

# PISM REPORT

## 20 YEARS OF POLAND IN THE EUROPEAN UNION



AUGUST 2024

PRZEMYSŁAW BISKUP (ED.)



THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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## PRZEMYSŁAW BISKUP

### INTRODUCTION

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, membership of the European Union has become the most important component of Poland's systemic transformation, simultaneously anchoring it in Western economic and political structures. Together with its accession to NATO in 1999, joining the Union became a symbol of a permanent change in the country's strategic position in the system of international alliances. The very fact of the passing of 20 years of Poland's membership justifies an attempt to summarise the key changes in the EU system and the achievements and challenges faced by the country and its citizens.

However, the reason behind the creation of this report was to provide national public opinion and decision-makers with analyses helpful in developing the programme of Poland's second presidency of the EU Council, which will take place in the first half of 2025. The first presidency, in 2011, coincided with Poland's "honeymoon" in its relations with the European Union and symbolically summed up the accession period. However, the upcoming presidency will take place in conditions that are very different in many ways—just after the election of what is likely to be the most Eurosceptic European Parliament (EP) in the history of the EU, in the face of a full-scale war in Ukraine, a background of numerous social protests in Poland and other Member States over EU policies, including in agriculture, and in view of the need to stimulate the European political debate after the controversial Hungarian presidency.

The preparation of the presented report was also inspired by the earlier output of the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) and its expert contribution to the process of European integration. A particular point of reference was the considerations and conclusions contained in the report *Poland in the European Union: Initial Problems and Crises?*, edited by Urszula Kurczewska, Małgorzata Kwiatkowska, and Katarzyna Sochacka, which stood out from the analytical literature of the time as a forecast of the future systemic challenges for Poland in the new integration reality. The report was based on dozens of questionnaires completed by experts in micro- and macroeconomics, law, international relations, European studies, and security, as well as more than a dozen broader analyses prepared by key experts and political activists of the time.

While encouraging interested readers to reach for the 2002 publication, it is worth a reminder of the accuracy of the forecasts contained therein, some of which are now historical, while others are still relevant. As regards the first set, it is worth pointing out the concerns expressed at the time about the degree of acceptance and understanding of Polish society for European integration and the outcome of the 2003 accession referendum. Solving this problem was helped by an intensive information campaign, the fact that the then left-wing government of Leszek Miller gained the support of the majority of the opposition parties and many social organisations, as well as by extending the voting period to two days. With regard to the second group, it is worth recalling the considerations concerning the departmentalisation of the government administration ("silo effect"), its ability to become efficiently involved in the law-making process within the European institutions, and the need for a stable civil service, which should provide an organisational memory for these processes. With regard to the dynamics of integration, experts also stressed the need to consider that the full benefits of membership

would only become apparent after 15–20 years, while the comprehensive reforms required by it could become the cause of adverse social reactions. The latter diagnosis sheds light on some interesting paradoxes of the real-life course of Polish membership in the EU, such as the persistently high support for the integration process despite equally persistent significant support for Eurosceptic parties.

This latest PISM report is an attempt to review the key fields of EU policy in the last 20 years from Poland's perspective. Taking into account the multitude of emerging academic and expert studies inspired by this anniversary, the intention of the authors of this PISM report is to present a broad, holistic view of Poland's participation in the integration process over the last two decades. It factors in all basic problem fields of this process and reflects the results of research systematically carried out at PISM. Individual chapters are devoted to the evolution of the EU, European policy implemented by individual Polish governments in the years 2004–2024, the evolution of social attitudes towards integration, as well as key economic issues, including the impact of economic integration on Poland in the last two decades and the impact of EU cohesion policy on the country's systemic transformation. In addition, the report presents a consideration of Poland's role in shaping EU foreign and security policy and an analysis of Poles' participation in the administration of the European Commission (EC). The study ends with conclusions relevant to Poland's further membership of the Union.



MELCHIOR SZCZEPANIK

## EVOLUTION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION 2004–2024

### CONTEXT

The history of the European Union since the so-called “Big Bang” enlargement of 2004–2007 has been marked by major crises that have shaken the foundations of the Community. In 2005, the citizens of France and the Netherlands rejected the Constitutional Treaty in referendums, calling into question the drive for closer integration and changes to the EU institutions. The prolonged economic and financial crisis at the turn of the first and second decades of this century slowed down economic growth in the EU and created a real threat of a break-up of the euro area. In 2015, an uncontrolled influx of large numbers of migrants and refugees jeopardised the Schengen area. A year later, one of the largest Member States—the UK—decided to leave the Union. Brexit not only weakened the political and economic potential of the EU but also represented a symbolic blow to its image as a project with an uncontested vision for the development of European countries. The COVID-19 pandemic took the lives of more than a million EU citizens and caused a short but severe economic shock. The return to growth was seriously complicated by the full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine. Putin’s war also confronted the Member States with the real prospect of an attack on their own territory.

This series of crises was accompanied by an unfavourable evolution of the international environment. Already in 2016 the Union’s Global Strategy described the situation as an “existential crisis.”<sup>1</sup> The growing rivalry between the U.S. and China imperils the stability of the *rules-based* world order—the optimal environment for the EU. The “pivot” to Asia, executed by the U.S. administration of then President Barack Obama, raised concerns about a weakening of the American commitment to the defence of Europe. Fears grew significantly during the presidency of Donald Trump (2017–2021), who cast doubt on the relevance of NATO and the transatlantic relationship. Meanwhile, Russia has been increasingly aggressive in contesting the post-Cold War order and seeking to subjugate the states that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. To this end, Russia has not hesitated to go as far as invading neighbouring states and annexing their territories.

### POLITICAL EVOLUTION

In response to these crises, the EU opted for closer integration. Following the failure of the Constitutional Treaty, the Member States adopted the Treaty of Lisbon, which retained most of the provisions that extended the EU’s competences.<sup>2</sup> It enabled closer cooperation in justice and home affairs and in foreign and defence policy, and gave the EU additional competences

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<sup>1</sup> EEAS, “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy,” June 2016, [www.eeas.europa.eu](http://www.eeas.europa.eu).

<sup>2</sup> In the Lisbon Treaty, elements that might suggest that the Union takes on the characteristics of a nation-state were dropped. These included the mention of the flag and anthem, and such nomenclature as the “Council of Ministers” and “Foreign Minister.”

in environmental protection and energy policy. Later, the economic and financial crisis provided the impetus for the adoption of new regulations and greater coordination in this area. The economic challenges posed by the pandemic encouraged the Member States to issue common debt. Russia's use of energy resources as a tool of political pressure mobilised the Union to integrate markets, diversify supply, and introduce the possibility of joint gas purchases. The attack on Ukraine, in turn, underpinned an unprecedented decision to finance arms supplies with EU funds and to seek deeper cooperation in defence policy.

Among the leaders of the Member States and in the European Parliament, supporters of closer integration prevailed, but their decisions were contested. As economic problems multiplied and the EU displayed limited effectiveness in external relations, a growing number of citizens opposed the extension of Community competences, previously accepted in connection with the obvious benefits of integration (*output-based* legitimacy). Political movements that questioned the effectiveness of solutions adopted by the EU gained ground. They called for loosening of cooperation and curbing the powers of supranational institutions. Following the 2004 European Parliament (EP) elections, the two right-wing Eurosceptic factions constituted 8.7% of the chamber's members, while 10 years later they accounted for 15.7%, and in the 2024 elections they could win almost 25% of the seats.<sup>3</sup> The strengthening of the Eurosceptic trend is also manifest in election results in the Member States. In 2002, in the second round of the French presidential election, National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen won 18% of the vote. Twenty years later, Marine Le Pen had a much better result with 41%. The electoral results showed that there is a growing group of citizens, consisting mainly of older people, and less educated blue-collar workers, as well as inhabitants of rural areas and smaller town, who can benefit very little from the achievements of integration and sometimes even consider them to be a source of danger.<sup>4</sup> They therefore accept the ideas of Eurosceptics who claim that by reducing cooperation and "taking back control," the Member States' governments and parliaments will be better able to tackle the problems of a globalised world.

The EU's remedies to successive crises were created in a process of time-consuming and turbulent negotiations between the Member States. Often they represented a temporary remedy rather than comprehensive reform of a policy. Although the Union has strengthened cooperation, no consensus has crystallised on a major modification of Community institutions or policies. The debate on the future of the EU, which has gained momentum in the wake of Brexit and the Trump presidency, has shown divisions within the camp of supporters of integration. Emmanuel Macron, elected president of France in 2017, became one of the most determined advocates of deepening. In 2017, in the oft-quoted speech at the Sorbonne, he called for closer cooperation especially in economic, defence, and migration policies.<sup>5</sup> His vision was that the eurozone countries would form a closely integrated EU core. However, these proposals were greeted with reservation by the majority of Member States that preferred the status quo or cautious, evolutionary change.

<sup>3</sup> The European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) brings together parties with a moderately Eurosceptic profile (its members describe themselves as "Eurorealists"), while the Identity and Democracy Group (ID) is an alliance of groups radically critical of integration. Between 2009 and 2019, the latter group was known as the Europe of Freedom and Democracy. For forecasts for the outcome of this year's elections, see: M. Müller, "European Parliament seat projection (April 2024): EPP far ahead, third place remains contested, Greens regain ground," *Der (europäische) Föderalist*, 26 April 2024, [www.foederalist.eu](http://www.foederalist.eu).

<sup>4</sup> On the rise of working-class support for the far right, see: I. Krastev, *After Europe*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2017, pp. 33–35.

<sup>5</sup> "Initiative pour l'Europe – Discours d'Emmanuel Macron pour une Europe souveraine, unie, démocratique," Elysée, 26 September 2017, [www.elysee.fr](http://www.elysee.fr).

As opinions on the future of the EU diverged, the creation of an inner circle of the most integrated countries mean has been a constant thread in the debates. The Lisbon Treaty provides for an “enhanced cooperation mechanism” that allows members to develop joint ventures in smaller groups. However, this mechanism has only been used in a few cases. Among the potential candidates for the inner circle, there was no consensus on the benefits that joint ventures could bring. When Macron called for the creation of a eurozone budget, he failed to win the support of Germany and other net contributors to the EU budget. They feared that such a decision could lead to an increased burden on the richest countries to the benefit of the EU’s South, battling significant public debts.

Apart from the issue of EU governance and policies, political developments within the Member States also became a contested topic. For the first time in the Union’s history, its institutions and a group of Member States accused several others of breaching fundamental values of the Community, including the independence of the judiciary and media freedom. Poland and Hungary were not sanctioned under the so-called Article 7 procedure, but the Union adopted (and used) a regulation that allowed for the freezing of part of Community funds in the event of violations of the rule of law.<sup>6</sup> The dispute over the rule of law has demonstrated that not only external threats but also internal conflicts over fundamental principles can weaken the Union. It has also highlighted the limited capacity of Member States to counter infringements of common values within their ranks.

The Union continued the endeavours, dating back to the 1990s, to strengthen cooperation in foreign and defence policy. The Lisbon Treaty created the legal basis for the establishment of an EU diplomatic service and extended the competences of a quasi-minister of foreign affairs. However, efforts for a truly common foreign and defence policy have yielded mediocre results. They exposed both the limited capacity of the Member States to define key threats together and the lack of military forces that could support the implementation of EU plans. While Central European states highlighted the danger coming from Russia’s resurgent imperial ambitions, Western Europe succumbed to the illusion that the development of economic relations would mitigate the aggressive tendencies of the Russian elite. This view was advocated above all by Germany, which increased its imports of energy from Russia despite the conflicts it caused with its neighbours. There were also differences of opinion regarding relations with the EU’s key ally, the United States. French pleas for building EU strategic autonomy focused not only on the need to strengthen military capabilities but also were often linked to the theme of gaining greater independence from the United States.<sup>7</sup> Such ideas were opposed by the Central and Northern European states, which consistently emphasised the importance of the United States for Europe’s security.

Economically weakened and divided on issues of foreign policy strategy, the Union has been unable to realise its ambition of building a zone of democracy and prosperity in its immediate neighbourhood. The series of protests in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011–2012, referred to as the Arab Spring, brought hope for democratisation, but failed, resulting in a regression of civil liberties in the region, as well as an increase in migration flows to Europe. Negative developments also occurred in the Western Balkans. In most of the countries, political forces came to power that showed moderate interest in pursuing the reforms that were a prerequisite for EU accession. At the same time, the belief in the benefits of further

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<sup>6</sup> Article 7 TEU describes the actions that the Member States can take if one of them is found to have violated the fundamental values of the EU. It allows for the deprivation of member rights, including the right to vote in the Council of the EU.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example: B. Le Maire, *Le Nouvel Empire: l’Europe du vingt et unième siècle*, Gallimard, Paris 2019, pp. 40–43.

enlargements waned in the largest EU states, not least under the influence of economic problems. An illustration of the importance of EU soft power, on the other hand, was the situation in Ukraine, where a large group of citizens, often risking their lives, pressed those in power to strengthen relations with the EU. Here too, however, the moderate progress of reforms in Ukraine and enlargement fatigue in Western Europe meant that the strengthening of mutual relations was slow. Only the full-scale Russian aggression led to a breakthrough with the decision to start accession negotiations.

As the Union remained in crisis-management mode on a virtually permanent basis, the European Council began to play an increasingly prominent role. Reforms considered in response to crises tended to be so controversial that final decisions could only be made at the level of the Heads of State and Government. The actions carried out by the European Central Bank in defence of the euro area (see below) highlighted the importance of this institution. Meanwhile, the European Parliament's influence on the construction of anti-crisis solutions, especially in the case of the euro crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, was limited. The institution consistently called for reforms in the EU, pleading for closer integration that also entailed an increased role for the Parliament in the decision-making process.<sup>8</sup> MEPs demands included legislative initiative and a greater say in the creation of the EU's multi-annual budget and the appointment of the EC president.

Economic strength and political stability have boosted Germany's role in EU politics. Chancellor Angela Merkel, at the head of the government from 2005 to 2021, played a key part in the creation of community decisions. She favoured cautious modifications that preserved unity. However, Germany was not widely perceived as a benign hegemon, and the solutions it promoted were not always considered as beneficial compromises for the community.<sup>9</sup> The policy of maintaining a large trade surplus with EU partners was criticised as a hindrance to the latter's growth. Merkel was also accused of being excessively lenient towards authoritarian states in the name of the economic benefits Germany derived from relations with them.

When the UK decided to leave the Community, the rise of Franco-German dominance was heralded. These expectations only partially materialised. The agreement between Berlin and Paris greatly facilitated key decisions. This was the case of the Next Generation EU recovery fund created on the basis of shared debt. However, on a number of issues, such as energy policy, relations with the United States, trade policy or fiscal rules, differences of interest prevented the two countries from presenting a common position that could become a reference point for the EU as a whole.

## ECONOMIC EVOLUTION

The Big Bang enlargement fulfilled the hopes placed in it regarding the economic development of the new members. The inflow of EU funds and private investments, as well as export opportunities associated with access to the single market, have driven economic development that has enabled the newcomers to reduce the development gap between them and Western

<sup>8</sup> European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution on possible changes and adjustments to the current institutional structure of the European Union* (2014/2248 INI), 16 February 2017; European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution on the European Parliament's proposals for the revision of the Treaties* (2022/2051 INL), 22 November 2023.

<sup>9</sup> D. Webber, *European Disintegration? The Politics of Crisis in the European Union*, Red Globe Press, London 2019, pp. 56–105; J. Zielonka, *Counter-revolution: Liberal Europe in Retreat*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, pp. 77–78.

Europe. At the time of accession (2004–2007), the per capita GDP of the 10 former Eastern Bloc countries was at 25.7% of Germany's, while in 2022 it reached 44.8%.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the positive developments in the new Member States, the two decades since enlargement have been dominated by economic hurdles. The multifaceted financial and economic crisis brought a period of stagnation. EU GDP in 2014, expressed in constant prices, was only 0.5% higher than in 2008. The crisis has called into question the existence of the euro area. Some researchers have argued that for some countries, membership brings more losses than benefits.<sup>11</sup> The policy of budget cuts that the most-affected countries were obliged to implement resulted in a protracted economic slowdown. A few years later, when the pandemic impeded economic activity, leaders did not repeat that mistake. The creation of a recovery fund based on common debt provided the Member States with an injection of funds to enhance the economic rebound. However, yet again a comprehensive response was missing. Despite the initial agreement, members are still unable to resolve the issue of new sources of Community revenue. This means that in order to repay the debt the EU may be obliged to implement cuts in Community policies.

Successive crises have shown that EU leaders are determined to defend the greatest achievements of integration—such as the euro—and capable of creative solutions. A case in point is the monetary policy pursued by the European Central Bank (ECB) in the second decade of this century, though its compatibility with EU primary law has been questioned.<sup>12</sup> By buying up the bonds of Member States on the secondary market, the ECB contributed to lowering debt-servicing costs. The crisis has mobilised the EU to improve regulations on the functioning of banks, and to tighten the coordination and mutual control of fiscal policies under the European Semester. Despite the problems, seven of the 10 countries that joined the EU in 2004 joined the euro area.

