

Review of the Polish discussion on the White Paper/Future of Europe



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The debate on the White Paper in Poland confirms that the likely scenarios do not cover all the possible options for the future of Europe. At the same time, despite a profound social and political division in Poland between the supporters of the governing party (PiS) and its opponents, both parties point out scenario 4 as a preferred approach, taking into account its feasibility and political acceptability. Scenario 3 is being rejected by the right, scenario 5 is being considered to be unrealistic by both sides, scenarios 1 and 2 are not accepted as being not good for Europe and for Poland.

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Among many weaknesses of the EU identified in Poland in the debate on the future of Europe which should be taken into account in the EU-wide debate, the following can be listed:

- No appealing narrative and no prime objective – a sense of community needs to be restored and a strong, collective emotion needs to be found to move people today and to shape the European identity. Poland could contribute its heritage of freedom and solidarity which inspired the world and Europe in the 90s. Without positive emotions it will be difficult to encourage Europeans to act in defence of common values and their civilisation. Member States will continue to reach compromises and to act together only if they can share the same important vision. Such concept has always accompanied the evolution of the European communities: peace, then reconstruction and reconciliation, single market, big enlargement and Constitution. Now this could be, for example, the “smart union” — strong, effective and cohesive to face global challenges (climate change, post-factual politics, fake news, scarcity of raw materials and water, mass migration, natural disasters, etc.) and new risks (assertiveness of Russia, international

terrorism, cyber and hybrid conflicts, China’s growing importance etc.). A paraphrased Donald Trump’s election campaign slogan, “Make Europe great again”, could be a vision of a united Europe as a strong player on the world stage, enjoying not soft powers, but also hard powers.

- Economic stagnation of the West versus the more dynamic East – it is instructive to refer to the Central and Eastern Europe, which still remembers the bad times, to get new reserves of creativity and energy. All the more that countries such as Poland continue to grow (3.6 % - forecast for 2017). A bridge West-East can have an invigorating effect, particularly in conjunction with the enormous potential of the human capital in the East and the financial capital and experience in the West. To succeed, we need to preserve the uniformity of the single European market, equal for all. Protectionism on the part of some Member States in the ‘old EU’ does not help to build the unity of the EU.

- The migration crisis, fear of strangers and terrorist attacks — Europe has got used to calmness at its borders, and now it is experiencing instability. Migrations to Europe will continue to grow, not only

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due to wars and political tensions, but also because of scarcity of water and other raw materials in Africa and Asia, and obvious development and economic gaps. It is therefore necessary to amend the message sent to third countries — switching from a soft and inviting one to a firm and discouraging one. All the more that the risk of terrorist attacks continues to grow. The position of the V4 countries needs to be taken into account: the EU external borders should be better protected while the migration policy requires a comprehensive approach focused not only on assimilation of migrants but above all on drastic reduction of the migration flow into Europe.

- Weakness in the context of external threats – surrounded by "a belt of fire" in the South, caused by the Arab Spring, facing a progressing conflict on the Eastern border and unpredictable actions of Russia, concerned about the weakening transatlantic ties with the United States after Donald Trump's election, the European Union is now understanding that it can rely on itself only. Its fate will depend on its internal effectiveness and right answers to challenges stemming from outside. It should start laying down foundations of its own strong power

because 'soft power' is not enough today. It is therefore necessary to expand and strengthen the common foreign and security policy and enhance Europe's defence capabilities, not only by drawing on NATO but also on internal EU arrangements.

- Conflict between the centre and the periphery — if the European Union is serious about preserving the unity of the EU27, the West and East must better understand each other. The Central and Eastern European countries do not want to be treated as second class members. This also concerns the Europe's elites ("you might have principles, but we have the structural funds" — F. Holland) and imbalances between the values of liberal democracy and the social conservatism and traditionalism, represented by a large part of citizens of the "new EU". The European motto "United in diversity" should help to sensitize people to the needs of others, representing other policy options, coming from countries of varied experience and sensitivity. A social dialogue is very important in this context (including civil initiatives allowing to act and not only debate), as it is a universal education, including historical education. It is paradoxical that we are building a

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community of EU27 and do not know each other.

- Abandonment of values – it is worth referring back to the ideas of the European founding fathers which are shared by people of different views and defining what Europe is today and where it gets its power from. We need to develop such mechanisms that keep the Member States together rather than apart. It is worth building a European identity and a sense of togetherness because the values and the culture are a source of our European solidarity. Such cooperation based on the foundations is more sustainable and more resilient than ties based on shared interests.

