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*Ruling or Ruled: the Future of Poland
in a New Type of European Empire*

ABSTRACT

The article addresses current trends in the European transformation and compares the structure which is being built to ancient and medieval empires. The imperial order appears to be productive for the EU, due to it easily embraces the heterogeneity existing within the Union, as well as contributes to the strengthening of the EU institutional legitimacy and efficiency in global governance. The ongoing EU transformations, promoted by the German-French lobby and supported by the authorities in Brussels, are indirectly leading to the emergence of an imperial structure, which is secured by a soft power, instead of a rule of sword. Taking all this into account, an attempt is made to define the role of Poland, the largest post-2004 enlargement state, in the new structure. To make this attempt sufficient a brief analysis of current Polish foreign policy and economic growth is provided.

Key words: European Union, European integration, European Empire, Poland, Central Europe, genuine economic and monetary union

“Sometimes I like to compare the EU as a creation to the organisation of empires.

We have the dimension of Empire but there is a great difference.

Empires were usually made with force with a centre imposing *diktat*, a will on the others. Now what we have is the first non-Imperial empire.

We have 27 countries that fully decided to work together and to pool their sovereignty.

I believe it is a great construction and we should be proud of it”.

José Manuel Durão Barroso

INTRODUCTION

One can hardly deny the fact that the European Union has evolved into a far more sophisticated structure than what was drafted by the Founding Fathers of the ECSC. The policy of achieving common interests through taking common actions bore its fruits; peace, security, and prosperity were brought to each of the member states. However, on the other hand, the successes of integration triggered new problems and required respectful mechanisms to deal with them. Paradoxically, a majority of these mechanisms demanded even more joint efforts and further cooperation than it had before.

Six decades of common history have shown that the EU citizens and leaders – despite recognising it as the painful process – mainly agree to the gradual pooling of sovereignties of their states. One of the brightest evidences for this resides in the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty. Along with amending the Maastricht Treaty and complementing the Treaties of Amsterdam and Nice, it legalised a significant shift of powers from the national to the international level. Particularly, it introduced more coherent framework for the foreign and security policy and increased the role of the European Parliament. In a word, if to believe John McCormick [2008: 31], the EU was transformed into some kind of confederation of states rather than remaining an advanced intergovernmental organisation.

Since the eruption of crisis in 2008 a new urgent need for reorganising the EU became evident. Implementation of more rigorous economic regulations and financial supervision are the first issues on the agenda. Such implementation will inevitably lead to a new wave of pooling sovereignties and power shifts; and these processes will not be hindered even if several non-aligned member states are granted opt-outs. Consequently, a new kind of political structure – carrying features of the imperial division on the “central” and “periphery” regions – is very likely to replace the existing “confederation”. Germany, France and Euro-zone members which are willing to deepen integration will constitute the imperial core; while Great Britain, Denmark and other states reluctant to establishing even closer ties may become political backbenchers. This imperial structure is usually described in media as the two-tier Europe or the Europe of two speeds.

Taking into consideration the existing tendencies in the EU transformation, it is worth trying to predict the changes in political influence of each member state in the long run. One should not underestimate in this regard the possible strengthening of Poland, which is the biggest post-2004 enlargement member and one of the most rapidly developing states in the European Union.

Having risen from a Soviet satellite country to sovereign democratic state, Poland possesses a good impetus to become one of the crucial actors in the common agricultural, economic, and foreign policies. It is one of the few EU member states enjoying a stable increase in GDP over the last three years. Much of that increase was granted by the investments from the EU cohesion funds, however private consumption also grew and still maintains its positive dynamics [Gebert 2012; and *Information on socio-economic situation of the country in May of 2013* 2013].

In a word, this article is focused on the current processes of the European transformation. Particularly, the attempts which are made to assess critically the following issues:

1. what are the dominant tendencies in the EU transformation and what are the predicted outcomes;
2. what does the idea of new imperial structure stand for and what are the features of this structure;
3. what will be the possible position of Poland in the new political structure of the EU;
4. what are the chances for Poland to become one of the EU leaders in the long run and what will constitute the fields of its competence;
5. what policies should be pursued by current Polish authorities to make their country one of the leaders of the new Europe.

Naturally, there exist numerous alternatives to those EU transformational trends favoured by Germany, France and other Euro-zone members; moreover, these alternatives are also worth considering due to they are backed by reasonable arguments and promoted by outstanding social scientists or politicians. However, commending the diversity and viability of existing alternatives, this article will focus on the most lobbied trends in the European transformation which are the most likely to come into being. Not to mention that addressing all of the existing alternatives would become a time- and efforts-consuming research with its results impossible to cover within one article.