The first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw a weakening of the EU's position among the world's most innovative economies. The EC Communication of 2021 pointed out that in several areas considered key to the development of a modern economy (AI, Big Data, microelectronics, robotics), the EU was lagging behind its main competitors China and the United States.<sup>13</sup> China is becoming an increasingly serious player, as it has ceased to be solely a large assembly line for Western corporations and has developed the capacity to create advanced technologies on its own. At the end of the second decade of the current century, EU members interested in developing 5G networks were confronted with the dilemma that without cooperation with Chinese companies, which entails risks to data security, these plans come into question.<sup>14</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic and the increased Russian aggression against Ukraine have contributed to a reassessment of the way in which economic interdependence is perceived. The latter has never been seen as exclusively beneficial, but the events of recent years have made EU leaders acutely aware of the risks that it entails. The problems of access to medical

<sup>10</sup> Own calculations based on Eurostat data.

<sup>11</sup> F. Andersson, "Would Europe Benefit from the Return of National Currencies," [in:] A. Bakardijeva-Engelbrekt, K. Leijon, A. Michalski, L. Oxelheim (eds.), *The European Union and the Return of the Nation State: Interdisciplinary European Studies*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2020, pp. 165–190.

<sup>12</sup> S. Płóciennik, S. Zaręba, "German Constitutional Court Undermines ECB Policy and Criticises CJEU Judgment," *PISM Spotlight*, No 28/2020, 6 May 2020, www.pism.pl.

<sup>13</sup> European Commission, "Commission Staff Working Document, Strategic Dependencies and Capacities," SWD(2021) 352 final, 5 May 2021, pp. 30–41, www.eur-lex.europa.eu.

<sup>14</sup> L. Gibadło, "Berlin's 5G Dilemma – Prospects for Chinese Firms' Participation in the Building the German Network," *PISM Bulletin*, No 16 (1948), 4 February 2020, www.pism.pl.

equipment and vaccines produced outside the EU's borders have shown that it is not only knowledge and technology that matters, but also having the industrial capacity to produce key goods at home. In turn, the sharp increase in the prices of energy, linked above all to Russia's manipulation of supplies, brutally highlighted the risks associated with dependence on authoritarian states in strategic areas. As a result, economic security gained a prominent place among EU priorities. Member States began to control foreign investment more closely, construct legal and financial tools to strengthen industrial capacity, and seek more resolutely the diversification of supply of energy and key raw materials.

As knowledge of climate change and awareness of its effects has grown, tackling this issue (increasingly referred to as a catastrophe) has become increasingly important. The EU made successive commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase renewable energy production. This process culminated in the 2019 European Council's decision to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. This ambition not only affects energy policy but also translates into a desire to modify the EU's economic model to reduce its negative impact on the climate and the environment. The EU hopes that becoming a leader in a sustainable economy will pay dividends as ambitious climate policies are adopted by other countries as well. However, the green transition has met resistance from important economic actors who have built a strong position within the system based on fossil fuel, and from some citizens fearing high costs. It could also lead to a deepening of economic dependencies, as most of the raw materials used by the green technology sector are extracted and processed outside the EU, primarily in China.

## CONCLUSIONS

Since the Big Bang enlargement, the Union has survived two decades of "permanent crisis" and is today more strongly integrated than 20 years ago.<sup>15</sup> Cooperation has been strengthened in economic and budgetary policies, as well as in migration, energy, and defence. The solutions adopted may seem insufficient, but the balance sheet of the EU's struggle with the crises should be regarded as positive. The Union has not only withstood multiple predicaments but also has taken measures to strengthen its position in a world torn apart by the growing rivalry of superpowers. EU cooperation is seen by most political elites and citizens as the right answer to challenges that transcend national borders.

However, as the integration process touches upon policy areas that are crucial to national sovereignty (taxation, external and defence policy, common debt, border protection) and the Union lacks the spectacular successes that could justify the extension of Community competences, political movements that question the advantages of closer integration are growing in strength. Both the negotiation of reforms adopted in response to the crises and the wider debate about the future of the EU have shown serious differences of opinion among members. These relate to community policies, decision-making, the need for further enlargements, and the EU's role in the world. While the Union has proven its ability to build compromises in emergencies and to take measures seen as unachievable under "normal circumstances," reaching consensus around a more comprehensive reform—including treaty change—now seems unlikely. Growing support for Eurosceptic parties suggests that intra-EU debates may become even more turbulent and compromise-building more difficult. The

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<sup>15</sup> Prominent think-tankers even coined the term "permacrisis." See: J. Emmanouilidis, F. Zuleeg, R. Borges de Castro, "Europe in the Age of Permacrisis," *Commentary*, European Policy Centre, 11 March 2021, [www.epc.eu](http://www.epc.eu).

events of the last decade have also shown that in some Member States, democratic institutions remain fragile.

Despite its considerable potential (both economic and in terms of soft power), the Union proved incapable of preventing unfavourable changes in the international environment, including, above all, the destabilisation of its neighbourhood. Internal upheaval and a moderate record in external relations have had an impact on EU ambitions. Confidence in its ability to successfully export stability and prosperity has been replaced by a concern to defend the EU's *acquis* and position in the world. Reducing dangerous economic dependencies, battling unfair economic competition from third countries, curbing uncontrolled migration, and countering attempts to destabilise the political systems of the Member States are issues high on the Community's agenda.

A strongly integrated EU serves Poland's interests—it constitutes an environment that is conducive to economic development and to exerting greater influence on the neighbourhood and the international order. However, the deterioration of the international situation, economic problems, and disputes within the Union are eroding the EU's ethos of solidarity and, with it, the readiness of some Member States to support weaker partners and go beyond narrowly defined national interests. In such circumstances, the Polish authorities need to be proactive. In the European arena, they should participate in the design of reforms that will prepare the EU for the next enlargement, while at the national level, implement the digital and green transitions, and support economic actors in taking advantage of the new opportunities associated with them.

JOLANTA SZYMAŃSKA

## POLAND'S EUROPEAN POLICY 2004–2024

### BACKGROUND

The first stage of Poland's membership of the Community coincided with an intense debate on the reform of the EU system. Following the adoption of the new treaty, the EU evolved further. Unlike in previous years, however, these changes were not the result of a lengthy process of preparation, culminating in the adoption of a new treaty, but took place ad hoc in response to crises (including the financial crisis, the migration-management crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and Russia's war against Ukraine).<sup>1</sup>

Between 2004 and 2024, the EU has changed geographically. During this time, three new countries joined: Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 (the second stage of the "Eastern" enlargement), and Croatia in 2013. In 2020, as a consequence of the 2016 referendum and after a period of negotiations on the terms of withdrawal, the United Kingdom was the first country in history to leave the European Union.

Domestically, in the first years after Poland's accession, both the political class and society perceived EU membership as the next stage of the systemic transformation initiated in the late 1980s and an impulse for the modernisation of the country. Despite initial concerns, the positive effects of integration have strengthened the almost universal public acceptance of the country's membership in the EU in the following years. However, this support among Poles was superficial, and the direction of development of some EU policies, especially the climate transformation and migration policy, but also the potential costs associated with enlargement policy, put into question the possibility of maintaining a social consensus on membership.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, after several years of political instability (the collapse of the minority centre-left government led by Leszek Miller and the short duration of two minority governments led by Marek Belka), a division into two main, competing political camps crystallised—one centred on Civic Platform (PO; coalition governments of the Civic Platform with partners in the period 2007–2015 and from mid-December 2023) and the other around Law and Justice (PiS; coalition governments in 2005–2007 and the United Right coalition government in 2015–2023).

EU politics began to increasingly permeate national politics, and as the political dispute at home escalated, European politics became a field of contention. This was particularly evident after 2015; in December 2014, the long-term prime minister of the Republic of Poland, Donald Tusk, hailing from Civic Platform, was elected president of the European Council (the 2.5-year term was extended by another 2.5 years in 2017), but less than a year later the power in Poland was taken over by the right-wing coalition led by Law and Justice. The presence of the former leader of Civic Platform, the largest opposition party, in one of the most important positions in the EU determined the rhetoric of the Polish government on European issues.

<sup>1</sup> For more, see: M. Szczepanik, "Evolution of the European Union 2004–2024", in this report.

<sup>2</sup> For more, see: P. Biskup, "Polish Society and European Integration 2003–2024", in this report.



## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of the first years of membership was to take advantage of the opportunities it brings, including access to the internal market and EU funds, to close the gap between Poland and Western countries. In this context, Poland supported the deepening of economic cooperation, the removal of barriers and the reduction of protectionist tendencies in the common market. Polish governments have also attached great importance to budget negotiations, striving to ensure a large pool of funds for the so-called traditional EU policies (cohesion policy and the common agricultural policy).

An important assumption was to strengthen Poland's position as an important player, as well as—as the largest country in the region—the leader of Central and Eastern Europe in the European Union. In this context, the ambitions to maintain or strengthen the country's institutional position, present, among others, in the debate on institutional reforms and in the appointment of key positions in the EU, were important. It was also aimed at fulfilling its membership obligations and putting forward its own initiatives in EU policies.

With regard to the model of the European Union, Poland has been cautious about plans to deepen integration, while at the same time opposing excessive diversification. While Poland's accession to the EU was linked to the ambition to join the Schengen area as soon as possible, its stance on membership in the eurozone, partly motivated by the debt crisis, remained much more distant (despite political support in the first years of membership, preparations for Poland's adoption of the single currency were first postponed,<sup>3</sup> and then, under the Law and Justice government, completely abandoned). Both in relation to Schengen and the euro, as in the case of other integration initiatives, Poland stressed the importance of inclusiveness.

Eastern policy<sup>4</sup> and EU enlargement were the constant priorities of Poland's European policy. Support for democratisation and the ambitions of the European countries of the Eastern Neighbourhood, especially Ukraine, had a special place in this aspect. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Poland strongly supported imposing sanctions on the aggressor. Since the beginning of Poland's membership, it has also supported extending EU enlargement to include the Western Balkans and Turkey.

Poland has been cautious about the EU's ambitions in some areas, such as the climate transition and migration policy. With regard to climate strategy, the government emphasised above all the importance of compensation mechanisms for countries, regions, and industries particularly affected by its effects (“a just transition”). With regard to migration policy, the government emphasised the protection of external borders (since the crisis on the border with Belarus, it has paid particular attention to the problem of the instrumentalisation of migration), and has shown scepticism about increasing the role of EU institutions in the area of asylum policy.

## ACTION

Although the general objectives were defined in a similar way, the manner in which they were implemented significantly differentiated the individual governments of the Republic of Poland. Between 2004 and 2007, frequent changes of government and a lack of experience

<sup>3</sup> For more, see: K. Borońska-Hryniewiecka, P. Toporowski, “Poland's Policy towards the European Union,” *Yearbook of Polish Foreign Policy 2011-2015*, PISM, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> For more, see: E. Kaca, A. Kozioł, “Poland and the EU's foreign and security policy 2004–2024”, in this report.

in European issues made it difficult for Poland to pursue coherent and consistent policy in the EU.<sup>5</sup>

In later years, the political camp centred on the Civic Platform focused on cooperation with the largest EU countries, Germany and France, and with others in the format of the Weimar Triangle. On the other hand, PiS, riding the wave of criticism of the development of integration and Germany's dominance in the EU, set a course towards strengthening alliances in the region of Central Europe (especially within the Visegrad Group) and cooperation with the United Kingdom.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, in the rhetorical sphere, the governments led by Civic Platform emphasised the importance of co-ownership and co-responsibility of Poland for the European project, while PiS emphasised the division into "us" (Poland) and "them" (the EU), stressing the need to protect national sovereignty and the importance of assertiveness towards initiatives coming from EU institutions.

The political dispute on the domestic stage resonated on the EU forum at an early stage of membership, only gaining strength over time. The first manifestation of this was the conflict of competences between President Lech Kaczyński and Prime Minister Tusk over who should represent Poland at EU summits, which was resolved by the Constitutional Tribunal in 2009 in favour of the government. Its later manifestations include, among others, the PiS government's opposition to Tusk's re-election as president of the European Council in 2017, the conflict over the rule of law (after PiS took power in 2015), as well as the competence dispute over the law on the Polish presidency of the EU Council in 2025, which gives the president additional powers at the expense of the government.

The most important challenge of the first years of membership was the negotiation of a new EU treaty (later named the Lisbon Treaty). They were conducted on the part of the Polish by the presidential advisor Marek Cichocki and the head of the Office of the Committee for European Integration Ewa Ośniecka-Tamecka. The main dispute concerned the modification of the voting system in the Council of the EU. In this regard, Poland expressed reservations about the project to replace the Nice system, which was beneficial for Poland, with the so-called double majority rule, instead proposing the so-called Square Root system. It also referred to the provisions concerning, among others, the symbols and nomenclature used in the Treaty, the role of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the structure of the Treaty. In the final text of the Treaty signed on 13 December 2007 in Lisbon (by Prime Minister Tusk and Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski, in the presence of President Kaczyński) on the methodology for counting votes in the Council of the EU, it was agreed to move to a double-majority system with an extension of the Nice system until 2014 and, under certain conditions, until 2017.<sup>7</sup> Although the content of the new treaty was based on the Constitutional Treaty, given the resistance from many countries, including Poland, both the formula of a single treaty and provisions with features symbolising statehood were abandoned. In connection with the Charter of Fundamental Rights being made binding, Poland and the United Kingdom decided to sign a protocol on the partial suspension of the document, the so-called British Protocol.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Ł. Lipiński, J. Szyszko, "Polityczne sukcesy i porażki pierwszych 15 lat Polski w Unii Europejskiej," [in:] A. Radwan-Röhrenscheff (ed.), *15 lat Polski w Unii Europejskiej. Raport*, Instytut in.europa, Warsaw, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> For more, see: J. Szymańska, P. Toporowski, "Poland in the European Union," *Yearbook of Polish Foreign Policy 2016*, PISM, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> A. Kremer, "Aspekty prawne negocjacji podczas Konferencji Międzyrządowej 2007 ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem udziału Polski," [in:] J. Barcz, *Traktat z Lizbony. Główne reformy ustrojowe Unii Europejskiej*, UKiE, Warszawa 2008.

<sup>8</sup> L. Jesień, "Polish Policy in the European Union," *Yearbook of Polish Foreign Policy 2008*, PISM, Warsaw 2009.

In December 2007, Poland, along with eight new EU Member States, joined the Schengen area. This was the culmination of the preparatory process, which had already begun at the stage of accession negotiations, including, among others, the adaptation of the law and infrastructure. Securing Poland's external EU border was a particular challenge. Not without significance in this context was the decision in 2004 to locate the headquarters of Frontex, the EU border agency, in Poland.

The economic crisis of 2008, which in 2009 plunged all of the Member States except Poland into recession, had a positive impact on the country's image, allowing the Polish government to push through initiatives beneficial to Poland on the EU forum more and more boldly.<sup>9</sup> One of them was the Eastern Partnership project, launched in 2009 (together with Sweden), which envisaged closer cooperation with Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. Although it has gained the support of other Member States, it encountered numerous difficulties in the years after it was formed due in part to unfavourable developments in the security situation in the Eastern Neighbourhood.

The maturity of Poland's EU membership was tested by its presidency of the Council (held from July to December 2011). During the presidency, it was possible to conclude talks on the Association Agreement with Ukraine and finalise talks on EU accession with Croatia, and it led to the adoption of the so-called Six-Pack, a package of legal acts strengthening budgetary discipline under the Stability and Growth Pact. Although not all the goals of the presidency were achieved—the biggest disappointment was the Eastern Partnership summit in Warsaw, which was boycotted by Belarus and did not bring the other partners the promise of EU membership—Poland's presidency of the Council was well-regarded in Europe.

In 2014, during the pro-European “Revolution of Dignity” (Euromaidan) in Ukraine, the Polish government became involved in promoting the Ukrainian cause on the EU forum. Foreign Minister Sikorski, together with his counterparts from France and Germany, began mediation between the government and the opposition. However, as a result of Russia's opposition, Poland was left outside the Normandy format (Germany, France, Ukraine, Russia), which in the following years became a platform for negotiations on the war in Donbas and the nationality of Crimea.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, after the start of the war in Donbas and the occupation of Crimea by Russia, the Polish government presented a project of an energy union to the EU, the assumption of which was to limit energy ties between the Member States and Russia. Although it gained the support of France and the UK, the project was significantly reduced due to German opposition. It did not lead to halting plans to build the Nord Stream 2, a gas pipeline long-criticised by Poland that was to transit from Russia to Germany, bypassing Poland and the Baltic states.<sup>11</sup>

After PiS took power, in connection with reforms carried out by the government concerning the national judiciary, in January 2016 the EC initiated a procedure against Poland to protect the rule of law. The dispute with EU institutions over the rule of law in Poland had many scenes, stages, and negative consequences for European policy, such as the threat of depriving Poland of its voting rights in the Council on the basis of the procedure under Article 7 of

<sup>9</sup> E. Lipiński, J. Szyszko, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> A. Balcer, “Starszy brat czy strategiczny partner? Polityka Polski wobec Ukrainy po akcesji do Unii Europejskiej,” [in:] A. Radwan-Röhrenscheff, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> The first branch of the gas pipeline from Russia to Germany (bypassing Poland), Nord Stream 1, was commissioned in 2011. Then, in 2011, the construction of Nord Stream 2 began. It ended in 2021.

the Treaty or blocking European funds for Poland, and lasted until the end of the right-wing government in 2023.

