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Polish Church and European Integration

The 1989 events: the collapse of communism and the reconstruction of the democratic system, had initiated the process of redefining the place and role of the Church in Poland. The Catholic Church was faced with internal challenges stemming from system transformation within the country, as well as with external challenges resulting from a shift in Polish foreign policy priorities. Democracy restoration and civic society renaissance were accompanied by a process of the Church eschewing substitute functions it had carried during the communism era, acting *de facto* as political opposition. This process, albeit natural under new conditions, encountered ambivalent reception in certain church and social circles, and was interpreted as a limitation to the role of the Church. In parallel, the process of criticism and anti-clerical populism grew, boosted in particular by leftist parties, opposing excessive Church presence in public life.¹

Westward re-orientation of Polish foreign policy, and the clear definition in the priorities thereof as a firmly declared will of accessing NATO and the European Union alike, caused – especially given the perspective of integration with European structures – considerable confusion in wide social circles, also among representatives of the church hierarchy and clergy. This phenomenon was on the one hand accompanied with great hopes of Poland making up for her civilisation hiatus, of diminishing the gap in economic development, and of ensuring growth of the country; on the other, concerns have been and continue to be expressed as to the Polish economy being too weak to face international competition. Notwithstanding the above, there are also concerns

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¹ E.Wnuk-Lipiński, *Transformacja i integracja Europy a wyzwania dla Kościoła (Transformation and Integration in Europe vs. Challenges for the Church)* in: *Europa i Kościół (Europe and the Church)*, ed. H.Juros, Studium Generale Europa, ATK Foundation, Warsaw 1997, p.65-66.

and questions axiomatic in their nature, stemming primarily from the process of public life being secularised (laicised), and from a tendency of extreme materialism in everyday life in the Europe of expanding integration. To Poland, a country of traditional folk Catholicism, it is far from indifferent whether this shall be a Europe supporting her Christian traditions, a Europe built on an entirely different, i.e. proprietary moral relativism of commercialised values and the privatisation of faith, or a Europe of strong moral and religious foundations. Will we have a Europe of motherlands, or a continent ambiguous as to the national identities of membership states, uniform in their culture, language, and morals?² Unveiled concerns are expressed – in Church circles in particular – that West European mass culture, with its moral relativism and dispute against traditional values, the family in particular, shall become too great a challenge, which the indigenous Polish culture will be unable to withhold.³

Such doubts expressed and questions asked by Polish intellectuals, politicians, representatives of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, as well as by average citizens, in a sense reflect the theological nature of the Church, although obviously they are not limited to Church matters only. They apply to the future of a universal Church (but also to a model of life based on Christian values) in Europe, and – simultaneously – to the future of the Church in Poland, that is to the local dimension of the Church. The context evidently remains unchanged: a Europe undergoing integration, with the perspective distinctly narrowed, however. This is a viewpoint of Poland, a country aspiring to the European Union, with accession negotiations well advanced. In order to somewhat expand this Polish perspective, it shall be indispensable to present a number of comments as to the situation of the Roman Catholic Church (and of other Churches) in the context of European integration.

The Church vs. the European Union

The situation of the Catholic Church (and of other Christian churches) in Europe has stemmed from a number of factors, some of which Europe-specific, and others resulting from broader processes: globalisation, integrism, religious competition. The process of globalisation – a sign of our times – has also applied to some religions, which – especially the great ones – are a global phenomenon in themselves. This spells the cross-border nature of challenges and crises, religious competitiveness, rivalry, sects, despair, laicisation, and – last but not least – of fundamentalism. Against the background of globalisation, we encounter integrist tendencies: attempts at self-isolation and hermetising

² A.Grześkowiak, *Europa jutra (The Europe of Tomorrow)*, Ethos 1994, no. 4, p.215-216.