It is also important to stress that the article will embrace the ongoing EU transformations from the political and economic perspectives, not from cultural and civilisational. The latter, enjoying considerable popularity in Polish academic circles, argue that the EU procedural and institutional component should be constructed around the civilisational core originating from the times of ancient Rome and enriched by the medieval Catholic tradition. It is believed that such core may provide a genuine impetus for the EU competitiveness, entrepreneurship, solidarity, and respect to the common European legacy [Szczerki 2003 : 96; Szczerki 2008 : 168]. To be honest, cultural and civilisational perspectives are paving an interesting way for the EU to develop, however, to address them sufficiently a new research with completely different aims should be conducted.

FORGING THE NEW EU STRUCTURE

The most productive way to assess current tendencies of European transformation resides in analysing the priorities advocated by the EU leaders. Particularly, one should mention the EU Commission President José Manuel Durão Barroso, the President of the European Council Herman van Rompuy and the German Chancellor Angela Merkel in this regard. Being the engines of European transformation – or integration to be more precise – these three leaders play the most decisive roles in EU politics at this juncture. Not to mention that their priorities are usually accepted by other politicians representing both national and European levels.

All three leaders do not hesitate stating that the most efficient way to solve the existing crisis and ensure its non-occurrence in future resides in further integration. Such integration will grant the EU better protection from the negative impacts of globalisation and will make the governance over the region more flexible and coherent. José Barroso in his State of Union Address [2012: 3] applies interesting metaphor to emphasise this and describes member states as a crew on a boat which faces a storm. Struggling for survival all of them should stick together: “Because when you are on a boat in the middle of the storm, absolute loyalty is the minimum you demand from your fellow crew members”. In her speech in the European Parliament Angela Merkel [2012] adds to this point that the further integration will not only establish mechanisms for solving existing crisis, but will also ensure growth. Moreover, she advocates that the integration and growth within the EU are interdependent and should be pursued with the same courage. Integration and growth should not be perceived as mutually exclusive processes any more, but as the one joint incentive for the healthy European entrepreneurship. That would be rational and logical.

To succeed with the efficient integration several reforms should be introduced to the policies on national and international levels. In his speech José Barroso [2012: 5–7] mentioned that on the national level every member state should modernise its public administration, reduce wasteful expenditure, reform labour market to balance security with flexibility, and enhance social system. To the delight of the President of the European Commission, majority of national governments agree to proceed with these reforms, particularly because they look “natural” and can be implemented without giving up states’ sovereignties. More difficulties emerge, however, with the reforms on the international level. The well-being of United Europe requires elimination of physical, economic, and digital barriers between states, elimination of state support for the strategic industries, completion of the genuine single market and common labour market, and the creation of banking and fiscal unions with correspondent supranational mechanisms. These reforms will lead towards the federalisation of the EU, which is virtually inevitable if you believe José Barroso [2012: 11]:

“A deep and genuine economic and monetary union, a political union, with a coherent foreign and defence policy, means ultimately that the present European Union must evolve. Let’s not be afraid of the words: we will need to move towards a federation of nation states. This is what we need. This is our political horizon”.

And here:

“Today, I call for a federation of nation states. Not a superstate. A democratic federation of nation states that can tackle our common problems, through the sharing of sovereignty in a way that each country and each citizen are better equipped to control their own destiny. This is about the Union with the Member States, not against the Member States. In the age of globalisation pooled sovereignty means more power, not less”.

However, the struggle for power in a globalised world will restrict states' sovereignties and require conscious acceptance by the citizens and governments by each of the member states, which is not usually the case in the EU. Not to mention that reforms advocated by José Barroso are virtually irreversible. Therefore, they are triggering much more reluctance and numerous opt-outs in their implementation as if to compare them with the reforms on the national level.

Angela Merkel [2012] in her turn voiced three "integration demands" for improving cooperation and reliability between the EU member states, particularly in the most vulnerable economic and monetary spheres. These demands included a) greater financial market policy integration, based on functioning and robust financial markets, b) greater fiscal policy integration, and c) greater economic policy integration. All three "integration demands" entail the shift of powers from the national to international level, for the empowerment of existing multilateral institutions, and creating new institutions where necessary. Simply speaking, Angela Merkel advocates that the authorities on the EU level should be awarded with legal rights to intervene into every sphere of national economies – particularly monetary and fiscal – and "correct mistakes" if such are to occur. National governments as the inferior bodies should agree to accept and implement regulations coming from the "centre". All this is needed for the smooth running of the EU economy and ensurement of wide-scale sustainable growth. As Angela Merkel [2012] put it: "Stronger democratic legitimacy and oversight – this principle must be adhered to in all measures aimed at deepening economic and monetary union". Again, one may notice that the suggestions of Angela Merkel are complementary to José Barroso's idea of European Federation.

