co-ordination of any attempts at retaining our economic, political, military, and cultural position, with the respective states protecting their cultural identity of European societies. States would form an indirect link between such a European *super-society* (the European Union) and its *super-government* (EU authorities), and the separate societies.

A **federation** is an idea proclaimed by supporters of revising state functions in their traditional form. The sociologist shall find certain important truths in the argument that the state is both too large and too small as an institution. It is too small to be an effective subject matter of geo-political and economic relations, and too large to communicate with citizens within a framework of democratic rules.

One might well ask how would processes traditionally managed by the state be organised within such a radically perceived federation. Most certainly, some functions shall be assumed by federal institutions, including – obviously – those requiring co-ordination at a level considerably distant to the citizen, such as the defence policy or customs tariffs. Other matters, on the other hand, should be resolved at a level possibly closest to the people. This purpose ought to be served by a principle complementary to federalism – the rule of **regionalisation**.

In general, decisions would be made at four levels: the lowest local community (commune), the more distant local community (region), the state, and the federation. Decision-making competencies at the regional level would – so optimists believe – ensure the conformity of any decisions passed to the cultural tradition of those they apply to. Regional authorities would have a better understanding of local conditions and needs. It would also be easier to apply democratic control to such authorities. Such solutions would also enable an enhancement of democratic election forms. Indubitably, focusing decisions crucial to citizens at the regional level provides opportunities for expanding the scope of participant democracy.

As has been shown, the federation-based concept of European integration recognises the great importance of a rule, by virtue of which specific decision-making competencies accumulate within specific authority links. This principle is referred to as **subsidiary** or auxiliary. Briefly speaking, this means that a decision is made at such level of social organisation as it applies to.

2. Crucial changes in the social order within the European Union

The European Union has entered a process of constant formation, influenced by a pressure of numerous factors. I would be inclined to believe those most important to include the so-called **information revolution**, as it had laid ground for the creation of the so-called **information society** (notably also beyond the European Union, but it is the EU I am dealing with here). I believe the revolution to have been the lead factor in the process of changes within the social, economic, political, axiological, and moral orders.

Albeit all these processes have been the subject of close attention and concern,³ their depth and non-precedent nature cause them to be controlled to a minor extent only, whereas the social order is undergoing gradual erosion, as mentioned before. Notably, not for the first time in history it is scientific and technological progress causing such erosion. We are approaching an era of information societies, where a vast part of the national income shall be generated

³ See e.g. so-called 1994 *Bangemann Report*, or the results of the Lisbon European Council (March 2000), organised to follow the theme “Preparing the Transition to a Competitive, Dynamic and Knowledge-Based Economy”.

within the information processing area. At the same time, it is an era of computerisation, automation, and miniaturisation. All such civilisation processes result in a lower demand for human labour, with the demand for highly qualified professionals growing. This shall inevitably result in serious social tension.

The classical layout of the political scene in West European states is changing. It had formerly been quite simple, and this had probably been why it guaranteed stability in democracy. Crucial social divisions no longer outlined – contrary to Marx's theory – traditional social classes. Today, the society has disassociated into two fundamental classes: employers and employees.

Hence, two political parties representing interests of the respective classes have gained major impact within the government system. Most frequently, these two have included some form of social democracy, and some form of rightist party (Christian democrats, for example). If any party currently in power overcorrected in a direction exceedingly in line with interests of the class they represented, they lost the next elections. If, on the other hand, the rightist party then in power attempted to steer in the opposite direction, they lost their chance for a next term of office after having broken the tolerance level of employees.

This model, albeit highly simplified, has been proven and is reliable in practice, guaranteeing a balance of democracy and economy. Thanks to the aforementioned mechanism, no turbulence in balance exceeded options available to a ruling party during a single term of office. Moreover, often as not the party in power have grasped that perspectives of further rule do not depend on loyalty to ideals proclaimed as much as on pragmatism and skills of remaining within the vicinity of a balance of interests.

This balance was maintained in many states – especially those of the European Union – thanks to the existence of a centrist party, usually liberal. Such parties frequently relate primarily to the middle class, and upon entering a coalition with one of the fundamental parties, they had a soothing effect on the overall arrangement, thus protecting the balance within the entire system.