³ E.Wnuk-Lipiński, op.cit. p.67.

of small national and ethnic groups, with a concurrent hostile attitudes towards other communities. In Western Europe (France, Germany), problems have begun in relation to an integrism of closed Islamic groups, showing fundamentalist, and occasionally aggressive tendencies.⁴

Some religion sociologists point out that whereas in the seventies of the 20th century we had been facing a trend of “de-ecclesiasticising” Christianity in Western Europe, the eighties and contemporary years have brought a tendency of “de-Christianising” religiousness (“*Yes to religion, No to the Church*”). This has been joined by tendencies of “Protestantising” Christianity, after a fashion.⁵

The aforementioned processes do not usually cause a disappearance of religiousness in individuals or social groups, albeit they do influence the forms and symptoms of religiousness. Western Europe is a sole exception in this case, given the long-standing and still vital (or even expanding, in some cases) secularisation process. “*The contemporary world remains religious,*” declares Peter L.Berger, “*and has nothing in common with the secularised world, notwithstanding prophecies by numerous researchers of the contemporary*”.⁶

Secularisation tendencies, still strong in Western Europe, are pursued with a radical retreat from the world of values typical to Christian culture. As a consequence of the process, the existence of objective truth is denied, as is morality based on durable foundations of natural law. This is no unambiguous process, however. It has been emphasised in newer studies, that following secularisation processes in Europe, strong trends of religious restoration, awakening or renaissance have transpired, in Catholic and Protestant countries alike.⁷

In such context, we are interested in European Union policy as expressed in her documents, as well as in official statements by representatives of Union authorities and by member state dignitaries. These do vary from semi-official or private comments made by politicians – by Christian Democratic parties’ activists in particular – as in the latter case, numerous politicians admit the importance of the religious (Christian) aspect in European cultural life to be both crucial and positive. Officially, however, the influence thereof is ignored.⁸ “*European Christians are treated like invisible air*”.⁹

⁴ A.Shupe, *Obleżona forteca (Fortress under Siege)*, “*Rzeczpospolita*”, 20 June 2000, p.8.

⁵ J.Mariański, *Chrześcijaństwo wobec europejskiej sekularyzacji (Christianity vs. European Secularisation)* in: *Europa – zadanie chrześcijańskie (Europe – a Christian Task)*, ed. A.Dylus, Studium Generale Europa, ATK Foundation, Warsaw 1998, p.382.

⁶ P.L.Berger, *Secularism in Retreat*, “*Nowa Res Publica*”, no. 1/1998, p.70-71.

⁷ See related comments: J. Mariański, op.cit., p.386.

⁸ P.L.Berger, op.cit., p.71.

⁹ T.Pieronek, *Czy Kościół w Polsce boi się zjednoczonej Europy (Does the Church in Poland Fear United Europe?)* in: *Europa. Fundamenty jedności (Europe. Foundations of Unity)*, ed. A.Dylus, Studium Generale Europa, ATK Foundation, Warsaw 1998, p.214.

In terms of the State-Church relations, and of religion's influence on the forming of a European integration model, the European Union are unambiguous in supporting a purely laicised model of public life, whereby the Church – for the sake of pluralism, tolerance, general neutrality and separation of the Church and the State – ought to actually disappear from public life. According to Marek Jędraszewski's writings, the purpose is to instigate such conditions, whereby "even a comment concerning religion and the related faith made more or less by chance would be perceived as a social gaffe".¹⁰ Jacek Salij refers thereto as "public life disinfection of any religious symbols".¹¹

Such critical voices primarily come from church circles, scientists and publicists with connections to the ecclesiastical doctrine, but also from Christian Democratic party representatives. These reflect the beliefs of wider social circles in traditionally Catholic countries (Ireland, Portugal; Poland, as a country aspiring to the European Union), but can be found also in countries of Protestant domination (e.g. Germany). Moreover, one would be hard-pressed to defy that from their early days on, European Communities seemed to fail to notice Churches. This applies both to agreements constituting the Communities, and to community law, one of the reasons being a principle, by virtue of which the legal position of Churches in general remains a matter to be resolved within domestic legal orders. In European Union member states (and in democratic countries), such position is regulated by the fundamental act, and by executive laws and decrees. The situation of the Catholic Church is rather special in the context, as its position is usually defined in international agreements signed by and between the Holy See – the executive authority of the Church – and the given state. This stems from the special legal-and-international status of the Vatican. It is necessary to distinguish between conceptual and institutional elements, and to remain aware of their respective consequences. The Holy See is an entity of international law¹², and the relation of the European Union (European Community) to the Vatican and to the Pope as a sovereign of the State of Vatican and the supreme representative of the Holy See remains within the realm of international law. This is a mutual relation of two entities of international law.¹³ The relation to the Catholic Church is analogous to the

¹⁰ M. Jędraszewski, *Proces jednoczenia się Europy jako wyzwanie dla Kościoła w Polsce*, (*European Integration Process as a Challenge to the Church in Poland*), "Życie i Myśl", no. 1/1999, p.9.