To succeed with the enlisted above political priorities Herman van Rompuy, the President of the European Council, drafted guidelines in close collaboration with the so-called "EU Quadriga," namely with the EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso, Eurogroup President Jean-Claude Juncker and European Central Bank President Mario Draghi. His fifteen pages long document "Towards a Genuine Economic and Monetary Union" (EMU) envisages the consolidation of the Euro-zone states into a "genuine" entity with a common budget, a bank resolution fund, a deposit guarantee scheme, a single bank supervision and enhanced accountability [Marini 2012]. All these innovations should be completed in three phases within two years.

"Towards a Genuine Economic and Monetary Union" was adopted as the Roadmap for the Euro-zone states at the European Council summit in December 13–14, 2012, which automatically upgraded its provisions to the "official rules of the game" for Europe; at least, for the nearest future.

The first phase of transformation foreseen by Herman van Rompuy was launched right after the adoption of the roadmap and is planned to continue throughout 2013. Its final goal resides in creation of the single supervisory mechanism (SSM) for the in-time defining of the negative trends in the European banking sector. The second phase has also been in progress since the first months of 2013 and has its goal in completion of the integrated financial framework. Simply speaking, it entails the

creation of respectful institutions at the European level which will be empowered to intervene into the policies of troubled banks regardless of borders. The third phase has no precise time bounds but is expected to be launched at the beginning of 2014. Its main purpose resides in improving the Euro-zone sustainability through establishing shock absorbing mechanisms at the central level. Again, it stands for the creation of new international institutions with significant budgets to ensure smooth running of national economies through a system of insurances [Marini 2012]. In a word, Herman van Rompuy along with his colleagues reveals confidence that “Reinforcing the capacity of the European level to take executive economic policy decisions for the EMU is essential” [2012: 17].

As one may have noticed, van Rompuy’s guidelines were drafted only for those member states, which have already established some kind of joint monetary and economic mechanisms. It entails that “Towards a Genuine Economic and Monetary Union” is applicable only for the Euro-zone states (third EMU stage) and states which are willing to join the Euro-zone someday (first and second EMU stage). Only two of the EU member states, namely the Great Britain and Denmark, reveal no evident desire neither to join Euro-zone, nor to agree to the joint monetary policies. Since the 1990s the leaders of those countries were cautious in their policies and today they are known as the biggest European sceptics claiming that integration may not be the best solution for the crisis. Moreover, integration may not always lead to growth. As the British Prime Minister David Cameron [2012] said in his speech at Blumberg: “We must not be weighed down by an insistence on a one size fits all approach which implies that all countries want the same level of integration. The fact is that they don’t and we shouldn’t assert that they do”.

Therefore, there exist two political tendencies in the EU at this juncture: major centripetal and minor centrifugal. Major is advocated by the acting EU authorities and the leaders of the states which joined or are willing to join the Euro-zone. Minor is advocated by the leaders of the Great Britain and partially supported by the governing elites of other member states. Major will possibly result in the creation of a federation of nation-states as it is foreseen by José Barroso, minor will lead to several opt-outs for the non-aligned states or even to the exclusion of the Great Britain in case its leaders will constantly hinder the integration processes. As Jacques Delors, the former EU Commission President, said in an interview with the German daily *Handelsblatt*: “If the British cannot support the trend towards more integration in Europe, we can nevertheless remain friends, but on a different basis” [*Britain could leave EU, says Jacques Delors* 2012].

The acceleration of both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies is deepening the political gap between the EU member states. Consequently, there exists a reasonable probability for the two-tier Europe – or even the three-tier Europe – to come into being. The federation or any other structure driven by integration will emerge notwithstanding of positions of the Euro-sceptics. Euro-zone members – or the members of the forthcoming genuine EMU – will become the “core” of the new structure while

other states because of their relative under-development or numerous opt-outs will constitute the “periphery”.

The division of Europe into the “core” and “periphery”, which is one of the peculiar features of the imperial political structure, is not a new invention. It has been discussed for decades and its major advantages or disadvantages are explicitly described in the literature. Today, in the light of ongoing transformations and federalisation, it is the high time to re-discover the idea of New European Imperialism.