Despite the dispute with the EU institutions, the right-wing government has made attempts to push through its own initiatives on the EU forum. In the discussion on EU reform, which was revived after the Brexit referendum in 2016, the Polish government, together with its partners from the Visegrad Group, opposed the concept of a “multi-speed Europe,”<sup>12</sup> which was gaining more and more recognition in Western Europe, and promoted a model of integration that recognises the fundamental role of the Member States, stressing the importance of the principle of subsidiarity and the need to grant the right of veto to national parliaments over EU initiatives (the so-called red card). Although the Polish government’s proposals for institutional reforms have not met with wide approval in the EU, the assertive stance of the Visegrad Group (V4: Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) has had an impact on limiting the ambitions in the Community for greater diversity of integration or strengthening supranational institutions, in projects presented by then President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker (e.g., who advocated the appointment of a single person as president of the European Commission and European Council) and the President of France Emmanuel Macron (the introduction of transnational electoral lists to the European Parliament).<sup>13</sup>

The main glue that has held the V4 together since 2015 has been its opposition to the EC’s strategy in the area of migration and asylum policy, especially with regard to particular reforms of the Dublin system that provide for the creation of a system for the relocation of asylum seekers in the EU. At the 2018 summit, the V4 countries were assured that the EU would develop a consensus on the reform of the Dublin system. Due to problems with reaching an agreement, work on the so-called migration package, which provides for relocations, has been frozen. However, this work was resumed in 2023, and in June, the EU Council (with opposition from Poland and Hungary, which demanded that the discussion on the reform be moved to the European Council in order to develop a consensus on this issue) adopted a negotiating position on the regulation, announcing the completion of work on the migration package before the 2024 elections to the European Parliament. At the same time, taking into account the Polish demands, among others, related to the emergence of new challenges concerning the instrumentalisation of migration on the eastern border with Belarus, the work on the migration package places great emphasis on the protection of the EU’s external borders.

In 2022, as a result of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Polish government’s European policy was dominated by promoting in the EU the need to provide military, financial, and humanitarian support to Ukraine in fighting the aggressor. Poland has worked with EU institutions and other Member States to provide shelter to refugees arriving in the EU, initiated donor conferences in support of Ukraine, and motivated the EU to push to prosecute war crimes in Ukraine and adopt sanctions against Russia. With the confluence of Russian aggression and the strong support of Polish diplomacy, the door to EU accession was opened not only for Ukraine but also for Moldova and Georgia. A change was also made in the EU’s energy policy—giving up energy ties with the aggressor (this also meant burying the Nord Stream 2 project).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> J. Szymańska, P. Toporowski, “UE na rozdrożu: wkład Komisji Europejskiej w debatę nad przyszłością Unii,” *PISM Bulletin*, No 23 (963), 6 March 2017.

<sup>13</sup> For more, see: J. Szymańska, “Poland’s Policy in the European Union,” *Yearbook of Polish Foreign Policy 2017*, PISM, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> See: J. Szymańska (ed.), *The European Union in the Face of Russian Aggression against Ukraine*, PISM, Warsaw 2024.

In European politics, during the 20 years of Poland's membership in the EU, successive Polish governments attached great importance to economic issues, which was manifested by their involvement in the negotiations of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the development of the internal market. In both the negotiations of the MFF 2007–2013<sup>15</sup> and 2014–2020, and those of 2021–2027, thanks to intensive diplomatic efforts (among others, in cooperation with France in the negotiations of the MFF 2007–2013 and cooperation within the group of Friends of Cohesion Policy), Poland received a high amount of funds both in the area of cohesion and agriculture, becoming the largest beneficiary of the EU budget. In the MFF 2021–2027 negotiations, despite opposition from the Polish government and in the face of the disputes with EU institutions over the rule of law, disbursements from the post-pandemic recovery fund were linked to the assessment of the state of the rule of law.<sup>16</sup>

Efforts to curb the protectionist tendencies that emerged in Western European Member States after the end of the transitional periods in the access of workers from Central and Eastern Europe to markets proved to be a difficult challenge. For example, Poland has not built a sufficient coalition against the amendment to the Posted Workers Directive,<sup>17</sup> pushed through by France and adopted in 2018, which increases the labour costs of companies from Central and Eastern Europe. It also did not stop the changes in the regulations on international road transport that weaken the position of Polish transport companies on the European market, that is, the so-called Mobility Package, which was adopted in 2020.

The direction of development of the EU's climate policy also turned out to be a challenge for Poland. The European Green Deal<sup>18</sup> project presented by the European Commission in 2019, which envisages achieving climate neutrality by the EU by 2050, was considered very ambitious by Polish diplomacy from the very beginning. Under the influence of mass protests by farmers in the EU, including in Poland in 2024, the Polish government became involved in negotiations changes to the regulations governing the climate transition in the EU.

## CONCLUSIONS

The 20 years of Poland's membership in the EU have allowed Polish diplomacy to learn the rules of the game in the European arena. The government of the Republic of Poland has had the opportunity to diagnose both the preferences and limitations of its partners, test the functionality of alliances, and learn about the specifics of the work of individual institutions.

During the 20 years of functioning in the EU system, Polish diplomacy has managed to achieve many goals and assumptions beneficial for the country. An unquestionable success was obtaining record financing for Poland from EU funds. However, many initiatives or demands of the Polish government have encountered difficulties. An example of this is the government's eastern policy, which for years was misunderstood by many Member States with an attachment to cooperation with Russia and even considering it a guarantor of stability in the eastern neighbourhood, only to gain broad support and translate into decisive action by the EU after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

<sup>15</sup> See M. Banach, U. Pałłasz, "Poland in the European Union," Yearbook of Polish Foreign Policy 2006, PISM, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> M. Szczepanik, "European Council Adopts New Multiannual Budget and Recovery Fund," *PISM Spotlight*, No 57/2020, 21 July 2020.

<sup>17</sup> *Directive (EU) 2018/957 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 June 2018 amending Directive 96/71/EC concerning the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services*, OJ L 173, 9.7.2018.

<sup>18</sup> European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions The European Green Deal*, COM/2019/640 final.

The specificity of Poland's European policy is its strong entanglement in an internal political conflict. While so far the manifestations of this dispute have been largely symbolic and have not translated into fundamental differences in Polish European policy, further escalation of it may reduce the country's ability to pursue its own interests in the European arena.

## PRZEMYSŁAW BISKUP

**POLISH SOCIETY AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION IN 2003–2024****DETERMINANTS**

In the first decade of EU membership, the formation of a consensus towards European integration as a model for transformation after the collapse of the communist system was crucial. Poland's strategic choice of integration into Western European economic, political, and security structures was solidified by the conclusion of the Association Treaty with the European Community in 1991, the submission of an application for accession to the Community in 1994, and the adoption of the National Strategy for Integration in 1997, as well as the opening of accession negotiations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1997. The consequence of these steps was the progressive orientation of Poland's systemic transformation towards meeting the requirements set forth in the Association (and then Accession) Treaties, and ultimately the recognition of European integration as the most important component of the transformation, symbolically referred to as the "return to Europe."

The result of this process was the gradual formation of a consensus among political and social elites on the non-alternative nature of integration with the EU and NATO (at the time seen in Poland as complementary integration institutions). The breakthrough moment for consolidating this approach was the referendum on EU accession on 7–8 June 2003.<sup>1</sup> The campaign for accession involved most political forces and numerous social organisations, including the Catholic Church as the most influential religious institution. The maintenance of this consensus was fostered by high public trust in European institutions and the perception that they were neutral from the point of view of domestic politics, although this perception was corrected in the second decade of membership with the emergence of differences in the assessment of public policies between European institutions and a section of the Polish political elite.

The very strong social legitimacy for the integration process also played an important role, particularly in the first decade of membership. It resulted from the contrast in political dynamics favourable to the Union—Poles perceived the European institutions and the national policies of the main Member States as stable and fostering economic development, while the high dynamics of change in the country, resulting from the transformation and formation of the democratic system, was often a cause of high levels of uncertainty. From the first years of membership, social surveys revealed in Poland a significant degree of trust in European institutions, particularly in their professionalism, compared to national institutions.<sup>2</sup> As a result, among other things, this allowed the individual Polish governments to effectively legitimise measures to adapt to the *acquis communautaire* and the requirements

<sup>1</sup> EU accession was supported by 13.51 million voters (77.45%), with 3.93 million (22.25%) opposed and a turnout of 58.85%. Data source: [www.wybory.gov.pl](http://www.wybory.gov.pl).

<sup>2</sup> For example, confidence in the European Union in October–November 2023 was 53%, while for the Polish government and parliament at the same time, it was 34% and 33%, respectively. See: "Public Opinion in the European Union. Country Report: Poland," Standard Eurobarometer 100, October–November 2023, <https://poland.representation.ec.europa.eu>.

of the European Union, while limiting the scale and emotions surrounding the discussion on the national stage.

Another important determinant of Poland's membership in the EU was the dynamics of society's expectations of the European integration process. Throughout the entire period under review, the public perceived the inflow of EU funds and the public investments associated with them as the key benefits of Poland's membership, as well as the free movement of people (while the effects of participation in the common market were appreciated to a lesser extent<sup>3</sup>). However, the list of the public's expectations of the European integration process and the perceived costs of membership gradually grew longer and more nuanced as knowledge about the functioning of the EU and Western Member States expanded, as well as the number of people taking the initial achievements of the transition period for granted increased. In the second decade of membership, surveys clearly indicated a differentiation in public attitudes toward European integration.<sup>4</sup>

Poles' attitudes toward European integration also consisted, on the one hand, of a consistently high level of general support for the process,<sup>5</sup> and, on the other hand, of sustained, statistically significant (at times majoritarian) support for Eurosceptic parties.<sup>6</sup> According to Alex Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart's classification, the attitude of "soft Euroscepticism" can be defined as the absence of "principled objection to European integration or EU membership but where concerns on one (or a number) of policy areas leads to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU, or where there is a sense that 'national interest' is currently at odds with the EU trajectory" while "hard Euroscepticism" can be defined as "a principled opposition to the EU and European integration and therefore can be seen in parties who think that their countries should withdraw from membership, or whose policies towards the EU are tantamount to being opposed to the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived."<sup>7</sup> Initially, in the first decade of membership, the ability of Polish Eurosceptic parties to translate their agendas into governance was limited by their low effectiveness in converting votes into seats (and into participation in governments in general). Then, the period of 2015–2023 introduced a major change. The United Right coalition's Euroscepticism was moderated into a "soft" one as a result of exercising power and, consequently, taking responsibility for public policies.<sup>8</sup>

## POLISH SOCIETY'S GOALS

<sup>3</sup> See: P. Dzierżanowski, "Poland and European Economic Integration 2004–2024," in this report.

<sup>4</sup> For example, in 2023, support for Poland's membership in the EU was 92%, while support for membership in the eurozone was 34.9%. See: "Pora na wprowadzenie euro? Jest sondaż wśród Polaków," *Business Insider*, 11 September 2023, <https://businessinsider.com.pl>; G. Chrostowski, "Poparcie Polaków dla UE jest rekordowo wysokie!," *Obserwator Gospodarczy*, 27 April 2023, <https://obserwatorgospodarczy.pl>.

<sup>5</sup> Poles' support for EU membership in 2004–2023 oscillated around 60–90%, "Polska w Unii Europejskiej," *Komunikaty z badań Nr 139/2021*, 55/2023, CBOS, <https://cbos.pl>.

<sup>6</sup> Parties with a Eurosceptic profile won 27.59%, 49.56%, 33.66%, 30.2%, 51.3%, 50.41%, and 42.6% of the vote in the 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023 elections to the Sejm, respectively, and 41.32%, 33.07%, 44.35%, and 53.7% of the vote in the 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2019 elections to the European Parliament, respectively. Own calculations based on data from the State Election Commission: <https://wybory.gov.pl>.

<sup>7</sup> A. Szczerbiak, P. Taggart, "The Party Politics of Euroscepticism in EU Member and Candidate States," *SEI Working Paper*, No 51/2002, [www.sussex.ac.uk](http://www.sussex.ac.uk), p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> See the discussion in A. Szczerbiak, P. Taggart, *op. cit.* and B. Leruth, N. Startin, S. Usherwood, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, Routledge, London 2017 on the correlation between party-based Euroscepticism and the exercise of power by political parties. For instance, between 2015 and 2023, participation in power hampered the practical actions of *Solidarna Polska*, the party that rhetorically represents the stance of "hard Euroscepticism." It was illustrated by the controversial "Patrik Jaki Report" concerning the balance of benefits and costs of Poland's EU membership. The document was prepared under the auspices of an MEP and not a government member from that party.



According to public opinion polls, Polish society expected European integration to solidify the country's post-Cold War international status by embedding it in Western integration structures while anchoring Poland's domestic reform agenda in them. Subsequently, integration was expected to help the country achieve material and, more broadly, civilisational advancement (both through the construction of new, better, more transparent legal procedures and the attraction of foreign investment, as well as public investment implemented with the help of EU funds) and to obtain opportunities for individual development, including through the ability to travel and work freely in other Member States. While the goals most symbolic in nature were achieved by the very fact of accession to the EU (e.g., "return to Europe"), the long-term goals, dominant throughout the 20-year period of membership, were strongly output-based and pragmatic in nature (output-based legitimacy). They involved the expectations of systematic economic development and increased living standards. It should also be noted that during the period in question, the key policy goals formulated in the EU institutions, such as the green transformation or deepening European integration, did not receive a similar status in the Polish political debate, which was reactive to these issues.<sup>9</sup>

#### ATTITUDES OF POLISH SOCIETY TOWARD EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The political legitimisation of the European integration process was based in Poland on the 2003 accession referendum, the elections to the European Parliament (starting with the election of the sixth term in 2004), as well as references to European policy in national election campaigns. After 2003, the issue of EU membership or its basic conditions did not dominate any electoral campaign, while the topics of reforms related to European integration and the balance of benefits and costs of integration tended to be part of the electoral assessment of individual governments rather than a contribution to the general discussion of EU membership.

EU issues had a significant impact on the dynamics of electoral processes only in the second decade. Election campaigns since 2015 were characterised by an increasing partisanship in the debate on the EU membership model and, from the perspective of the United Right, an increasingly strong involvement of EU institutions in Poland's domestic politics. This trend indicated a link between sustained general support for EU membership and a much more pragmatic and critical public approach to many sectoral policies. In 2015, the dynamics of the national parliamentary campaign were influenced by Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz's failure to oppose the EU's emergency migrant relocation programme, a decision made against the preferences of the majority of the public.<sup>10</sup> During the 2019 campaign, on the other hand, the opposition's accusations against the United Right government that it was preparing Poland's exit from the EU (*Polexit*) were strongly exposed. These actions effectively mobilised the opposition's voters and promoted its consolidation, enabling it to win the majority of seats in the national upper chamber (Senate).<sup>11</sup> In the 2023 campaign, an important role in building the opposition's electoral message was played by demands for a return to mainstream European politics, repairing relations with EU institutions and key Member States, as well

<sup>9</sup> CBOS surveys show that in the second decade of membership, 57–67% of Poles stated that Poland had too little influence on the functioning of the EU, and 34–36% believed that EU membership limited Poland's sovereignty too much; "Polska w Unii Europejskiej," *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> See 2015 and 2016 data on the willingness to accept migrants from other EU countries: "Stosunek Polaków do przyjmowania uchodźców," *Komunikat z badań 1/2017*, CBOS, <https://cbos.pl>. Analogous trends were evident during the 2021 migration crisis on Poland's eastern border, which was caused by Belarusian hybrid warfare, "Opinia publiczna wobec uchodźców i sytuacji migrantów na granicy z Białorusią," *Komunikat z badań 111/2021*, CBOS, <https://cbos.pl>.

<sup>11</sup> Support for withdrawal from the EU reached only 15–21%. "Polska w Unii Europejskiej," *op. cit.*

as unblocking EU funds allocated under the Next Generation EU programme and the EU budget. Their disbursement was being held up due to the United Right government's dispute with the European Commission over the rule of law.<sup>12</sup> The United Right, in parallel, sought to mobilise their voters with negative messages about EU's migration policy, deciding to hold a referendum on the day of the parliamentary elections (Questions 3 and 4).<sup>13</sup>

European elections as a second-order vote<sup>14</sup> had a limited direct impact on the functioning of the domestic political scene or the model of Poland's membership in the EU. In general, the agendas presented in them were subordinated to national policy issues, and voting was also characterised by lower turnout than in elections to the Sejm and Senate, and a greater tendency to support groupings with more radical platforms. This status began to change in the second decade of membership under the influence of the increasing professionalisation of Polish political parties and their leaders' growing awareness of the opportunities associated with holding EP seats. The affiliation of Polish political parties with European groupings also gradually consolidated, revealing, however, a shift to the right of the Overton window of discourse<sup>15</sup> on the Polish political scene relative to the European average.<sup>16</sup> The 2019 EP elections were the first in which the issue of Poland's membership in the EU was placed as one of the main campaign issues. The opposition European List promoted demands for a return to mainstream EU politics and a controlled deepening of integration, while the campaign of the ruling United Right supported selective integration while opposing the push for further EU centralisation. The EP campaign of the 10<sup>th</sup> term (in May–June 2024) is likely to continue the trend marked in 2019, with EU centralisation, proposals for a shift to majority-voting in foreign and security policy decisions, the issue of EU strategic autonomy, and in the socio-economic dimension, the assumptions of the green transition and its socio-economic price.

