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Poland in the European Arena after Accession¹

Abstract: *Poland, as a middle-income and middle-sized power, has been constantly growing during the process of its post-Communist transformation (1990–2014). In this multilayered study the author employs the viewpoints of political science, sociology, economy, international relations, and even the philosophy of development. He concludes that with respect to both the contemporary and future role of Poland on the international scene, its domestic dynamics is no less important than its share of power on the global level. In that regard, after 2008 a fundamental change has been taking place, i.e. the erosion of Western domination, in contrast to the early years of Poland's transformation, when it so eagerly wanted to be a part of the West. In particular this concerns the European Union, which has been the 'modernization anchor' for Poland. Following the crisis of 2008 the EU has been in a state of flux and structural crisis, the outcome of which is still uncertain. Simultaneously the events in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea by Russia have created an era of new geostrategic challenges - and very close to Poland's borders. Thus, Poland finds itself once again facing its classical dilemma: between Russia and Germany. The author concludes that Poland has no other choice than to elaborate a new raison d'état, like in the early 1990s. However, in order to do this one needs domestic unity, which unfortunately is lacking in Poland now. And this is the major challenge it faces.*

Keywords: Poland-EU relations, Polish accession to NATO and the EU, EU crisis, Ukraine crisis, post-communist transformation, democracy in post-communist countries, 2008 global economic crisis, 2014 security crisis in Europe, new economic global order

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Introduction

Poland as a subject of international relations is vested with very specific attributes. Its most determining characteristics today are:

- 1) As a post-communist state, it experienced decades of the failed experiment of a centrally planned economy known as ‘real socialism’ and its accompanying autocratic system (which was, in fact, totalitarian between 1948 and 1956);²
- 2) As a former member of the Eastern Bloc, like the other states in the region – especially the members of the Visegrad Group – after the change of its political system it strived first and foremost to change alliances and settle firmly in the Western institutional system (Council of Europe, OECD, NATO, and the European Union);
- 3) As a candidate country for membership in NATO and the EU, it experienced the ‘shock therapy’ experiment, and for objective reasons, without in fact having any other choice, it went through a neoliberal form of transition of the state and economy;
- 4) As a young and firmly-established democracy with a still relatively weak market and low domestic capital, it often looks for solutions and innovations in foreign countries, which in fact it is often forced to do;
- 5) It is a ‘new’ EU Member State (since 2004);
- 6) It is a country still working its way up, struggling to catch up with the older democracies and stronger markets from the western part of the continent (this is the basis for its ‘adaptation strategy’);
- 7) It is a country which has managed to incorporate the main, essentially liberal, currents (‘liberal democracy’) dominant in the Western and global political arena after 1989. In line with this view Poland is yet another successful ‘emerging market’ which, however, according to its opponents on both the left and the right of the political scene, has become a ‘dependent country’, conducting its transformation mainly on the basis of foreign capital (hence its *dependent development*). Since 2004 it has been implementing changes through integration with the EU, which makes it an adaptive and imitational state, located at the periphery, or at least semi-periphery, of the Western world;³

² This remains a contentious issue. The scholar who argues most often, in most detail and most convincingly that 1956 was a turning point from totalitarianism to authoritarianism is A. Walicki, e.g. *Od projektu komunistycznego do neoliberalnej utopii (From the communist project to the neo-liberal utopia)*, Kraków 2013, p. 86.

³ The concept of the division, based on competitive advantages, into core, periphery and semi-periphery states and regions originates in the theories of I. Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis. An Introduction*, Durham and London 2004, pp. 28–31.

- 8) It remains a country still undergoing the process of transformation and trying to achieve convergence with the affluent societies of the world.⁴

As the above listing shows, Poland cannot be described using only one criterion, nor classified into a single category of states. As a matter of fact, it is a much more complex entity, one that requires a multi-directional approach and description. This requires the use of at least the instruments of political science, economics and sociology, and it would be advisable to add to it the instruments of geostrategic studies, international relations and the philosophy of history as well. The present study is an attempt to formulate such a multi-dimensional and multi-subject definition of Poland's current role in the European and global arena.

In order to perform this task properly, we need to focus on the roles played by a given state in the international arena. In this study they have been intentionally mixed with the determinants of these roles, starting with the most important category, that is the potential of the state.

Three landmark dates are incorporated in this study: 1989, when Poland embarked on its path of post-communist transformation; 2004, when it joined the EU, looking for an anchor to its modernisation; and finally 2008, when a depression hit the global (mainly Western) markets, causing far-reaching consequences that have been and are still felt today by all the subjects of the Western world – the world to which Poland has so strongly aspired after 1989 – starting with the USA (the main guarantor, along with NATO, of the country's external security) and the EU (the guarantor of modernisation and, as a consequence, internal security and development).

1. The Polish transformation

It is a well-known fact that Poland embarked on its path of post-communist transformation using what it aptly called 'shock therapy'. In this way it submitted itself to neoliberal orthodoxy under the banner of

⁴ This terminology is put in order by K. Jasiecki in his important work *Kapitalizm po polsku. Międzymodernizacją a peryferiami Unii Europejskiej* (*Polish Capitalism. Between Modernization and the Peripheries of the European Union*), Warszawa 2013, p. 35. An in-depth analysis of the first stage of transformation was conducted by G.W. Kołodko, *Od szoku do terapii. Ekonomia i polityka transformacji* (*From Shock to Therapy. The Economics and Policy of Transformation*), Warszawa 1999. In this as well as his other works Kołodko has been a consistent critic of the 'shock'-based solutions under the banner of the Washington Consensus: *Grzegorz W. Kołodko i czterdzieści lat transformacji* (*Grzegorz Kołodko and the Quarter Century of Transformation*), P. Kozłowski and M. Wojtyśiak-Kotlarski (eds.), Warszawa 2014, pp. 308–316.

the Washington Consensus.⁵ It remains, however, debatable whether this was an objective necessity or whether there was any alternative path available at that time, i.e. at the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century. Some Polish authors claim that there were indeed some alternatives,⁶ but these authors constitute a small minority.

Everything seems to indicate that once the new elites of the newly democratic country set their mind on joining the NATO and the EU, the choice was effectively already made. The West of that time, following the collapse of the bipolar global order and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, was very enthusiastic and euphoric, even to the point of adopting an 'end of history' theory, according to which the global triumph of a liberal democracy and economy worldwide was inevitable. The values emphasised by the neo-liberals, such as competition, the free market, capital, economic growth, efficiency, effectiveness, etc., became widespread and predominant. Thus, following the previous orthodoxy of excessive state domination a new orthodoxy of market domination appeared, with the inevitable consequence being the weakened role of the centre (i.e. the government and state authorities).⁷

This inevitable then course towards the liberalisation of markets and liberalism in political and public life was further consolidated after Poland joined the EU, in large part because after 1992 the EU institutions, and in particular the Commission, were also subjected to neo-liberal rules and principles.⁸ However, once Poland joined the EU, thus fulfilling the last among the strategic goals it had set for itself under its new *raison d'état*

⁵ The author of this concept was J. Williamson. The project was first of all about liberalisation and deregulation of markets and trade, as well as privatisation and guarantees of property rights. For more see: W. Morawski, *Konfiguracje globalne, struktury, agencje, instytucje* (*Global Configurations, Structures, Agencies, Institutions*), Warszawa 2010, pp. 147–149.

⁶ One of them is T. Kowalik, who presents his views in *www.polskatransformacja.pl*, Warszawa 2009. He writes explicitly that in his opinion Balcerowicz's plan, sometimes referred to as the Big Bang but usually as 'shock therapy', was unnecessary (p. 80). As noted in footnote 4 above, G. Kołodko has also been consistently critical of shock-based solutions, see: Grzegorz Kołodko..., op.cit., p. 74. Recently another important volume, strongly critical of the neo-liberal approach, has been published in Poland: R. Woś, *Dziecięca choroba liberalizmu* (*Liberalism, a children's disease*), Warszawa 2014. According to Woś, this liberal, or neo-liberal attitude, was 'a curse' which led to a '*liberalism that was vulgar, morally doubtful and economically ineffective*', ibidem, p. 12.