PECULIAR FEATURES OF AN EMERGING NEW TYPE OF EUROPEAN EMPIRE

Before speaking of this new type of empire it is crucial to stress that this idea does not contradict the European Federation. These ideas are of different orders, factually. Federation in the contemporary discourse stands for the “tangible” structure which can really appear on the world map after the EU member states agree to pool their sovereignties. Empire, in its turn, is not more than an abstract metaphor which defines patterns of governing, belonging, territoriality, and exercise of power within some group of interconnected states. In the light of making the EU more coherent to people, federation of nation-states was chosen as the key term, however this federation will immanently incorporate several imperial features such as the fuzziness of borders, peculiar distribution of power, civilian freedoms and others. Moreover, there exists no guarantee that the new European political structure will be named federation, as it is advocated by the EU Commission President, but it is very likely this structure will fit the imperial patterns.

The Empire as the metaphor possesses a recognisable background in Europe due to the fact that it alludes to the Austria-Hungarian Empire, the Napoleon Empire, the empire of Charlemagne and even to the Roman Empire. By alluding to the last two it entails the political orders preceding the medieval “decentralisation” of Europe when conquered territories were grouped around a single capital, usually the biggest city. After those two Empires collapsed Europe was torn between the drastically changing and competing centres for over a thousand years, and this tearing brought nothing to Europe except devastation. Therefore, a return to imperial structure and reunification around one centre could become a rational and efficient approach to governing the United Europe [Anderson 2007: 10]. Moreover, Jan Zielonka [2008: 475] mentions that the existing EU already possesses considerable imperial features which contributes to its possible transformation into the empire of a new type:

“Its territorial acquisitions take place by invitation rather than conquest. Legitimizing strategies of the Union do not follow the usual imperial motto of ‘might is right’. The EU legitimizes its policies by claiming that its norms are right and that it promotes the most efficient model of economic and political integration. The periphery is often able, gradually, to gain access to the decision-making mechanisms of the European metropolis. Its sovereignty is not denied, but merely constrained by the policy of EU conditional help and accession”.

The revival of the imperial structure will allow to meet at least two political challenges. The first resides in the impossibility to define a common economic standard for all member states. At this juncture the EU is constituted of the 28 sovereign entities characterised by their own level of development, political preferences, and human potential. What is worse, there exists no system for the multifarious acceleration for all these entities and doubtfully will it emerge in the nearest future; cohesion funds do not always bare expected fruits due to the differences in management, values, and ambitions of every member state. The EU as it is now lacks economic and social homogeneity and this handicap can be hardly – or even impossibly – eliminated, especially in the light of post-2004 enlargements. The lack of homogeneity is not the best prerequisite for building the state-like order inside the EU, however it is fairly suitable for constructing the empire. Roman and Carolingian Emperors by controlling the relatively under-developed territories did not directly aim to ensure their growth but were focused on exercising power. In a word, imperial structures do not struggle for the homogenisation of lands constituting them, but for the good governance accepting those lands as they are.

Second challenge is related to the democratic deficit and efficient allocation of power. One can hardly claim that the modern European states are well-prepared for the demands of globalisation. According to James Anderson, “national states were becoming an anachronism, too small for global competition but too big and remote for cultural identification and participatory citizenship” [2007: 12]. In attempts to adjust states to global challenges a question arises whether the national power should be transferred to the EU level or to the level of smaller administrative units, called sub-regions. Moreover, there exists no clear vision how this transfer should be completed, what will happen to sovereignties, and what powers should be transferred. Not to mention that the legitimacy of the new institutions should not be questioned by citizens. The imperial order offers a viable solution to these issues. Its heterogeneity immanently distributes the powers between all levels, providing the “centre” with a right to establish priorities and sub-regions to run appropriate local policies, which are not contradictory to the central. The nation-state does not necessarily preserve its political value in the imperial structure and can be replaced by more adjustable – from the position of sovereignty – administrative units; citizens of the empire will have a right to elect central and local authorities omitting state ones, if justified.

Both challenges mentioned above are defined by James Anderson [2007: 13] as the *Gulliver Fallacy*. The EU member states are too small for executing power globally, too big for enjoying indisputable legitimacy, and too different for establishing common standards. Moreover, this conflictual and irresolvable heterogeneity has a predilection to grow; its further growth will possibly evolve into the deeper differentiation of the EU territories with the borders varying from precise lines to fuzzy zones [Anderson 2007: 19]. Not to mention that the relations between sovereignty and territory will become even more fragile and undefined. Imperial political order possesses sufficient flexibility to absorb this heterogeneity. To illustrate this one can observe the existing

in the EU divisions on the Euro and non-Euro zones, Schengen and non-Schengen members, states with the significant number of opt-outs, and others. All these divisions emerged because the sovereign entities share different views on the economic engagement, territorial belonging, and inter-state political institutionalisation. As time passes, these divisions can be either diminished by the compromises found on the EU level, or *au contraire* deepened by the differences in the member states' interests.