Geographically, the centres of support for integration were western Poland and metropolitan areas, while eastern Poland and the provinces were more Eurosceptic. This trend was consistent with party electoral geography, where support for the more sovereigntist and Eurosceptic parties of the right was traditionally high in smaller urban and rural centres and eastern Poland. Support for left-wing and liberal parties, traditionally the most supportive of the EU, meanwhile, was higher in large urban centres and metropolitan areas and in northern and western Poland.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> For pro-government voters, policy toward the EU was the 12<sup>th</sup> most important reason for supporting the United Right, while for opposition voters, the desire for change in this area was the 5<sup>th</sup> most important priority. See: "Motywacje wyborcze Polaków," *Komunikat z badań 118/2023*, CBOS, <https://cbos.pl>.

<sup>13</sup> This referendum was largely boycotted by voters of the then opposition and did not reach the 50% turnout threshold to be legally binding. However, 10.8 million voters cast their votes in line with the United Right's proposals (i.e., 50% of those taking part in the election). Own calculations based on PKW database, [www.wybybory.gov.pl](http://www.wybybory.gov.pl).

<sup>14</sup> K. Reif, H. Schmitt, "Second-Order Elections," *European Journal of Political Research*, 1997, Vol. 31, pp. 109–124, <https://link.springer.com>.

<sup>15</sup> The term "window of discourse", or "Overton window", describes principles considered politically acceptable in the current state of public discourse, which a politician can proclaim without the risk of being accused of representing too extreme views that would prevent him/her from holding public office: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overton\\_window](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overton_window).

<sup>16</sup> Conservative or Christian Democrat forces controlled 43 out of 50, 47 out of 51, and 49 out of 53 Polish EP seats, respectively, after the 2009, 2014, and 2019 elections (with some politicians who ran on the European List moving later to the Socialist and Liberal groups rather than the Christian Democrat one after the 2019 elections).

<sup>17</sup> The paradoxes related to support for Poland's EU membership are exemplified by CBOS research on the run-up to the 2023 elections ("Opinie o członkostwie w Unii Europejskiej," *Komunikat z badań 55/2023*, CBOS, <https://cbos.pl>). The percentage of voters who assessed that EU as restricting Poland's sovereignty too much increased from 36% to 45% between 2014 and 2023. It included 72% of PiS voters and 77% of Confederation voters who agreed with such an opinion, while only 6% of Civic Coalition voters, 18% of the Left, and 28% of Poland2050 did. However, support for changes in the judicial system (as required by the EU before it would unblock funds) was given, for pragmatic reasons and at odds with their own ideological stance, by 51% of respondents representing the view that the EU limits Poland's sovereignty too much.

The political debate in Poland between 2004 and 2024 was also characterised by the absence of strong political parties that consistently supported the agenda of centralisation or federalisation of the EU, or the development of the green transition, postulates characteristic of mainstream EU politics. Rather, the debate in Poland was carried out within the framework of programmatic divisions between the attitude of “soft Euroscepticism” (sometimes also referred to as “Eurorealism”) and selective administrative and legal modernisation, where the EU was accepted as a vehicle for Poland’s economic development, and moderately “Euroenthusiastic” attitudes, which emphasised the need to keep Poland in the mainstream of EU policy in order to strengthen its negotiating position and maintain a steady flow of financial resources for its modernisation. However, both of these attitudes, after 2005 represented in the national two-block system integrated on the basis of Law and Justice and Civic Platform, respectively, assumed—when compared to mainstream European politics—a relatively conservative approach to integration, based essentially on the assumption of a guiding role for nation-states in the EU, with a selective transfer of competences to the Union in selected areas, often under the influence of specific external challenges (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic or the Russian invasion of Ukraine).<sup>18</sup>

The symbolic realisation of goals related to the “return to Europe” vision was fostered by the assumption by Poles of prestigious functions within the EU institutional system (e.g., the presidency of the European Parliament by Jerzy Buzek in 2009–2012 or the European Council presidency of Donald Tusk in 2014–2019), as well as the smooth conduct of the first presidency of the EU Council in 2011. In the social dimension, similar symbolic significance was attached to the successful organisation in cooperation with Ukraine of the European Football Championships (UEFA Euro 2012), during which numerous new infrastructure investments co-financed with EU funds were highlighted.

In the period of the first two EU Multiannual Financial Frameworks (MFF) with Poland’s participation (2007–2013 and 2014–2020), the public perception of the benefits of the integration process was largely based on the ability to obtain EU funds in the negotiation process in Brussels, on the efficiency of absorbing the allocated national sums and translating them into public investments, and on the increased opportunities for growing individual wealth. From this perspective, Poland’s membership in the EU was a huge success in the first two decades.<sup>19</sup> Integration was also seen as an avenue for, among other things, modernising the administrative, legal and technical (especially transportation) infrastructure of the state or attracting foreign direct investment. On an individual level, economic mobility taking advantage of the freedoms of the common market also played an important role. Finally, EU membership was seen as an important element in successfully coping with the global financial and economic crisis of 2008–2011 (due, among other things, to investments fuelled by EU funds), helping to build an image of Poland as a new “green island” of growth against the backdrop of the recession-stricken “old” EU.

The process of systemic transformation, which over time has merged in the public eye with the process of European integration, has also given rise to challenges. The collapse of many enterprises that proved inefficient in the single market, the problems of smaller towns and cities dependent on one or two large employers, and the uneven development of transport

<sup>18</sup> Representation of the Polish left in the socialist groups in the EP during the period in question was sparse, with the United Right forming the Eurorealist (“soft Eurosceptic”) European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) faction, with similar support for Civic Platform, which belongs – together with the PSL – to the European People’s Party (EPP), winning almost half of the seats in the 2014 and 2019 elections.

<sup>19</sup> For more detail, see the chapter by P. Chorąży concerning EU funds in this report.

infrastructure, rewarding foreign investment in the western part of the country at the expense of the eastern part, led to disillusionment on the part of the "transformation losers", and in the middle of the second decade to public support for a change in Polish membership policy. In particular, the debate emphasised the need for greater assertiveness toward EU institutions, as well as a change in the country's development model from one based on polarisation and diffusion to a more balanced one, and a corresponding adjustment in the distribution of EU funds. Changing public expectations was a major component of the United Right's electoral successes in 2015–2020.

The years 2004–2024 also brought a breakthrough in terms of migration trends—when entering the EU, Poland continued its historical emigration trend, but a decade later it began to turn towards net immigration. When joining the EU, Poland was characterised by a high level of unemployment, and at the same time, it was a period when the second most numerous generation in its history was entering the labour market, resulting in a high level of emigration.<sup>20</sup> From a medium- to long-term perspective, however, this trend had a number of negative consequences in the form of the phenomenon of divided families (and the phenomenon of "euro-orphans"), the permanent exodus of the younger part of the labour force, the gradual depopulation of many smaller towns and cities, and a deepening of the demographic crisis. These problems were most acutely felt in the localities of eastern Poland, which attracted less investment and where the economic pressure to emigrate was strongest. At the beginning of the second decade of EU membership, Poland became a net immigration country for the first time in its recent history, initially mainly due to the attraction of workers from neighbouring countries (primarily Ukraine and Belarus), and in the longer term from the post-Soviet area (Central Asian countries) and Southeast Asia (India, Pakistan, Philippines), among others. These developments promoted the gradual raising of the political profile of the migration issue, demonstrating, on the one hand, the need for Poland to develop a coherent, long-term migration and integration policy, and, on the other hand, emphasising the migration issue in European politics and the solutions proposed by the European institutions. The turning point was the arrival of numerous groups of migrants from North Africa and the Middle East to the southern and south-eastern borders of the EU in 2014–2015. The scale of the crisis led to the development of an emergency programme for relocation of migrants within the EU in 2015. However, it raised serious objections in Central European countries. In Poland, the rejection of such a solution was supported by the majority of the public (opposition to the relocation of migrants from other EU countries was expressed by 53–67% of respondents in 2015–2016).<sup>21</sup>

**Conclusions.** According to pre-accession forecasts,<sup>22</sup> the full benefits of the integration process were to become apparent after a decade to 15 years, while the early years of membership were to be characterised in many respects by difficult structural reforms. These predictions largely came true, with tangible consequences for the formation of support for the EU. This course of events would explain the consistently high acceptance of European integration perceived as the chief element of Poland's systemic transformation and, at the same time, the formation of more critical assessments of Poland's functioning in the EU.

The gradual revision in the second decade of membership of the original consensus placing the European question above national political disputes led to an increasing extension of

<sup>20</sup> See: P. Dzierżanowski, "Poland and European Economic Integration 2004–2024," in this report.

<sup>21</sup> "Stosunek Polaków do przyjmowania uchodźców," *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g.: E. Wnuk-Lipiński, "Członkostwo Polski w Unii Europejskiej – pierwsze problemy i ewentualne kryzysy społeczne w Polsce?" and J.J. Wiatr, "Polska w Unii Europejskiej: zagrożenia i szanse. Komentarz," [in:] U. Kurczewska, M. Kwiatkowska, K. Sochacka (eds.), *Polska w Unii Europejskiej. Początkowe problemy i kryzysy?*, PISM, Warszawa 2002.

national party competition to integration policy issues. Currently, the two dominant blocs on the Polish political scene are usually identified as “Euroenthusiastic” and “Eurorealist” (or “soft Eurosceptic”). In the run-up to the upcoming election campaigns, the polarisation against this backdrop seems, unfortunately, to be deepening, especially as the socio-economic price of the EU’s green transition and migration policy are revealed. Polish society often takes a sceptical view of the EU’s ambitious policies. In fact, they have been external to domestic political discourse and gaining supporters on the national party scene only at relatively late stages. Polarisation results in a change in the attitude of some parties under the influence of public protests over the costs of reform, as exemplified by the United Right’s recent change in approach to the green agenda after it lost power in December 2023.

In conclusion, the first 20 years of Poland’s membership in the EU are seen by the public as an undoubted success, especially in economic and development terms. However, this period also seems to have seen the exhaustion of the original paradigm, on the economic level consisting of the low-cost competition model, and on the socio-political one of the idea of a “return to Europe,” cross-party consensus on integration and the omission of this topic from domestic political competition. Poland’s stable future in the EU should therefore be based on a much more in-depth and realistic public debate (and not just expert debate) on the directions of the Union’s development, the nature of Polish interests in the EU, the growing role of the EU in building a security system in Europe, and preparing for the challenges of the next enlargement of the Union, especially with Ukraine. Given the continued strong presence of Eurosceptic parties on the Polish political scene, neglect in this area could easily result in strong contestation of EU membership.

PIOTR DZIERŻANOWSKI

## POLAND AND EU ECONOMIC INTEGRATION 2004–2024

## CHANGES IN POLAND'S ECONOMY AFTER EU ACCESSION

According to the World Bank, Poland's GDP in 2003, the last year before EU accession, was around \$218 billion,<sup>1</sup> and according to the Polish Central Statistical Office (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, GUS), just over PLN 800 billion.<sup>2</sup> At the end of 2022, The World Bank estimated Poland's GDP at almost \$690 billion and GUS put it at over PLN 3.06 trillion.<sup>3</sup> GDP per capita was 51% of the EU average<sup>4</sup> in 2004 and 79% in 2022.<sup>5</sup> This means that the Polish economy has grown several times over this period, and the standard of living has essentially approached that recorded in the countries of the EU-15.

From 2003 to 2022, the share of goods and services exports in Poland's GDP also increased substantially, from 33.4% to 62.7%, and imports from 36.1% to 61.2%. In absolute terms, this was an increase from \$72.7 billion to \$431.5 billion for exports and from \$78.6 billion to \$421.5 billion for imports. In the same period, Poland's foreign trade balance improved, from -2.7% of GDP (about \$5.5 billion) to +1.4% of GDP in 2022 (about \$12.8 billion) and +3.7% (about \$22 billion) in 2019, the last year before the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe.<sup>6</sup> The patterns of foreign trade have not changed markedly. By far the most important export partner in both 2003 and 2022 was Germany,<sup>7</sup> followed mainly by the developed countries of Western Europe and Poland's neighbour Czechia. The situation was similar in imports, in which, however, the share of China (as a big exporter of industrial goods) has increased in recent years, and the position of producers of energy raw materials has always been high. This shows that accession to the EU was a natural step for Poland, as it did not fundamentally change the structure of trade (which previously followed the so-called gravity model, according to which the geographical proximity of countries and the size of their economies are responsible for trade intensity), but resulted in a huge increase in turnover.

Since joining the EU, the structure of the Polish economy has changed significantly. Employment has decreased in agriculture, from about 2.1 million people to about 1.3 million, while it has increased in industry, from about 2.9 million people to about 3.2 million, construction, from about 0.6 million people to over 1 million, and in services.<sup>8</sup> There has been a marked decline in unemployment, from around 20% in 2003 to around 5% in 2023. Foreign investment flows have increased. In the five years prior to EU accession (1999–2003), it averaged just over

<sup>1</sup> "World Development Indicators," World Bank, [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org).

<sup>2</sup> "Rachunki narodowe według sektorów i podsektorów instytucjonalnych 2000–2003," GUS, <https://stat.gov.pl>.

<sup>3</sup> "Informacja Głównego Urzędu Statystycznego 05.10.2023 r. w sprawie skorygowanego szacunku produktu krajowego brutto za 2022 rok," GUS, <https://stat.gov.pl>.

<sup>4</sup> "Polska w Unii Europejskiej 2004–2014," GUS, <https://stat.gov.pl>.

<sup>5</sup> According to Eurostat, see: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>.

<sup>6</sup> All data according to the World Bank, see: [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org).

<sup>7</sup> *Rocznik Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (2022)*, GUS, Warszawa; *Rocznik Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (2004)*, GUS, Warszawa; "Direction of Trade Statistics," IMF, [www.imf.org](http://www.imf.org).

<sup>8</sup> *Rocznik ... (2022)*, *op. cit.*; *Rocznik ... (2004)*, *op. cit.*

PLN 28 billion (€6 billion) per year,<sup>9</sup> while in 2022, over PLN 140 billion.<sup>10</sup> In the same period, Poland's foreign direct investment stock increased substantially, from around PLN 208 billion (around €44 billion) in 2003 to PLN 1,179.8 billion in 2022.<sup>11</sup>

An analysis of basic economic data clearly shows that Poland's economy has grown and developed after EU accession. Poland is one of the fastest-growing countries in the world, whether 1990 or 2004 is the starting point. Due to the low base level of GDP per capita, convergence to Western European countries is natural, but studies show that EU membership and participation in the common market are important factors supporting it. An analysis by the Polish Economic Institute shows that in a scenario in which Poland would not be a member of the EU, its GDP per capita would be 60% of the EU average (compared to almost 80% today), and GDP per capita in purchasing power parity is currently 31% higher than if Poland had not joined the EU.<sup>12</sup> Although these figures (as in any case when ambitious counterfactuals are developed) carry a significant margin of error, there is no doubt that EU membership is, on a quantitative level, unequivocally beneficial to the Polish economy and the living standards of its citizens.

### **POLAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMON MARKET**

A key component of EU membership is participation in the Common Market, defined, according to Article 26(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), as “an area without internal frontiers in which the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital is ensured in accordance with the provisions of the Treaties.” Accordingly, the functioning of the EU internal market should resemble that of national markets. From a theoretical point of view, participation in a larger market has positive effects for both businesses and consumers. Poland gains from participation in the common market and the resulting economic benefits far outweigh the payments from EU funds, key in the general perception.<sup>13</sup>

However, the theoretical perspective does not take into account that the distribution of benefits does not necessarily correspond to the aspirations of individual market participants and, in extreme cases, may even lead to losses for some of them despite aggregate benefits. The issue of the distribution of gains from the operation of the Common Market defines one stream of its criticism. The other is the failure of the EU to achieve the desired level of completely free movement of goods, persons, services, and capital, which will also have distributional consequences. While the overall benefits of participation in the Common Market for Poland are proven by research, some criticisms are also valid.

The most straightforward element of international economic relations is trade in goods. In this respect, the EU has succeeded in achieving the fullest harmonisation. For participants in the Common Market, the elimination of customs duties and border controls is beneficial. It levels the playing field between domestic and imported products, the price of which no

<sup>9</sup> “Zagraniczne inwestycje bezpośrednie w Polsce w 2003 r.,” NBP, December 2004, <https://nbp.pl>; Data provided by the National Bank of Poland are in euro, conversions for 2003 according to the average NBP exchange rate of 31 December 2003.