¹¹ J. Salij, *Dezynfekcja religijnych symboli (Disinfection of Religious Symbols)*, "Życie", 7-8 February 1998, p.14.

¹² See J. Czaja, *Prawnomiędzynarodowy status Watykanu (Legal-and-International Status of the Vatican)*, Warsaw 1983, p.106-178.

¹³ A detailed explanation of legal aspects relating to the special status of the Vatican would require a separate treatment thereof (see previous footnote). This relates also to the mutual relations of both organisms, whereas one ought to recognise that the European Union is an

European Union's relation to other Churches. The Catholic Church is recognised as one of the faiths followed within European Union territory.

The European integration context we are considering here leads to a question: does the ever-expanding European Union law relate to Churches as well? Does it regulate their position in any way?

As I have said, from their early days on, European Communities seemed to fail to notice Churches. The shift towards economic co-operation was distinct in prioritising matters of property over matters of spirit and ideas. Treaties constituting the Communities, followed by the European Union (through to the Amsterdam Treaty) contained no reference to Churches. This did not mean, however, that the Communities (and, subsequently, the European Union) had not legal competencies in relation to the Churches. These arose from the overall framework of community law in such areas as life quality, education, culture, labour, taxes, and social affairs. Such had been the stance of the European Court of Justice in the several cases concerning the State-Church relations resolved in the Court practice.

The so-called Church Clause was adopted in June 1997 in the form of an auxiliary "Statement" by member states to the Final Act of the Amsterdam Treaty. Said clause describing the "*European Union obligation to recognise the status enjoyed by Churches and religious associations and communities in member states (...)*" is the first attempt ever to formally regulate the position of Churches at the high European law level. The clause had not proven fully satisfactory to the Holy See or to other Churches, albeit it had been perceived as a step in the right direction. Representatives of the Catholic Church and of other Churches emphasise that the implementation of the Church Clause into the very body of European law would serve as a better highlight of the importance of religion to European culture, and to the life of societies within an integrated Europe.¹⁵

Actions to expand the Clause shall probably continue. Churches are increasingly more convinced of the necessity of starting co-operation. The ecumenical approach has become a crucial element in the pontificating of John Paul II. The process of building Church unity may have a positive impact on European integration; it may serve as a carrying agent in efforts to create a

international organisation in development – *in statu nascendi*. Its legal-and-international entity status has never been confirmed by states. In contrast, the European Community recognised as the First Pillar of the European Union is an entity of international law. For related comments, see E.Latoszek, *Podmiotowość prawna Wspólnoty Europejskiej i jej kompetencje w zakresie zewnętrznych stosunków umownych (Legal Entity Status of the European Community, and its Competencies in the Area of External Contractual Relations)*, Elipsa, Warsaw 1999.

¹⁵ See: H.Juros, *Klauzula o kościołach w Układzie Maastricht II (On the Church Article in the European Maastricht II Treaty)* in: *Europa i Kościół (Europe and the Church)*, op.cit., p.121-136.

Europe
of spirit.

John Paul II is an avid supporter of united Europe, and of Polish participation therein. Concurrently, the Pope emphasises the importance of axiological aspects in European integration, the matter of spiritual community included. Moreover, the Catholic Church (and other Churches) is concerned about the ever-increasing secularisation of public life in Western Europe. The Church feels this unambiguously as forcing institutionalised Christian religion out, to life's margin. The Holy See fear that Christian values, formerly deeply present in European identity, shall cease belonging within the axiology of united Europe. A remedy has been devised in the form of a programme of so-called new re-Evangelisation of Europe. This shall be no easy process, as it will require a re-education of conscience, and – as emphasised by Tadeusz Styczeń – an improvement of the *ortos logos*: a deepening of the culture of conscience.¹⁶

Stance of the Church in Poland on the Subject of European Integration

Challenges and problems faced by the Catholic Church in Europe expand to include local Churches, the Church in Poland included. The ecclesiastical hierarchy in Poland and the majority of the clergy are aware of such challenges. For centuries, Christianity has been a source of durable and fundamental vital force, an inspiration for ideas, culture, architecture and art – a carrier of values. Hence, forcing religion out into the margin of public life, secularisation, and a retreat from Christian values are all a cause for concern. On the other hand, the thoughts and teachings of John Paul II about Europe are indeed inspiring. A Polish Pope, open to the world, pays special attention to Europe, emphasising that “European roots and identity lie within Christianity”. The Pope deeply believes this to be greatly important to European future as well. Should the uniting Europe eschew Christian values, “*she would find herself deprived of a major part of her foundations, whereas the concept of a human being would be weakened by a lack of anthropological or spiritual structure.*”¹⁷