⁷ G. Kołodko supplies yet another argument, and a quite important one at that. He observes that there was a battle for access to Eastern European and then post-Soviet 'emerging markets' with their human and material resources, Grzegorz Kołodko..., op.cit., p. 75.

⁸ For more, see: T.G. Grosse, *W poszukiwaniu geoeconomii w Europie* (*In Search of Geoeconomics in Europe*), Warszawa 2014, pp. 118–122.

after 1990,⁹ it fairly soon encountered external and, even more importantly, internal barriers to further integration. In the external dimension, the initial signal that the process was crumbling was the rejection of the Constitution for Europe in the referendums held in France and the Netherlands in the spring of 2005. At the same time, in the internal dimension there emerged, in autumn 2005, an alternative to the development path pursued by Poland to date. This came in the form of the so-called Fourth Polish Republic (IV RP), strongly supported by the right-wing political camp.¹⁰ It was the first time, post-transformation, that a new alternative concept for Poland and its future had appeared (except for a brief and failed experiment by Jan Olszewski's government from 23 December 1991 to 5 June 1992).

What was the reason for such a dramatic 'turn to the right', which culminated in the electoral defeat of the liberals and then the left wing as well in 2005? Polish analysts and observers essentially agree that the formally left-oriented, post-communist Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej – SLD) paid such a high price for governing the country because it became effectively liberal instead of truly left or social-democratic, as it claimed to be. It represented the interests of the ruling and privileged elites instead of those who actually needed support and assistance. In other words, the SLD betrayed its most faithful hardcore electorate.¹¹ Under the 'left' governments (in 1993–1997 and then again in 2001–2005) the privatisation of the country was carried out. The logic of spoils, rapacity, the handing out of positions and awarding benefits to cronies, as well as pursuing narrowly understood personal or party interests became commonplace. The most spectacular proof (or evidence) of this thesis was the so-called 'Rywin affair', in the wake of which the first Committee of Inquiry was formed in the Polish Sejm (later many similar commissions were formed following this model, but none of them played so significant a role as this first one). It should be noted that the right-wing politicians

⁹ This was set forth by the first minister of foreign relations of democratic Poland: K. Skubiszewski, *Racja stanu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (The Polish Raison d'Etat)* in: K. Skubiszewski, *Polityka zagraniczna i odzyskanie niepodległości. Przemówienia, oświadczenia, wywiady 1989–1993 (Polish Foreign Policy and the Regaining of Independence. Speeches, Declarations, Interviews 1989–1993)*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 299–308.

¹⁰ A highly critical evaluation of this project in the field of international relations and foreign policy can be found in the volume: R. Kuźniar, *Droga do wolności. Polityka zagraniczna III Rzeczypospolitej (The Road to Freedom. Foreign Policy of the 3rd Republic of Poland)*, Warszawa 2008.

¹¹ M. Janicki and W. Władyka, *Cień wielkiego brata. Ideologia i praktyka IV RP (In the Shadow of the Big Brother. The Ideology and Practice of the 4th Republic of Poland)*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 8–9.

skilfully played the situation for their benefit. It is generally agreed that the 'Rywin affair' brought down the Left and ruined its chances in future elections.¹² Another element, no less significant, which hurt not only the left but the liberals as well was that the extremely right-wing party PiS (Law and Justice) managed to attract a significant part of the disillusioned electorate of the SLD.

In the international dimension, the rightist and nationalist IV RP project was nothing other than an attempt to direct the process of modernisation towards domestic sources, under the pretence of 'defending national sovereignty'.¹³ In the internal dimension, it was a rejection of all the developmental directions adhered to up until that time, and it broke the parliamentary consensus on the main developmental and foreign policy objectives. Unfortunately, this break turned out to be permanent. There was no longer any political will for cooperation, compromise and dialogue, even in matters of overriding importance for the state and the nation concerning its *raison d'état*. The two opposing political camps, which have constantly been fighting against each other since that time, have each defined these principal issues in their own different ways.

The 'IV RP' experiment failed. Jarosław Kaczyński and his government had to relinquish power following its loss in the early elections held in autumn 2007. The new coalition of the Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska – PO) and the Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe – PSL) turned, in both its philosophy of governance and behaviour in the internal and external arenas, to the methods and formulas previously employed – despite the frequent changes of government – between 1990 and 2005. Unfortunately, the brief experiment of building the Fourth Republic set the state on a path of permanent ideological conflict between the governing coalition, in fact liberal again, and the main opposition Law and Justice Party (PiS), attached to the concept of the IV RP. This has had two serious consequences, both clearly negative for the further development of the state. The clash of two different philosophies of further modernisation and development of the state not only resulted

¹² Lew Rywin was an eminent media potentate. For example, he was the producer of the film 'The Pianist', for which the director Roman Polański received an Oscar. See: *System Rywina, czyli druga strona III Rzeczypospolitej*, J. Skórzyński (ed.), Warszawa 2003.

¹³ Roman Kuźniar, invoking the words of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Bronisław Geremek, describes the project as one in which Polish national politics was 'Sarmatised', that is stuffed with demagoguery, megalomania and the slogan of a 'proud nation' that deserves more than others, empty gestures, highlighting the Polish uniqueness, emphasising an aggressive and demanding attitude, characterized by the inability to conduct a dialogue and search for compromise, *My. Europa (We. Europe)*, Warszawa 2013, p. 194.

in the aforementioned rejection of compromise on the main directions of foreign policy, but also effectively spread to every area and often resembled (and still does) a domestic cold war, thus clearly undermining the previously accepted *raison d'état*, which is now understood by the two opposing political camps in opposite terms. While PO has remained pro-European, PiS has become strongly eurosceptic. A symbolic expression of the pro-European sentiment of the governing coalition was the famous speech delivered by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski in Berlin in November 2011, in which he called for greater involvement of Germany in the process of integration.¹⁴ Naturally this speech did not sit well with the main opposition party (PiS), which subjected it to scathing criticism.¹⁵ Both sides also have different views on the role of the USA. PiS would like a direct alliance with the USA,¹⁶ while PO is for an alliance within NATO.¹⁷

The J. Kaczyński administration differed from its predecessors in that it paid particular attention to issues of an ideological nature, even going as far as its project for establishing the Fourth Republic of Poland (IV RP) to replace the existing Third Republic, which was a product of the Polish Round Table Talks of 1989 and the following transformation processes. It is clear that the intention of the initiators of the IV RP project was an ideological one, slightly archaic and heavily lined with statism, but also deeply Polish in both tradition and spirit, with the 'true patriots' being those who supported PiS and opposed the 'liars'-elites' ('łże-elity') who were compared to ZOMO.¹⁸ One of the words used most frequently

¹⁴ For the full text of the speech, see the website of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs at: <http://www.msz.gov.pl/resource/c2a33d88-7b8d-4fa5-8680-a67a4b2b38af:JCR> (last visited 06.10.2014).

¹⁵ *Burza po wypowiedzi Sikorskiego w Berlinie* (Storm following Sikorski's speech in Berlin), PAP, 29.11.2011.

¹⁶ The main exponent of this view, shared by the party, is the former Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs W. Waszczykowski; see: <http://www.bbn.gov.pl/pl/wydarzenia/2099,Witold-Waszczykowski-Sikorski-gra-dzentelmena-Gdy-nie-ma-kamer-jest-brutalny-i-w.html> (last visited 04.10.2014).

¹⁷ See the policy statement by Minister R. Sikorski regarding the tasks of the Polish foreign policy in 2014, available at: <http://www.msz.gov.pl/resource/9699a82d-9e2d-41d4-bd4e-2095b1c1fabe:JCR> (last visited 04.10.2014).