<sup>10</sup> “Zagraniczne inwestycje bezpośrednie w Polsce w 2022 r.,” NBP, December 2023, <https://nbp.pl>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> Ł. Ambroziak, J. Markiewicz, J. Strzelecki, I. Święcicki, M. Wąsiński, *Korzyści Polski z jednolitego rynku*, Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, Warszawa, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g.: W.M. Orłowski (ed.), *Gdzie naprawdę są konfitury? Najważniejsze gospodarcze korzyści członkostwa Polski w Unii Europejskiej*, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa, 2021.

longer has to include additional transaction costs.<sup>14</sup> Also important is the harmonisation of product requirements across the EU and the principle of mutual recognition of standards, according to which a product manufactured in accordance with the requirements of one EU country should be allowed to be marketed in all others without additional restrictions. Integration into the Common Market has brought a rapid increase in Poland's trade in goods with EU countries. Both exports and imports of goods to and from the EU have increased more than sixfold from 2003 to 2022.<sup>15</sup> Poland has benefited also from wider incorporation of Polish products in the international supply chains of foreign and supranational enterprises (especially German), which use them as inputs for goods then exported as final products.<sup>16</sup>

Poland benefitted from the free trade in goods in a predictable way, as it gained access to rich customers from Western Europe and the possibility to specialise. On the other hand, as can be seen in the increased volume of imports, Polish businesses were subjected to greater competitive pressure from entities from other EU countries. In the future, it will be desirable for Polish businesses to move towards the most lucrative parts of value chains, such as high-tech manufacturing activities, and creating their own brands or innovative solutions and products. Due to the exclusive competence of the EU in shaping the Common Commercial Policy, Poland has lost the ability to take independent action in this regard and benefits from agreements negotiated by the European Commission, while not being able to conclude them on its own or gain a competitive advantage over other EU Member States in trade with third countries. The unequal distribution of the benefits of such agreements can be a challenge. Due to economic diversity within the EU, a trade agreement beneficial to some may be problematic for others. It is therefore advisable to actively cooperate with the EC and collect information from Polish businesses on which solutions they perceive as opportunities or as threats.

A more complex type of international trade takes place in services, also covered by Article 26(2) TFEU and part of the Common Market. Services vary greatly in their complexity, from the simplest (e.g., hairdressing, tutoring) to highly complex, such as international transport, IT, banking, or telecommunications services. Unlike goods, where a particular product crosses a border when traded, this does not have to be the case for services—the border can be crossed by the service provider (by taking up an economic activity abroad), an employee of the service provider, the service recipient, or none of them (if the service is provided remotely). EU law on services is based—unlike the freedom of movement of goods, derived primarily from the TFEU and judicial interpretations—on secondary law, that is, EU directives and regulations. Due to the high complexity, there are more impediments in the services market than in the movement of goods. Given that services are the most important sector of the Polish economy, both in terms of employment and GDP, the failure to fully harness the Common Market potential in services remains a problem for Poland. Nevertheless, Poland benefits from its membership of the Common Market in terms of trade in services. The share of services in GDP has increased from around 50% at the time of accession to over 70% in 2021.<sup>17</sup> In 2022, the value of services exports to the EU amounted to almost €90 billion and imports to just

<sup>14</sup> In economic terms, long border checks have an effect similar to customs duties, as they freeze capital in goods and incur the cost of waiting for workers and transport equipment to cross the border.

<sup>15</sup> Data according to M. Kolasa, *Kompendium Handlu Zagranicznego Polski – styczeń 2024*, Polski Fundusz Rozwoju, 18 January 2024, <https://pfr.pl>.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g.: M. Šebeňa, T. Chan, M. Šimalčík, *The China Factor: Economic Exposures and Security Implications in an Interdependent World*, CEIAS, March 2023.

<sup>17</sup> “Produkt krajowy brutto i wartość dodana brutto 28.09.2023 r. w przekroju regionów w 2021 r.,” GUS, <https://stat.gov.pl>. GUS divides services into several categories, including trade, repair of motor vehicles, transport and storage, accommodation and catering, information and communication, other services (including public administration and defence, compulsory social security), financial and insurance activities and real estate services, construction, etc.



under €55 billion. The balance of trade in services increased from slightly positive values immediately after accession (less than €3 billion per year) to a surplus of almost €35 billion in 2022, thus offsetting the negative balance of trade in goods.<sup>18</sup> Poland is one of the EU leaders in road transport services. Support or *back-office* services, such as accounting or IT, are also developing. Poland also sends many delegated workers to EU countries,<sup>19</sup> i.e., workers employed by a Polish business and providing services on the firm's behalf in another Member State. Trade in services is beneficial for Poland not only because of the direct benefits for the economy but also because it deepens integration with other Member States. It is advisable for Poland to promote more complete harmonisation of the market for services so that Polish businesses can provide services in other EU countries as easily as possible.

The third freedom of the Common Market is the free movement of people, primarily workers. From an economic point of view, this freedom leads to a more efficient allocation of workers across the EU, allowing unemployment to be nearly eliminated in some regions and filling labour shortages in others. After Poland's accession to the EU, some Member States introduced transition periods for workers from countries in the recent enlargement to protect their labour market. The UK, Ireland, and Sweden immediately opened their labour markets to Poles, while the longest possible transition period—seven years—was applied in Germany and Austria. This resulted in mass migration out of Poland—in 2004, 750,000 Poles were in EU countries, but at its peak (in 2019), there were more than 2 million.<sup>20</sup> In the short term, this helped to reduce Poland's unemployment problem, which fell after EU accession, and also enabled the families of labour migrants to receive remittances. In the long term, however, the outflow of workers has disadvantages, including the need for replacement migration, the outflow of skilled professionals, and negative social effects, such as the breaking of family ties. As the gap in living standards between Poland and Western Europe narrows, it will be possible to encourage some migrants to return. However, it will also be necessary to pursue a migration policy that avoids the problems associated with accepting replacement migration and to encourage skilled professionals to stay and work in Poland.

The last of the freedoms of the Common Market is the free movement of capital, which includes direct investment, investment in real estate, securities investment, granting of loans and credit, and other operations with financial institutions. As in the case of the other freedoms, the benefits of the freedom of movement of capital stem from its better allocation in the Common Market, that is, an increase in its inflow to Poland and the 2004, 2007, and 2013 enlargement countries, experiencing a relative shortage. EU membership and participation in the Common Market also reduces risks for investors familiar with the EU institutional and legal system. As a result, the level of foreign direct investment stock in Poland has greatly increased, from around €50 billion around 2004 to more than €250 billion in 2022.<sup>21</sup> The key investors come from the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, and France. In the case of the first two countries, it is difficult to assess where the capital actually comes from, as the so-called special purpose vehicles registered there are most often controlled by foreign companies (from EU members or third countries). Polish direct investment abroad also increased, especially in Czechia and Luxembourg. The inflow of capital to Poland has been one of the factors supporting development in the last 20 years. At the same time, however, it

<sup>18</sup> M. Kolasa, *Kompendium...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> According to the data in the report prepared for the EC by F. De Wispelaere, L. De Smedt, J. Pacolet, *Posting of workers Collection of data from the prior declaration tools Reference year 2020* (HIVA-KU Leuven, June 2022), 19% of posted workers were from Poland.

<sup>20</sup> "Informacja o rozmiarach i kierunkach czasowej emigracji z Polski w latach 2004–2020," GUS, <https://stat.gov.pl>.

<sup>21</sup> "Zagraniczne inwestycje ... 2022 roku," *op. cit.*

can be associated with certain difficulties. The first is the structure of the investments, based on Poland's comparative advantage and focused on less-advanced manufacturing sectors using cheap labour. The second is the loss of control over investment streams in Poland. This makes it difficult to pursue a policy that allows for the most optimal use of foreign investment (although, as it increases investor security, it is likely to be beneficial to the total amount of investment). Moreover, it raises the risk of political backlash and the proliferation of populist arguments refuting the benefits of Poland's EU membership.

## CONCLUSIONS

Poland has fundamentally changed since it joined the European Union. It is today a much richer country, with a more advanced structure of the economy, a lower level of unemployment, and a significantly higher level of integration with foreign partners. The European Union is an important element of this success, which does not mean that Poland's economy would not have grown without EU membership and participation in the Common Market. However, there is no doubt that participation in the Common Market has accelerated Poland's development and allows for rapid convergence to the level of Western Europe.

An analysis of the changes in Poland's economy related to EU accession shows that accession was a natural and necessary step. Poland still has closest ties to the same countries as before accession, and the intensity of contacts has increased. This also means that it is counterproductive to look for alternatives to EU membership, as in the foreseeable future the EU will be the only large, developed, and geographically close market for Poland.

It should also be pointed out that full access to the Common Market is the most important economic benefit of EU membership for Poland. Studies show that payments from EU funds, which are very important in the perception of the general public, influence the Polish economy to a lesser extent than integration into the EU market.<sup>22</sup> It is therefore advisable to emphasise the benefits of Poland's participation in the Common Market, especially in view of the potential deterioration of the balance in transfers to and from the EU budget.

A shift in economic governance is taking place in the European Union, which is no longer based solely on trade liberalisation and deepening the integration of the Common Market and the introduction of regulation, but is moving towards a broader opening for activist industrial policy. The Green Deal and the energy transition, greater lenience for state aid, or attempts to stimulate the modern chip and artificial intelligence sectors will define the image of the EU economy in the coming years. Although active state economic policy, especially public support (both at the EU and Member State levels), is generally more favourable to larger economies with a longer history of participation in the capitalist system, Poland may benefit from such changes. It will be advisable, on the one hand, to seek solutions desired by Poland at the Community level, and on the other hand, to actively use the tools allowed at the national level, such as loosening in recent years of the rules for granting state aid.

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<sup>22</sup> See, e.g.: W. Orłowski (ed.), *op. cit.*

PAWEŁ CHORAŻY

## THE IMPACT OF EU COHESION POLICY ON POLAND'S SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION

### DETERMINANTS

Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 was accompanied by great hopes for the transfer of European funds. In the group of 10 countries negotiating membership, Poland stood out not only for its size and population but also for having some of the worst social and economic indicators. Economic development as measured by GDP per capita placed Poland among the least-advanced accession countries. Prior to the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, the poorest regions in the EU were the provinces of eastern Poland.<sup>1</sup> Political elites and society as a whole saw the prospect of using EU funds as a unique opportunity for infrastructural, economic, and social modernisation.

On joining the European Union, Poland implemented its first cohesion policy programmes under rules over which it had no influence.<sup>2</sup> The challenges of absorbing EU funds were also much greater in its case than for the other accession countries. They resulted both from the sums allocated to Poland and the administrative structure, requiring much more efficient and effective coordination both between different ministries and government institutions subordinate to them, as well as between the government and local governments at different levels. Also of great importance was the absorption potential, that is, the ability to prepare project frameworks for individual endeavours and to adapt them to the range of complex formal and substantive requirements of individual EU programmes.

From the 2004–2024 perspective, it should be pointed out that the structure of programming and implementation of European funds required by the European Commission and the consequent institutional arrangement for individual programmes forced a departure from the traditionally understood departmentalism (“administrative silos”). Instead, thinking in terms of strategic goals enforced by the process of EU funds absorption—and actions subordinated to them—became in Poland a catalyst for the development and implementation of coherent public policy frameworks. Furthermore, the requirements connected to monitoring and evaluation opened the way for the assessment of results, impact, and, consequently, for the modification of actions in various areas.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See: “Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z dnia 22 czerwca 2004 r. w sprawie przyjęcia Narodowego Planu Rozwoju 2004–2006 (Dz.U. 2004 nr 149 poz. 1567, s. 10388)”. The Lubelskie and Podlaskie regions (voivodeships) had a GDP per capita level of about one-third of the EU average, and each voivodeship from eastern Poland was among the 20 least-developed regions in the European Union. Basic social and economic indicators such as the level of employment, unemployment, productivity, added-value of industrial production, and the length of motorways reflected the huge gap between Poland and the “old” EU countries.

<sup>2</sup> This was decided during the negotiation of the budget and the regulations governing the implementation framework for the 2000–2006 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

<sup>3</sup> Since 2015, 610 evaluation studies have been conducted in Poland, see “Evaluation of Cohesion Policy in the Member States,” European Commission, <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu>.

An important determinant was also the need to decentralise responsibility for the implementation of EU cohesion policy. While preparations for EU membership focused on government administration,<sup>4</sup> the implementation of cohesion policy, as one of the few EU policies, required the implementation in practice of the principle of multi-level governance. It involved both the national authorities and local government at all levels. In Poland, therefore, entrusting the management of EU funds has contributed not only to strengthening the role of local government (especially at the regional level, i.e., voivodship—*województwo*) but also to improving cooperation at the level of agglomerations (e.g., metropolitan cooperation), unions of communes (*gmina*), or counties (*powiat*) in the implementation of joint projects that exceed the scale of a single local government unit, for example, in the field of transport or municipal management.<sup>5</sup>

The key systemic determinant that emerged in the middle of the previous decade regarding cohesion policy and the disbursement of EU funds was also the principle of conditionality. The dispute between Poland and the EU institutions over the rule of law, which characterised the period of the United Right government (2015–2023), put cohesion policy and the National Recovery Plan (launched after the COVID-19 pandemic) in the spotlight. This was a completely new situation for cohesion policy in Poland, which in this country had previously been seen as uncontroversial and requiring a technocratic approach. Its previous incidental appearance in the political discourse was generally reduced to a discussion of Poland's failure to use, or possible loss, of allocated funds.

At the European level, the application of conditionality to cohesion policy has involved two processes. The first is the systematic assertion by net-contributor countries of the need to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and control of funds disbursed to poorer, more corruption-prone net-beneficiary countries that may be unable to meet European standards. The second came with a growing conviction within the EU institutions that the Union lacked an instrument with which it could better coordinate the socioeconomic policies of the Member States and enforce the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* more effectively. These trends led first to the linkage at the EU level of cohesion policy with the coordination of socio-economic policies (the so-called European Semester) and, after 2014, to the emergence of requirements in terms of spending strategies and the transposition of EU directives into the national legal system, which Member States had to implement in order to be in a position to receive EU funds (i.e., an *ex-ante* conditionality).<sup>6</sup>

In the EU discussion on conditionality, Poland initially addressed the European Commission proposal with constructive scepticism. At the time, the majority of observers and participants in the debate at the European level thought that the main aim of the new mechanism would be Member States with inherent problems with the capacity of public administration to use EU funds and/or with a high susceptibility to corruption, such as Romania, Bulgaria, or Greece. The growing dispute between the European Commission and the European Parliament on

<sup>4</sup> When searching for a model for the implementation of EU funds, Poland looked towards medium-sized and larger Member States (UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain), where responsibility for the management and implementation of EU funds was shared between the central authorities and the regions. The institutional set-up, unique for EU funds, with so-called managing authorities responsible for individual programmes and who could delegate certain implementation functions while retaining full responsibility for the entirety of the funds entrusted to them, was not compatible with the Polish constitutional system, which assumed equal status for individual ministries and departments.

<sup>5</sup> Since the MFF 2014–2020, the importance of so-called territorial instruments within cohesion policy has been growing.

<sup>6</sup> Until 2014, the only instrument of macroeconomic conditionality was the possibility to withhold payments under the Cohesion Fund in the event that an excessive deficit procedure was initiated against a Member State. *Ex-ante* conditionality implies that EU general and thematic pre-conditions must be met, otherwise it was not possible to start implementation and/or apply to the European Commission for intermediate payments.

the one side, and Hungary and Poland on the other, led to the extension of the application of conditionality provisions beyond the original field of cohesion policy and, later, national recovery plans. In other words, it led from covering activities closely related to the correct spending of EU funds (e.g., public procurement or environmental issues) to new fields, including issues of the rule of law and European values in their broadest sense.

Leaving aside the political dimension of the conflicts over the rule of law and the judiciary, from the point of view of the mechanisms of implementation of EU cohesion policy, the principle of conditionality has had a positive impact on the process of spending European funds in Poland in many respects. Its introduction accelerated the transposition of EU directives (e.g., on public procurement<sup>7</sup>) and led to the creation of a more coherent framework for the implementation of investments in certain areas (e.g., public services or transport). Conditionality has also been a catalyst for taking necessary, but unpopular, decisions important from the point of view of rationalising public expenditure (e.g., mapping health needs and investments in this area) or environmental decisions (e.g., introducing clean transport zones in cities).

## OBJECTIVES

Throughout its 20 years in the EU, Poland, as one of the so-called cohesion countries, has invariably set itself two basic objectives on the European stage. The first was to maintain the role and importance of cohesion policy in the entire EU budget while ensuring that its allocation mechanisms remain favourable to Poland. Over successive financial perspectives, spending on cohesion policy has remained at around one-third of EU resources. The second objective emerged after acquiring the first practical experience of implementing EU funds and involved seeking to simplify implementation at the EU level and prevent the introduction of excessive administrative and control burdens from the EU level. Poland also sought to delay and soften initiatives aimed at turning cohesion policy into a tool for enforcing obligations and punishing Member States for infringements in various areas unrelated to the essence of the policy.<sup>8</sup>

At the national level, on the other hand, the paradigm of full absorption of EU funds has been in place since the beginning of EU membership.<sup>9</sup> The huge modernisation expectations at accession translated into the activation of various mechanisms to prevent the loss of funds. This paradigm manifested itself in two mutually opposed ways. In the first period of membership, it appeared mainly in the form of so-called gold-plating,<sup>10</sup> resulting in the excessive enforcement of bureaucratic and control procedures, supposedly to ensure the correct spending of EU funds. In juxtaposition with a very high level of activity on the part

<sup>7</sup> It is worth pointing out as an example the extraordinary pace of the process of amending the Public Procurement Law in 2014, which resulted from the ECJ judgment *C-465/11 Forposta and ABC Direct Contact* and the EC's ensuing decision to file a complaint against Poland, and consequently was necessary for fulfilling the legal conditions for the 2014–2020 financial perspective. As a result, Poland decided to amend this law in respect of exclusions, wanting to bring it in line with EU law. Without the European Commissions' insistence and the need to meet one criterion from the public procurement condition, the absence of which would have resulted in the inability to certify measures in respect of the Commission, it would have taken much longer to incorporate this judgment into legislation and fully comply with the Directive.