The state plays an extremely important role within this mechanism. It is an institution guarding the aforementioned balance. Hence, the state protects the durability of the **social compromise** as an essence of democracy, and – to a considerable extent – also a compromise between employers and employees. This is the actual sense of the so-called protectionist state.

A protectionist state is not necessarily one destroying a country's economic foundations with generous gestures addressing employees. The core of the matter relates more to the fact that social and political balance alike is based upon an understanding that employers provide employees with a certain socially acceptable minimum of fundamental revenue, whereas employees do not violate private property, and express their moods in a manner provided for in law.

The bargaining position of employees has deteriorated drastically following the revolution, and its effectiveness shall continue to drop. Hence, if the state is to guard the social compromise stemming from a structure of powers, we do not know today where the boundaries within such structure lie, not to mention the even lesser knowledge of the future near and far. Thus, the democratic system has to survive a new challenge, and the emergence of a new social compromise. Clearly, we have been witnesses to such a process in Europe since the “Iron Lady’s” times.

Moreover, differences between programmes of centre-rightist and centre-leftist parties cannot be actually that major, as the aforementioned mechanism brings them closer. From the viewpoint of a not very well prepared and yet highly frustrated observer, there are no differences between them whatsoever. This is an element of discouragement as concerns the entire political system, the democratic-and-liberal social order included. Such reactions are growing more frequent as expansive social programmes of wealthy states do not result in any gratitude of the nation, but in demand attitudes only.

Moreover, numerous constituents believe that their vote is of little or no importance. Consequently, they fail to go to the polls, or they vote for marginal –and yet extreme – groups. Their frustration, not relieved in the election act, takes on the form of a variety of social movements and protest actions, extraordinarily common during the most recent years. Such processes boost extremist attitudes.

Civilisation-related processes mentioned before also result in a diversification of the employee class. On the one hand, the class of the unemployed is expanding, including individuals, who – discouraged to the social system as such, and encouraged by the relatively high level of social benefits – choose an alternative lifestyle. Often as not, they cannot accept the spirit of competition prevailing on the ever-shrinking job market. It causes workaholism, abandonment of any values other than work, remuneration, and professional promotion. On the other hand, a strong market position has been gained by the class of professionals indispensable in the world of modern technologies, but with few or no connections to other labour market players. The difference in interests makes it difficult for a single social compromise to satisfy everyone.

Hence, a real threat of huge social diversification has emerged. We may indeed witness the formation of a monstrous social structure encircling a narrow group of beneficiaries of new technologies; a small **middle class** servile to the former, and a huge, poorly educated, impoverished, and influenced exclusively by mass culture group of other citizens.

The election mechanism as such has also been recently facing a crisis. Many people believe that mass culture, the heavy influence of which has also stemmed from the technological revolution, has converted elections into a beauty contest,

where skills of media interaction and of collecting massive election funds seem to be a factor of ever-increasing impact on election results. More and more often, election campaigns are turning into advertising campaigns.

All this is a source of frustration to a considerable group of citizens; it makes political moods more radical, it disables the implementation of a crucial purpose of the civic society, that is the sense of influence and importance of a possibly large mass of people, forming a **nation** out of a **social mass** in the understanding of ancient Greek concepts. Another matter is that of fundamental security, forged with such difficulty in Europe.

A civic society can make sense only if at least the majority of the nation are competent to make co-decisions; otherwise, claims shall replace civic mentality. This is the precise future threat to European democracy. A crisis of the state accompanied by the popularisation of a civic society may indeed cause many individuals to seek their social and political realm beyond the state itself. As Hannah Arendt⁴ wrote, this is a path leading directly to a totalitarian system, or to a drop in the quality of life at the very least. Although this is no major threat for the near future, a failure of European Union states to master this crisis may prove extremely dangerous long-term, especially if accompanied by other processes causing concern, not described here for reasons of limited space.