¹⁸ The ZOMO – *Zmotoryzowane Odwody Milicji Obywatelskiej* (Motorized Reserves of the Citizens' Militia) – was a paramilitary police formation of the communist regime, infamous for the extreme brutality it used, *inter alia*, to pacify protesters. It became a symbol of the martial-law period in the history of the Polish People's Republic, which commenced on 13 December 1981. The phrase 'liars'-elites' was coined during a debate in the Sejm in February 2006. See: <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1342,title,Lze-elity,wid,8629995,wiadomosc.html?tcid=1927d>. This second phrase, addressed to PiS's

in the context of this project was *'układ'* ('an arrangement'), which was the alleged result of a 'conspiracy' of the elites of the Third Republic of Poland (1989–2005) with representatives from the world of politics, the media, former intelligence agencies and organised crime, all of whom were in cahoots with each other. In the opinion of the project's authors, it was an extensive web of intrigue infiltrated into the whole of Polish political life and leading to a pathology and even a paralysis of state structures. Even though no one has ever managed to prove the existence of such an 'arrangement' – which was by definition left undefined and vague – the remedial measures undertaken to fight it were all too real: personal purges; increased state control; reforms of the intelligence agencies (the most well-known of these being the dissolution of the Military Information Services (*Wojskowe Służby Informacyjne*, WSI) and the broadening their competences, the 'crowning success' of which was the establishment of a new agency, the Central Anticorruption Bureau (CBA)); as well as settling accounts with the communist past, which took the form of increasing the prestige and role of the Institute of National Remembrance (*Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*, IPN) and a new, much broader and more restrictive vetting (lustration) law.

Because the main political focus was on such issues as lustration, removing people with ties to the former communist regime or the security services of that time from offices, and settling accounts with the communist past (including with the Round Table and those who benefited from it, e.g. Adam Michnik and his media empire, *Agora*),¹⁹ economic issues were pushed to the background.²⁰ The overriding political goal of the prime minister and his administration was, next to the establishment

political opponents and claiming that they were occupying the place of ZOMO, was uttered at an election rally in the Gdańsk Shipyard in October 2006 and caused an avalanche of protests from the opponents of PiS and from former activists who fought against communism. See: *Kto jest tam, gdzie stało ZOMO (Who is Standing Where the ZOMO Used to Stand?)*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 03.10.2006.

¹⁹ The eminent Polish feature writer Jacek Żakowski vividly described the Third and Fourth Polish Republics as, respectively, 'the Poland of Michnik' and 'the Poland of Wildstein'. In the Poland of Michnik there was a presumption of innocence, while the Poland of Wildstein was guided by suspicion and a presumption of guilt – for this reason the Poland of Michnik strived for evolution, while the Poland of Wildstein chose revolution. *Czyja Polska (Who's Poland is it)*, "Polityka", 19.02.2005.

²⁰ Economic issues appeared at the back (page 54) of PiS's electoral programme of 2005. M. Janicki and W. Władyka, op.cit., p. 150. The thesis that the economy was not so important for Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński was confirmed to Rafał Woś by the well-known and rather right-oriented historian Antoni Dudek, who acknowledged that the 'frequent visitors to Kaczyński's office were mainly representatives of power centers, justice, heads of intelligence agencies and the president of IPN, while almost nobody was from economic sectors', R. Woś, op.cit., p. 47.

of the IV RP, the so called ‘historical policy’, which involved rewriting the most recent Polish history. In foreign policy, in turn, the usually discordant coalition spoke with one voice against Germany and Russia and consistently expressed far-reaching euroscepticism.²¹

After 2008, Poland also had to deal with the effects of the great crisis in the global markets, which began in mid-September 2008 in the USA following the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, an icon of the US financial system. It soon became obvious that the crisis represented the fall from grace of the neo-liberal orthodoxy connected with the Washington Consensus, which had largely contributed to the outbreak of the crisis and even, in the opinion of some, caused it (this view is still a subject of discussion in the literature).

On the Polish political scene this fact naturally seemed to support the arguments of the diverse opposition, its strongest component definitely being PiS. While the governing coalition of the PO and the PSL advocated continuing liberalism in the economy and liberal democracy in general, PiS clearly called for (and continues to call for) the need to strengthen the state, i.e. to increase the role of government, even to the point of centralisation and state domination.

This dichotomy in the domestic arena is sharp and has led to diverging interpretations of the reality in the country. While after 2008 the governing camp maintained the narrative and concept of Poland as the ‘green island’ (as Poland turned out to be the only EU Member State that avoided recession and experienced continuing growth after 2008),²² the opposition has been pointing to the significant increases in emigration, unemployment, and even prices²³ and still takes the position that Poland’s development has been a failure, that the economy has been subordinated to foreign capital and hence Poland is experiencing ‘dependent development’, and that reforms are fragmentary and the country is suffering from the ‘soft state’ syndrome.²⁴

²¹ One example: the President of Poland then L. Kaczyński (the prime minister’s twin brother) withheld his signature on the Treaty of Lisbon for a very long time (557 days), finally signing it on 9 October 2009, after the second referendum in Ireland. He was the next-to-last head of state in the EU to sign it, the last being the declared eurosceptic President of the Czech Republic Vaclav Klaus. *Prezydent podpisał Traktat Lizboński (The President Has Signed the Lisbon Treaty)*, “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 10.10.2009.

²² See the summary of a TV interview with Prime Minister Tusk: http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,12677047,Tusk_Nadal_jestesmy_zielona_wyspa_Tylko_ludzie_sa.html (last visited 04.10.2014).

²³ http://www.wiadomosci24.pl/arttykul/zielona_wyspa_donalda_tuska_w_liczbach_239125.html (last visited 04.10.2014).

²⁴ For a scientific explication, see: K. Jasiecki, *op.cit.*, pp. 205–238.

This dichotomy also affects the external arena. Many analytical and media centres in the West support or even consolidate the official version of the PO-PSL government, presenting post-1989 Poland as a country of incredible success.²⁵ The visit of President Barack Obama to Warsaw on the 25th anniversary of Poland's semi-democratic elections of June 1989 (which heralded the systemic transformation) represented a kind of culmination of this trend.²⁶ This 'narrative of success', however, is contrasted in the internal arena with a quite grim description of the everyday reality, emphasizing the ineffectiveness of the state, corrupt and irresponsible elites, and a sick economy.

The unexpected appointment of Donald Tusk as President of the European Council at the end of August of 2014 has raised even more questions about the future of the Polish domestic political arena. A new government was formed under the leadership of Ewa Kopacz, who also took over the leadership of PO. Naturally there are many different opinions about the actual consequences of these developments, but even those analysts who are ideologically close to the PO, such as Aleksander Smolar, do not exclude the possibility that the PiS will rule on its own after the parliamentary elections in Autumn 2015.²⁷ It is an open question the void caused by the absence of D. Tusk's strong leadership will be filled.²⁸

Let's make an inventory. We should list the following achievements of the seven-year long Tusk administration. They:

- handled the crisis in the world markets very well, even exceptionally well, on the European scale, allowing Poland to boast about its positive economic growth at the end of 2014 (estimated at around 3.2 per cent, with the same projected for 2015);²⁹

²⁵ The highly regarded weekly *The Economist*, in its special edition of 28.06.2014 devoted to Poland, declared that Poland is experiencing its best economic situation in half a millennium and that it is currently entering a 'New Jagiellonian Era', adding that '*since 1989 [Poland] has achieved unprecedented levels of income and quality of life and its economy has grown faster than that of any other country in Europe*'. Golden opportunity. Special Report: Poland, "The Economist" 28.06.2014, p. 14.

²⁶ Obama highly praised the achievements of the 'free and democratic Poland'. See: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/04/remarks-president-obama-25th-anniversary-freedom-day> (last visited 04.10.2014).

²⁷ *Kaczyński przebija sufit (Kaczynski Shatters the Glass Ceiling)*, interview with A. Smolar, "Newsweek", 4–10.08.2014.