The smooth governance in the imperial structure can be assured through adoption of the administrative pattern of concentric circles. James Anderson [2007 : 19] states that the power in this pattern is exercised

“from a central core of direct rule through domination over subject units with some internal autonomy, to suzerain overlordship and indirect rule over variably dependent client states, to a looser, more indirect hegemony over formally independent states, to territories which are beyond the empire's sphere of influence and perhaps within the sphere of a rival empire”.

In a word, imperial structure entails that the governing territory is divided into the three hierarchical circles at least. Central or core circle ensures a strong position of the “imperial government” which adopts decisions for the common good regardless of the peculiar interests of smaller territorial entities. In the case of the EU, core circle will be constituted of states which adopt the van Rompuy's genuine EMU roadmap. Second circle includes the semi-dependent territorial entities which agree to implement only the selected regulations coming from the centre. In the case of the EU, that will be member states and lands with the significant number of opt-outs and sufficient powers remaining on the national level. Third circle will be constituted of the EU neighbouring states attracted by the European soft power and willing to align their policies with those adopted in Brussels; ENP states are first on the list in this regard.

Still, the issue remains unclear what circle Poland will belong to in the New European Empire. To shed some light on it one should address the Polish economic potential and analyse the political intentions voiced by the state leaders.

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND POLITICAL PRIORITIES OF POLAND IN 2010'S

Poland is one of the states which has gained significant advantages from joining the EU. After the end of the communist era in 1989 the state experienced hard times, however since 2000s the new wave of industrialisation and rapid economic growth started. With a GDP below the EU-27 average in 2001, Poland managed to ensure a breakthrough towards the EU-27 average and almost reached that level by 2011. As Poland's Regional Development Minister Elżbieta Bieńkowska described it, “In Poland the result is that GDP *per capita* has risen from just over

40% of the EU average when it joined the Union in 2004 to nearly 70% now” [Morris 2012].

As for the second quarter of 2013 Polish economy slightly hindered its growth. That was related to the negative dynamics of households’ consumption, as well as constantly high level of insecurity related to overall economic situation. According to the data provided by the Central Statistical Office [*Information on socio-economic situation of the country in May of 2013* 2013], a gradual deterioration was recorded in many areas of business activity:

“In May of 2013 sold production of industry was lower than a year before by 1.8% (after eliminating the influence of seasonal factors the drop amounted to 1.5%). A decrease in production was observed in electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply and in manufacturing, with a growth in the remaining two sections of industry. Among the main industrial groupings a drop in production was observed in most kinds of goods, except for durable consumer goods. In May of 2013 the decrease in annual terms of construction and assembly production deepened (to 27.5%, and after eliminating the influence of seasonal factors – to 27.1%). Retail sales were higher than a year before by 1.2% (in April of 2013 it grew by 0.1%)”.

At this juncture, however, the economy of Poland still remains one of the fastest growing economies in Central Europe and is considered to be the sixth largest in the EU. Its continuing growth is greatly dependent on the EU’s financial assistance, particularly on the investments coming from cohesion funds. Money received from these funds is mainly spent on improving the infrastructure, however significant amounts are also assigned for education, research and development. The government even plans to increase its support for social policies in the nearest future [Morris 2012].

Altogether, almost 300,000 jobs were created in different spheres of Polish economy in the last five years. That allowed unemployment rate to decrease from 20% to around 13%; the officially registered unemployment rate was 13.5% at the end of May 2013 [*Information on socio-economic situation of the country in May of 2013* 2013]. Moreover, Polish experts claim that there is not enough human resources allocated in Poland for the further growth of economy, therefore immigrants are needed to occupy the vacant positions. Professor Krystyna Iglicka who is an economist at Lazarski University and advisor to the government on immigration considers that Poland needs hard-working immigrants eager to contribute to this nation: “Just as Western Europe got the ubiquitous “Polish plumber” Poland got the Ukrainian nanny and the Belarusian builder” [Henley 2012].

In his turn Rafal Rogala, the head of governmental office for foreigners, feels proud that Poland is a destination country for economic migrants. “We understand them perfectly because, up until now, we have been the economic migrants (...) Now it is a question of education, of getting our people used to the idea that we are a destination country for lots of foreigners who will want to live and work here” [Henley 2012].

To draw a brief conclusion, people shaping the Polish economic and immigration policy are quite optimistic in regard to the further growth of their state and see no

obstacles which can significantly hinder the positive dynamics. Especially if to take into consideration the abundance of resources Poland gets from the EU. One may assume that constantly growing economic strength of Poland and planned joining the Euro-zone in January 1, 2016 as promised by Radosław Sikorski [*Interview by Stephen Sackur* 2012] will introduce Warsaw to the cohort of the most influential European capitals.