John Paul's faith and conviction as to the justifiability and reason of the European integration process are an element of discipline for the Polish Church. The economic success of the European Union are a factor as well, especially in terms of the development of trade, of the freedom of flow of persons and commodities, of an improvement in living standard, of health care and social

¹⁶ T.Styczeń, *Reewangelizacja Europy sprawą reedukacji sumienia, (Re-Evangelisation of Europe by Re-educating the Conscience)* “*Chrześcijanin w Świecie*”, no. 2/1992, p.25-26.

¹⁷ See address to the European Parliament Deputies of 6 March 1997 in: *Documentation Catholique*, no. 2157, 6 April 1997.

welfare. Hence, the Church generally supports Polish integration with the European Union, albeit – similarly to the Polish society – it is not free of concerns. It shares the worries, emotions, and hopes common to the society. The actual problem – as Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński claims – concerns the skill of separating unfounded hopes from realistic hopes, constituting the natural momentum of overcoming the heritage of the communist system. A matter of no lesser importance is the ability of separating concerns stemming from a general fear of the unknown from worries born of observation of realistic threats¹⁸. It could be said that in case of European phobias, fear moderators ought to relate to adequate information on European integration. This is far from certain, however, as it does happen that concerns are also expressed by those best informed, being fully aware of the scale of threats (e.g. unemployment). This obviously happens as well, as can be proven by quoting names of well-known intellectuals, economists, or politicians. In general, however, the scale of concerns shrinks as the level of education grows.

It is more or less known what Poles fear in the European Union context. They fear the loss of sovereignty and national identity, and of the Polish national culture being overgrown with the weed of mass commercial production from the West. They are afraid of foreigners taking over Polish soil and national property, of foreign capital, and of the loss of economic independence. They fear international competition and mass unemployment. These fears are not entirely unfounded.

The Church in Poland, deeply immersed in the nation's history, having carried during its course the mission of protecting Polish identity numerous times, has an excellent sense for such fears. It has to recognise, however, that it is also an element in implementing the universal mission of a universal Church, said mission uniform in terms of cult, form, and manner of operation. Europe-related opinions of John Paul II, his distinct and decisive support of European integration, are a frequent reminder for the Church in Poland of a necessity to take a more universal viewpoint.

As Tadeusz Pieronek claims, the most dangerous element in reference to the Church is the danger that the Polish Church shall lose identity, eschew its Evangelical enthusiasm, consent to moral compromise, and dissolve in the New Age.¹⁹ Some social circles express concern that materialistic, laicised Western Europe, deprived of moral values and fully cosmopolitan, shall charge into Poland and the Poles' conscience after all borders are removed, creating moral havoc, and emptying temples. *“The nightmarish vision of Poland with empty temples, with a possibility of leading a life with no moral principles, with*

¹⁸ E.Wnuk-Lipiński, op.cit., p.61.

¹⁹ T. Pieronek, op.cit., p.209.

Christian tradition rejected, forces some critics of united Europe into armies of modern crusaders, ready for a crusade not only against those following such a model of life, but even against those who do not share an opinion about the inevitable coming of such a catastrophe,” writes Pieronek, not without irony.²⁰

The Polish Episcopate realise that this is a crooked image, one from a broken mirror; nevertheless, the lead question in the afore-quoted publication: “*Does the Church in Poland fear United Europe?*”, is followed with an affirmative answer from the author: “*Yes, the Catholic Church fear United Europe*”. At the same time, a clarification follows, that this is rational fear stemming from the huge responsibility carried by Polish accession to the Union.²¹ Primate Glemp’s response to the question is somewhat different. In a comment for the Catholic Information Agency (Kościelna Agencja Informacyjna – KAI), upon the Episcopalian delegation’s return Brussels, the Primate said, “*the Catholic Church in Poland does not fear European structures*”. He fully supports Polish integration with European structures, but shall not act to accelerate this process, as “*it should be natural, and conform to the expectations of each state involved*”.²²