- A twilight of the “European dream” — an important point of reference is the social dimension of the European integration. The European Union can try to elaborate a system where social disparities are low and the social security high, with a high quality of life. However, this means enormous public expenditure, as well as problems of competitiveness in relation to other regions of the world (Asia, Africa) where labour is cheap and social security is weak. The next technological revolution and an ever more

automated production undermine the labour market and the welfare systems so that the ‘European dream’ will not be possible anymore without introduction of other remedial instruments, such as a tax on robots or a basic income (currently being tested in Finland and Switzerland).

The main strands of the White Paper/Future of Europe

The discussion on the future of the EU is a fundamental political dispute in Poland between the governing party Law and Justice (PiS, ECR in EP) and the opposition. In 2005 PiS won both the parliamentary and presidential elections which gave it party full power: majority in the Parliament and the Senate as well as the President. Whereas the opposition is fragmented today and not all the groupings are represented in the Parliament (left-wing parties). A sharp political dispute deepens a division in society in two opposing blocks; it influences relations at work, in family, in everyday life. The dynamics of the internal conflict and the desire to win the electorate also affect the Polish diagnosis of the situation of the today's Union, and Europe as a civilisation. They determine

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how the relationships we should build with our EU partners are assessed. The debate in Poland around the future scenarios for the EU is essentially of an expert nature. The European Commission's White Paper is being analysed by the scientific community, extensively discussed at universities and by think tanks. Representatives of local and regional authorities, activists of the third sector and young people, especially students, show great interest in it. Experts say the White Paper lacks a scenario on the EU fragmentation which is not improbable. Fragmentation does not mean disintegration of the Union, but it would be a serious breakdown between groups of Member States, determining any coherence of the integration process. Already today the Union is differentiated (Schengen, euro), but the current scale of challenges related to this differentiation makes this model difficult to further function. Experts also stress the importance of a common currency in the European integration process and a positive role of national parliaments which should be involved more in the decision-making system because they represent a huge power of influence. A substantive debate in Poland is distorted by the political narrative, formulated and

presented by both the government and the opposition parties. The reference point is not the White Paper, but the situation in Europe, actions taken by the EU institutions in the context of key challenges as well as rising tensions in relations between Brussels and Warsaw (Poland's objection to the decision on migrants' relocation, conflict around the Constitutional Tribunal, procedure to monitor the rule of law, possible cases in the ECJ against Poland, possible application of Article 7 TEU and related sanctions, including cuts in the EU budget within the cohesion policy, etc.). The debate on European affairs in Poland reveals two different points of view on the European Union and its future.

1. The view on Europe from the ruling party and its supporters

Back to the root of Christian values and Founding Fathers of the EU

“I think Europe has to decide whether it wants to live and thrive or it wants this shrivel and disappear”, said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu meeting Prime Ministers of V4 in Budapest (18 July 2017). Such opinions can be heard

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also among the ruling elites in Warsaw. According to PiS politicians and their supporters, Europe is at the historic crossroads and will not be able to develop properly if it does not return to its roots i.e. its values. The Western world is on the brink of collapse and the main reason for that is its lost "civilizational backbone", Christian morals and forces — both soft and hard. Lazy Europeans, living in prosperity, are not ready today to fight for their world or to die for it. Right-wing circles in Poland see the European Union rather as a source of threats than opportunities. This is leading to the redefinition of the role of this organisation in shaping the future of Poland. They believe that Western Europe has evolved for the last decades in an opposite direction to what was the desire of the European Communities' founders, coming from the centre-right factions (Schuman, Adenauer, de Gasperi). Over time, Europe's civilisation, based on Christian morals, shifted towards a secular and liberal Europe (under influence of France), opening up to all kind of differentness. At the same time, a process of decolonisation was progressing and it contributed to an increased migration of people from other cultural circles. As a result, the 'old EU' has ceased to be

distinctive, got influenced by excessive political correctness, gone towards tolerance for undesirable behaviour and clouded distinction between the good and the bad, and eventually towards glorification of behaviour once condemned and fought against. Europe without visibility and its Christian roots is now unable to formulate a proper development strategy and to defend itself against other civilisations. It is a fundamental threat to the European life, comparable with the decline of the Western Roman Empire under the barbarians. An unprecedented migration wave of people of a different culture, especially Muslims, is perceived by the right-wing circles as one of the most important challenges that Europe would not be able to face without changing its approach and showing force instead of sympathy. The "old Europe" (West) could draw new energy to fight for its future, and indeed for its survival, upon the "new Europe" — countries in Central and Eastern Europe which were not subject to liberal spoilage during the Cold War and have maintained old European values. To remedy the existential threat to the old continent, according to the Polish right, Europe shall go back to its Christian roots and build an "illiberal democracy".