²⁸ D. Passent, *Łyzka dziegciu (The Fly in the Ointment)*, blog entry: <http://passent.blog.polityka.pl/2014/09/05/lyzka-dziegciu/> (last visited 04.10.2014).

²⁹ <http://finanse.wp.pl/kat,1033745,title,Wzrost-PKB-Polski-w-2014-r-32-proc-tyl-samo-w-2015-r,wid,16836462,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=113942> (last visited 04.10.2014).

- managed to restore the slightly tarnished image of Poland in the international arena, with the symbol of this restoration being the election of the former Polish prime minister Jerzy Buzek to the seat of the President of the European Parliament – the first time this function was given to a politician from post-communist East-Central Europe. This trend was further strengthened by the later appointment of Donald Tusk, mentioned above;
- kept a stable exchange rate of the Polish currency (the zloty), which has recently been strengthening in relation to the basic foreign currency basket;
- launched many road construction projects and completed construction of the first sections of motorways (the first real successes appeared in the form of opening ceremonies of new motorway segments after 2010, and the projects are currently quite advanced);
- despite the crisis in the world markets, including in neighbouring countries, they managed to keep a tight rein on the trade balance and, more importantly, on the unemployment rate as well (which, however, still remains quite high at approx. 11 per cent).³⁰

However, the list of the deficiencies, shortcomings and negligence of the Tusk government is equally long:

- the public debt in the country is experiencing unprecedented growth and the remedies such as raising the retirement age for both men and women to 67 instead of the present 65 for men and 60 for women, or taking over most of the funds collected by private retirement funds (OFE), are treated ambivalently at the very least and remain quite controversial;³¹
- there is a dramatic increase in public spending, which more and more often provokes the thesis that we are ‘living on credit at the expense of future generations’. The situation is made even more grave by the fact that three quarters of these costs are fixed expenses: pensions and other social benefits that must be paid;³²

³⁰ For quite a long period it remained at the level of 8.2–8.5%, the European average during that time being 8.9%, but the latest data indicates that it has increased to 11.7% and may increase to 12%. Based on the data from a special website of GUS, “Polskie bezrobocie” (“Polish Unemployment”), see: <http://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/praca-wynagrodzenia/bezrobocie-stopa-bezrobocia/miesieczna-informacja-o-bezrobociu-rejestrowanym-w-polsce-w-sierpniu-2014-roku,1,31.html> (last visited 04.10.2014).

³¹ According to the forecast of the Ministry of Finance, the public finance sector, calculated according to the EU method ESA'95, will have a surplus of 5.8% GDP in 2014, a deficit of 2.5% in 2015; in 2016, the deficit is expected to fall to 1.8%, and in 2017 – to 1.2%; <http://biznes.onet.pl/dlug-publiczny-wg-metodologii-ue-w-2014-roku-wynie,18490,5633456,news-detale> (last visited 04.10.2014).

³² PiS counts among the ‘seven deadly sins’ of D. Tusk as Prime Minister the ruining

- it is true that there is no recession but the budget deficit is clearly growing;³³
- the government has departed from one of its main priorities and goals – introducing the euro. Recently, as opposed to previous years, it has ceased giving any target date in this respect;
- despite promises of the necessary reform of public finance, there has been no such reform; moreover, there has also been no reform of the health system or of the uniformed services, and this latter deficiency has been strongly felt by the society;
- there are no investments into the energy sector, which is not only antiquated but, more importantly, mainly based on coal (Poland unfortunately has no nuclear power plants, and the construction of such a plant is only in the planning phase, and then with a quite vague schedule). This lack of a vision in the field of energy and climate policy is one of the gravest shortcomings of the Tusk government(s);
- out of the ten promises made by Prime Minister Tusk in his first political statement, very few have been fulfilled (in fact, only the withdrawal of the Polish armed forces from Iraq; the commencement of road constructions; and the improvement of Poland's image in NATO and the EU), while Poland's good economic situation despite the world crisis is, according to many independent experts, more the achievement of Polish business and the middle class than of the government. It was not the government but the Polish economy, in particular individual and private businesses, that have so far handled the crisis quite well;
- in the eyes of the opposition, Prime Minister Tusk gathered even more power in his own hands and his government maintained stagnation rather than introduced reforms. It had no vision or strategy for the state and the citizens have become subject to manipulation by the media, lacking any actual information about the current state of the economy and the country.³⁴

of public finance, tax increases (excise taxes, VAT), and the growing debt. See: <http://www.pis.org.pl/article.php?id=23322> (last visited 05.10.2014).

³³ The project of taking over funds from the OFE has been consistently criticised from the very beginning by Leszek Balcerowicz, Poland's first Minister of Finance and the author of the 'shock therapy'. See: <http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1013622,Balcerowicz-kontra-Tusk-Ostre-starcie-o-OFE> (last visited 04.10.2014).

³⁴ The first scholar to formulate such theses was Professor Z. Krasnodębski, connected with PiS; cf. Z. Krasnodębski, *Tusk i PO zagrożeniem wolności (Tusk and the PO as a Threat to Liberty)*, "Dziennik-Gazeta Prawna", 16.11.2009. Later – not without reason – they were consistently maintained and publically promoted by PiS.

2. Quality of democracy

One of the key conflicts in the internal arena is the dispute over the quality of democracy in Poland. After 1990, Poland decisively chose the liberal democracy variant. Given its previous experience with a totalitarian regime, and after 1956 with an autocratic regime, there was widespread social support for the concept of individual freedoms and an open civil society.³⁵ In the first phase of the changes these ideas raised no doubts among the elites and were commonly accepted by society as a whole. The previous lack of democracy – a time of dogmas, monopoly on power, and an ideology of ‘the only justified system’ – was to be replaced by political pluralism and civil liberties. There was a universally recognized need to change the closed system into an open one. However, it was rather common, even among the elites, to ignore the fact that a transition to liberalism required not only institutional and legal changes but also changes of customs and social behaviour, which proved to be much more difficult.³⁶

Only after a few years of the operation of democratic processes did it become obvious how difficult this path was and how serious were the challenges posed, not by the institutionalisation of democratic structures and processes, but by social mentality and awareness. While citizens quickly assimilated the EU’s ‘four freedoms’, i.e. the free movement of goods, services, capital and persons, they were not as eager to take on civic responsibilities. As Ralf Dahrendorf had predicted at the onset of the post-communist transformation, it proved to be a long, winding and bumpy path leading ‘through a valley of tears’.³⁷ Constitutional changes were implemented within a couple of months (although Poland had to wait until 1997 for a whole new constitution), but economic changes proved much more painful and it soon became evident that the transformation in mentality would take years or even decades.

Unfortunately, after more than two decades of democratisation, the quality of democracy in Poland is still unsatisfactory. According to the data published in April 2013 concerning the fifth edition of the Democracy Index compiled in December 2012 by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), Poland ranked 44th among 167 states and was considered as being among the ‘flawed democracies’. Poland’s score was 7.12, exactly the same as in the preceding report for 2011. The lowest component score was

³⁵ For broader and more detailed information on this issue, see: A. Walicki, *Idee i ludzie. Próba autobiografii (Ideas and People. Towards an Autobiography)*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 59–63.

³⁶ J. Szacki, *Liberalizm po komunizmie (Liberalism after Communism)*, Kraków 1994, p. 249.