The visit of the Polish Episcopate in Brussels on November 4th – 7th 1997, was a positive experience for supreme dignitaries of the Church in Poland. It provided an occasion to ask questions and receive responses from high-ranking European Union officials in matters crucial to the Church. The tone of comments made by Polish Church dignitaries as to Polish European Union membership became much more optimistic following the visit. When commenting on the visit, archbishop Henryk Muszyński declared the visit to have been very helpful in grasping the essence and role of the European Union. The archbishop also added that he had had the impression that the interest in ethics is growing in the Union, which is why bishops could engage in a very fruitful dialogue with top Union officials as concerns axiological and philosophical assumptions. The metropolitan of Gniezno also found a confirmation of his own opinion that economy itself shall not be sufficient to build unity. A search for values of deeper nature shall be also required.²³

Bishop Pieronek remarked that talks held in Brussels proved that the Union is extremely concerned about the preservation of national, cultural, and religious identities of each member, and as identity is identical to the soul, we should not fear the loss of “*the Polish soul*”.²⁴

²⁰ Ibidem, p.209.

²¹ Ibidem, p.209-210. In his subsequent comments, T.Pieronek does not refer to concerns or threats, but to challenges to the Church.

²² “*KAI Press Bulletin*”, 7 November 1997.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Ibidem.

In late 1997 and early 1998, the Institute of Public Affairs organised a poll among selected groups of priests as concerns the perspective of Polish integration with the European Union.²⁵ The study revealed an image of a positive, or even very positive attitude of the clergy to the integration process. Authors of the study clarify that the supportive attitudes of Pope John Paul II and of the Polish Episcopate have been of great importance here. The authors believe that the source of such attitude ought to also be sought in the high level of education amongst the clergy, in the relatively high level of their interest in public affairs, in the favourable command of foreign languages, and in the more frequent than average rate of travel to European Union states.

Research shows the priests' positive approach towards the impact of Polish EU accession on our economy, on the economic attitudes of our citizens, international security, the perception of law, on the development of democracy, state reforms, as well as on the condition of knowledge and access to property.

Threats part of the clergy associate with Polish accession to the European Union as being of potentially negative impact on the Polish society primarily include the priority of material values over those of spirit, a chase after money and property, excessive wealth, consumer lifestyle, a deterioration of family values, a growing divorce rate, and the lack of care for the upbringing of children and young people. Most priests believe that Polish integration with the Union shall not result in a diminished role of the Church. The clergy perceive the Union as a community of interests, with a deficit of community values being the Union's main flaw. Some priests have expressed concern that Poland shall lose its national identity upon joining the Union. They believe the essence of such identity to lie with religiousness, patriotism, and family values.

In line with the results of studies discussed here, the clergy express favourable opinions concerning the efficiency and democratic nature of Union-based institutions. Usually they do not support federalist ideas. They follow the concept of a "Europe of motherlands". Priests believe Polish accession to the European Union to be a source of new challenges for the Church. These chiefly apply to the Evangelisation mission of the Church in Poland and Europe, to the promulgation of Christian ethics, and to the cultural and national identity of Poles.²⁶

This has not been the only sociological study of the attitude of the Church in Poland towards European integration. Research results vary, with extensive differences revealed as to forecasts concerning the development of the Church's position upon Polish accession to the Union. Piotr Mazurkiewicz has analysed

²⁵ For further comments, see L.Kolarska-Bobińska, *Duchowieństwo polskie wobec perspektyw integracji europejskiej (Polish Clergy against Perspectives of European Integration)* in: *Europa, drogi integracji (Europe, Paths to Integration)*, op.cit., p.225-237.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p.225-227.

these forecasts as part of a collective publication entitled *Kościół wobec integracji europejskiej (The Church vs. European Integration)*.²⁷ He believes the attitude of the Church in Poland to Europe to have undergone three phases: from a perception of the Polish Church as a model for Europe, through a stage of fear of Europe to a realistic vision thereof as a source of threat and hope.²⁸

Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński also describes three attitudes, typical as he has it – for both the lay and the clergy. These are:

- “*a march to the West*”, towards anything European, as personified by the West, as opposed to Eastern provincialism (Euro-enthusiasts);
- an opinion that “*we have always been part of Europe; it was Europe who had betrayed us at certain turns in history*”; European integration is a necessity equal to that of retaining – in an integrated Europe – proprietary national and cultural identities (Euro-realists);
- an opinion that European integration shall bring more damage than benefit. “*As a result, Poland shall disappear, dissolve in ‘Europeanism’, with our sovereignty severely limited*” (Euro-sceptics).²⁹