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Closing ranks against West European Arrogance

The right circles in Poland consider the European Union today as an inefficient body which requires deep reforms - it is not even possible to say whether feasible at all in the current situation. The biggest obstacle is, in their view, arrogance of the old EU elites, unwillingness to listen to "junior" countries and inability to "manage disagreements" (Minister Konrad Szymański). This unequal treatment, despite the declared and legally enshrined in the Treaties co-decision process, annoys Polish members of the ruling party and encourages them to oppose and fight for their arguments. It is a commonly shared opinion among the right that Western Europe reduces Poland to vassalage. This concerns both the politics and economy, and even cultural and social matters. The politicians of the ruling party are of an opinion that Poland has lost not only its "family silverware", i.e. the most valuable businesses, but also its own identity, due to its excessive servility and submissiveness towards the "old EU". Pro-Western elites of the Third Republic of Poland, consisting mainly of people from the "new order" (post-communist), have imposed Poles their

narrative and perception of the world, to foster cosmopolitan attitudes, thus undermining patriotism and fellow-feeling with their own nation and history. Such diagnosis needs to be addressed. It is a clear articulation of the Polish national interest, as defined by the Law and Justice party. It means hardening of the position vis-à-vis the largest EU countries (notably Germany) or the pursuit to diversify energy supplies and business partners (almost 80 % of the Polish exports go to the EU today). Intensification of relations with countries from outside the "hard core" (UK, V4 and other countries of the Three Sea Initiative) is very visible, new alliances are being sought (China, Israel) and old ones are being strengthened (USA). The right sees the need to build the position of Poland within the EU in the context of the whole Central and Eastern Europe, and shows the willingness to carry out an autonomous bilateral policy and establish their own initiatives (V4 meetings with Egypt on the migration crisis and the upcoming V4 summit in Cairo; the North-South axis to balance the East-West axis). In the opinion of the ruling camp, 13 years after the enlargement the West should understand that Poland is an EU member equal to France or Italy and the Czech

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Republic and Slovakia are equal to the Netherlands and Belgium. However, this is not the case. An example cited by the Polish right is the disagreement between the V4 and Italy around the letter sent on 19 July 2017 by the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group countries to Prime Minister Gentiloni. “We believe that people actually seeking asylum should be identified even before they enter the territory of the European Union. Our external borders must be protected. The EU and the Member States should mobilise financial and other measures to create safe and humane conditions at flashpoints or at hotspots outside the EU territory”. The V4 Heads stated that they rejected the relocation mechanism and the forced and automatic redistribution. In response, the Prime Minister of Italy defined the letter as an unnecessary lesson given to Italy and declared that he did not accept threats or cautions and he had the right to “request solidarity”. PiS and its supporters perceive such behaviour as evidence of “deafness” and arrogance of large Western countries, which are fully apparent in the discussions around the migration crisis. In view of the Polish ruling camp, shared by the governments of other V4, risks identified by the countries of the region have not been

taken seriously into account (“external border defence is key”, “free movement of people without controls raises the risk of terror” — Victor Orban) and a mandatory and automatic allocation of migrants (relocation), preferred by the countries directly affected by the crisis (Germany, Italy) has been imposed. This approach means that the European Union is already implementing scenario 3 of the White Paper (those who want more do more), and therefore it is a Union of two speeds — the centre and peripheries. Poland cannot accept such developments.

Brussel's elites and bureaucracy

Another example is the behaviour and decisions of the Brussels bureaucracy. In the opinion of the Polish right-wing circles, it is dominated by the old EU countries and therefore the interests of our part of the continent are neglected. The Poles who work for the EU institutions, not only that they are under-represented and essentially occupy subordinate positions, according to the right, come mostly from the liberal elites of the Third Republic of Poland and therefore they do not struggle for the Polish interests in the EU. According to supporters of the ruling party, given that Poland is still not treated

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in partnership by the Western countries, it has to fight for such a position by strengthening its forces based on regional coalitions. In this context we observe intensification of joint actions (especially regarding migration) within the Visegrad Group, home to 60 million people, and the Three Sea Initiative involving Member States that are home to more than 100 million EU citizens. At the same time, the Polish government is purchasing back stocks and shares in companies of strategic sectors (e.g. banks), etc. The Polish right appears to be the most favourable to scenario 4 of the White Paper (doing less more efficiently), provided, however, that the European Union retains its unity among the 27 Member States and that there will be no division into first and second class members. This will mean that Brussels will have to take into account the optics and sensitivity of the Central and Eastern European countries and to better “manage disagreements” among the 27 Member States. Otherwise, the Polish government envisages the scenario of progressing fragmentation of the EU, which makes it to build a certain back-up in the form of a political and economic space (the Three Seas Initiative) between the “dying West” and unpredictable and aggressive Russia,

with strong “anchors of power” in the US and China.