³⁷ R. Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*, New Jersey 2005, 1st edition, New York 1990, p. 84.

awarded for the culture of Polish political elites (the category of ‘political culture’), which scored only 4.38, said score having had considerable influence on the overall score. The categories with the highest scores were, in turn, ‘electoral process and pluralism’ (9.58) and ‘civil liberties’ (9.12), but the scores for the remaining categories scores were much lower (6.11 for ‘political participation’ and 6.48 for ‘functioning of government’). Overall Poland ranked immediately after Timor-Leste and below such countries as Jamaica and Costa Rica (39th and 22nd, respectively), albeit higher than Hungary (49th). Among the post-communist countries the Czech Republic ranked the highest (in 17th place), followed by Slovenia (28th), Estonia (34th), Slovakia (40th), and Lithuania (42nd). The countries deemed most democratic in the world were four Scandinavian states – Norway, Sweden, Iceland, and Denmark, in that order. From among the members of the euro area, only Finland and the Netherlands made it into the first ten (9th and 10th, respectively). As regards the EU’s two major players, Germany ranked 14th and France 28th. The results of the study were heavily influenced by the course of the crisis that broke out in 2008, with Greece, Italy and France dropping into the category of ‘flawed democracies’ between 2008 and 2010.³⁸

The effects of the crisis are even more visible in the study conducted for the Eurobarometer concerning satisfaction with the way in which democracy works and trust in institutions. While in the early years of the 21st century there was a clear upward trend – as evidenced by the results of Eurobarometer 51 of 2002 and Eurobarometer 65 of spring 2006,³⁹ the studies conducted after the 2008 crisis show a deep depression or even a truly catastrophic situation in the countries affected most strongly by the crisis. The five main challenges facing the EU are: unemployment (55 per cent), social inequalities (33 per cent), public debt of the Member States (32 per cent), access to jobs for young people (29 per cent), and ageing of the population (24 per cent).⁴⁰

Fortunately, according to a respected study of the quality of democracy conducted by the American Freedom House, on a scale from 1 (best) to 7 (worst) Poland has been consistently receiving a ‘1’ for more than

³⁸ <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1356,title,Szukajacy-raport-na-temat-wadliwej-demokracji-w-Polsce-Jestesmy-za-Jamajka,wid,15503406,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=11309d> (last visited 04.10.2014).

³⁹ For the results and their analysis, see: A. Antoszewski, *Partie i systemy partyjne państw Unii Europejskiej na przełomie wieków (Parties and party systems in the EU countries at the turn of the 21st century)*, Toruń 2008, pp. 26–28.

⁴⁰ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2013/election/EB79.5%20EP%20EURO%20BAROMETER%20IE%20%28EN%29.pdf> (last visited 04.10.2014).

a decade, just as the oldest and most mature democracies in the world. With this rank it is in the group consisting of 90 completely 'free' countries (out of 195 surveyed)⁴¹ and it is not losing its positive rating, although some alarming phenomena were noted in the latest report for 2013 in the entire region of Central and Eastern Europe, to wit: 'economic difficulties, the corrupt merging of business and political interests, and government intolerance of checks and balances (Hungary, Romania).' As a result it was further noted that 'the subregion consisting of Central Europe, the Baltics, and the Balkans now enjoys a level of political rights and civil liberties second only to that of Western Europe'.⁴² While on first read this sounds promising, the problem here is that it is still 'second', i.e. not equal to that of Western Europe.

3. Economic potential

In terms of the economy, Poland belongs to the medium group. In the last two-plus decades the country's share in the global GDP has visibly increased, but it still amounts to less than 1 per cent. According to various estimates and assessments, as well as the data published by the World Bank, the IMF, the CIA, or Eurostat, the Polish economy ranks between 21st and 24th among the economies of the world and slightly higher in terms of currency exchange rates according to purchasing power parity (PPP).

As regards Poland's share in global trade, even though after Poland joined the EU its trade turnover began to rapidly rise, and despite the outbreak of the crisis in the global markets, Poland is still among the pretenders rather than strong countries with considerable trade incomes. Trade turnover also clearly defines Poland's place on the economic map of the world, as almost a third of the total trade is with Germany (26 per cent of exports and 27.3 per cent of imports in 2013), and more than 70 per cent with EU Member States (77.3 per cent of exports and 58.1 per cent of imports in 2013).⁴³ In terms of its economy, Poland is therefore strongly tied to Germany and Europe (even though it remains outside the euro zone), and other regions and continents are only complementary in the Polish trade strategy. Furthermore, in consequence of the strategy of

⁴¹ http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FIW%202013%20Charts%20and%20Graphs%20for%20Web_0.pdf (last visited 04.10.2014).

⁴² http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2013/essay-democratic-breakthroughs-balance#.U746JLFr_pI (last visited 04.10.2014).

⁴³ Based on official data published by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS): <http://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/prices-trade/trade/foreign-trade-turnover-in-total-and-by-countries-january-march-2014,1,15.html> (last visited 05.10.2014).

going West adopted by Poland, entire areas and even continents – such as Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, or even the recently highly dynamic Asia – are absent in Poland's mainstream expansion and even as areas of its interest.

So far the process of integration with the EU has been very successful. One of the best proofs of Poland's successful modernisation is the fact that the citizens' living standards have considerably improved. According to Eurostat data, when Poland joined the EU its average income per capita stood at 38 per cent of the EU average, but in 2013 it was already at 67 per cent, which was higher than Hungary's and much closer to Slovakia (76 per cent) and the Czech Republic (81 per cent). After joining the EU it experienced the highest economic growth among the countries of the Visegrad Group, and after 2008 had the highest growth in the entire EU -15 per cent between 2009 and 2013, with Slovakia occupying second place with its 8 per cent growth.⁴⁴ With this Poland considerably improved its position in the economic map of the world.

Poland is still, however, far from having achieved a fully satisfactory situation. In the Global Competitiveness Index 2013–2014 of the esteemed Swiss World Economic Forum (WEF), Poland ranked 42nd (out of 148 countries) with a score of 4.42 (on a scale from 1 to 7). While this was below Estonia (32nd with a score of 4.65), Poland was for the first time above the Czech Republic (46th with a score of 4.41 and considerably above Hungary (63rd with a score of 4.25) and Slovakia (78th with a score of 4.10). Of course Poland is far behind the leaders of the ranking – Switzerland (a score of 5.67) and Singapore (a score of 5.61) - but what is important is that it is constantly improving its position in this index and is already better than 106 countries.⁴⁵ However, in another respected opinion survey, one conducted by the top-ranking Swiss business school IMD reporting on economic competitiveness in the world, Poland dropped from the 33rd place in 2013 to 36th place in 2014. Moreover, the report notes that the internal evaluations presented by those directly involved in the economy in the country are much grimmer than the official line would suggest.⁴⁶

The competitiveness of the Polish economy is improving, but the process of catching up with the best is painstaking and slow. Furthermore, new risks have emerged in recent years as a consequence of the global crisis. According to one of the specialist analyses, in 2009 labour

⁴⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_the_European_Union (last visited 09.09.2014).

⁴⁵ http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GCR2013-14/GCR_Rankings_2013-14.pdf (last visited 09.09.2014).

⁴⁶ <http://www.imd.org/news/2014-World-Competitiveness.cfm> (last visited 09.09.2014).

efficiency in Poland was at 65 per cent of the EU-27 average, which was five percentage points more than in 2003 and 4.3 percentage points more than in 2006. Among the other new EU Member States from Central and Eastern Europe, both the level of labour efficiency in Poland and the scale of its improvement in 2007–2009 were deemed average (respectively in 6th and 5th place among the ten countries). It was also observed that entities with foreign capital which are active in Poland are characterised by relatively high labour efficiency.⁴⁷

In 2013 Jerzy Hausner and his team, being aware of the aforementioned shortcomings, and taking into account the effects of the crisis in the global economy after 2008, prepared a special report for the Polish government entitled ‘Competitive Poland. How to Advance in the Global Economic League’. The report suggested remedies to counteract the inevitable – as the experts concluded – process of economic slowdown to a level of 2 per cent of GDP per annum. The suggested solutions include: increased assistance for enterprises, diversification of exports with an emphasis on innovation, and a more productive use of Poland’s own workforce. Furthermore, the experts advocated and stressed the need for the development of a new strategy of European integration, because the formats used to date have become obsolete. They state outright that Poland should be better prepared and its economy more competitive before it adopts the euro as its common currency, a fact which the team considers inevitable in terms of further modernisation of the country.⁴⁸ Poland should join the euro area, but it first needs to prepare itself better for this change.