The priorities Poland pursues within the EU at this juncture reside in maintaining the cautious diplomatic balance between Berlin, London, and Paris. Such a behaviour allows Poland to gain geopolitical benefits by utilising contradictory interests of the three capitals [Gebert 2012]. To make this behaviour possible a significant shift has taken place in the domestic political thinking recently. Polish citizens started to abandon the perception of their state as the troublesome land torn between the Western (German) and Eastern (Russian) imperialisms; that could particularly be observed after the conservative Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* or *PiS*) came second at the parliamentary elections in 2007. Since that time conservative policies became gradually overshadowed by more liberal and Euro-oriented approaches of the Prime Minister Donald Tusk and his Social Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska* or *PO*).

Contemporary Polish authorities tend to connect the well-being of their state with the deeper integration into the EU. In their turn, majority of Polish citizens are inclined to perceive EU as a liberating force locking their state into a secure and democratic family of nations. Poland's Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski told in one of his interviews to BBC that by joining the EU Poles were finally recognised as the citizens of a free sovereign state: "For us World War II and its political consequences only ended, in some sense, in 1989 when we had our first free elections and, really and truly, only after we joined NATO and the EU" [Little 2012].

The way Poland should integrate into the EU, as well as the way the EU should transform, are virtually the same from the perspectives of Warsaw and Berlin. It happened after 2007 that the Polish side declared support to majority of German initiatives which indirectly strengthened Poland's voice in Europe. The brightest evidence for this can be found in the speech by Radosław Sikorski, which was delivered in the Bundestag in November 28, 2011. The Polish Foreign Minister [2011 : 9–10] stressed that Germany is the only state eligible to solve the crisis in the Euro-zone by promoting necessary reforms:

"And I demand of Germany that, for your own sake and for ours, you help it [the Euro-zone] survive and prosper. You know fully well that nobody else can do it. I will probably be first Polish foreign minister in history to say so, but here it is: I fear German power less than I am beginning to fear German inactivity ... You may not fail to lead. Not dominate, but to lead in reform. Provided you include us in decision-making, Poland will support you".

According to the position of Jakub Wiśniewski [Gebert 2012], who is the head of strategic planning at Poland's MFA, the speech was a success. It was not only

perfectly performed, but also stressed the growing importance of Poland on the EU stage. Radosław Sikorski proved that the 2004 expansion was not a political mistake leading to the economic crisis, it was rather a solution allowing to accelerate the further transformations in the EU. Therefore, the newly arrived member states should not be perceived as a ballast, but as an impetus for Germans and French to forge stronger Union and for Britons to pursue more coherent continental policies. However, having emphasised their ambitions to the leading European powers, it still remains unclear what is the real impact of Polish authorities on the European integration.

POLAND AS AN EMERGING POWER IN EUROPE

At least two issues should be addressed to answer the question whether official Warsaw is eligible to reach the political goals it intends to. Primarily, it requires to consider the overall perception and acceptance of Polish activity by the other EU member states, especially by the most influential. Secondly, it requires to evaluate the existing political mechanisms allowing Warsaw to pursue its ambitions in the EU. Having covered those issues one will better define Polish chances to be admitted to the EU “club of the strongest” – even in the long run – and, more generally, to define its role and place in the new European structure.

Not so long ago, on the eve of its EU membership, Poland appeared in the eyes of Europeans as an unpredictable and potentially troublesome state. It was often depicted in media as a land of peasants on carts pulled by jaded horses, or miners with their faces black and deformed. European politicians, in their turn, spoke of Poland in the categories of “expenses” and “challenges” thus euphemising their scepticism regarding the fast and genuine integration of Poland into the EU multilateral structures [Szczerki 2003: 95]. However, things have significantly improved since 2004.

At this juncture the best interstate relations which Poland enjoys are relations with Germany. Politicians on both sides came to the conclusion that although history matters, it brings no profits to revive the old conflicts [Osesik 2012: 1]; the more important is the present and future cooperation within the EU. Therefore, they try to avoid any misunderstandings which might derive from the arbitrary past, and instead promote common projects with enthusiasm. For instance, German authorities strongly supported Polish application for the EU membership and repeatedly stressed the necessity of democratic reforms in the Central and Eastern Europe. German financial assistance and political guidance was of significant importance for Polish transformation into the market economy.

The public opinion of Germans regarding Poles and vice versa is improving at the moment what decreases tensions between both nations and increases the range of fields for cooperation. Also, the leaders of both states have common visions on resolving the European crisis; particularly, they desire to fulfil that task within the existing institutions, not outside them. Germany in hope that these institutions can

impose rigorous control over the spendthrift members, and Poland in the concern that the poorer and smaller states risk to marginalise without central ruling after the genuine economic and monetary union is completed. Therefore, both Germany and Poland speak in one voice regarding the empowerment of the multilateral institutions and perceive the importance of one another as the prerequisite for maintaining strong positions within the EU.