2. The view on Europe from the opposition and its supporters

In the opinion of opposition supporters, represented in the Parliament by the Civic Platform (PO, EPP in EP), the Modern (Nowoczesna, close to ALDE) and the Polish People's Party (PSL, EPP in EP) and outside the Parliament by post-communist Social Democrats (SLD), the left-wing Together (Razem) and other citizen's movements, Poland has been part of Europe for over 1,000 years within the meaning of the Western civilisation, expressing our values and political, social and cultural membership. Today, Europe is experiencing difficult times, is subject to subsequent crises, but this should not change the Polish optics. On the contrary, Poland with its human and cultural potential could be actively involved in shaping the fate of the continent, together with other Western countries. This is all the more true given that Europe is still the best place to live on earth, as demonstrated by the migration wave from Africa and Asia.

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The image of the European Union

As all the opposition agrees, it is thanks to the integrated Western Europe that Poland had a clear point of reference and political goal for two decades. The European Union gave us human capital, financial and institutional capacities, which allowed for a rapid recovery from socialism, as well as for a free market economy and a parliamentary democracy. Up to 2004 the perspective of the EU membership was a clear lodestar what and how to do. From the entry to the EU, Poland sought to be an active member of this organisation by learning how the institutions function and how to build compromises. These efforts allowed to minimise corruption, achieve one of the highest levels of EU funds absorption, implement hundreds of thousands of projects within the cohesion policy, introduce Polish companies into the European single market and improve their competitiveness, improve the quality of the work of public bodies, and make Poland an actor of the global circulation. A stable economic growth at 4 %, very well carried out Poland's Presidency of the Council of the EU, a Pole as the President of the European Parliament and a Pole as the President of the European Council, efforts to make Poland member

of G20 — all of this demonstrated a growing position of Poland in the EU and in the world. The 2015 elections broke down this path. Opposition groups argue that Poland is currently being marginalised upon its own request. We are losing influences, reputation and money. At the same time, we have changed the political course just when the European Union has entered into a crucial moment in its history, which will define relationships inside the EU and the situation on the continent for the years to come. We should now stand by our Western partners, remain united and build a union that is desired by Poles, too. We should together pool the necessary reforms and continue to be one of the most important countries in the organisation. For the very first time after hundreds of years we could have had a significant impact on the fate of our stronger neighbours and contributed to better decisions which regard Poland as well. However, we are losing this “momentum”. The leaders in Poland should be reminded that “who does not sit at the table, is on the table.” (Ivan Krastev).

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EU as source of opportunities

The European Union is perceived by the opposition in Poland as a source of opportunities. These have three major dimensions: a) political dimension — the opportunity to influence the whole continent, to participate in the decision-making process on all EU matters, increased coverage of actions taken by Poland (also on the global stage), empowerment vis-à-vis Russia and China but also vis-à-vis the USA; b) human and cultural dimension — “Europeanness” versus Polish “provincialism”; openness, return to good traditions of the First Republic of Poland: tolerance (religious and social), multiculturalism, inclusiveness, Poland being a North-South liaison and an East-West liaison; c) economic dimension — competitiveness, drive for modernisation (new technologies, environment, alternative sources of energy, automation etc.) In the opinion of the opposition, Poland's place is at the most powerful EU countries' side, as this strengthens us (both within the EU and vis-à-vis third countries) and offers greater opportunities to pursue Polish interests. Therefore, the Weimar Triangle is being pushed through as an optimal

format for the Polish *raison d'état*, in particular in the context of Brexit.