So far the Polish economy has still been struggling with numerous shortcomings. In the latest edition of the Index of Economic Freedom published by the USA-based Heritage Foundation, Poland ranked 50th, which puts it in the category of ‘moderately free’ countries, right next to Hungary (51st), but rather far behind the Czech Republic (26th), which made it alongside Lithuania and Estonia to the category of ‘mostly free’, the only countries from the CEE region to rank so high.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ J. Chojna, *Konkurencyjność polskiej gospodarki w latach 2007–2010 w kontekście dotychczasowej realizacji strategii rozwoju kraju 2007–2015* (*Competitiveness of the Polish Economy in 2007–2010 in the Context of the Implementation of the National Development Strategy 2007–2015*). This expertise is available online at: https://www.mir.gov.pl/rozwoj_regionalny/Ewaluacja_i_analiza/Raporty_o_rozwoju/Raporty_krajowe/Documents/Ekspertyza_Konkurencyjnosc_polskiej_gospodarki_w_latach_2007_2010_2007_2011.pdf (last visited 09.09.2014).

⁴⁸ http://www.kig.pl/files/Aktualnosci/Raport_Konkurencyjna_Polska_Jak_awansowac_w_swiatowej_lidze_gospodarczej.pdf (last visited 09.09.2014)

⁴⁹ <http://www.heritage.org/index/ranking> (last visited 09.09.2014).

4. Other areas (of potential concern): demography, social tension, high-tech challenge

Poland is also a medium country in terms of both population (38 million) and territory. While it is a significant country in Europe, as demonstrated by the fact that Poland was the largest and most populous country that joined the EU in its enlargement of 2004, at the same time it cannot even dream of being regarded as a large country or an important power globally. Moreover, due to its geographical and geopolitical location it often suffers from the syndrome of being too large for Central Europe but too small for Western Europe and the world. Because of this Polish foreign policy, as has been pointed out by Juliusz Mieroszewski and Jerzy Giedroy, often reflects the paradox or a kind of inferiority complex which coincident with a superiority complex, thus impairing sound judgment and a sober perception of reality.⁵⁰

The post-communist transformation has proved to be a difficult and rather traumatic process and entailed considerable social costs.⁵¹ For 25 years now, Poland has been struggling with high unemployment of approximately 10 per cent (and even more than 12 per cent towards the end of 2013), with a growing social stratification, as well as with a lasting, structural emergence of regions of poverty and underinvestment. Maria Jarosz, who has studied this subject in detail, demonstrated that unfortunately the traditional division of Poland into Poland A and Poland B, i.e. into 'better' and 'worse' regions, has become even deeper and more pronounced during the transformation. There are areas where social pathologies are all-too-common, and the material and moral/psychic state of the entire society cannot be considered positive.⁵² However, studies

⁵⁰ J. Mieroszewski further added insightfully that Polish political thought is characterised by a megalomania on the one hand, and stalling and atrophy on the other; J. Mieroszewski, *Finiał klasycznej Europy (The End of Classical Europe)*, Lublin 1997, p. 60. J. Giedroy, in turn, noted with an equally heavy heart that it is a Polish tradition to peck independent thinkers to death; M. Grochowska, *Jerzy Giedroy. Do Polski ze snu (Jerzy Giedroyć. To Poland from a dream)*, Warszawa 2009, p. 181.

⁵¹ For more see: R. Skidelsky, *Świat po komunizmie (The world after Communism)*, Kraków 1999, p. 127; also see: T. Kowalik, op.cit., p. 213; for information on the social costs, see: T. Bogucka, *Polak po komunizmie (Poles after Communism)*, Kraków 1997; for comparable information on the cost of the transformation from real socialism incurred by Hungary, see: J. Kornai, *Stabilizacja i wzrost w procesie transformacji. Przypadek gospodarki węgierskiej (Stabilisation and Growth in the Process of Transformation. The Hungarian Case)*, Poznań 1998, pp. 158–173.

⁵² M. Jarosz, *Wygrani i przegrani polskiej transformacji (Winners and losers in Poland's transformation)*, Warszawa 2005.

conducted by Janusz Czapliński and confirmed by public opinion surveys show rather clearly that there is a positive tendency among the people assessing their quality of life and that there are increasing numbers of positive opinions about the transformations taking place in the recent years.⁵³ According to the latest esteemed report 'Diagnoza społeczna' of October 2013, there is no justification for claiming that Polish society is in a crisis, since as many as 79 per cent of respondents evaluated their overall life positively.⁵⁴

According to the respected social development index of the UNDP (the Human Development Report (HDI)) – possibly the most objective index of this kind in the world (including categories such as healthcare, education, wages, and poverty) – Poland has been ranked amongst the medium and highly developed countries (although in the bottom layer of the latter group). In the report of March 2013 it was ranked 39th with an HDI of 0.821, while the Czech Republic was ranked 28th with an HDI of 0.823, the leader being Norway with 0.955.⁵⁵

Next to unemployment among young people, one of the most serious social risks is the progressing ageing of the population, going even so far as to threaten a demographic collapse. Many regions of Poland are experiencing depopulation and the decline in the rate of natural growth is starting to become a permanent trend. According to a special report of 2012, in 2010 the natural growth was only 35 thousand and fell to 12.9 thousand in 2011 and 9.6 thousand in 2012. In cities the natural growth is almost at zero and no improvement in this area is forecasted. At the same time, emigration is surging. While at the end of 2002 there were 786,100 Polish citizens permanently residing abroad, at the end of 2012 the number was already 2 million. A particularly worrisome phenomenon is the emigration of young people, i.e. those well educated and skilled.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, this appears to be a lasting trend, as evidenced by the latest data published by the GUS – at the end of 2012 there were 2.13 million Polish citizens 'temporarily' residing abroad. The largest group were those who migrated to the EU – approximately 1.72 million, most of whom migrated to the UK (where an estimated 637,000 Poles live), Germany (500,000), Ireland (118,000), the Netherlands and Italy (97,000 each), but also to Norway

⁵³ <http://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/art,2566,polacy-pozytywnie-oceniaja-transformacje.html> (last visited 05.10.2014).

⁵⁴ *Diagnoza Społeczna 2013. Warunki i Jakość Życia Polaków (The social diagnosis. Conditions and quality of the life of Poles)*, "Contemporary Economics", Vol. 7/2013.

⁵⁵ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2013-report> (last visited 05.10.2014).

⁵⁶ *Sytuacja demograficzna Polski. Raport 2011–2012 (The Demographic Situation in Poland. 2011–2012 Report)*, Z. Strzelecki (ed.), Warszawa 2012, pp. 8, 10.

(65,000, albeit not in the EU), France (63,000), Belgium (48,000), Sweden (38,000), Spain (37,000), and Austria (28,000).⁵⁷

All this leads to population ageing, which in turn is yet another economic challenge – as noted already in the title of another specialist report. There is a direct negative relationship between the demographic dependency ratio and decreasing GDP. It is a worrying and telling fact that as many as 64 per cent of respondents in the age group of 18–24 are considering leaving the country forever or for a long time.⁵⁸ If the young generation does not see any future for themselves in the country, this is a signal which raises alarm bells.

Another serious deficiency in the context of Poland's future is the relatively low amounts allocated to research and development in Poland, which has negative consequences for innovation. According to the 2013 government-sponsored report 'Cyfrowa przyszłość Polski' ('The Digital Future of Poland'), already two thirds of adults in Poland use the Internet, while in 2007 it was less than 50 per cent. Furthermore, it is estimated that the share of the Internet in the economy will be 3 per cent in 2013 and 9.5 per cent in 2020. Consequently, it is explicitly recommended that spending on modern technologies be increased.⁵⁹

5. The impact of the EU crisis on the politics and reality in Poland

The crisis in global markets came at a time when Poland was already internally divided and torn between the two major political factions. While Poland fortunately avoided falling into recession, its considerable dependence on Western (primarily European, and within Europe – German) markets sooner or later had to translate into the internal arena and the Polish market. The growth decreased and the economic situation worsened.