<sup>8</sup> The flagship example here is the aforementioned conditionality, but there are also others, such as financial penalties (financial corrections) for non-compliant spending, imposed both by national and EU bodies.

<sup>9</sup> Its quintessential form were the words of Deputy Prime Minister Waldemar Pawlak, who spoke in 2006 that "squeezing Brussels sprouts [...] should be the national sport for the years to come." See: "Waldemar Pawlak: Wyciskanie brukselki," *Serwis Samorządowy PAP*, 7 December 2007, <https://samorzad.pap.pl>.

<sup>10</sup> A term used to describe over-regulation and the additional complication of EU rules at the Member State level.

of potential recipients of funds (such as local governments, businesses, or NGOs), this led to paralysis in the granting, spending, and accounting of EU funds.<sup>11</sup> The second was the mobilisation of all resources and means so that Poland “did not lose a single euro,” leading to the primacy of financing EU programmes over national ones, and the use of numerous implementation tricks, which in the end were to enable the spending of all funds allocated to Poland.<sup>12</sup>

## ACTIVITIES

The necessity to prepare and negotiate with the EC long-term planning documents of a framework nature<sup>13</sup> and implementation documents (the so-called Operational Programmes), as well as the increasing pressure of the European Commission on linking the spending of European funds with national and regional strategies in individual areas of support led to the development of public policies in Poland. The first years of implementation of EU funds exposed the lack of a coordinated approach, fragmentation, and dispersion of investments. There was a conceptual mess at the level of planning documents, from their number, naming, through the level of detail, to mutually contradictory and mutually exclusive provisions.<sup>14</sup> The ordering of the strategic planning system in the 2006 Act on the Principles of Development Policy<sup>15</sup> reduced their number, introduced a hierarchy, and laid the foundations of a system for creating, coordinating, and amending development strategies at the national, regional, and local levels. The Polish system of strategic planning, although not without its faults, significantly facilitated the state’s access to EU funds in the ensuing financial perspectives, when the so-called *ex-ante* conditionality and having a coherent strategic framework became a requirement for accessing cohesion funds in particular areas.

In the initial period, Poland chose a decentralised model for the implementation of operational programmes, locating the functions of managing authorities in a larger number of government departments (including ministries responsible for the economy, labour, or transport). The increasing difficulties and delays in the implementation of operational programmes led, after the 2005 elections, to the creation of the Ministry of Regional Development, centralising programme management and delegating implementation functions to so-called frontline ministries. The implementation system with a strong coordinator inside the government in the form of a minister responsible for regional development<sup>16</sup> is considered one of the factors for Poland’s absorption success, understood as the ability to make correct, full, and increasingly effective use of EU funds. The Polish system of managing EU funds has also

<sup>11</sup> Thanks to the changes initiated during the first and second financial perspectives, it was possible to streamline the implementation procedures, which was of great importance in view of the much larger sums foreseen for Poland under the 2007–2013 financial perspective.

<sup>12</sup> An example of this is the fairly widely used mechanism of over-contracting (making commitments above the original allocation in a given programme) or the creation of reserve lists of projects.

<sup>13</sup> They have operated under different names: in the MFF 2004–2006 as the National Development Plan; in the MFF 2007–2013 as the National Strategic Reference Framework; and since 2014 as the Partnership Agreement.

<sup>14</sup> Between 1989 and 2006, 406 strategy and programming documents of a strategic nature were adopted at the level of the Council of Ministers alone. Out of this number, 286 documents became obsolete due to the expiry of the periods to which they referred (146 documents) or lost their usefulness (140 documents). See: M. Sulmicka, “Nowy model programowania polityki rozwoju w Polsce,” [in:] *Prace i Materiały Instytutu Rozwoju Gospodarczego* 2012, No 88, p. 262.

<sup>15</sup> *Ustawa z dn. 6 grudnia 2006 r. o zasadach prowadzenia polityki rozwoju* (Dz.U. 2006 nr 227 poz. 1658).

<sup>16</sup> The Ministry of Regional Development functioned from 2005 to 2013, then the department became part of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development (2013–2015), the Ministry of Development (2015–2018), the Ministry of Investment and Development (2018–2019), the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy (2019–2020), the Ministry of Development, Labour and Technology (2020–2021), and since 2021 it has been part of the Ministry of Development and Technology. See “Ministerstwa w III Rzeczypospolitej,” Wikipedia, <https://pl.wikipedia.org>.

become an inspiration for countries encountering difficulties in spending EU money (e.g., Romania or Croatia).

Significant and visible in the perspective of Poland's 20 years of membership in the European Union is the participation of voivodship-level self-governments in the management of EU funds.<sup>17</sup> For these institutions, created a few years earlier by the reform of Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek's government, involvement in the programming, management, and implementation of EU funds has become the most important driver of development and success. Since the 2007–2013 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the voivodeship marshals (CEOs) have continuously managed the growing pool of cohesion policy funds,<sup>18</sup> which are a key source for creating and implementing regional policy.<sup>19</sup> Even after 20 years of Poland's membership of the EU, the regions are largely financing their development goals with external funds. What is more, they have occupied or taken over competences in the management and coordination of various public tasks, which very often appeared for the first time under EU-funded programmes.

Since the beginning of its accession, Poland has received from the EU the possibility to spend nearly €280 billion for development purposes. Between 2014 and 2023 alone, it was more than €141 billion under the three MFFs (2004–2006, 2007–2013, 2014–2020).<sup>20</sup> In addition, Poland was allocated €135.8 billion under the EU budget for 2021–2027 and funds from the National Reconstruction Plan (including €25.3 billion in non-refundable aid and €34.5 billion in loans).

Poland's success in investing these funds is evident on many levels. EU money has increased the rate of convergence to the EU—without it, GDP per capita (in PPS<sup>21</sup>) would have been 71.9% of the EU average in 2020, while it was actually 75.7%.<sup>22</sup> Between 2004 and 2020, the distance between Poland and the EU27 measured by GDP per capita (in PPS) decreased by 24.2 percentage points. The level of convergence reached in 2023 (according to preliminary estimates by Eurostat) 80% of the EU-average GDP per capita.<sup>23</sup> Cohesion policy has also helped to halt regional divergence, as a result of the stronger impact of cohesion policy in less-developed regions and the channelling of more resources to them.<sup>24</sup>

Since the beginning of the accession, more than 300,000 projects have been accepted for implementation.<sup>25</sup> It has been possible to improve the state of infrastructure to a large extent.

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that voivodeships are the only level of self-government involved in the management of European funds, while county and municipal self-governments are only involved in the implementation of projects.

<sup>18</sup> It increased from 24.6% in the MFF 2007–2013 to 44% for the MFF 2021–2027. Source: own calculations based on data from programme documents.

<sup>19</sup> In 2024, for example, the average annual allocation under the Lubelskie Voivodeship's regional programme exceeds 80% of the value of the region's income in the budget adopted for that year (assuming an equal distribution of the programme's funds between 2021 and 2027). Even in the case of Wielkopolskie Voivodeship, which in the 2021–2027 perspective no longer falls into the category of the poorest EU regions (defined as a region where GDP per capita does not exceed 75% of the EU average), this share is 46%. For comparison, in 2010, this share was 97% in the Lubelskie Voivodeship and 56% in the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship (source: own calculations).

<sup>20</sup> With the possibility of spending funds until 31 December 2023.

<sup>21</sup> PPS—Purchasing Power Standard, see “Glossary: *Purchasing Power Standard (PPS)*,” [in:] Eurostat. *Statistics Explained*, <https://ec.europa.eu>.

<sup>22</sup> *Wpływ polityki spójności na rozwój społeczno-gospodarczy Polski i regionów w latach 2014–2020*, Ministerstwo Funduszy i Polityki Regionalnej, Krajowe Obserwatorium Terytorialne, Warszawa, 2022, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> “Purchasing Power Parities Database,” Eurostat, <https://ec.europa.eu>.

<sup>24</sup> *Wpływ polityki spójności na rozwój społeczno-gospodarczy Polski i regionów w latach 2014–2020*, *op. cit.*, pp. 12–14.

<sup>25</sup> As of 18 February 2024, the EU grant map contains 301,039 projects (88,545 projects from 2004–2006; 106,351 projects from 2007–2013; 104,253 projects from the 2014–2020 perspective; and 1,890 projects from the 2021–2027 perspective,

For example, the length of the express and motorway road network has increased more than eightfold, and in the 2014–2020 perspective alone, out of 2,127 km of contracted expressways, EU funds accounted for 48% of them.<sup>26</sup> Examples from recent years also illustrate the important contribution of EU funds to various areas of socio-economic development. For instance, investments under the digital development programme (Operational Programme Digital Poland) have significantly accelerated the expansion of telecommunications infrastructure in Poland. EU funds accounted for 25% of the value of all telecommunications investments in the country between 2018 and 2021 and contributed to the increase by 10 percentage points in the building penetration rate in Poland.<sup>27</sup>

As a result of the huge inflow of EU funds, problems emerged (especially in the 2007–2013 perspective) with the selection, effectiveness, and relevance of the projects to be co-financed. This was due to a number of factors, the unprecedented scale of grants,<sup>28</sup> their relatively high availability, as well as deficits in financial and strategic planning as well as compliance with the aforementioned paradigm of full absorption. This prompted the funding of any project (including those of poor quality) as long as it met the minimum requirements. Potential beneficiaries, in turn, often made decisions to become involved in those investments for which funding could be obtained, rather than in the most necessary and relevant at the time.<sup>29</sup> The ineffectiveness of investing EU funds, often attracting media attention,<sup>30</sup> was to a significant extent a consequence of the scale and the jump in the amount of funds available under cohesion policy, the lack of administrative capacity, or the incompatibility of funding areas with the absorption capacity and needs of the country or its regions.

Basing the economic growth policy in Poland on EU funds was a natural choice, although to a certain extent determined by the rules for them, such as the necessity to contribute so-called national co-financing. In situations of budget inflexibility or economic downturn (e.g., following the 2008–2010 European debt crisis), it forced the redirection and linking of public spending to European projects both at the government and local government levels. The development model based on EU funds has been important for the structure and nature of investments undertaken at the national level. However, it also faced constraints related to the EU's promotion of investment in some areas (e.g., innovation, research and development) and the limitation of funding opportunities for others (e.g., local road or sport and recreation infrastructure).

However, it would be a far-reaching and unjustified simplification to reduce the role and significance of EU funds solely to financial and material effects. In terms of spending EU funds, the adjustments related to Poland's accession to the EU and the resulting changes in procedures and—in the longer term—in the administrative and legal cultures, have significantly contributed to instilling a number of changes at home, such as improving the

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including 326 projects from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan). See: "Mapa dotacji UE," Government of Poland, <https://mapadotacji.gov.pl>.

<sup>26</sup> "Fundusze UE, dalej istotnym elementem wsparcia finansowego dla budowy nowych dróg," Generalna Dyrekcja Budowy Dróg Krajowych i Autostrad, 5 December 2023, [www.gov.pl/web/gddkia](http://www.gov.pl/web/gddkia).

<sup>27</sup> "Wpływ polityki spójności na rozwój społeczeństwa informacyjnego," [in:] *Raport z badań przeprowadzonych przez EGO i LBIE na zamówienie Ministerstwa Funduszy i Polityki Regionalnej*, p. 9. The building penetration level is a measure of the coverage of the telecommunications network, determined by the ratio of the number of buildings within the coverage of a network to the number of all buildings in a designated area.

<sup>28</sup> Compared to the MFF 2004–2006, Poland received more than 2.5 times the average annual funding for the MFF 2007–2013.

<sup>29</sup> See: D. Jęgorow, "Fundusze europejskie - stymulanta i destymulanta rozwoju," *Roczniki Ekonomii i Zarządzania* 2015, No 7 (43), pp. 7–20.

<sup>30</sup> It has resulted in the emergence of terms such as *granthosis* and *projectosis* in the Polish language.



transparency of public spending or strengthening cooperation with socioeconomic partners and non-governmental organisations. The contribution of EU funds to development leap is also one of the foundations on which the positive attitude of Polish society towards the EU is based.

Cohesion policy, although an investment-oriented instrument, also had a significant impact on national legislation. In addition to the aforementioned issue of conditionality, this was due to the need to create a new framework for a number of policies in view of accession.<sup>31</sup> Of greatest importance from that perspective were laws critical to receiving EU funding, such as those related to public procurement, state aid, and the environment, as well as legislation providing frameworks for the implementation of successive MFFs, starting with the 2004 National Development Plan Act. This law was amended after the first, not very successful, year of using EU funds. The far-reaching simplification and de-formalisation of implementation conditions set the stage for subsequent regulations, introducing, among others, the institution of guidelines, which made the formal framework of cohesion policy more flexible and useful.

## CONCLUSIONS

European funds have made a significant contribution to bridging civilisational and infrastructural gaps and improving the economic and social situation on the continent. They have also improved the quality of the creation and implementation of public policies. Cohesion policy is one of the most important factors in the growing importance of regional self-government and the strengthening of investment potential at lower levels of territorial self-government.

Poland has been the largest beneficiary of EU funds over the past two decades. As a country with a modernisation success story, it will be active in the EU debate on the future of cohesion policy and all development policies. The evolution of cohesion policy in its traditional sense (i.e., as a tool of European regional policy) towards an instrument that finances European development priorities, and the associated reduction in the autonomy of national and regional authorities in defining objectives and funding directions, should lead to a review of sources and methods of funding investment in Poland.

The growing prosperity of Poland and its regions and the potential enlargement of the Union to include Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkan countries will lead to a decline in the importance of cohesion policy as an important source of funding for Poland's modernisation after 2027 (eastern Poland is likely to be less affected by this process). EU funds will be increasingly concentrated on selected areas of EU-wide relevance, including R&D, innovation, migration, and climate change adaptation.

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<sup>31</sup> For example, in respect of the labour market, it was the Employment Promotion and Labour Market Institutions Act 2004 (*Ustawa o promocji zatrudnienia i instytucjach rynku pracy z 2004 r.*).

ELŻBIETA KACA, ALEKSANDRA KOZIOŁ

## POLAND AND THE COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

### CONDITIONS

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, after more than a decade of transition since the end of the Cold War, the security architecture in Europe began to consolidate. Central European countries joined the EU and NATO, confirming their European development perspective and transatlantic security guarantees. The process of stabilisation also involved the states of Eastern Europe, and one of the most important security agreements in post-Cold War Europe became the NATO-Russia Founding Act (NRFA) of 1997. With the terrorist attacks on the U.S. in 2001 and the end of the armed conflicts that accompanied the break-up of Yugoslavia, there was a widespread belief in the West in the sustainability of peace in Europe and the consolidation of a new asymmetric nature of threats that required the use of small task forces and police rather than the expansion of conventional military capabilities.<sup>1</sup>

The challenge, however, was once again posed by Russian policy, which increasingly sought to rebuild its sphere of influence and impede the transformation of Eastern European states. The Russian authorities used economic blackmail through trade embargoes and the withholding of energy supplies, as well as military blackmail, exploiting disputes over separatist territories. They also instigated new territorial conflicts in Georgia in 2008 or in Ukraine—first in 2014 and then in 2022. Russia has also carried out hybrid actions against Western states, including cyberattacks,<sup>2</sup> exploiting migration, and interfering in democratic electoral processes. A limiting factor for the EU's influence in its eastern neighbourhood has been the varying degree of involvement of the countries in the region in bilateral relations, depending mainly on their foreign policy orientation. While Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine pursued a pro-European foreign policy in principle, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus maintained an interest in cooperation with Russia.

On the international stage, China's intensifying rivalry with the U.S. has been crucial. Since 2008, the Chinese authorities have pursued an increasingly confrontational foreign policy towards the West. The U.S. has gradually stepped up its engagement in the Indo-Pacific region. For the EU, this has meant increasing its own responsibility for security in Europe, in terms of stabilising both its eastern and southern neighbourhoods, for example after the Arab Spring (2010–2012). However, the extent of the EU's commitment to conflict resolution in the neighbourhood has been diminished by its focus on current domestic challenges, including tackling the financial crisis (2008) and the debt crisis (2011–2013), securing the EU's borders in the wake of the migration-management crisis (2015–2016), and combatting the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021).