The reality of and potentially short time span separating us from such threats may be proven by reactions to globalisation processes we have been witnesses to, in particular those during international conventions where politics or global economy were debated, such as the recent Seattle events, or the Prague outcry, occurring even as I pen these words. Naturally, the information revolution, new technologies, or even globalisation may bring either very negative or positive results. In light of the purpose of this paper, I am commenting on threats. It is an indisputable fact, however, that the European integration opportunity would not have been fulfilled to the extent it is taking place today, were it not for new technologies and the consequent globalisation.

The processes described here may indeed be a source of crisis for the democratic state and the European Union alike. Globalisation, European integration inclusive, have been causing a weakening of functions and importance of the state in general, and a national state in particular. This triggers off questions as to the issue of identity among large groups of EU citizens. The natural need for identity and individualism may, as the programmed state weakening occurs, result in a yearning for nationalist level identity. A region may prove too narrow, and the European Union too large and abstract a reference point for social and cultural self-identification, indispensable to a human being.

⁴ H. Arendt, *Korzenie totalitaryzmu (Roots of the Totalitarian System)*, Warsaw 1989.

Such great civilisation-forming processes result in other complications as well: for example, states and nations are gradually losing their role of chief entities in global politics, economy, or culture. This results in an even more profound disappointment of citizens, who feel even more marginalised and deprived of any influence whatsoever. One may assume that all these dangers are resolvable, but only if they have been communicated and bring positive mobilisation. I am not exhausting the problem range as defined. I simply wished to show that the Union and European Union community shall be experiencing major problems with itself. A perspective of European Union enlargement to include aspirant countries (Poland, for example) not only makes the situation more difficult, although I believe it to be a necessary (though not sufficient) opportunity, obviously provided that institutional, legal, economic, and cultural problems are resolved in a modern and enlightened way. All illusions aside, however, it shall be much easier to resolve such matters in a large rather than a tiny European Union.

3. Polish social transformation

Poland's membership in the European Union shall also require very complex and rapid domestic adjustment processes. We have our own problems, however, complicating our "way to Europe", as a phrase coined without much attention to detail yet explicitly has it. We suffer of our own civilisation revolution-related troubles, albeit not as deeply as EU member states. I see social transformation as our major problem.

What does this mean? The very concept of social transformation is not clear. I nevertheless believe that it may prove useful, should the concept of social order be placed at the core of a transformation phenomena analysis. Why, for example, are we not debating social change or revolution, which concepts have an excellent tradition in humanist sciences? Would it not be better to refer to the term "modernisation", or something entirely different? Most certainly, this is not a term well embedded in sociology, since even in a book with transformation in its title⁵ it is impossible to find a definition of the concept. Andrzej Rychard, co-editor of the publication, though referring in the introductory chapter to the so-called transformation theory, concurrently admits that we do not actually have a definition of transformation as such available.⁶

I would not, however, refer him back to power engineering or cybernetics. We ought to know indeed, when and in what sense shall the term be used. One may assume that since a linguistic custom has been formed, whereby instead of

⁵ *Spoleczeństwo w transformacji (Society in Transformation)*, ed. A.Rychard, M.Federowicz, Warsaw 1993.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p.5.

enjoying terms existent to date, the term “transformation” is commonly applied, such term is necessary as describing a phenomenon no previously used concepts had been able to define precisely.

I would hence assume that transformation is mentioned whenever one wishes to describe changes stretching over a lengthy period of time (therefore, transformation is not a revolution), taking on the form of mutually dependent process cycles, and extremely dispersed, i.e. encircling a very broad scope of phenomena occurring in a systemic fashion in numerous areas of social life, and applying o the deepest spheres of social life. If, however, we speak of transformation when changes are of no revolutionary nature, why should we not be satisfied with the term “evolution”? Most probably, in the common sense of the term, it also matters that transformation occurs slower than a revolution and faster than evolution. Thus, it is a process of average dynamics. As far as process depth is concerned, we witness transformation when changes apply to the social order.⁷

The social order is one of the most fundamental categories applied in sociology. It defines the essence of foundations of any society. According to Jan Szczepański, the social order entails a certain condition, arrangement, and bond between processes of satisfying the needs of all individuals, subgroups, circles, and other components of a community; it entails an operational condition of institutions and of individual behaviour forms, whereby the community exists in its entirety, functioning, achieving objectives, and developing.⁸

Mirosława Marody writes, on the other hand, that the social order is a well-organised and interconnected set of operational rules binding in a society (formally and/or realistically), with the following elements recognised as fundamental to such order: (1) operational standards, and (2) institutions establishing normative rules and the institutional social order, respectively.⁹ Hence, the author distinguishes between two forms of a social order: the assumed and the implemented,¹⁰ with the difference being that the former is officially proclaimed, whereas the latter is actually applied.