Wnuk-Lipiński claims that the second, Euro-realistic approach is most common amongst the clergy. He believes the Church will not avoid dilemmas as Poland approaches the European Union, the crucial ones including: permanent conflict between the Church’s entanglement in local history and its universal mission; the problem of defining the Church’s attitude towards Polish integration with supranational European structures; threats to national identity; and a weakening of in the viability of Polish culture.³⁰

When commenting on analysis results, certain religion sociologists claim that all studies concerning the Church are nothing but a misunderstanding, as neither the researchers nor the researched fully know what the Church or the Church’s work are. Hence, one ought to primarily define the essence of the question, and analyse responses thereafter only. Most frequently committed methodological errors include that of placing the Church and Episcopate among political institutions, and – in such context – making queries as to trust offered to both, which means that political, not social or moral authority is at stake here.³¹

I share these critical comments. Results of some sociological research, and in particular those published by public opinion poll centres specialised in political analyses, are not only far from common beliefs – which is obviously of lesser

²⁷ P.Mazurkiewicz, *Tożsamość polskiego Kościoła po 1989 roku (Identity of the Polish Church after 1989)* in: *Kościół wobec integracji europejskiej (The Church vs. European Integration)*, ed. J.Grosfeld, Warsaw 1997, p.7-41.

²⁸ Ibidem, p.31-32.

²⁹ E.Wnuk-Lipiński, op.cit., p.67.

³⁰ Ibidem, p.68-69.

³¹ Quoted from P.Mazurkiewicz, op.cit., p.37.

importance – but from opinions of specialists systematically working on the matter in a regular manner for a longer period of time. They also differ from the assessment expressed by the majority of the ecclesiastical structures, who in themselves are no monolith on such issues either.³²

The motive of incomparability of ecclesiastical against state and political structures is also frequently emphasised by Church representatives. They remind us that the Church should not be matched against Europe in a manner applied to state structures. No Church is making attempts to join NATO or the European Union, for many grave reasons. The nature of the Church is different, its character and mission are different, and – last but not least – the purpose of its work is different as well.³³ In the European context, the role of the Church is primarily about a constant reminder, indication, and creation of spiritual, moral, and ethical foundations of European unity. Christianity began forming the foundations of such unity back in the first thousand years of Christian history.

There is obviously nothing – against the universal mission of a universal Church – to stop the Church in Poland from supporting European integration and Polish participation therein. Official documents of the Polish Episcopate contain an unambiguous declaration of support for European integration. The intent was expressed in a particularly unique manner in the “Joint Address of the Polish and German Bishops on the Occasion of the 30th Anniversary of Exchange in Correspondence (1965-1995)”, dated November 21st 1995. In the letter, Episcopates of both states support integration ideas, concurrently expressing distinct requirements as to its implementation. Although the bishops made no mention of the term “European Union”, the content of the letter clearly relates to a specific political process.³⁴

In commentaries concerning the attitude of the Church towards European integration, the mutually conforming statements concerning the matter offered by the former Secretary General of the Polish Episcopate, bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, and by the Head of Delegation of the European Commission in Poland, Rolf Timans, had been emphasised. They both declared that Polish integration with the European Community is a threat neither to the national nor to the religious identity of Poles.³⁵

³² For further comments, see T.Wiścicki, *Aspekty politycznoprawne (Political and Legal Aspects)* in: *Kościół wobec integracji europejskiej (The Church vs. European Integration)*, op.cit., p.89-96.

³³ T.Pieronek, op.cit., p.208.

³⁴ On the occasion of the 30th anniversary, publications emphasised the historical importance of the exchange of correspondence between Episcopates for the Polish-German reconciliation, and the process of building bridges of consensus in Europe. See G.Särchen, *Rok 1965: czy tylko dokumenty biskupów? (1965: Nothing but Bishops' Documents?)*, “Więź”, no. 5/1996, p.95 et seq.

³⁵ “KAI Press Bulletin”, 12 March 1993.