<sup>1</sup> B. Górka-Winter, E. Posel-Częścik, "Jak będą ewoluowały instytucjonalne aspekty bezpieczeństwa w związku z integracją Polski z Unią Europejską?" [in:] U. Kurczewska, M. Kwiatkowska, K. Sochacka (eds.), *Polska w Unii Europejskiej. Początkowe problemy i kryzysy?*, PISM, Warszawa, 2002, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> A. Kozioł, "Cyberattacks Integral to Russia's Political and Military Strategies," *PISM Bulletin*, No 191 (2108), 6 December 2022, [www.pism.pl](http://www.pism.pl).

A key constraint on the EU's ability to respond to emerging challenges and crises continued to be differences between states on threat assessments and, consequently, on the direction of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as an intergovernmental policy. Although the Lisbon Treaty strengthened the EU's foreign policy competence—it introduced the post of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who heads the European External Action Service (EEAS)—it did not solve the problem of the EU's lack of coherence in this area. The High Representative acted under a mandate agreed unanimously by the Member States. As a result, the EU's response time to successive crises was often prolonged and the range of possible actions was narrowed mainly to limited sanctions, financial assistance, economic and sectoral offers (e.g., in trade, energy, migration, investment), and a narrow security mandate in missions and operations abroad.

Although the EU has begun to build strategic autonomy, including deepening cooperation under the Common Security and Defence Policy, progress has been limited. The main obstacles have been a lack of interest on the part of states in developing common defence capabilities and insufficient funding. Even the creation of new mechanisms such as the European Defence Fund (EDF), Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), or the European Peace Facility (EPF) could not reverse this trend. It was not until Russia's armed attack on Ukraine in 2022 that countries turned their efforts to rebuilding conventional capabilities, and the unity of the EU's response to the aggressor was unprecedented.

### **POLAND'S MAIN OBJECTIVES<sup>3</sup>**

Poland's main objective in the CFSP was to counter Russia's aggressive policy. It was crucial to ensure the stability of the rest of the eastern neighbourhood and to enhance its resilience to internal and external threats. This was to be achieved by deepening relations with the EU and supporting the implementation of structural reforms—strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law, and modernising the economies according to the European development model. The Polish government intended to pursue these goals at the EU level by formulating an ambitious offer of cooperation within the Eastern Partnership (EaP). In the area of security, Poland sought to strengthen the EU's engagement in Eastern Europe, including by launching new EU missions. Poland also emphasised security-sector reform efforts to structurally strengthen the eastern neighbourhood countries. In addition, it sought respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the freedom to decide on military alliances, in support of Eastern European states under increasing pressure from Russia.

Poland advocated a strong EU response to Russia's actions, including the use of possible deterrence mechanisms such as sanctions, and sought to shape a common Western position in relations with Russia. The Polish government enjoyed the support of a coalition of countries that shared its threat assessment. This included the Baltic states, Czechia, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden, and Romania. The coalition was intended to help the EU maintain the right balance in preventing and resolving problems in its eastern and southern neighbourhood. The Polish authorities sought to develop a European Security and Defence Policy to complement NATO, which is seen as the main guarantor of security in Europe. It was therefore important to ensure interoperability between the two organisations. Poland—as one of the few European states—consistently supported the development of defence capabilities and increased spending on

<sup>3</sup> The analysis of Poland's objectives was based on the annual information of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the tasks of Polish foreign policy in the years 2004–2023; the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland of 2007, 2014, 2020; the strategy Priorities of Polish foreign policy 2012–2016, The strategy of Polish foreign policy 2017–2021.

them. There was a consensus on the need to build its own defence industry in cooperation with European and transatlantic partners, and opportunities for strengthening it were also seen in EU funding programmes.

#### POLAND'S ACTIONS<sup>4</sup>

On the threshold of EU accession, the Polish government believed that the EU's Eastern policy was focused on relations with Russia and recognised Ukraine and Belarus (the two countries most important to Poland because of their immediate neighbourhood) as its sphere of influence.<sup>5</sup> Since 2004, therefore, it has sought to strengthen the EU's involvement in relations with its eastern neighbours in order to increase their resilience to threats from Russia. In 2009, Poland succeeded in launching the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative, which includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. As a result, the EU signed Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine in 2014, including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements. Following its accession to the Eurasian Economic Union, Armenia signed a Partnership Agreement with the EU in 2017, which was less advanced in terms of the scope of cooperation. The Eastern Partnership has led to closer sectoral cooperation with all participating countries, as exemplified by the acceleration of visa liberalisation. Poland also sought to strengthen such EU cooperation with Belarus during periods of easing of the Alexander Lukashenka regime's repression of the population. However, the progressive integration with Russia and Belarus' participation in the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022 marked a policy failure. Another weakness of the Eastern Partnership was that it did not include the prospect of EU membership for Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, or cooperation in the area of hard security. Despite the efforts of Polish diplomacy in this direction, these issues were insurmountable for many EU members.

The Polish government has sought to strengthen the EU's response to successive internal crises in the Eastern neighbourhood and to Russia's aggressive actions. Over the years, the Polish government's engagement has focused most on issues related to Ukraine. During the 2004 Orange Revolution, President Aleksander Kwaśniewski was involved in mediating between the authorities and the opposition in Ukraine. In 2013–2014, Poland worked to resolve the crisis triggered by then President Viktor Yanukovich's withdrawal of Ukraine from association with the EU. Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski joined the Weimar Triangle in mediating between the Ukrainian government and opposition on 20–21 February 2014, leading to an agreement and a change of power in Ukraine. However, after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 and sparked the war in Donbas, Poland did not participate in the Normandy Format peace talks, reducing its ability to influence the resolution of the conflict. Nevertheless, the Polish government gradually supported the imposition of sanctions against Russia (the 2014 sanctions were limited in scope) and increased EU assistance to Ukraine, including in the security field. After Russia's subversive invasion of Ukraine in February 2014, the Polish government, mainly in coalition with the Baltic states, set the course for the EU's response to the aggression. Among other things, it succeeded in adopting unprecedented economic sanctions, increasing financial and military aid to Ukraine, and extending the enlargement policy to Ukraine (as well as Moldova and Georgia).

<sup>4</sup> Based, among others, on the *Yearbooks of Polish Foreign Policy* published in 2005–2021 by the Polish Institute of International Affairs, [www.pism.pl](http://www.pism.pl).

<sup>5</sup> E. Wyciszkievicz, "Jak będą wyglądały stosunki Polski z krajami sąsiednimi, które nie wchodzą do Unii Europejskiej w początkowym okresie członkostwa w UE?" [in:] U. Kurczewska, M. Kwiatkowska, K. Sochacka (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 159–166.

Recognising the contribution of EU missions and external operations to improving international security, Poland has advocated their deployment in the EU's eastern neighbourhood. Although for years they covered only the civilian dimension, due to differing threat perceptions among EU countries and concerns about deteriorating relations with Russia, in response to Russia's aggressive actions in 2008–2014 it was possible to establish missions to Georgia (EUMM Georgia) and Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine), to which Polish personnel were also deployed. After a turnaround in European security policy in 2022, the first military mission was launched to Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine).<sup>6</sup> Poland took on a significant part of the effort, including the training of about a third of the 40,000 Ukrainian troops, by deploying an operational command on its territory. Polish personnel have also been deployed to a new civilian mission in Armenia (EUM Armenia), established in 2023 following Azerbaijan's armed takeover of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. Despite its focus on Eastern policy, Poland also took into account broader European interests, as demonstrated by its involvement in the Balkans, the Mediterranean and the Somali coast, as well as in Africa and the Middle East. As a result, Poles have participated in almost half of the EU's 43 missions and operations abroad, with soldiers and police officers being the main contributors. To a lesser extent, it was civilian personnel, on whom, however, the building of the structural resilience of countries, including those in the eastern neighbourhood, is crucial from the Polish point of view.

The Polish government has consistently highlighted the military threat from Russia, advocating for increased defence spending. This has resulted in the European defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB) remaining underfunded,<sup>7</sup> with an average of 1.3-1.6% of GDP spent on defence in the EU over the past two decades. Consequently, the Polish government expressed reservations about further European integration in the field of security and defence, emphasising the necessity to coordinate activities in a way that would not compromise or duplicate NATO capabilities. Nevertheless, Poland was involved in establishing EU rapid response forces, contributing units to battlegroups in a multinational format. Poland also participated in PESCO, engaging in projects such as military mobility and logistics hubs that strengthen the capabilities of European states in NATO. Furthermore, the authorities advocated for the ambitious implementation of national plans to increase troop mobility.<sup>8</sup> In this area, the authorities pursued goals such as reducing the time for issuing military transit permits and expanding dual-use infrastructure financed by the EU's "Connecting Europe Facility." Poland also highlighted the need to expand links with Ukraine and Moldova, which became particularly important in connection with the transport of military equipment and humanitarian aid after the outbreak of the full-scale war in 2022. Furthermore, participation in the creation of Cyber Rapid Response Teams (CRRTs) has been a success. This was the first PESCO project used in an operational context, with personnel consisting of cybersecurity specialists deployed in late February 2022 to support Ukraine.<sup>9</sup>

The CFSP was a key instrument for implementing Poland's Eastern policy. It supported a robust EU foreign and security policy, provided that the interests of all Member States

<sup>6</sup> A. Koziol, "EU Launches Military Assistance Mission in Support of Ukraine," *PISM Spotlight*, No 133/2022, 18 October 2022, [www.pism.pl](http://www.pism.pl).

<sup>7</sup> European Commission, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Defence Investment Gaps Analysis and Way Forward, Join(2022) 24 Final*, 18 May 2022, [www.commission.europa.eu](http://www.commission.europa.eu).

<sup>8</sup> A. Koziol, "EU Smoothly Developing Military Mobility in Europe," *PISM Bulletin*, No 45 (2164), 18 April 2023, [www.pism.pl](http://www.pism.pl).

<sup>9</sup> "Activation of first capability developed under PESCO points to strength of cooperation in cyber defence," European Defence Agency, 24 February 2022, [www.eda.europa.eu](http://www.eda.europa.eu).

were taken into account and its intergovernmental nature was preserved.<sup>10</sup> Following the launch of the EEAS in 2011, the Polish authorities advocated for the greater involvement of states in EU diplomacy, including the performance of certain diplomatic missions of the High Representative by foreign ministers and the development of community solutions by coalitions of willing states. Poland remained sceptical of extending qualified-majority voting in the CFSP (the European Commission made such a proposal in 2018) due to concerns that this could reinforce the dominance of some states in shaping the policy and consequently undermine EU unity. Instead, it proposed the more frequent use of constructive abstention, as long as it did not lead to an apparent manifestation of a lack of EU unity.

The focus on Eastern policy also affected Poland's approach to the EU's relations with key countries in the world. Poland sought to ensure that EU policies did not lead to a deterioration of relations with the U.S., which it saw as the guarantor of European security. Since the start of negotiations on the EU-U.S. Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership in 2013, Poland has supported the conclusion of an agreement as soon as possible, and in the debate on the development of EU strategic autonomy, it has sought to ensure that the development of the Union's security and defence capabilities takes place in close cooperation with the U.S. With regard to China, after a period of intensification of Poland's political relations with the country in 2008–2016, exemplified by its accession in 2012 to the "16+1" format, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Poland gradually tightened its policy at the EU level. Among other things, it remained sceptical about the rapid conclusion of a comprehensive EU-China investment agreement. This was due not only to China's increasingly confrontational foreign policy towards the West and its intensifying relations with Russia but also to the projected relatively small economic gains for Poland from this cooperation.

## CONCLUSIONS

Poland's actions at the EU level have focused on ensuring a stable eastern neighbourhood and enhancing its own security, which has also influenced its approach to EU relations with key countries such as the U.S. and China. For years, the CFSP remained Poland's main instrument for implementing its Eastern policy.

Despite its ambitions, the Eastern Partnership was not prepared to confront Russia's aggressive policy and lacked instruments to prevent increasing pressure on Eastern European states. However, it proved important for the economic stabilisation of the region, and its gradual integration with the EU prepared the associated states for EU candidate status. However, despite years of Polish diplomacy and the threat posed by Russia, the EU has not been able—due to divergences among the states—to adopt an ambitious policy towards the East, including the prospect of EU membership, support on military issues and the introduction of effective sanctions against Russia. It was only the Russian escalation of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 that led to a breakthrough on these issues, although countries remain divided on the terms of eastern enlargement, and the accession of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia to the EU will depend on, among other things, the security situation and consensus on EU reform.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> E. Kaca, "Poland's views on CFSP: priority for Eastern neighbourhood and transatlantic relations," [in:] V. Gubalova (ed.), *From Contestation to Buy-In: the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy as seen from European Capitals*, Globsec, Bratislava, 2021, p. 19, [www.globsec.org](http://www.globsec.org).

<sup>11</sup> E. Kaca, "EU Sizing Up Prospects for Eastern Enlargement," *PISM Bulletin*, No 187 (2306), 19 December 2023, [www.pism.pl](http://www.pism.pl).

The lack of a coherent threat assessment has made the EU a reactive structure in the face of international developments over the past 20 years. States with different political priorities have been unable to reach a consensus on actions in line with their strategic security interests. Foreign missions and operations have been carried out after the fact and have not prevented crises, but only mitigated their effects. Support for EDTIB has been low, leaving the European market fragmented. The low level of security and defence spending reflected the overall level of ambition, and despite growing instability in the eastern neighbourhood, defence capacity-building was difficult. Only Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine forced declarations from EU members to increase spending, first through the EPF and then through investment in the defence industry, although there was no change in the structural approach to the CFSP. The multiplicity of crises means that EU states are currently unwilling to accept institutional and treaty changes in both foreign and security policy.

In the face of unfavourable trends at the EU level, the policy of the Polish authorities has been characterised on the one hand by activism, including raising the debate on the need to strengthen defence capabilities, deepen cooperation with NATO, and formulate a common response to the Russian threat. This succeeded in initiating support for countries affected by Russian interference, such as Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. However, Poland did not find sufficient support at the EU level—either in the institutions or among the Member States—to allow a significant increase in defence spending and a tougher stance towards Russia. As a result, no EU military mission could be established in the East until 2022, although such missions are operating in Africa. On the other hand, the attitude of the Polish authorities was characterised by conservatism, which translated into a reduced interest in the development of European integration in the security and defence dimension. However, the evaluation so far, taking into account the unprecedented nature of the military assistance to Ukraine, shows that actions of a common nature contribute to a greater commitment of all EU members to their implementation.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, and in the context of the deepening of cooperation through the development of the defence industry initiated in 2023, it is necessary to develop a long-term position of Poland towards the future role of the EU in the area of security and defence.

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<sup>12</sup> A. Koziół, "EU military assistance to Ukraine and the future of the Common Security and Defence Policy," [in:] J. Szymańska (ed.), *The European Union in the Face of Russian's Aggression against Ukraine*, PISM, Warsaw 2024.

TOMASZ ZAJĄC

## POLES IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

### BACKGROUND

The proportional participation of citizens of Member States in the EU administration translates into mutual benefits. First and foremost, it ensures the representation of different sensibilities and points of view specific to a given region or country, which means better decisions made by the EU institutions. In addition, people working in the EU administration gain an in-depth understanding of how the EU works, and the knowledge and skills gained can then be applied at home, both in the public administration and in the private sector. The opportunity to work in the EU institutions is also an interesting career path. Ultimately, however, it is simply fair that citizens of the countries paying a contribution to the EU budget are adequately represented in its administration.

Although the term “EU institutions” is commonly referred to as any agency or body that operates within the EU institutional system, in reality Article 13(1) of the Treaty on the EU (TEU) contains a closed catalogue of them, comprising the European Parliament (EP), European Council, Council, European Commission (EC), Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), European Central Bank (ECB), and Court of Auditors.

This text focuses on the EC for two key reasons. First, the Commission is undoubtedly one of the most powerful institutions of the Union—it is overwhelmingly the draftsman and initiator of EU legislation, takes key decisions on the common market and state aid, is the guardian of the treaties and can initiate infringement proceedings against a Member State. The Commission is also the dominant institution of an executive nature in the EU system. This is why adequate representation of the citizens of each member in this institution is so important. Second, in 2023, the EC employed 30,272 staff<sup>1</sup> out of a total of 79,211 people working across all EU institutions, bodies, and agencies (data for 2022).<sup>2</sup> The EP was next in terms of staff numbers with 8,132 officials, while the European External Action Service (EEAS) was third with 5,188.<sup>3</sup> This means that EC staff constituted by far the largest group of officials (around 38% of all employed) among the EU bureaucracy.

Since Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004, there has been an awareness of the need for adequate representation of Poles in the EU administration. Particularly relevant in this context was the lack of tradition of Polish citizens’ employment in EU institutions compared to countries that had belonged to the Union for decades and had developed a whole ecosystem related to this career path (such as schools and private courses specialised in this direction). The Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) has been monitoring this issue for years, with

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, “Statistical Bulletin for Commission on 01/10/2023,” 24 October 2023, [commission.europa.eu](https://commission.europa.eu).