The actual concept of a social order draws its tradition – as Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński describes – from Herbert Spencer having distinguished between an

⁷ More on the subject in: K.Wielecki, *Młodzież i edukacja po wielkiej zmianie (Youth and Education after the Big Change)* in: *Edukacja i młodzież wobec społeczeństwa obywatelskiego (Education and Youth vs. the Civic Society)*, ed. K.Przyszczykowski, A.Zandecki, Poznań-Toruń 1996.

⁸ J.Szczepański, *Elementarne pojęcia socjologii (Elementary Sociological Concepts)*, Warsaw 1970, p.237.

⁹ M.Marody, *Sens zbiorowy a stabilność i zmiana ładu społecznego (Collective Sense vs. Stability and Change in the Social Order)* in: *Rzeczywistość polska i sposoby radzenia sobie z nią (Polish Reality and Ways to Cope)*, ed. M.Marody, A.Sulek, Warsaw 1987, p.113.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p.114.

industrial society, self-organised at the grass-root level, and a military society, organised top-down.¹¹ In Poland, Stanisław Ossowski's typology is best known. He distinguished between a monocentric and a polycentric order.¹² The former is based on the dominance of a group ruling the entire society, primarily by coercion. The latter describes a society consisting of numerous relatively autonomous groups, where decisions are made in recognition of a common interest.

I shall summarise my social order-related comments with a conclusion that the scope of the social order concept includes institutions of top importance to the society. Contemporarily, this covers the state and its central institutions. Moreover, another factor of the social order is that of an institutionalised system of social distances, i.e. a social structure encompassing classes, layers, and groups. This concept also includes value systems fundamental to any given society, as well as its basic standards, norms, justifications, ethos, symbols, and meanings: the culture of such society.

Therefore, the fact that Poland is undergoing social transformation means in-depth changes occurring at varying levels of the social order: the social structure, institutional order, and culture. Thus, the foundations of social existence are changing.

I shall not describe the details of Polish transformation. Although it is very interesting, for the sake of this article let it suffice for us to show how difficult the interference of two social organisms is, said organisms being the European Union and Poland, deeply shaken with profound, crucial, and deeply rooted processes.

My purpose has also been to prove that such act – necessary from the viewpoint of EU and Polish interests – shall require deep thought, sociological included. Neither Polish nor European Union problems can be resolved by refusing to admit their existence. Moreover, I am convinced that EU enlargement to include (at least initially) the first three to four states (Poland included) may prove useful, or even necessary in the interest of both parties. Legal or economic claims or problems, on the other hand, cannot serve as sole decision criteria, nor can they be the only realm of seeking opportunities to resolve our own and third party problems. We are facing more serious troubles and reasons for integration than people with medium-term forecast inclinations imagine.

¹¹ E. Wnuk-Lipiński, *Małe grupy w ładzie monocentrycznym (Small Groups in a Monocentric Order)* in: *Grupy i więzi społeczne w systemie monocentrycznym (Social Groups and Bonds in a Monocentric System)*, Warsaw 1990, p.71 *et seq.*

¹² S. Ossowski, *Struktura społeczna w społecznej świadomości (The Social Structure in Social Awareness)*, in: S. Ossowski, *Dziela, t.V, Z zagadnień struktury społecznej, (Collected Works, Volume Five, Social Structure Issues)*, Warsaw 1968.

I have mentioned primarily threats in this paper. I have no ambition of exhausting the list thereof. I have rather attempted to show the depth and extent of problems prevalent throughout the world, the European Union included.