This exacerbated internal tensions and caused a surge of polemics and debates. In turn, externally it weakened the importance and role of

⁵⁷ <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/migranci-wciaz-przesuwaja-decyzje-o-powrocie-do-polski/42p5j> (last visited 05.10.2014).

⁵⁸ Raport. Starzenie się społeczeństwa jako wyzwanie ekonomiczne dla europejskich gospodarek (Report. Population Ageing as an Economic Challenge for European Economies), Warszawa 2011, p. 9.

⁵⁹ Cyfrowa przyszłość Polski. Fundamenty rozwoju konkurencyjnej gospodarki w dobie globalizacji (Poland's Digital Future. The Foundations of Development of a Competitive Economy in the Age of Globalisation), Warszawa 2013, see: <http://static.forbes.pl/2013/12/12/635224432565630000.pdf> (last visited 05.10.2014).

Poland in the international arena. The Polish scholar Ryszard Zięba devoted a very valuable study to the international roles of contemporary Poland. Next to the traditional roles of a medium-sized state and regional leader, regarding the periods of post-2005 and then post-2008 he listed such roles as a) role model of a successful political system transformation b) 'barrier' to Russia's imperial traditions, c) vassal and client of the USA, and d) sometimes a brake on, and sometimes a pragmatic participant in, European integration.⁶⁰ Let us examine these roles from the point of view of the present, i.e. mid-2014, perspective. What is the current position of Poland? What has it gained and what has it lost?

In domestic politics, European affairs and politics are of overriding importance. This was the firm belief of Juliusz Mieroszewski, the main expert of the Paris-based Polish monthly *Kultura*. He openly claimed that Poland's fate was inseparably linked to the fate of Europe and that European solidarity was our *raison d'état*.⁶¹ These and other ideas of Mieroszewski, such as the two way policy towards the USSR and then Russia, were later drawn upon by Krzysztof Skubiszewski, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and visionary of Polish foreign policy after 1989, as shown by the priorities of the policy he set in 1990 – first, European policy; second, new regionalism; third, relations with the powerful neighbours – Germany in the west and the USSR in the east.⁶²

From the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Communities on 16 December 1991 up until Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, the pro-European orientation was the most important factor in Polish politics and, at the same time, unchallenged by any of the main political powers.⁶³ Problems with integration started only in 2005 due to internal factors (the IV RP project) and deepened further after 2008 due to external factors (the crisis). The consensus that had previously existed collapsed and divergent interpretations of our presence in the EU emerged. At the same time, despite its earlier announcements Poland did not opt to quickly join the euro zone. According to most experts, this threatens to make Poland a 'second class' Member State and, as

⁶⁰ R. Zięba, *Poszukiwanie międzynarodowej roli dla Polski – konceptualizacja roli państwa 'średniej rangi'* (In Search of an International Role for Poland – Conceptualisation of the Role of a 'Middle Rank' State) in: *Polityka zagraniczna Polski po wstąpieniu do NATO i do Unii Europejskiej. Problemy tożsamości i adaptacji* (Polish Foreign Policy after Joining NATO and the European Union. Problems of Identity and Adaptation), S. Bieleń (ed.), Warszawa 2010, pp. 52–70.

⁶¹ J. Mieroszewski, op.cit., p. 25.

⁶² K. Skubiszewski, op.cit., p. 93.

⁶³ E. Kuźniar, op.cit., p. 321.

a result, drop it into the rank of a European periphery country.⁶⁴ Opinions can also be heard that Poland is at risk of falling into a crisis similar to that in the other peripheral countries, such as those of the Mediterranean Basin. All this is a subject of a serious dispute, and as a result there is no longer any wide-ranging consensus in Polish policy towards Europe.

Just as membership in the EU was to bring Poland modernisation ('the modernisation anchor'), external security was expected to be found in an alliance with the NATO and the USA. Serious controversies emerged only after Poland joined NATO, particularly in relation to the degree of Poland's involvement in the USA's war on terrorism after 11 September 2001 and the subsequent interventions in Afghanistan and, most importantly, Iraq (March 2003). These controversies essentially came down to the question whether Poland's primary ally should be the USA or NATO,⁶⁵ and they became even more intense with respect to the planned construction of a missile defence system in Central Europe, including in Poland.⁶⁶ However, no serious political power in Poland would question the country's membership in NATO and during Barack Obama's visit to Warsaw President Bronisław Komorowski officially announced a token increase of military expenditures from 1.95 to 2 per cent of GDP.⁶⁷ It remains open to question whether Poland still wants to remain a 'vassal and client' of the USA (Ryszard Zięba)⁶⁸ or work towards strengthening NATO as a truly Euro-Atlantic alliance, especially in the context of the ongoing, severely violent and unpredictable upheaval in Ukraine and in the East.⁶⁹

As far as regional and international engagement is concerned, the activities of two institutional frameworks were of key importance to Poland, namely cooperation within the Visegrad Group and within the Weimar Triangle, both created in the early 1990s. The Visegrad Group undeniably

⁶⁴ T.G. Grosse, op.cit., p. 337.

⁶⁵ R. Kuźniar, op.cit., p. 224.

⁶⁶ B. Balcerowicz, *Aktywność Polski w dziedzinie bezpieczeństwa euroatlantyckiego (Poland's Activity in the Field of Euro-Atlantic Security)* in: *Polityka zagraniczna...*, op.cit., pp. 136–137

⁶⁷ <http://finanse.wp.pl/kat,1033781,title,Polska-zamierza-podniesc-finansowanie-wojska-do-2-proc-PKB,wid,16652759,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=11315f> (last visited 05.10.2014).

⁶⁸ R. Zięba, op.cit., p. 69.

⁶⁹ As reflected in the recent political statement delivered in the Sejm on 8 May 2014; the entire speech is available at: http://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci/informacja_ministra_spraw_zagranicznych_o_zadaniach_polskiej_polityki_zagranicznej_w_2014_rokuinai; see also: http://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci/informacja_ministra_spraw_zagranicznych_o_zadaniach_polskiej_polityki_zagranicznej_w_2014_roku (last visited 05.10.2014).

performed its task in the process of removing its members' dependence on the East and consequently engaging in alliances with the West.⁷⁰ Later however it became more and more a façade, with the only practical aspect being the Visegrad Fund, which supports cultural and personal exchanges between the four members of the Group. Unfortunately, the 'cooperation' between the four member states with respect to the Ukrainian crisis only confirmed its façade status. While Poland spoke out explicitly in favour of increasing the NATO presence in the region,⁷¹ the other three countries opposed such a solution and were reluctant to become involved in the East.⁷²

After 2005, the same fate befell the Weimar Triangle: it went into hibernation and remained but an empty shell with no real content behind it, although it should be noted that this, in turn, was a matter of relations with Poland's neighbours, namely Germany.⁷³ There is much to indicate that Poland's relations with its largest neighbours, Russia and Germany, are starting to resurface in relation to Poland's geopolitical location 'right in the middle' – both in the context of the 2008 crisis, which has led to the further strengthening of Germany, and the events in Ukraine and the annexation of the Crimea by Russia in Spring 2014. Germany has become the dominant power in the European Union as it struggles with a deep and multidimensional crisis,⁷⁴ while Russia has successfully challenged – as the Ukrainian has shown – the geopolitical order that had existed since the dissolution of the USSR. Thus, Poland is currently facing an entirely new situation; new in the era of pos-Communism but familiar and frequent given Poland's history. Namely we have the situation with a strong, and confident Germany in the west and an expansive and even aggressive Russia in the east. It is very likely that this is how the Polish 'neighbourhood' will look in the near future.

⁷⁰ B. Góralczyk, *Współpraca Wyszehradzka: geneza, doświadczenia, perspektywy* (*The Visegrad Group: Genesis, Experience, Prospects*), Warszawa 1999.