The Polish-French relations are not that cloudless, however. Official Paris reacts with restraint on the ambitions of Warsaw and this can be explained from several perspectives. Primarily, France is concerned that Poland as well as the whole Central and Eastern Europe reside within a domain of German influence and any initiatives coming from this region undermine the political weight of Paris in the EU. Secondly, being the biggest beneficiary of the EU agricultural funds France is worried to lose the incomes in case Polish farmers claim their rights for donations. Thirdly, France is simply not interested in developing advanced policies with the Eastern European states due to its geopolitical interests. Significant numbers of the Muslim population and immigration from the North Africa makes Paris more focused on cooperation with the states to the south from the EU, not with Poland.

As the result, different kind of tensions and slowdowns are not rare in the Polish-France relations. For instance, France was one of the member states hampering Poland's accession to NATO and the EU. In their turn, Poles declared their support to the US intervention into Iraq while France was against that campaign; also Polish side did not share French initiatives on voting in the European Council and amending the European Constitution. The latest significant tension resided in the French veto over Poland's aspiration, as EU President, to participate in Euro-zone summits held between July and December 2011.

However, France has no other rational option except accepting Polish dynamics and ambitions. This becomes inevitable if to consider that both states exist in the liberal competitive environment and experience growing interdependence. Big French companies, such as *Auchan*, *Carrefour*, *E. Leclerc* and others invest in the Polish economy. Growing cooperation of the national businesses encourage state leaders to take active position, either. As a result, a vast number of agreements were signed recently, as well as regular meetings on the highest levels are taking place at least twice per year. Accessing the Polish potential seriously, France attempts not to transform this developing state into a political rival, but still acts with precaution aiming to prevent the drastic shift of power to the East.

If to analyse the mechanisms Poland can utilise to shape the EU policies one should consider the Weimar Triangle above all. This is a regional block – or better to say an international forum – consisting of Germany, France, and Poland. The idea behind its creation was to promote cooperation between states, coordinate domestic and foreign policies, and assist Poland in the post-communistic transition. Weimar Triangle, notwithstanding of its currently poor efficiency and modest achievements, possesses remarkable potential to refuel the EU in the nearest future, or even to

become its “core”. As a German MP Dietmar Nietan once noticed: “The Weimar Triangle ... may well develop into a new generator for the EU... Poland has a particular interest in this constellation, since it enables the urgently needed aspect of the ‘Eastern experience’ gained prior to the fall of the Iron Curtain to be incorporated into the ‘Franco-German motor’ from the ‘old’ EU” [Nietan 2010]. The format of the Weimar Triangle, if it is appropriately adjusted to the demands of modernity, can become beneficial for all constituting it member states. France, for instance, will have more chances to impact the EU politically, Germany economically, and Poland by giving the impetus to its integration and further development [Szczerki 2008: 175].

It is also interesting to assess the relations between Poland and the UK in the existing context. From the historical perspective, these relations were mainly constructive and mutually beneficial. After Poland had lost its statehood in 1939, Britain agreed to provide the shelter for Polish Government-in-exile, as well as to open the borders to numerous migrants. However, such policies put Poland in the inferior position to Britain and made it dependent on the good will of the Downing Street. At this juncture, while considering Britain as an old and reliable partner, Poland is given an opportunity to build its success independently. British alienation from the European affairs will not only remove the powerful “rival”, but also will shift the centre of decision-making to the East. In their daring statements Warsaw officials, particularly Radosław Sikorski [see Little 2012], claim that Poland is even eager to replace Britain in the EU in case London will not change its priorities. However, Poland is far not as developed and advanced as Britain is and, therefore, the possible replacement will take a lot of time.

In the current political discourse Poland has all chances to strengthen its positions in the EU. Warsaw can benefit from the obvious support of Germany, amiability of France, and British neutrality. Moreover, the membership in the Weimar Triangle and adopting the Euro in future can become extra assets for the further Polish empowerment. The only issues remaining are to accumulate enough economic power and ensure civil support on the pursued policies.

CONCLUSIONS

The European Union as it exists today proved to be poorly prepared for the political and economic challenges of modernity. The recent economic crisis not only uncovered it, but also questioned the trust between states, legitimacy of multilateral institutions, and smoothness of the common market. However, no single position was adopted since 2008 by the member states regarding how to transform the EU into more viable structure. The least conflictual strategy was drafted by Herman van Rompuy in his “Towards Genuine Economic and Monetary Union”. Being an obvious response to the German and French lobby, this strategy advocates deeper integration and further empowerment of the European institutions. On December 13–14, 2012, this strategy was accepted as the roadmap of transformations, in particular for the Euro-zone states.