Participative membership

For the opposition supporters the most desirable scenario for the EU would be to deepen the European integration in all its dimensions (scenario 5). However, there is no much confidence in its feasibility in the current situation. Therefore, the preferred options are scenario 4 (doing less more efficiently) or scenario 3 (those who want more do more) — on the condition that Poland is among the doing more countries. Under the PO-PSL government Poland positioned itself as an interface between the euro zone and the other countries, and was preventing a gap between them. It successfully opposed proposals of a separate parliament, a separate budget or specific summits of Eurozone countries only, arguing that this could have been the beginning of the end of the single market. It had the image of a country which was building and not destroying, which participated in important Union related matters, and at the same time, if it was fighting for its own interests it knew how to merge them with the Community interests. Today, the opposition (notably Nowoczesna) is going

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further – it is calling for a major debate on the euro and its adoption as soon as possible – not only for economic reasons but above all for political ones. It considers the common currency an important element of the Union consolidation and its stabilisation. Political parties are referring to a positive experience of the Baltic States and Slovakia (member of V4 which is an important factor to be taken into account by the government in Warsaw). Other issues highlighted by the opposition in the public debate on Poland's EU membership and their vision for the future are the following:

- European values enshrined in Article 2 TEU (democracy, rule of law, political pluralism, freedom, democracy) + the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Article 6 TEU) — the opposition claims that the government is seeking to replace the Western liberal democracy, of which Poland was until recently an example, with dictatorship of a single party, experienced already in times of the People's Republic of Poland. The government accuses the opposition of treason against the national interest by "washing Polish dirty linen in Brussels" and inviting the EU institutions to adopt

sanctions.

- Modernisation — the opposition claims that the government is taking Poland back to the 19th century, era of coal and steel, while we need to switch to the new century ("21st century, stupid!" — President Kwasniewski). We need to encourage automatization of the industry and develop new technologies. This is all the more important since the growing air pollution in Polish cities concerns the Poles more than problems of the Polish mining sector. Modernisation also applies to institutions and the civil society. The EU benchmarks in the field of subsidiarity, greater public participation and administrative culture have changed the working culture even in such areas as planning or implementation of the strategy within regional and local authorities (marshal of the voivodship, Jarubas).

- The broader sense of freedom and of being part of the Western world — the opposition claims that the government is marginalising Poland's position within the EU and making a mockery of us in the West, which we wanted to join so much after 1989. In times of the Polish People's Republic Poles had neither civil freedoms within the country, nor freedom of

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travelling abroad or opportunities for legal work in other European countries, unless they emigrated.

3. Opinion polls

Opinion polls continue to show a high degree of support among Poles for the European integration. The Polish society is firmly anchored in Europe and attached to the most important Western values. According to a recent survey on Visegrad Group countries (V4), carried out by IPSOS in March 2017 for the Republican Institute (IRI), based on a sample of 1020 individuals, 83 % of respondents support Poland's membership in the EU, while 81 % support close ties with the US. In response to a question what is more important — prosperity or democracy, 59 % indicate democracy while 40 % prosperity (for example in the Czech Republic the proportions are reversed). More than half of the respondents indicate the West as a source of values, culture and intellectual development (only 9 % indicate Russia), while 79 % are against the policies of President Putin's administration. However, while the Poles (and Hungarians) demonstrate one of the highest levels of EU support, the current government shows a certain distance from

the West. Among the many causes of PiS's electoral success and its stable public support at around 30 %, the following may be named: expectations that politicians would pay greater attention to social problems and take responsibility for the situation in the country, rather than constantly 'looking' at Brussels. At the same time, the economic crisis has substantially decreased people's support for the euro. It is currently at 40 %, while in 2004 it was comparable with the support for the EU. The migration crisis, also being used for a political struggle, led to increased anti-migrant sentiments in the country where there are practically no ethnic or religious minorities. More recent examples: Polish students do not want to live in dormitories together with foreigners, and tourists do not want to mix in resorts with tourists from other countries. According to IPSOS, Poles consider screening of migrants and terrorism as the main threats for Europe today. At the same time, as many as 75 % state that they cannot see any good future for their children in the country, 59 % want greater stability of the European Union and only 33 % want changes.

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Centre for International Relations (CIR) is an independent, non-government analytical centre established in 1996 which deals with Polish foreign policy and the most important issues of international politics. CIR is active in research, education and publishing, organises conferences and meetings, and participates in international projects in collaboration with similar institutions in many countries. CIR creates a forum for debate and exchange of ideas in matters of international politics, relations between states and challenges in the global world. CIR's activities are addressed above all to local-government officials and to entrepreneurs, as well as to officials of the central administration, politicians, diplomats, political scientists and the media. In 2014, CIR was again recognised as one of the best think-tanks in East-Central Europe in the study "The Leading Public Policy Research Organisations in the World" conducted by the University of Pennsylvania.

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