⁷¹ A particularly significant initiative in this regard was that of Minister R. Sikorski. For opinions on it, see: <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1342,title,Politycy-o-slowach-Radoslaw-Sikorskiego-ws-wojsk-NATO-w-Polsce,wid,16516945,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=113177> (last visited 05.10.2014).

⁷² <http://alexjones.pl/pl/aj/aj-swiat/aj-polityka-na-swiecie/item/29452-premierzy-czech-i-s%C5%82owacji-przeciwko-obecno%C5%9Bci-wojsk-nato> (last visited 05.10.2014).

⁷³ *Nieistniejący trójkąt, zaginiona grupa* (*The Non-Existent Triangle, the Lost Group*), "Nowe Państwo", 15.07.2014.

⁷⁴ For more, see: Z. Czachór, *Kryzys i zaburzenia dynamiki Unii Europejskiej* (*Crisis and Disturbances in the European Union Dynamics*), Warszawa 2013; B. Góralczyk, *The 2008 Crisis and the New Global Role of the EU*, "Yearbook of Polish European Studies", Vol. 16/2013, pp. 15–40.

These relations will not be easy given that structural problems and systemic mistakes have come to light within the EU,⁷⁵ that the 2008 crisis has considerably undermined the role of the USA as the sole global superpower, and as a consequence the role of the entire West, to which Poland has so consistently aspired after 1990. In addition, a new category of 'states' have appeared in the global arena, referred to as 'emerging markets',⁷⁶ and so far Poland has not developed any strategy towards these countries. They are, however, starting with the most dynamic one – China, already starting to erode Western power.⁷⁷ Poland will have to adapt to this new situation and the new challenges which accompany it, and it will have to do so in very short order.

Conclusions

An analysis of the available material and data leads to a single conclusion: in the last 25 years following Poland's systemic transformation, and especially in the last decade (since it joined the EU), Poland has made considerable economic progress. It is, however, still more a country that aspires to rather than belongs to the group of the most successful and effective economies in the world, and it remains in a state of limbo between the EU's core and semi-periphery. Furthermore, it has its problems resulting from the fact that it is a relatively young democracy, not yet fully matured, struggling with, *inter alia*, the immaturity of its political elites as well as with a continuing, almost constant, lack of nationwide consensus in almost all crucial issues on the national agenda. One of the most serious deficiencies is the low level of mutual trust, both communal and public – indeed at times a complete lack of it, especially in the political sphere. The stalemate in the presentation of the two different visions of the state, existing since 2007, as well as the permanent lack of consensus regarding the main directions of foreign policy and state strategy since

⁷⁵ T.G. Grosse, op.cit., p. 176. One of the crucial voices in this respect is that of George Soros, an influential financial guru. Soros clearly maintains that the future of the EU now belongs to Germany, as it is the strongest link out of 28 in all. See: G. Soros with G. P. Schimtz, *The Tragedy of the European Union. Disintegration or Revival?*, New York 2014, pp. 22–23.

⁷⁶ For a recent important study on this subject, see: A. Acharya, *The End of American Order*, Cambridge 2014, especially pp. 21–28 and 45–50 (here *vis-à-vis* the liberal hegemonic order dominant until now).

⁷⁷ Z. Brzeziński, *Strategiczna wizja. Ameryka a kryzys globalnej potęgi (A Strategic Vision. The USA and the Crisis of Global Power)*, Kraków 2013; joint publication compiled at the Transatlantic Academy, *Liberal Order in a Post-Western World*, Washington 2014. See also: an important Polish joint publication: *Kryzys 2008 a pozycja międzynarodowa Zachodu (The 2008 crisis and the international position of the West)*, R. Kuźniar (ed.), Warszawa 2011.

2005 pose serious risks to the state and could prove highly destructive to the process of pursuing primary state interests.

The crisis of 2008, which caused serious damage to the Western liberal hegemonic order, has also affected the condition of the Polish economy and society, despite the fact that the current government promotes a vision of Poland as a 'green island' – the only EU Member State which has not experienced recession in the recent years, which in turn are characterized by the 'crisis-management' situation on the whole continent. What's more, the crisis has increased distrust in the market (and consequently, in the West) and further exacerbated the controversies and conflicts that already existed in the internal arena.

Since 2008 discontent is growing, concerning both governance and the excessive role of the market compared to the limited role of the state, while Poland's cooperation with the EU has become an openly contested issue. One can detect and observe growing euroscepticism and anti-democratic tendencies which, unfortunately, coincide with similar tendencies emerging all over the EU (as proven by the low turnout and the results of the elections to the European Parliament held in May 2014).

At the moment when this text is being written (September 2014), it remains uncertain how and whether the country will manage to deal with the tangle of problems it faces, but so far the long-lasting clash between two entirely different and competing narratives concerning the reality and future of the country – one being that of the governing PO coalition and the other being that of the main opposition party PiS – has led to a rather ominous state of a permanent civil cold war and gives rise to many uncertainties concerning the future of the country. Many experts ask – and perhaps rightly so – whether Tusk's departure from the Polish political stage might introduce a breath of fresh air into the political scene and perhaps break the inveterate stalemate.⁷⁸ From the point of view of the national interest, this would be highly welcome, but only history will tell whether it truly happens.

After 25 years of comprehensive reforms and many real successes, widely applauded abroad, Poland still requires much more than simple maintenance. It rather requires a thorough renovation. But who will execute it, and more importantly, how? The intensity and magnitude of these questions has become even greater with the departure of the prime minister and head of the PO from the Polish political stage. It is so far uncertain

⁷⁸ Some even predict a generational change. Cf. <http://fakty.tvn24.pl/ogladaj-online,60/nadchodzi-pokoleniowa-zmiana-warty-w-polskiej-polityce,475091.html> (last visited 06.10.2014).

how Tusk's successor to both positions, Ewa Kopacz, will manage to deal with these challenges.

Naturally there is no common agreement as regards the answers to these and similar questions. It seems that the commodities in the shortest supply in the Polish internal arena are public mutual trust, national consensus and domestic social cohesion, which coincides with such major maladies as high unemployment rate, especially among well-educated youngsters, social polarization and inequality, as well as constant problems and deficits in the healthcare and social benefits systems. These, in turn, coincide with external risks such as the crisis in the EU – prolonged in time and unprecedented in scope – combined with the events to the east of Poland's borders. Unfortunately, the list is even longer, as further down on this 'national and regional deficiency' list one needs to mention also the lack of consensus and a single vision concerning the further development of the process of European integration and, although to a lesser extent, the EU's involvement in the East. With all this it would be prudent to remain cautious about forecasting optimistic scenarios. We are dealing with too many upheavals and uncertainties, both in Poland and in the EU, to venture genuinely optimistic predictions.

Poland – a country which is still developing and has not yet completed its transformation – could play a much greater role if it were not politically torn in two, with two competing narratives ('green island' and 'effective governance' vs. 'socio-economic catastrophe' and 'failed governance'), the existence of which also influences our foreign relations. There is no question that the well-recognized and lauded pattern of adaptation and innovation should further prevail in the Polish national strategy, but due to the political split on the domestic scene its implementation cannot be guaranteed in the immediate future.

Among the new EU members, Poland is a distinct country, but its focus on internal matters prevents it from playing the role that it aspires to and the one that would match its potential, both within the EU, the NATO and internationally. Poland is a medium-sized country with limited resources, possibilities and potential. The aspirations regarding the roles it plays should be taken into account by the country's major political players, but some actors on the internal arena seem to forget about this from time to time. This situation – of miscalculations of political and strategic role – could last at least until the currently volatile and unpredictable outside world, including especially Poland's immediate neighbourhood, is reminding us – again – of geopolitical realities. This is especially critical given the events of 2014 in Ukraine, where history has brutally reminded us of its tendency to repeat itself, and right at our Polish borders.