<sup>2</sup> “How Many People Work for the EU Institutions in 2024?,” European Union Employment Advisor, <https://euemployment.eu>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.



a particular focus on employment in the EEAS. To date, PISM has issued three reports on different aspects of the Service's human resources policy, published in 2010,<sup>4</sup> 2012,<sup>5</sup> and 2021.<sup>6</sup>

## CONDITIONS

According to the Staff Regulations of Officials of the European Union and the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the Union (SR),<sup>7</sup> the EC's corps of officials consists primarily of persons employed within three functional groups: administrators (AD), assistants (AST), and secretarial and clerical staff (AST/SC). Each of these categories is accompanied by a numerical assignment (from 5 to 16) indicating the level of sophistication of the tasks that the person in the post performs.<sup>8</sup> In addition, contract agents, selected through a permanent selection procedure (Contract Agents Selection Tool, CAST),<sup>9</sup> are recruited to fill temporary staff shortages (mainly in the administrators' group). Other forms of employment relationship include temporary agents (TA) and traineeships. To join the EU civil service, one has to go through the selection procedure organised by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) for the relevant group. This consists of a number of tests, including tests of abstract, numerical and verbal reasoning.<sup>10</sup>

The obligation to ensure an equal representation of nationals of all Member States in the EU institutions is a legal requirement. Article 27 of the SR states: "Recruitment shall be directed to securing for the institution the services of officials of the highest standard of ability, efficiency and integrity, recruited on the broadest possible geographical basis from among nationals of Member States of the Union. No posts shall be reserved for nationals of any specific Member State. The principle of the equality of Union's citizens shall allow each institution to adopt appropriate measures following the observation of a significant imbalance between nationalities among officials which is not justified by objective criteria. Those appropriate measures must be justified and shall never result in recruitment criteria other than those based on merit."

The issue of the prohibition of favouring any candidate on the basis of nationality, even if he or she comes from a Member State that is underrepresented in the EU administration, is often highlighted in Commission documents.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, in the EC's view, this would amount to discrimination against other candidates on the basis of nationality, prohibited by Article 9 TEU. This approach also results in the refusal to introduce any nationality quotas, while the Commission emphasises that the decision to employ a given person must be taken on merit-based grounds.

<sup>4</sup> R. Formuszewicz, J. Kumoch, *Analiza obsady stanowisk szefów delegatur Unii Europejskiej w przededniu powołania Europejskiej Służby Działań Zewnętrznych*, Raport PISM, Warszawa, August 2010, [www.pism.pl](http://www.pism.pl).

<sup>5</sup> R. Formuszewicz, D. Liszczyk, *Personel Europejskiej Służby Działań Zewnętrznych do przeglądu? Bilans i wnioski z dotychczasowej polityki kadrowej*, Raport PISM, Warszawa, December 2012, [www.pism.pl](http://www.pism.pl).

<sup>6</sup> B. Bielizczuk, P. Biskup, B. Znojek, *Specifics and Trends in the Appointment of European External Action Service Administrative Staff (2011–2019)*, PISM Report, Warsaw, February 2021, [www.pism.pl](http://www.pism.pl).

<sup>7</sup> "Staff Regulations of Officials of the European Union and the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the Union," EUR-Lex, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu>.

<sup>8</sup> People with the AD5 rank are at the beginning of their careers, while AD15 and AD16 are ranks reserved for directors-general.

<sup>9</sup> Within the four function groups: FGI-FGIV.

<sup>10</sup> EU Careers, "EPSO tests," <https://eu-careers.europa.eu>.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. European Commission, "Action Plan on Geographical Balance—Poland," 2023, and "A new Human Resources Strategy for the Commission," C(2022) 2229 final, 5 April 2022, <https://commission.europa.eu>.

## PRESENCE OF POLES IN THE EC ADMINISTRATION

In 2004, the process of making up for staff shortages in the EU bureaucracy began among the newly acceded countries. To this end, temporary mechanisms were created to allow citizens of these countries greater access to official posts in the Union. One of these was to reserve a certain pool of seats for people specifically from the newly acceded countries, with the transitional period associated with this arrangement coming to an end in 2018.

However, a decade after enlargement, it became apparent that the attempt to equalise the participation of citizens from the new Member States in the EU administration had failed and that the mechanisms in place were not sufficient. This led in 2014 to the creation of Article 27 of the SR, which is still in force today, indicating the need for adequate representation of citizens from all EU countries. A special EC report was also prepared to detail the issue of geographical balance in employment in the EU institutions (data collected in 2017, publication in 2018).<sup>12</sup> A special guiding rate (GR) was used to determine whether nationals of a given country are sufficiently represented among EC staff. Developed even before enlargement, in 2003, it was calculated on the basis of three parameters: the population (relative to the population of the EU as a whole), the number of MEPs (relative to all parliamentarians), and the weighted voting system in the Council (this solution was replaced by the double-majority rule in the Lisbon Treaty) and expressed as a percentage. Where a country's share of citizens was below 80% of the GR, the EC concluded that there was a "significant imbalance" in this respect.<sup>13</sup> In 2017, the GR for Poland was 8.2%, which meant that the Commission's employment of less than 6.6% of Poles (an 80% rate) qualified as a "significant imbalance."

In 2017, the share of Poles in AD staff (the report focused on this category of officials as having the greatest impact on the functioning of the Commission) at the non-management level (i.e., AD5–AD14) was 4.2%, which equated to only half of the GR. The situation looked better for AD5–AD8 posts alone (i.e., those at the beginning of their career in the EU institutions), where Poles accounted for 11% of those employed in the EC (134% of the GR). However, at a higher level (AD9–AD12), again the GR was only half met within this group, in which Poles accounted for only 4.1% of those employed at the Commission.

Between 2017 and 2023, the negative trend regarding the underrepresentation of Polish citizens in the EC continued, while in 2023 Commission found a worsening of this condition compared to the data in the 2018 report.<sup>14</sup> In October 2023, out of all AD, AST, TA, and CAST staff, Poles accounted for 5.3%,<sup>15</sup> i.e., they only filled about 65% of the GR (it remained at 8.2%). That this is a wider, systemic problem is evidenced by the fact that, according to the EC itself, at the end of 2022, eight countries had a "low or very low presence" of their nationals in AD5–AD16 positions in the Commission, while 15 did not meet the GR set for them.<sup>16</sup>

In terms of management positions, the Commission's presumption is that each Member State is represented by at least one person serving as Director-General or equivalent. Although this

<sup>12</sup> "Report from The Commission to the European Parliament and the Council pursuant to Article 27 of the Staff Regulations of Officials and to Article 12 of the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Union (Geographical balance)," EUR-Lex, 15 June 2018, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> Council, "Note of the Presidency of the Council on geographical balance of staff in EU institutions, bodies and agencies, (ST 9953/23)," [www.consilium.europa.eu](http://www.consilium.europa.eu).

<sup>15</sup> "Statistical Bulletin..." *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> "Note of the Presidency..." *op. cit.*

standard has been generally adhered to for some time, already at lower managerial levels nine countries are below the threshold of 80% of their GR.

The issue of geographical imbalance in the EC's employment policy has been raised in the public debate for years by the authorities not only of Poland but also of the Baltic countries (with regard to key managerial positions, so-called top jobs)<sup>17</sup> and the Nordic countries.<sup>18</sup> EU members whose citizens are underrepresented in the EC administration include, moreover, not only countries that joined the Union after 2004, but also, for example, Germany. Although there are numerous discrepancies in the diagnosis of the reasons for this state of affairs, both representatives of Poland and the Commission agree that the key issue in this regard is the small number of candidates coming from these underrepresented states. The shortcomings in this respect mean that any attempts to adjust the recruitment mechanisms internally will fail due to the lack of candidates with which to fill EU posts.

This issue is methodologically important, as the choice of criteria to diagnose which Member States are underrepresented will determine the corrective measures applied. The EC is primarily looking at AD5–AD14 (i.e., non-managerial) positions, with a particular focus on the AD5–AD8 group. The reasoning behind this is twofold. First, there are fewer high-level posts, hence it is more difficult to maintain perfect proportionality in this respect without compromising the merit criteria. The second argument is that managerial posts are often recruited from within the Commission itself who have previously worked in AD5–AD14 positions. Consequently, if there is not an adequate representation of nationals of a country in the lower posts, this will automatically translate into a deficit of candidates for the higher level posts.

While Polish representatives agree that this is an important issue, they also point out another correlation. There is a tendency to increase the employment of persons of the same nationality as the holder of a management position in a given Directorate-General.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the lack of adequate representation of all Union citizens at this level leads to an over-representation of selected nationalities also in terms of lower-level staff and blocks potential change, creating a vicious circle.

The Commission has so far introduced a number of measures to address the problem of unequal national representation in the EU administration. Since September 2022, an internal standard set by the EC has been in place, according to which its Directorates-General, as part of the recruitment procedure for non-permanent staff, should allow at least one candidate from a Member State who does not meet the requirement of fulfilling 80% of the GR to be interviewed. In addition, the competency tests have been reformed and an effort has been made to increase the reach of communication on the European career pathway, while stressing that this should be a joint effort between the EU administration and the Member States.<sup>20</sup> Since 2018, there has also been a Junior Professionals Programme within the EC, which aims to better integrate and use the potential of the Commission's young staff.

<sup>17</sup> S. Lau, B. Moens, "In race for top EU, NATO jobs, Eastern Europe asks: 'Are we equals or not?'" *Politico*, 4 March 2024, [www.politico.eu](http://www.politico.eu).

<sup>18</sup> G. Sorgi, G. Coi, L. Mackenzie, "A Viking funeral? Dwindling Nordics in Brussels blame the EU," *Politico*, 23 August 2023, [www.politico.eu](http://www.politico.eu).

<sup>19</sup> Such conclusions with regard to the European External Action Service were reached by B. Bieliszczyk, P. Biskup, B. Znojek in the cited report *Specificity and Trends...*: "Moreover, an above-average increase in appointments for Italians to senior positions occurred during the tenure of their compatriot Mogherini as [High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy—note TZ]," p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> "Note of the Presidency..." *op. cit.*

However, in the view of the underrepresented countries in the EC administration (including Poland), such measures are insufficient. They propose stronger measures, such as national competitions, held only in a given country (EPSO recruitment tests are accused of being tailored to a Western audience). Poland is also trying to stimulate debate on this issue, for example within the Committee of Permanent Representatives of the Governments of the Member States to the European Union (COREPER). As a result of these discussions, annual meetings of a working group to deal with this very issue have been agreed (but in a legally non-binding manner).<sup>21</sup> A National Action Plan<sup>22</sup> was also developed and signed (at the end of 2023) together with the EC, setting out specific undertakings to be taken, both on the EC and Polish side, to address the underrepresentation of Polish citizens in the Commission's administration.

## CONCLUSIONS

Poland is one of the Member States whose citizens are underrepresented in the EC. This is an undesirable state of affairs, as Poland loses many benefits related to the presence of its citizens in the EU bureaucracy, such as the acquisition of know-how, the opportunity to promote topics and views important for the region (e.g., transatlantic relations, approach to Russia), or attractive jobs. In order to counteract the current negative trends in this respect, Poland should act in two ways, domestically and at the EU level. As regards the national dimension, it is crucial to increase the number of candidates with Polish citizenship in competitions for positions in the EC administration. A systemic solution to this problem would be to create an overall vision for the promotion of this career path, special funding for European studies, information campaigns on working in the EC, incentives for choosing this career path, mentoring programmes, etc. Although Poland currently grants scholarships to Polish citizens who would like to study at universities oriented towards a career in the EU (e.g., the College of Europe), this should be extended to other universities with a similar teaching profile.

In turn, on the EU front, it is in Poland's interest to ensure—in coordination with the other 15 countries whose citizens are also underrepresented in EU institutions—that action on the part of the EU is taken to facilitate the recruitment of citizens from these countries. In addition, it would be advisable to increase financial outlays related to the search by the Polish administration for potential candidates for posts in the EU within the staff of Polish institutions (including the employment of persons who would deal with “headhunting”), but also as part of the activities of the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Poland to the EU in Brussels.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>22</sup> “Action Plan on Geographical Balance—Poland,” *op. cit.*

**PRZEMYSŁAW BISKUP****CHALLENGES FOR POLAND'S MEMBERSHIP OF THE EU**

Poland's membership of the EU over the past 20 years has had a fundamental impact on its integration with the West and the provision of a stable basis for economic growth, the financing of development projects and participation in shaping EU decision-making processes and legislation. A measure of tangible success has been the severalfold increase in Poland's GDP and the reduction of the gap to the average EU per capita income by around half. Less tangible—but at least equally important—were the reforms of the public administration system, including the revival of local self-government and assistance in combating the problem of corruption, which had been a major socioeconomic burden in the 1990s. This period was also characterised by important challenges, such as the need to implement socially costly market transformations and a significant wave of emigration. Despite the consistently high support of Poles for EU membership, the political scene towards the end of its second decade saw a return to the debates around the accession period concerning national sovereignty in the face of integration and growing party polarisation in this field.

The present European Union built on the basis of the Lisbon Treaty, not to mention further treaty reform currently under discussion in the Union, is much more integrated and centralised than at the time of Poland's accession. The success of the next decades of Poland's EU membership will therefore depend on the development of a broad domestic consensus on the directions of the Union's evolution. Its integration is likely to deepen in the face of the challenges posed by the process of enlargement to include Ukraine, Moldova and the Western Balkan states, as well as Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The discussion about the future shape of the Union will take place in all Member States in the context of strengthening Eurosceptic attitudes, the EU's numerous problems in tackling the crises of the last decade (e.g., refugee-migration, energy, financial) and the growing social challenges related to the implementation of new policies, in particular the green transition (e.g., the recent pan-European farmers' strikes). In Poland, the debate will additionally take place in a situation where the sources of the Union's legitimacy so far are being depleted, both symbolically (e.g., due to the fact that the Polish electorate has been transformed by a new generation of people treating membership as the status quo) and in terms of results (e.g., due to the exceptionally high social and economic costs of the forthcoming energy transition compared to the rest of the EU).

The debate on Poland's EU membership must furthermore take into account the need to break the development barriers associated with the medium-growth trap (i.e., based on low labour, energy and raw material costs). The green transition forces Poland not only to accelerate its transformation into a low-carbon economy, but, above all, into one based on knowledge and innovation. To a much greater extent than before, it will also have to reckon with the fact that the centralisation of EU economic policies—if only indirectly, through the green transition regulations—will require Poland to increase its capacity to influence EU trade and economic policy more effectively. Another key issue that has been strongly exposed in the Polish media debate in recent months is the question of joining the eurozone, which polarises the political scene. Given the relative decline in the EU's economic position vis-à-vis more rapidly growing

parts of the globe and the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, it will also be important to shorten supply chains with a view to increasing Europe's technological competitiveness. Finally, it will be important to develop an economic and political strategy in the face of Ukraine's progressing integration into the single market, which poses both serious challenges for many segments of the Polish economy (e.g., the agricultural sector or low-cost industrial production) and opportunities to create synergies (e.g., in livestock production based on Ukrainian feed).

In the area of foreign and security policy, it is also important to consolidate the new role acquired by Poland as a key state of the Eastern Flank of the EU and NATO, as well as one of the leaders of these organisations in the face of Russian aggression. In this area, it is important, on the one hand, to strengthen the national military potential and, consequently, its credibility as an exporter of security in the region, and, on the other hand, to expand quantitatively and qualitatively the defence industry as one of the levers of economic growth and technological development. The key issue here is the extent to which these goals are achievable within the framework of European programmes, and/or achievable nationally and bilaterally in relations with the most important allies. It will also be a fundamental challenge for Poland to reinforce on both sides of the Atlantic the conviction that the United States and NATO play a leading role in stabilising the European security system, while at the same time advocating among the European allies to steadily increase defence expenditure.

Brexit has placed Poland as the fifth most-populous country and the fifth-largest economy in the EU, while Russian aggression has exposed Poland's role as a critical ally in defending NATO's Eastern Flank and supporting Ukraine's military effort. This destines Poland to play a much more prominent role in European decision-making processes. Success in this field, however, requires a number of measures to strengthen the state's proficiency. Referring to the cited PISM report from 2002, there are still some challenges to be faced, such as dismantling "silo" mechanisms within the public administration, strengthening the civil service and diplomacy, making them more of an organisational memory of the state, or—as the last chapter of this volume indicates—a higher saturation of the EU administration with Polish citizens. It will also be necessary for Poland to become much more involved in supporting partners in spheres more distant from the country's direct interests, especially in the Mediterranean and Africa, for example, in the context of migration, environmental, and security calls (incidentally, such actions should support the expansion of the Polish economy in non-European markets).

Finally, it will be important to remodel the legitimacy mechanism of Polish membership in the EU. In the public debate, it will be necessary to explain to the citizens the scale of the benefits of participation in the common market in view of the gradual depletion of the benefits associated with the transfer of European funds (which will be related to Poland's approaching role of a net contributor), particularly in the event of EU enlargement to Ukraine and other countries. On the other hand, the evolution of cohesion policy as a tool of European regional policy towards an instrument that finances EU development priorities should lead to a review of sources and methods of financing investments in Poland and to a deeper public debate on the Union's priorities. It will also be necessary to strengthen national instruments for bridging economic and social disparities between regions. Breaking the growing party competition on European issues will require the Polish political class and voters to recognise that a significant part of Polish society holds deeply ingrained Eurosceptic views. Given that EU membership itself still enjoys the support of the vast majority of Poles, in practice this means the need for a much stronger and transparent explanation in the political debate of the specific benefits of EU membership, an honest presentation of the costs of these activities, and a strengthening of Poland's effectiveness within the EU.

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