The creation of the genuine monetary and economic union can become an impetus to transform the whole EU into a better controlled and more balanced entity in the long-run. At this moment, however, only the Euro-zone states are eligible to proceed with the full range of transformations. The remaining member states are expected to join the EMU after they fulfil obligatory preconditions and their citizens agree to join. This scenario is not likely to happen in the nearest future; some sceptics even claim that this scenario is unreal. Therefore, despite being united within one political entity – usually defined as a federation – the EU member states would differ from one another by the amount of power transferred to the central level, the degree of subordination, and the economic and political development. It entails that some states will agree to join the genuine monetary and economic union, some will join with numerous opt-outs, some will preserve their current status, and some will even alienate from the EU. Consequently, several unions within Union – or better to say several tiers – with different speeds and levels of integration will emerge. This foreseen entity reminds the imperial structure, so usual for the ancient and medieval Europe. Grouped around one political centre imperial administrative units were different in their economic development, political priorities, and cultural values. Widely spread heterogeneity, however, did not undermine the general effectiveness of governing; not to mention that each of the units enjoyed relative freedom in interpretation and implementation of the centrally adopted decisions.

Imperial structure built in the EU can efficiently neutralise the negative impacts of *Gulliver Fallacy*. On the one hand, there will be no necessity to define a common economic and political standard for all member states, which is practically impossible. On the other hand, each member state or smaller administrative unit will have a right for self-governance; surely, if the decisions adopted locally are not contradictory to the central policies. Except this, each member state will be in position to execute power globally, which is hardly achievable even for the biggest EU member states in the conditions of independent action. Unlike its predecessors, the forthcoming European Empire will be created not by force, but by a good will of citizens who understand the benefits for themselves and for their homeland. This is the feature which makes the EU an empire of a new type.

As the parts of the Empire, Germany and France will be in position to continue with their strategic policies, particularly with deepening integration and empowering the EU institutions. That will allow Paris and Berlin to utilise indirect leverage of pressure on the problematic states and ensure financial stability at home and in the region. Along with the other states of the EMU, Germany and France will constitute the “core circle” of the empire. As for the UK, alienation from the centripetal policies may decrease the economic and political power of London in the EU and move it to the “periphery”, where the majority of post-2004 enlargement countries are allocated. London, notwithstanding of its advancement and development, would not be able to utilise common institutions and mechanisms efficiently to maximise profits for the UK. The centre of legislature will be allocated between Brussels-Strasbourg-

Luxembourg, as it is now. The decision-making power will factually be split between Paris, Berlin, and probably Warsaw.

The position of Poland in the new type European Empire can be hardly defined with sufficient precision at this moment. The current authorities declare their support for the van Rompuy's roadmap and are willing to contribute to the integration process, as, for instance, it happened during the Polish presidency in the European Council of Ministers. However, modest economic development does not allow Poland to speak with strong voice in Europe, at least at this moment. The situation may change in future due to the benefits Poland gains from the EU cohesion policies and the prolonged uninterrupted growth of the economy. If such a change takes place, as well as if the current authorities ensure their re-election, Poland is very likely to join the EMU states in the "core circle" of the empire.

The competences of Poland as a possible EU leader can reside in moderating the cooperation between old developed and new developing member states; Polish "civilisationalists" define this type of policy as "community building". The active presence of official Warsaw on the European stage will introduce a feeling of balance and mutual respect between all actors in their attempt to shape and implement common policies. This is of particular importance for the post-2004 enlargement member states which are mainly optimistic regarding their membership, however their role is often underestimated in the EU [Szczerski 2003 :109]. At the same time, Poland can reinforce the Eastern Partnership Policy, promote good governance on the EU borders, and coordinate the EU relations with Russia. This aspect of competences will be useful for the "old" member states which are dependent on the resources imported from Siberia.

Finally, Poland can utilise the membership in the Weimar Triangle as an efficient tool to impact the EU policies along with France and Germany. With a proper improvements and adjustments, the Weimar Triangle may become the ruling circle of the EMU and, respectfully, of the whole EU. However, the issue still remains unclear whether Paris and Berlin accept Warsaw as an equal power and allow to join their club. The chances for this will raise high in case the UK continues with its alienation. The only tasks depending directly on Poland at this moment reside in maintaining further economic growth at home, active participation in the EU policies, and ensuring domestic support to the transformations in Europe. The possible adoption of common currency in 2016 (or later), will also contribute to the new Polish status as one of the ruling states in the forthcoming European Empire.

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