The Primate of Poland, Cardinal Glemp, has been repetitively expressing his support for Poland joining European structures. During a meeting at the “Young People’s Academy of European Integration”, the Primate declared: *“I following rules observed when joining the Soviet Union, when all the principles and regulations had been predefined. We are joining the Union indeed; the Union has to recognise our specificity, however, as we are joining the community without relinquishing the essence of what we truly are”*.³⁶

Moreover, the Conference of the Polish Episcopate expressed their support – *“in a manner both claim and unanimous”* – as emphasised by the Secretary General, for Polish integration with the European Union.³⁷

The Importance of Ecumenical Efforts and of International Co-operation

When writing about the attitude of the Church in Poland to the European integration process, one ought to also mention certain broader phenomena and conditions the Polish Church is subject to. These are due to the fact that its role forms part of the universal Church, while being the result of conscious actions and involvement of the Church in Poland. According to the teachings of John Paul II, the actual role of the Church in integrating the continent consists in the forming of a new Europe of spirit. The path thereto leads through the ecumenical unity of Churches, and – as mentioned before – through a new Evangelisation. When commenting on ecumenical reconciliation, the Pope primarily emphasises the urgent need of the Roman Catholic Church reaching reconciliation with Eastern Churches, while announcing that the “full breath” of European Christianity would require the Churches of Europe to breathe with both lungs, that is with the Western Latin-based and Eastern Orthodox alike. This stems from the Pope’s conviction that the Churches of Europe may have their share in the act of integration in the form of historical experience and cultural and spiritual heritage, but only provided that when implementing the “Christian conscience imperative”, they overcome the barrier of division in confession.³⁸

The Church in Poland engages in the process of ecumenical reconciliation of Churches, perceiving the process also as an element of restoring and expanding the awareness of joint cultural and religious roots of Churches divided, and

³⁶ “KAI Press Bulletin”, 24 March 1998.

³⁷ “KAI Press Bulletin”, 2 December 1997.

³⁸ See A.Nossol, *Znaczenie ekumenii w jednoczącej się Europie (Importance of Ecumenical Efforts for Europe under Integration)* in: *Europa, drogi integracji (Europe, Paths to Integration)*, op.cit., p.188-190.

as an element of reconciliation or agreement of nations, as barriers in confession continue in their destructive and dividing nature.

A yet another factor stems from the fact that the integration process is also a process of mutual “inculturation”, of absorbing alien models and passing own models on. Fears of the material culture of the West taking over are alleviated with expectations that the strong Polish folk Catholicism shall be a moral and spiritual boost to the West, while strengthening the position and importance of Churches in the European Union.

A third crucial factor of bringing the Polish Church closer to issues and challenges brought by the Polish European Union membership is international co-operation. Forms of co-operation with Episcopates of EU member states are consolidating, while co-operation with the Conference of the German Episcopate has aspired to a symbol, as also emphasised on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the letter of the Polish to the German bishops, and on numerous other occasions.³⁹

The Church in Poland is becoming increasingly more active in co-operating with the Council of Conferences of European Episcopates (CCEE), and with the Commission of European Community Episcopates (COMECE). In practice, both institutions are actually a form of the Church communicating with European Union structures. The role of the COMECE has been particularly pronounced during works concerning the so-called Church Clause to the Amsterdam Treaty.

Meetings in Gniezno co-organised by the Church on the occasion of the millennial anniversary of St. Adalbert’s death (when the Pope visited Poland), and of the historical Gniezno assembly of the year 1000 had been a contribution to the “spiritual dimension” of European co-operation. These meetings, attended by presidents and leading politicians from Central European countries, had been crucial historical events building co-operation among these countries at the stage of implementing the European Union eastbound expansion project.

It is also worthwhile emphasising that the Church and a number of related organisations, primarily universities, are increasingly more involved in problems concerning European integration and the place of the Church as part thereof. This trend has brought a number of publications on Europe (e.g. a series of publications related to the operations of Studium Generale Europa), as well as numerous international conferences engaging in Europe-related topics.

All this contributes to the Church in Poland gaining a better grasp, understanding, and feel for European integration problems, and to be coming closer to a Europe under integration. The Church speaks less frequently of threats stemming from the soon-to-be-expected Polish European Union

³⁹ As part of such co-operation, a Task Force for Permanent Liaison of Episcopates is in operation, see: “*KAI Press Bulletin*”, 3 July 1998.

membership, with any fears expressed rather in terms of challenges; more and more often, however, the Church mentions opportunities and hopes related to integration. Moreover, the Polish Church remains under the influence of example from Rome. For some time, it seemed that with regard to European integration matters, the Polish Church – to paraphrase the Pope’s famous expression – does not breathe in a rhythm equal to that of the Holy See. Most recently, however, this rhythm seems to have harmonised.